

A Case-study of Alcohol Consumption and of the Irish Public House in late Modernity

*Social processes that manifest themselves as
cultural, economic and political constraints.*



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Abstract.

Social drinking in Ireland is acknowledged as a ‘traditional and a ‘cultural’ pursuit. The social world of the drinker however, is constructed in a complex way that extends beyond the cultural sphere. Movement of people, commodities and ideas (global processes) are central to contemporary life-style choices and leisure activities. The economy at any given time (economic processes) has a direct bearing on sales and purchases of alcohol. Regulation of the drinks industry and of drinking practices (political processes) construct a legal framework within which drinkers and drinks providers are obliged to operate.

Owing to the harmful effects of excessive alcohol consumption, social research understandably, focuses on the ‘problematic’ aspects of alcohol misuse, while ‘moderate’ or ‘social’ drinking practices are largely overlooked. A sociological approach that would address this oversight calls for a ‘social process’ methodology that extends beyond the negative elements of alcohol and instead encompasses the broader concept of social drinking. This project investigates the experience of the ‘social’ or ‘moderate’ drinker in Ireland from a cultural ‘life-course’ (Hunt, 2005) perspective that reveals how economic and regulatory processes are negotiated and experienced at the micro-level. Research was conducted during 2000-2005, a time of economic prosperity and optimism. Social conditions that impacted upon lifestyle practices and that transformed the drinking environment (public house) reflect changes in consumerist practices along with a strengthening of regulatory processes. Investigation of the public house as ‘cultural icon’ and as ‘third place’ (Oldenburg, 1999) of informal association reveals the political and economic frameworks within which it operates. This study of the social world of the drinker developed into three distinct themes: the definition of the social drinker, the metamorphosis of the Irish public house and the re-spatialization of social drinking practices.

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Chapter 1. Introduction.

The uses and misuses of alcohol have always been and still are a key source of concern in Irish society. Most recently, controversy surrounded Arthur's Day celebrations on September 26th 2013. The music festival event sponsored by Diageo and which takes place in pub venues around the country gave rise to a robust debate. On the one hand a celebratory cultural 'event' was actively promoted while on the other hand the bringing into being of an 'alcohol-fest' was condemned. Since its inception in 2009 the live music festival sponsored by Diageo has developed into a major international event, which is heavily promoted by the company, and draws significant crowds into pubs. Yet a key message which the event signals is that alcohol is a necessary ingredient for the enjoyment of a cultural event. A significant rise in admissions to hospital A & E Departments on the night of September 26th indicates that an unintended consequence of the event is excessive alcohol consumption.

Arthur's Day has also been referred to as 'pseudo national holiday' that encourages excessive drinking (<http://alexwhitetd.wordpress.com/2013/09/24/alex-whites-statement-on-diageos-arthurs-day/>). Referring to the Arthur's Day celebrations, Professor Frank Murray, chairman of the Alcohol Policy group of the Royal College of Physicians has also spoken out, stating that 'with high rates of alcohol consumption and binge drinking, we don't need another reason to drink' (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/24/ireland->

[diageo-guinness-idUSL5N0HK32P20130924](#)). Irish folk singer Christy Moore and Mike Scott of the Waterboys each released anti-Arthur's Day ballads that epitomized young drinkers as 'fodder' in Diageo's 'advertising scam' and that critiqued the 'reckless over-promotion of alcohol in a land already blighted by its effects' (<http://mikescottwaterboys.com/waterboys-arthurs-day.php>). The Arthur's Day debate is but one example of the complex and often divisive relationship (that has alcohol at the core) that exists on many levels between drinkers, the drinks industry, interest groups that encourage/condemn drinking and the State.

Much of the current analysis of alcohol is negative in content, focusing on its harmful effects or on the anti-social alcohol related behaviour that it engenders. This researcher believes that this negative focus obscures the social processes and practices surrounding every-day or temperate alcohol consumption. The purpose of this project is to uncover and analyse the social world of the 'moderate' or 'non-problematic' drinker as it is experienced throughout the life course and in the context of social, economic and political change in Irish society. This study examines and shows social drinking as a cultural phenomenon that is shaped by the economic climate at any given time and according to the socio-economic position of the drinker. Social drinking is also shown in the context of political and regulatory structures that govern alcohol, the drinks provider, the consumer and the drinking environment; the public house. Alcohol consumption therefore is not approached as a 'social

problem' but as a combination of social processes that produce the contemporary social drinker. The main field work for this project was carried out in the period of 2000-2005, during the high point of the Celtic Tiger years. The analysis presented here locates the C21 social drinker within a time-frame that spans three centuries (C19-C21).

1. 1. Alcohol consumption in Ireland: moving away from the 'problematic'.

This research project was undertaken against a background of 'moral panic' (Cohen, 2002) generated through discourses of excessive alcohol consumption, binge drinking and undesirable social behaviour, attributed to the misuse of alcohol. Studies in the US, however, would suggest that medical and sociological research exaggerate the extent of problematic drinking due to the gravity of the problem. According to Heath, problems with alcohol affect fewer than 10% of those who drink (2008). The concept of 'moral panic', a collective reaction to a perceived threat against 'societal values and interests' (Cohen, 2002:1) identifies (and seeks to generate solutions) to what is considered deviant or unacceptable. For Cohen, mass media plays a central role in the generation of 'folk devils', by allocating a significant measure of 'space' to negative reports, statistics and images. Irish media feature alcohol-related news, articles and visual representations that highlight the practice of excessive drinking and the bizarre anti-social behaviour of predominantly young drinkers. The prevalence of alcohol misuse and the

economic and social costs of alcohol-related crime, illnesses and injury, are portrayed as damaging to the individual and to society and consequently, is in need of urgent and effective resolution.

In light of the perceived increase in alcohol consumption and more importantly the social and economic consequences of ‘misuse’ (Hope, 2008), public debate is conducted largely through a discourse of pathology. Research in the areas of health and crime and increasing regulatory controls of the drinks industry, emerge as a consequence of the ‘destructive’ impact of alcohol on society. While headlines¹ such as “Alcohol Abuse Ruins our Nation” (Irish Examiner, 29/7/2002 p.14) “We Have to Call Time on Alcohol Abuse” (Sunday Independent, 20/10/2002 p.19), “Drink Situation a Sobering Sight that Demands Radical Change in Attitudes” (Irish Times, 28/5/2003 p.14) highlight the misuse of alcohol, more importantly they link high levels of consumption to social and economic harm.

Quantitative data that explain alcohol sales in relation to population growth 1986-2006 (Hope, 2007) show a 48% increase in consumption over the twenty year period. Media reports and analysis that link excessive alcohol consumption to crime (“Five-year Sentence for Man who Killed his Partner in Drunken Row” Irish Times, 7/12/2002 p.4), accidents (“Drink-Driving Campaign to be the most Vigorous ever, says Molloy”, Irish Times, 22/11/2001, p.4) and illness

¹ Adverse reports/features connected with alcohol, excessive consumption practices and their consequences, responsibility of the publican and position of the public house in society, dominated the print and electronic media.

(“2,000 Seek Treatment for Alcohol Abuse” Irish Times, 1/6/2002 p.5) construct a negative image of alcohol, of alcohol consumption practices and of drinkers.

While scientific research into alcohol use largely concerns itself with issues such as addiction and crime (Mongan, Hope and Nelson, 2009), popular media highlights the more ‘sensational’ incidents (RTE, ‘*Teenage Kicks*’ 24/11/1999) linked to alcohol misuse. A report of the address to a conference in Ennis, Co Clare, 3/11/2004, by the Ombudsman and Information Commissioner, Emily O’Reilly on the subject of alcohol consumption is a prime example of the pathologization of Irish drinking culture that consistently permeates the media. O’Reilly is reported as having spoken of the ‘vulgar-fest’ of modern Ireland, citing ‘rampant, unrestrained drunkenness’, the ‘brutal, random violence that infects the smallest of our town-lands’ and the ‘fracturing of our community life’ (Fahy, et al, 2007:1-2). Research into the prevalence and consequences of alcohol misuse (Hope, 2007, 2008, 2009) that highlights the social cost of alcohol addiction and alcohol-induced criminal behaviour not only further pathologizes alcohol but also questions and critiques the operation of the drinks trade. Factors such as excessive alcohol consumption, the declining image of the public house, a limitation on alcohol advertising (25% of advertising space from 1st July 2008) and in particular, the perception of publicans² is indicative of the uneasy

² See quote by Limerick publican. Respondent G, Chapter 8, sub-section 3. 1.

relationship that exists between drinkers, drinks providers and spokespersons for the common good.

1. 2. The social world of the drinker: a multi-dimensional approach.

While recognising the value and the necessity of research, policy-making and the dissemination of information regarding the misuse of alcohol, this researcher explicitly disavows the pathologizing of alcohol. Studies that focus on the negative elements associated with alcohol consumption fail to address drinking as a social activity that is incorporated in a positive way into the social lives of the vast majority of Irish people. This researcher, therefore chose to depart from such ‘extremes’ and instead concentrate on the changing nature of Irish ‘social’ or ‘non-problematic’ drinking patterns and practices but more importantly, the way in which they are shaped and controlled. My starting presupposition was that the vast majority of drinkers engage in moderate or temperate patterns of alcohol consumption. Hence, it was necessary to dispense with a ‘social problems’ methodology and substitute a ‘social processes’ approach.

The aim of this project is to examine the social world of the public house drinker in contemporary Irish society by investigating the social processes that shape both the drinking environment and the actions of drinkers. Previous studies (HRB) mainly address the ‘problematic’ of alcohol misuse for the purpose of resolving the damaging effects on the

drinker and to society. Ireland in the mid C20 was a time of sexual Puritanism, late marriages and clearly defined structures regarding the inheritance of land. A study by Robert Bales (1944) documented a number of celebratory and utilitarian usages for alcohol in Ireland. Baptisms, weddings and funerals meant the consumption of copious amounts of alcohol. The tendency in Irish culture to substitute alcohol for food was hypothesised by Bales as a legacy from poverty and famine and the emphasis placed by the Catholic Church on the virtue of fasting. Children as well as adults consumed alcohol, given as rewards for good behaviour. Many business transactions took place especially at fairs over a few drinks, where whiskey was often part of the payment. The medicinal use of alcohol also has a long history. It was used as a palliative in cold wet weather, as a cure for many illnesses and as a painkiller. The consumption of alcohol as a remedy for the effects of alcohol taken the previous day set up a cyclical pattern of drinking. This was referred to as 'a hair of the dog that bit you'. Bales believed that the pattern of drinking in the morning to cure a hangover and at night to relieve insomnia was directly linked to the development of alcohol addiction.

For males in the period 1870s to 1930s, the transition from boyhood to manhood was symbolised by entrance to the 'bachelor group' (McNabb, 1964). This was marked by a combination of events i.e. the drinking of alcohol in a public house in the company of older men and his acceptability into the male community. As a 'rite of passage' (Van

Genep, 1960) the first drink in the public house in the company of bachelor group members is meaningful for the young male as 'a ceremony demonstrating his manhood' (Stivers, 2000:83). 'Hard drinking also played a compensatory role in Irish society. The segregation of males and females, late and limited opportunity for marriage, the regulation and control of reproduction and the promotion of celibacy as the ideal state arose out of economic necessity; the scarcity of resources (land). As work, land ownership and identity as husband/father were not accessible to all males, alternative systems of identity and prestige were established. While the positive aspects of the married state were downplayed, the freedom from responsibility, sense of adventure and the devaluation of marriage formed part of the ideology that inability to marry or own land had its compensations. Male drinking was considered a 'moral demand in Irish culture' (Stivers, 2000:94) that compensated for the lack of opportunities to marry, have a family and to own land. Compelling arguments for total abstinence from alcohol coming from the temperance movement, and the status associated with hard drinking as an 'integral part of male identity' (p. 100), meant little scope for moderation or restraint.

For Stivers, 'bachelor group membership and manhood were one and the same' and hard drinking associated with the construction of masculinity formed a 'collective search for identity' (2000:88). 'Hard drinkers' and 'teetotallers' of the 19th and 20th century (as polar opposite groups), have been largely replaced by early 21st century 'moderate' or

‘social’ drinkers. Terms that endorsed ‘extremes’, have been substituted by a discourse of constraint, self-discipline and what is *now* interpreted as customary or acceptable drinking practice. Stivers investigation centred mainly on male drinking practices (appropriate as public houses at that time were male dominated spaces), and Van Gennep (transition from one status to another) on the clearly defined function of alcohol (influenced by the Catholic Church and the economy) in everyday social life. This research investigates drinking practices that are no longer gender-specific or influenced by Church teaching, but are instead governed by an array of different influences specific to 21st century Ireland.

While a ‘social problem’ approach centres on the misuse of alcohol and on the consequences of misuse, a social process approach focuses on ‘social’, ‘moderate’ or ‘non-problematic’ drinking practices. Concentration on excessive consumption and on alcohol abuse reveals a tendency to ‘express a strong bias towards Western culture’ (Douglas, 2003:4). Anthropological studies dispute the links between alcohol and criminal behaviour and also challenge the notion that misuse of alcohol leads to anomie. According to Douglas, ‘social and cultural studies should be matched by medical studies’ (Douglas, 2003:5), in a multifaceted approach where the disciplines of pathology, sociology and anthropology come together. ‘The strength and uniqueness of a ‘social process’ approach to drinking patterns and practices emanates from an in-depth investigation that reaches beyond the ‘problematic’ and instead

scrutinizes the determining factors that generate the social world of the drinker. Alcohol consumption, therefore, is approached as an activity determined by an array of social processes and where drinking in the company of others is viewed *positively* as a leisure activity and an aid to relaxation linked with ‘informal association’ (Oldenburg, 1999) and interaction. While consequences of the misuse of alcohol dominate countless debates, the responsible social use of alcohol in Irish society receives minimal attention. To redress the balance, this project – while acknowledging and accepting the ‘problematic’ of alcohol misuse, instead focuses on what are described as ‘social’ or ‘moderate’ drinking practices.

Investigation of the social world of the drinker, called for a multi-dimensional approach, beginning with the unfixed definitions of ‘social drinker’ and ‘social drinking’. As a qualitative study, drinkers who described their drinking patterns as ‘social’ or ‘moderate’ (despite considerable variation in the quantities consumed on any one occasion and in the frequency or regularity of such occasions) were selected as participants³. This step in the research process proved both informative and challenging; a rich source of data on the one hand, through insights into personal (respondents) relationships with alcohol, while on the other hand, revealing some contradictory interpretations of what constituted ‘social’ drinking. The changing relationship between the drinker and alcohol that evolves throughout the life course indicates the non-fixed

³ See Chapter 3.6.

nature of social drinking practices as they change over time. A ‘temporal perspective’ (Fornas, 1995) that traces respondents’ perception and consumption practices of alcohol and the changing role of the public house in Irish society, reveals the co-existence of continuity and change that constitutes the social world of the drinker at any given time.

The relationship between the social drinker and alcohol is one that evolves throughout the life cycle. When social drinking is investigated from the ‘life-course’ perspective (Hunt, 2005), the relevance of the ‘life-stage’ position to ‘social life’ experience becomes apparent. While time and place provide a contextual backdrop for social drinking, a longitudinal study of drinking practices traces and explains changing relationships with alcohol throughout the life-cycle. During the interview stage of the research, respondents recounted with the aid of a ‘life-story grid’ (Neuman, 1997:373) what social drinking and the public house meant at different stages of their lives. This was interpreted as a changing (maturing) involvement with alcohol throughout the life-cycle and was evident to some degree in all cases. Age-appropriate links with alcohol, changes in patterns of consumption and changing views regarding the social importance of alcohol revealed the transformative nature of the drinker/alcohol relationship. It is a relationship that changes throughout the life-course of the drinker and is essentially bound up with the motivations for, and the modes of ‘social’ interaction that are always in transition. It is also a relationship that is structured by an array of constraints and obligations that are socially and legally determined.

1. 3. The public house: a social history

The practice of consuming alcohol in Ireland, almost certainly dates back to the arrival of the Neolithic farmers c.7000BC. (Molloy, 2002:8). According to folklorist Kevin Danaher, ancient Irish literature contains numerous references to drinking. Banquets where excessive drinking and drunkenness were commonplace, are key social events that provide the backdrop for many Irish folktales. According to Danaher, St. Patrick had a brewer in his household while St. Bridget was ‘praised for the excellence of the ale she brewed’ (1964:46). Accounts of early alcohol brewing and importation, trade and consumption practices, come mainly from ancient legal, political and religious texts. The oldest surviving Irish manuscript ‘The Book of the Dun Cow’, written at Clonmacnoise, c.1100 AD refers to events (dating from the 5th century) that include tales of heavy drinking and drunkenness. Hagiographies of the Irish saints also contain references to feasting and drinking wine and to the use of wine for the celebration of the Eucharist. The custom of offering an alcoholic drink was an act of social importance and an expression of hospitality, and ancient law texts decreed that a mug of beer be made available to all callers.

Winetavern Street in Dublin was established as the city’s alcohol trade centre. Taverners were ‘off-sales’ wine merchants who imported and supplied wine to the nobility. According to Molloy, the ‘off-license begat the pub’ and taverns became places of ‘social interaction and

discourse', where professional business was conducted and food and drink was consumed (2002:17). The Brazen Head in Dublin's Lower Bridge St., established in 1198, displays a sign claiming to be Ireland's oldest pub. By the 1600s, the words 'alehouse' and 'taverne' were used interchangeably to describe places that sold wine and places that sold beer. The term 'public house', was according to Molloy, used in legislation and in conversation. This was later abbreviated during the Victorian period to the word 'pub', a term that is now recognized globally. In 1667, Dublin City Corporation records show 1,500 premises selling alcohol and the continuing increase in trading licenses became a significant source of revenue to the exchequer.

Towards the end of the 1600s, the practice of brewing on the premises had declined as beer was sourced from commercial breweries. This change came about due to the emergence of a more discerning drinker and developments in the craft of brewing. During this period restrictions were introduced that limited hours of trading, and new procedures were established for the annual renewal of licenses. Norman (licensing) law regulated the setting up and operation of taverns. The constabulary was responsible for the implementation of licensing laws. William of Orange introduced a legal requirement that alcohol be subject to measurement. All pint vessels were required by law to display an 'assay mark'(2002:37) to certify holding a full pint measure. The concept of precise measurement has been brought forward and is now enforced by personnel from the 'weights and measures' (Dept of Justice).

Regular spot-checks are carried out on both quantity and quality of alcohol, particularly spirits, and prosecutions are initiated where discrepancies are detected. From 1753 a new law required that a record be kept of all license holders. While this law should have put an end to unlicensed premises, many continued to operate into the 1930s. Crowded conditions in the Dublin slums impeded law enforcement, therefore 'shebeens' continued to operate into the 1950s.

The public house is an accepted symbol of Irish culture. Taylor describes the Irish pub as the 'true centre of Irish life for centuries' ... 'that has served many functions such as grocery store, funeral parlour, concert hall, restaurant, bar, political forum, congenial meeting place, courting corner, and, most of all, a place for talk'(1983:15). The 18th century was a period of much social change that had a profound effect on the Irish public house:

- The development of a regular stage-coach service meant a new role and a valuable source of income to many pubs. Refreshment and overnight accommodation became available for both travelers and horses in 'coaching inns'.
- Marriages took place in pubs, often occurring on the spur of the moment while bride and groom were under the influence of alcohol. Due to the failure of a great number of these unions the practice ceased in 1753 with the introduction of the marriage act.
- In 1789, the establishment of mail coach lines and the expansion of the national postal service instituted a further role for coaching

inns. Services to coach drivers and their military escorts was an important social function as well as an added source of income.

- From 1846 - 1962, the Coroners Act stipulated that public houses could on the instructions of a coroner, be used for the storage of bodies until an inquest took place.
- Publicans who also operated as undertakers, made use of their cool store rooms and marble topped tables as appropriate storage for beer or for bodies.
- By the mid 19th century the establishment of the Irish railway network greatly benefited the licensed trade. The transportation of goods meant a general availability and a greater choice of products and movement of people saw the beginning of a tourist industry that directly benefited publicans. Molloy cites pubs in Bundoran and Lisdoonvarna as two such examples.

In 1883, the Licencing (Ireland) Act was introduced. This Act was an adaptation of the Duke of Wellingtons' liberal 1830 Beer Act for England and Wales, introduced as a response to public concern about drunkenness. The first temperance societies were established in New Ross, Belfast and Dublin, the most famous total abstinence movement being led by a Capucin Friar, Fr. Theobald Matthew. In 1924, a 'Committee of Inquiry into Intoxicating Liquor' was set up by the government due to the image of Ireland as a 'country that was ridden with alcohol' (2002:75). Their report issued the following year, stated that the 'drink problem had lessened', due to improved social conditions,

increased taxes on alcoholic products and reduced alcohol strength. The view of the committee was that the ‘problem’ was one of ‘supervision’ and ‘excessive competition’. A recommendation that licenses should be limited to one for every 400 people saw a ‘Reduction of Licenses’ amendment to the 1927 Intoxicating Liquor Act.

Alcohol consumption in the public house plays an important role in Irish social and economic life (Conniffe and McCoy, 1993). Due to the negative effects of alcohol abuse on the health and social life of abusers, the World Health Organization seeks to reduce alcohol consumption levels. The degree of concern was mirrored by setting a target of a 25% reduction on 1980 consumption figures. In Ireland the Department of Health took on the task of responding to these guidelines by developing a national policy on alcohol use. When forming social policy, a number of factors are taken into account. They include the economic, social, medical, cultural and political conditions of Irish society. Conniffe and McCoy first of all look at the economic implications of the alcohol trade and the effects of the alcohol industry on the Irish Economy. In 1991, 4,600 people were employed in the manufacture of alcohol, accounting for 2% in industrial employment. In the retail area, there were 10,500 licensed premises and 300 off-licenses, employing 33,000 fulltime and a further 15,000 part-time staff. Between the industry and trade, it accounted for 3% of total jobs in the economy. The exchequer benefitted from excise duty, VAT, license fees and rates paid by publicans. Excise duty alone contributed over £440 million to

the exchequer in 1991. A positive role of alcohol therefore is its contribution to the balance of payments, where exports exceed imports.

(Molloy 2002) estimates that there are currently almost 11,000 licensed premises in the Republic Of Ireland. This is an approximate figure as an unknown number of licenses issued prior to 1902 are still ‘in circulation’ (Molloy p.5). Figures released by the Revenue Commissioners (Foley, 2010) show that 9896 pub licenses were issued in 2002 however by 2009 this number had fallen to 9082. The figures for spirit off-licenses for 2002 showed 808 outlets, this had increased to 1770 by 2009. Wine off-licenses for the same period also showed an increase from 2023 to 3705. These figures reflect the recent cultural shift from drinking in the public house to drinking in the home. Historically, the public house as social space has evolved over time in terms of usage and its meaning and continues to do so. The transition from marriage venue or general grocery/undertakers to the contemporary themed food/drink/entertainment space is reflective of wider social change. Throughout its history the public house has evolved according to social norms, the needs and expectations of users and a political economy that imposes structural constraints on all aspects of the drinks trade. The social role and the function of the pub is always in the process of transition. As a place of congregation, refreshment and interaction however, its specific status and function within the community remains constant.

1. 4. Drinking practices: a fusion of social processes

Investigation of ‘social’ drinking practices is a complex undertaking. Firstly, the definition of ‘social’ drinker is according to my data, a relative term. The quantity and frequency with which alcohol is consumed by the moderate drinker varies considerably and often exceeds official guidelines (WHO) or the recommendations of medical experts, therefore the terms ‘moderate’ and ‘social’ when applied to drinking always require further clarification. Secondly, drinking as a social activity is shaped by processes that have been identified in accordance with my research as largely cultural, economic and regulatory. A social process perspective contextualises alcohol consumption as a cultural activity and as participation in the Irish economy that takes place within a regulatory framework. Conversely, the influences of contemporary cultural norms, modern-day business models and the increasing politicisation of social life combine to produce the social world of the drinker. Social processes that impact upon all aspects of the supply and consumption of alcohol warrant an investigation that centres exclusively on the experience of the ‘non-problematic’ drinker; processes that will be shown to have their origins in the *misuse* of alcohol.

Investigation of the contemporary social drinker, moderate drinking practices as they are constructed and experienced, along with places of consumption first of all addresses a broad spectrum of social, economic and regulatory processes. Processes that embody the various

‘interests’ of drinkers, drinks providers and those of the ‘common good’ converge and conflict to reshape and recreate drinking practices at the micro-level. Secondly, the social and societal setting within which the research is situated is contextualised. Ireland’s prosperity during the research period (Clinch et al 2002) manifested itself in a rise in consumerism that impacted upon leisure time activities thus changing the way drinkers relate to alcohol and to the public house. New ranges of alcohol products, particularly wines and the growing trend of public-space dining developed in response to more sophisticated and fast-paced lifestyle demands. Indicators that the consumption of alcohol is experienced as more than a traditional cultural activity become apparent at the ‘field work’ stage in the research process when the impact of external influences was revealed

Contemporary Irish culture is subject to global forces where external influences make their presence felt at the micro-level (Inglis, 2008). Evidence of ‘political processes’ that are local as well as global come to light as having considerable influence on the re-shaping of drinking practices and alcohol-related activities. Controls and regulations (Inglis, 2002) permeate the social world of the drinker on all levels. Legislation applies to the Drinks Industry, to the place of consumption (the public house) and the actions (behaviour) of consumers of alcohol. This study shows how regulation and politicisation of the sale and consumption of alcohol and of the public house, which are nearly invisible ‘on the ground’, are shown to have far-reaching consequences

for the changing forms of social drinking within these establishments. The presence of laws governing the drinks trade, their enforcement and potential sanctions for non-compliance are shown to shape the way in which alcohol is provided (retailed) and how it is consumed.

The task of exploring the social world of the non-problematic drinker focuses on the structural context from micro to macro level to explore the economic, social, cultural and political processes that across time shape and re-shape the nature and character of social drinking. The ‘social reality’ of the drinking experience when ‘explained with reference to causal laws, which describe causes and effects’ (Neuman, 1997:64), implies that human behaviour is shaped by social forces that limit free will. Factors that shape and underpin alcohol consumption practices arise out of an amalgamation of cultural, economic and regulatory processes. Economic and regulatory structures along with contemporary cultural mores generate the social world of the drinker, a world of desires, constraints and obligations that are negotiated at the micro-level.

A perceptible rise in the availability and consumption of a variety of new alcoholic beverage products and related commodities and services, reflects the growth in general consumer goods and consumer activity. Consumption of imported beers and wines and the growing popularity of cocktails mark the move from traditional (limited) choice of ‘pints’ and ‘shorts’ to an array of alcohol types that are branded and are imported from several different countries of origin. Changes in alcohol-

related activities associated with the public house have also transformed to meet the changing needs of social drinkers. Live and electronic music performance, large plasma screens showing sporting events, food and adequate smoking zones (post 29/3/2004), are but some of the factors that indicate a growing diversity among Irish public houses. As well as changes in the chief 'product' (alcohol) and in the 'place' of consumption (the public house), contemporary business models and a gradual proliferation of regulatory structures and processes also play a crucial role in transforming the social world of the drinker. Factors such as consumer culture at a given time, the drinks trade/industry and the regulatory constraints that apply to the production and consumption of alcohol contextualise the social drinking experience and form the basis of this investigation into non-problematic social drinking. A framework is constructed that takes into account the temporal and spatial processes that generate the social world of the moderate drinker and what it means in contemporary Irish society.

1. 5. Chronology of a sociological research project.

The social world of the drinker is a sociological complexity that calls for a multi-dimensional approach empirically at the research stage and theoretically when constructing a framework of analysis. Chapter 2 begins with a discussion on how and why a 'social process' approach might best explain the social world of the drinker. The rationale for a 'social process' approach is to contextualise the spatial and temporal

aspects of social drinking within a framework of cultural, economic and political structures. A 'life-course' perspective that traces the changing relationship with alcohol and with the public house over time extends longitudinally the social process methodology. Social drinking is influenced by a multiplicity of social, cultural and global processes that are in a continuous state of flux and instability.

The Irish public house as location for the consumption of alcohol is investigated as a 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1999) that is multi-purpose in character and is in transition. Economic processes that govern the production and distribution of alcohol are also shown to have a direct bearing on drinking practices, for example marketing, growth in product choice and pricing. Political processes are discussed in so far as the regulation of alcohol, the drinks industry and the drinker have a profound impact on the social world of the drinker. Chapter 2 contextualises Ireland's changing consumption practices within a framework of social and global processes through which the social world of the drinker is examined and analyzed.

In view of the complexity of the topic, a research methodology was devised that in the view of this researcher would best produce the relevant data. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and the investigative processes. The formulation of the research question and the rationale for data gathering methodologies and of the chosen frameworks of analysis are shown. A 'social process' approach to the practice of

social or moderate drinking identified 3 separate frameworks of analysis; the ‘cultural’, the ‘economic’ and the ‘regulatory’ along with an inherent global influence. In Chapter 4, cultural processes that generate the social world of the drinker are explored. A ‘life-course’ perspective that traces the relationship between the drinker, alcohol and the public house over time illustrates changes in consumption practices and changing attitudes to alcohol that are reflected in contemporary tastes and in current leisure and consumption practices. The social morphology of the Irish public house is revealed as a consequence of changing structural forms and as response to new cultural trends. Social drinking practices while cultural in character are also shown as subject to an array of influences from beyond the cultural realm that in effect structure and impose constraints on the social world of the drinker.

Social drinking while perceived as cultural is also uncovered to reveal a sizeable and a deep-rooted economic impetus. The drinks industry as a market-driven and profit-motivated business shapes social drinking and the activities of social drinkers in an often subtle but tangible manner. Chapter 5 explores how economic strategies influence drinking practices and how the public house as consumer space is organised and managed for monetary gain. The reorganization and aesthetisation of consumer space, use of surveillance technologies and marketization policies create a consumer environment that is conducive to the expectations of the contemporary drinker. Business/consumption practices however, are not only confined to consumer desires or to the

business aspirations of the drinks provider but are shaped by the obligations and constraints inherent in Ireland's changing political economy.

Regulatory constraints and legal obligations that apply to drinkers and to drinks providers are explored in Chapter 6. Contemporary legislative changes such as those that apply to tobacco consumption in the workplace and current rules and sanctions regarding drink-driving are shown to impact on the social drinking experience. The role of the State in identifying and responding to the social and financial costs and benefits of alcohol in Irish society is one of complexity that generates tension and controversy. In order to explain how regulations shape drinking practices at the micro-level, a 'top down' approach to political processes (as structural constraints and obligations) is crucial. Regulatory processes that originate within the State or from beyond, for example, European law, are shown to produce, and to have a profound effect on the 'controlled' social world of the contemporary drinker.

Chapter 7 locates social processes that impact upon the drinking experience within the public house environment. The public house as well as being a place where alcohol is consumed and that is highly regulated and controlled is shown as a significant venue of informal interaction that is valued and is widely utilized within the community. The environment and the operation of the public house are also shown to function within cultural, political and business frameworks. Social

processes that govern the choice of product, that shape consumer behaviour and that informs drinks-provider activity, are also shown to produce new *places* of consumption (private space) thus further contributing to the social world of the contemporary drinker. A ‘bottom up’ perspective of social drinking practices reveals a multiplicity of social practices that ultimately produce and shape the social world of the public house drinker.

Chapter 8 concludes that the study of ‘non-problematic’ drinking is in itself a problematical endeavour due to varying interpretations of the concept ‘social drinking’. This finding generates discussion on the existence of an unfixed ‘fine line’ that separates social drinking and alcohol misuse. As a qualitative study, data is generated from accounts and analysis of individual alcohol-related experiences throughout the life-course. Changes in drinking practices and in attitudes to alcohol over time are explored in terms of changing individual choices and lifestyle trends within a social and an environmental context. The decline of the ‘local’ public house and the rise of the multi-functional ‘venue’ where alcohol, food and entertainment is available, mark out changes in informal social life that is at once regretted as a break from the ‘traditional’ while at the same time embraced as a natural response to the fast pace of modern life.

The relocation of drinking practices away from the public house, a recent and growing trend, raises a number of concerns such as the

limitation of social contact and the unstructured nature of consuming alcohol in the home. In this study the social world of the drinker is shown to operate within separate but interconnected spheres. At the same time the juxtaposition of theoretical frameworks presents a multi-faceted perspective that further explicates and validates this study of 'social' or 'moderate' alcohol consumption practices. This sociological study of an ordinary but time-honoured social practice also demonstrates the strength and the value of a multi-faceted approach when researching and analyzing the social world and discusses the possibility of developing and utilizing this framework in future studies.

Chapter 2.:The Social World of the Drinker: a Sociological Complexity.

This chapter sets out the complex nature of the topic(s) of inquiry, for example, the ambiguous nature of the social drinker and the diverse characteristics of the contemporary Irish public house. Contextual factors that are undergoing rapid change also have a direct bearing on drinkers, drinking patterns and drinking places. Investigation of the social world of the moderate drinker is a complex task insofar as the ‘topic’ is multi-faceted and diverse and extends beyond a single ‘field’ of inquiry. The social world of the drinker may be defined as a space inhabited by drinkers and drinks providers who interact in designated drinking places. It is also a social world that interconnects with and is shaped by inter-related ‘worlds’ and influences. A ‘social process’ approach creates a framework of analysis that explains the social world of the drinker (cultural processes), the drinks trade (economic processes) and alcohol controls in Ireland (political/regulatory processes). Alcohol consumption, therefore, is analysed and interpreted as the juxtaposition of cultural, business and regulatory processes that manifest themselves at the micro-level through the activity of social drinking.

2. 1. A ‘social process’ approach to moderate drinking practices.

Social life is experienced materially in accordance with a complexity of abstract processes that connect the individual to society. The construction of the social world is the outcome of human creativity that is contextually motivated and shaped at any given time. Ireland at the turn of the 21st century was a modernising society, undergoing rapid and unprecedented

social change. The economic boom of the Celtic Tiger era brought about changes to social life that were marked by a newfound prosperity and opportunities to experience new ways of living and new ways of being (O’Hearn, 1998:58). The social world of the individual as an amalgamation of cultural, economic and regulatory processes, filter through and are experienced socially and materially at the micro-level. For example, firstly, cultural expression as the routine ‘whole way-of-life’ (Williams, 1958) is shaped economically according to the socio-economic position of the consumer that determines spending power and spending practices, the consumption element of culture. Secondly, the social world is shaped according to the rules (regulatory processes) that govern cultural practices and laws that control economic processes.

Where human action such as alcohol consumption is shaped by sometimes contradictory empirical processes and conceptual frameworks, a ‘theoretical convergence’ (Faulks, 1999:165) that embraces a pluralist approach is called for. The actual source of power in society, whether coming from the dominant institutions of the ‘State’, or through ‘Capitalism’ a constant ‘revolutionary force in world history’ (Harvey, 1990:188) must be re-evaluated in the light of rapid social change. The notion that power does not emanate from any one institution or ‘interest’ exclusively, suggests that power is located throughout society¹. As power is defined as the ‘capacity to achieve one’s objectives, even when those objectives are in conflict with the

¹ According to Held’s (1987) *principle of autonomy*, ‘persons should enjoy equal rights and accordingly, equal obligations in the specification of the political framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them; that is, they should be free and equal in the determination of the conditions of their own lives, so long as they do not deploy this framework to negate the rights of others’.

interests of another actor' (Faulks, 1999:1), the potential for conflict is an ever-present phenomenon that is evident when the interests of stakeholders collide.

At an abstract level, the cultural process of alcohol consumption is shaped by capitalist processes that govern all consumption practices, and is also subject to political processes of regulation and control. State power and authority on the one hand and the strength and influence of civil society on the other signify an 'interdependent power relationship between the state and civil society' (Faulks, 1999:11), where ideological differences and aspirations are negotiated. As social life is always cultural and culture is always political (Fornas, 1995:64-65), the presence of underlying tensions, create conditions where conflict is inevitable. With the rise in 'the cult of the individual' (Inglis, 2005:60), social consensus becomes problematic, for example, when individual desires and expectations come into conflict with the aims and aspirations of others. Where cultural ideals seek expression and capitalist forces seek to dominate, 'bureaucratic principles impinge upon our everyday functioning' (Inglis, 2005:42). Capitalist forces, for example the accumulation of capital defines the relationship between producer/provider and consumer. Maximisation of profit through price setting and the expansion of products and services have a direct bearing upon the social drinking experience. Social life at the micro-level, in this instance the social world of the drinker, could be said to occupy a middle-ground position in a milieu of cultural, economic and regulatory forces. As forces converge, an interpenetration of cultural, economic and regulatory processes confine the

social drinking experience within boundaries set out by the drinks trade and consistent with political and legal structures.

The act of consuming alcohol, a material and visible phenomenon, may also be defined in abstract terms as a cultural process and as participation in an economic system, within a highly regulated framework. Contemporary cultural practices of alcohol consumption therefore, are determined not only by factors such as personal choice and taste, socio-economic position and the life-stage position of the drinker. A sociological perspective of the routine everyday experience of the drinker (that is unique to each individual), takes into account the 'more hidden aspects of social structure and organisation' (Inglis, 2005:4), while an understanding of individual experience at the micro level reveals how the structure operates. Economic processes are equally subject to strict regulatory controls as well as to prevailing societal and market forces that always have a cultural basis. Drinking practices as an integration of cultural, economic and political processes come about through the 'co-presence' (Goffman, 1967:1) of people in a 'routinised social setting' (Goffman, 1967:1), such as the public house and implies a specificity of social relations that defines social experience at the micro-level.

The social world of the drinker is a complex one, where human ideas and creativity intersect with the forces of capitalism and with the coercive power and authority of the state. Construction of reality for the social drinker emerges from the integration of cultural, economic and political processes

that together define drinking practices at the micro level. In order to explain the world of the social drinker, a clear understanding of the underlying structural forces that shape and control the relevant people, practices, products and places is crucial. Identification and analysis of the complex and multifaceted determinants of social drinking call for a 'research design' (Kane, 1997:39) that is both integrative and flexible.

2. 2. The social drinker: a 'life-course' perspective.

For the purpose of this study a sample of 'moderate' or 'social' drinkers were selected to represent gender, an urban/rural demographic and from different positions of the life-course. A logical assumption may be made that as human needs change over time, the manner and objectives of social interaction also change. Making a distinction between patterns of formal and informal 'social connectedness' (2000:94), Putnam claims that informal social involvement that peaks in young adulthood tends to decline in retirement, while formal community connections tend to peak in late middle age. Leisure time activities and the nature of informal free association are lifestyle choices that are time and place specific, are life-stage appropriate and that evolve according to social and cultural trends. Lifestyle choices made throughout the life course, reflect personal preferences as well as attitudes towards leisure practices at any given time in the life-cycle. Alcohol consumption therefore, as a lifestyle (leisure and consumption) practice, reflects or is appropriate to the relevant life-stages throughout the life-course. A 'life-cycle approach' (Hunt, 2005:162) to

leisure and therefore to alcohol consumption, is of understandable significance, in view of the changing relationship between consumer and product (drinker and the public house) that takes place throughout the life-course.

The Rapoport and Rapoport (1975) model identifies four distinct stages of the life-cycle. The first '*adolescence*' stage, where leisure activities are associated with personal identity, should not (legally) be relevant to social drinking. However, studies (Morgan, 2001) and (MEAS, 2005) show that underage drinking is a growing cause for concern. For the under-eighteen age group, the public house experience is a somewhat limited one; 'on premises' (Section 31 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 1988) times are restricted and the serving of alcohol is prohibited by law. '*Young adulthood*' is the stage in the life cycle during which social identity is formed. The formation of social identity comes about through the establishment of relationships and friendships that are closely linked to occupation, and to leisure time activity. During this stage in the life cycle, alcohol consumption plays a significant role in the formation of identity, due to the links between leisure time activities and the establishment of lifestyle practices.

During the '*establishment phase*' (roughly between the ages of 25 and 55) leisure and life-style practices become more 'home-centred' (Hunt, 2005:162). Home-ownership however, may also have socio-economic constraints and can be delayed through inability to establish a family home. When family and friendship networks are established, the 'sociable use'

(Oldenburg, 1999:33) of the public house is less frequent. This decline makes way for additional or alternative leisure practices that have a more domestic or familial focus. The shift from public house consumption to domestic consumption however, has a more complex explanation. The significant increase in domestic alcohol consumption practices must also be viewed beyond the 'life-stage' explanation, to the array of societal factors that shape personal and social life at all stages. From the mid fifties onwards when work and family commitments lessen, the fourth 'stage' of the life-cycle begins. What Rapaport and Rapaport, (1975) refer to as the '*later years*' stage (from age 55 or with retirement), marks a re-connection between individuals and the wider community.

While leisure practices in general are determined by factors such as culture, gender and socio-economic position (Hunt, 2005:163), the social world of the drinker in terms of sociability and alcohol consumption practices are also defined along socially constructed age-appropriate lines. Alcohol consumption practices, as they change throughout the life-course, are generally life-stage specific and therefore, can be best explained within the context of this model. My analysis presents accounts of social drinking that reveal individual consumption patterns as they change throughout the life-course. For the purpose of this study, contemporary drinking practices among drinkers ranging in age from 20 years to 70+ years are also taken into consideration.

Empirical data generated from biographical accounts of individual(s) relationships with alcohol and with the public house over time, bring to light the temporality of social processes that are at the core of this study. At any given time the quality and level of sociability associated with the practice of consuming alcohol in the company of others, manifests itself through human social action in accordance with the age-profile of drinkers, connectivity between drinkers and alcohol-related activities such as entertainment, tobacco and food consumption. For the drinker a combination of social processes contribute to the ‘social construction of reality’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The quality and diversity of social experience is contextual in that it varies according to time and place, thus showing the impact of social structure and human agency over a given period (Hunt, 2005).

Oldenburg’s ‘third place’ (1999:20) where emphasis is on the *settings* of informal public life, argues for the traditional (but declining) practice of informal association associated with social drinking in the company of others. While Hunt’s ‘life-course’ (2005) theory conceptualises the relationship between the individual, the public house and alcohol consumption over time, Oldenburg’s perception of the public house as ‘third place’ (1999) is presented as a site of social integration that is informal, egalitarian and community oriented. The spatial dimensions of social drinking intersect with changing drinking practices occurring across the temporal dimension, thus bringing together two theoretical approaches to the diverse ‘life-stage’ practices of social drinking.

2. 3. Alcohol consumption: a multiplicity of socio-cultural processes.

Alcohol consumption practices are historically and contemporaneously located in Irish culture and lifestyle. Cultural processes involve all procedures through which people transform the social and material world. As the outcome of meaningful interaction between the individual and the wider society 'culture operates as a bridge between the social structure and the acting self' (Smith, 2001:133). When culture is defined as day-to-day life experience, it includes 'even the most banal' (Simmel, 1950:413) of routine activities that permeate throughout work and family life. Where culture is defined as a 'way of life', cultural processes are identified firstly, as 'communicative practices' (Fornas, 1995:1) where human agents construct the social worlds through active and creative processes. This study, however, will show how and why this assertion does not apply in all cases; that human agency and creativity are shaped according to an array of complex social processes, such as those that apply to drinking and to alcohol-related activities.

The construction of the social world is a process that embraces a 'multitude of works and a great diversity of forms' (Lefebvre, 1991:68). Prevailing ideas and values in any given society arise out of a dissemination of thought, knowledge and information that is exchanged, appropriated, altered and created anew in a process of communication that 'embraces the customary ways that people behave towards each other' (Tovey and Share, 2003:325). The cultural sphere is generated through the integration of

structural forces and individual creativity. The definition of culture as ‘a record of our reactions, in thought and feeling, to the changed conditions of our common life’ (Williams, 1971:285) centres on the role of the individual. The increasing significance of choice in a routine lifestyle experience supports the notion that ‘modern culture is in part characterised by a search for unique self expression’ (Inglis, 2005:65). An important element of self expression is the link between consumption and class, in that ‘consumers and their objects communicate positions in the social world’ (Corrigan, 1998:17). Although the notion of culture as the expression of personal identity and day-to-day social life implies a considerable autonomy, cultural processes take cognisance of contextual factors that influence and shape the construction of social life.

Social processes that produce everyday social life have a temporal as well as a spatial quality. As part of the ‘accelerating modernization process’ (Fornas, 1995:3) ‘historicization’ and ‘modernization’ are thematically linked. Culture has ‘roots’ in history from which contemporary practices originate, and through which prospective social life will develop in the future. Culture also develops along ‘routes’ that shape and redefine the way in which social life is experienced, therefore, culture is ‘not a static structure but an ever-changing flux’ (Fornas, 1995:1). While having their origins in tradition, our experiences of the social world are ‘always shaped in one way or another by the cultural contexts in which we live’ (Inglis, 48). Cultural practices that define social life are characterised by both continuity and change (Hunt, 2005). Rapid social change associated with modernity, is said

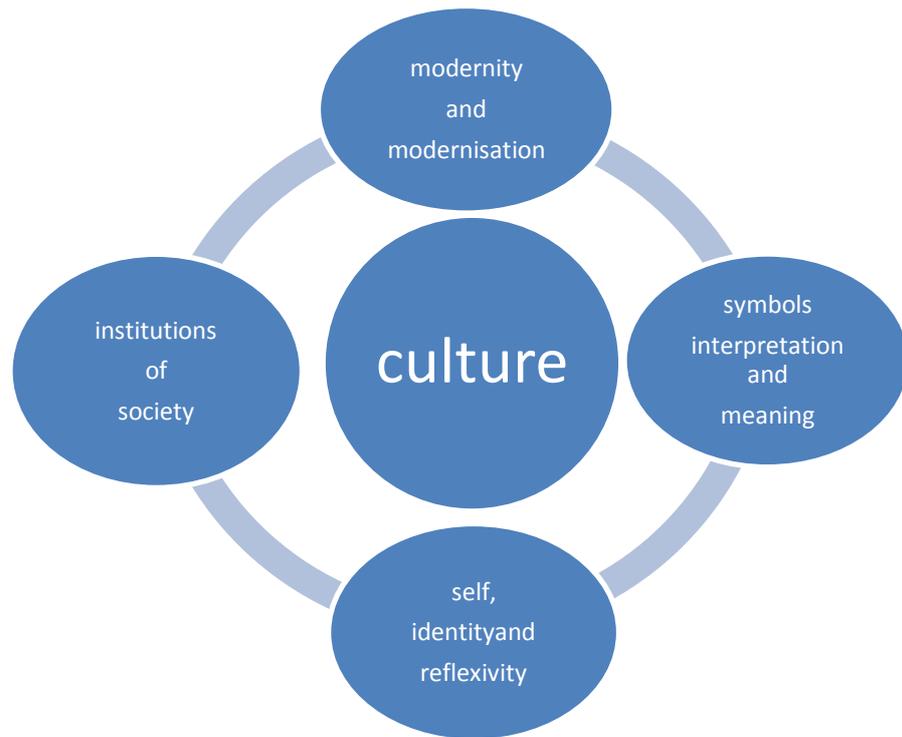
to have ‘destroyed some traditions, invented others, and those it has invented it puts on display for commercial gain or for the purposes of political expediency’ (Inglis, 2005:69). Cultural processes therefore operate in conjunction with economic and political processes, where each juxtaposes and interpenetrates the other.

The metabolic mix of ‘cultural processes’ (Fornas, 1995, ‘economic structures’ (Marshall, 1993:9) and ‘political power’ (Held, 2002:101) determine all alcohol-related activities from the social drinking experience at the micro level to the ‘business’ and the ‘regulatory controls’ that apply to the drinks industry. Drinking as cultural activity is at the same time a consumerist activity and a regulated activity. The drinks trade as a business operates within cultural norms that influence consumer expectations and within a regulatory framework that monitors and controls, crucially within a particular political economy. The State therefore, can be seen to mediate between consumer demands and business interests for the purpose of maintaining social order and reducing the harmful effects of alcohol on society. While evidence-based countermeasures such as high taxation and restrictions on the availability of alcohol have some degree of effectiveness, the strategy is referred to as ‘more palliative than preventative’ (Room, Babor and Rehm, 2005). The accumulation and management of revenue generated by the drinks industry, implies a deep-rooted involvement of the State in the regulation and control of the (alcohol) market system.

Social and cultural processes that generate everyday social life emerge as ‘a dizzying array of different potentials and possibilities’ (Inglis, 2006:56), that change according to human goals or desires. Embedded in a network of beliefs and values, human creativity produces a social and material world through an array of abstract (systems and structures, for example economic and regulatory frameworks) and concrete (incorporating materiality and social action) processes. Alcohol consumption as a routine leisure activity is first of all a cultural experience while at the same time it may be defined as participation in an economic process. Cultural influences that shape and are shaped by an array of abstract (in this instance business principles and regulation) and material processes, ultimately determine the social world of the drinker. Drinking practices therefore, are perceived not only as a social or cultural pursuit, but as engagement with the broader political economy.

2. 4. Cultural processes: a multi-dimensional perspective.

The practice of social drinking in Ireland in the public house is a cultural activity that has a history, pervasiveness and is deeply entrenched in the Irish psyche and in Irish identity. Contemporary cultural theorist, Fornas (1995), puts forward a multi-dimensional model that takes into account four ‘tendencies and dimensions’ (1995:2) of culture:



Fornas's four dimensional model of 'culture' (1995)

Firstly, late modernity, a time of accelerated modernisation processes, demands new ways of understanding social change. A 'temporal perspective' that links the past with the present, acknowledges the 'historically specific constructedness' (1995:3) of concepts and theories. Social life is experienced as a processes of continuous change however, 'changes and continuities co-exist' (1995:21), for example, social practices and ways of thinking are preserved while at the same time they are subject to revision. According to Fornas, processes of modernization as 'interplay between continuity and change' (1995:22) have three defining characteristics: Cultural expression is subject to an 'irreversible dynamization' (1995:20) whereby present practices which have their foundations in the past, at the

same time play a role in actively constructing future practices through processes of continuity and change. Processes of change include an ‘ambivalent rationalisation’ (1995:20) where a two-sided rationality reveals a positive (creative) and a negative (destructive) potential. The concept of a ‘differential universalism’ inherent in the processes of change addresses the increasingly global and general nature of modernisation that ‘create new pluralities by separating social and individual life-spheres’ (1995:20).

Secondly, Fornas’s critique of contemporary society takes into account ‘objective or external factors’ (1995:3) such as the material world, new technology and the political and economic systems that have both a unifying and a divisive consequence.

Thirdly, interpretation of symbols and texts that produces meaning facilitates ‘symbolic communication’ (Fornas, 1995:134) which is the basis of human social interaction. Interpretation and a shared meaning of the social world are essential to the formation of self (Fornas, 1995:222) through processes of socialization, identity construction and reflexive thought and action.

The fourth cultural tendency is one of increasing ‘reflexivity and self-referentiality’ (1995:5) not only in everyday social life, but also within the social research process itself.

Fornas’s four-dimensional theoretical framework offers a broad perspective of contemporary culture through which the social world of the drinker may be explained. Cultural phenomena, such as social drinking that have roots in the past, are shaped over time according to changing trends and expectations (taste, availability of new products), as well as changing

structures and institutions (technology, regulation). A 'network of ordering structures' (Fornas, 1995:50) that organise and control contemporary society, are dominant forces that impact upon all aspects of the drinks industry. According to Fornas's concept of culture, the phenomenon of social drinking may be interpreted as a practice that has a history and is subject to structural controls, and for the reflexive drinker the practice is linked directly to the construction of identity. The construction of identity when bound up with leisure and lifestyle choices manifests itself in social drinking practices that can reflect life-stage position or class. This research shows how for the social drinker reflexive action in the prevailing social and structural context, plays a central role when choices are made regarding site of consumption, alcohol product type and the quantities and frequency of consumption. A multi-dimensional model of cultural theory facilitates the evaluation of modernisation processes along with the concepts of modernity, the changing structures and institutions of contemporary societies and the cultural symbolism and communicative mechanisms that contribute to the formation and realisation of the self. The strength of Fornas' model of contemporary cultural analysis is its scope and progressiveness in explaining the social world of the drinker; an amalgam of temporal processes, contextual factors global influences and human social action.

Social life in Ireland at the beginning of the twenty-first century is inextricably linked to and influenced by wider European and world cultures. Increased mobility (travel and tourism) and developments in communications technology (media) are instrumental in the dissemination of alternate ways of

being and ways of doing. Increased flows of people, ideas, goods and capital, have created a culture of ‘interdependency’ (Inglis, 2002:183) and a ‘sameness’ (2002:5) that extends beyond national boundaries. Awareness of and in some instances the adoption of aspects of other cultures not only transforms social life, but is also bound up in the global capitalist system through the production and circulation of consumer goods. For Inglis, recent changes in Irish cultural (consumption) practices reveal a shift from a ‘culture of self-denial to one of self-indulgence’ (2002:35). When locating Irish consumption practices within a global system, Inglis identifies the ‘desperate search for difference, the demand for constant transformation’ (2008:165) as a driving force of the world capitalist system that impacts at the local level. An extensive range of different products, (for example, alcohol and food) and services inspires people to purchase and consume. Development of our own ‘particular tastes, preferences and pleasures have become part of what we are’...a culture of ‘self-indulgence’ has followed on from a culture that ‘venerated the plain and simple’ (Inglis, 2002:28-30). The practice of engaging in new lifestyle experiences and exploring new tastes develops a ‘portfolio of choices that constitute not just a unique lifestyle, but an ongoing unique sense of self’ (Inglis, 2008:165).

The hybridization of culture, a consequence of global processes manifests itself in everyday life when choices about eating and drinking and sites of consumption are made. While the cultural activity of social drinking is acknowledged as having a global input, this study makes an equally strong case for the domestic (local) determinants that also play key roles in the

generation of the social world of the drinker. Social drinking as an economic endeavour and in particular, as a highly regulated activity is also determined by a multiplicity of global as well as local processes. It is therefore, a *combination* of local and global forces that shapes the social world of the Irish drinker.

2. 5. The Irish public house: a multiplicity of practices and processes.

Close examination of social drinking practices also takes into account the transformation of the Irish public house environment, the primary location where alcohol is consumed. The ‘ale house’, ‘tavern’ or ‘pub’, as the places where alcohol is routinely consumed, have evolved over time with a long history of multiple uses or functions that serve the communities in which they are located. As places of business (apart from the drinks trade) public houses were often the places where groceries, fuel or the services of undertakers or auctioneers (Molloy, 2002) might be located. According to a 2001 survey one of the ‘top five spending or financial priorities’ was assigned to meals and drinks in restaurants or public houses, where the main objective was ‘to have a good time’ (Inglis, 2008:176). While the availability of services and commodities were essential to the community, the public house as a place to socialise and interact with others was also acknowledged as having a significant if not essential role.

As the key location for social drinking, the public house occupies a position of social and cultural significance. Throughout its’ history, the

public house as a location of ‘informal association’ (Oldenburg, 1999:xxii) has changed in response to the prevailing time and place-specific norms. For example, before the 1960s, women in Ireland were not allowed to consume alcohol in the majority of public houses and this practice only became illegal with the introduction of the Equal Status Act (Molloy, 2002:80). As the practice of consuming alcohol in interaction with others (males) in a public house gradually changed to include women, a ‘feminisation of drinking spaces’ (Tovey and Share, 2003:376) came about. An increase in alcohol consumption by Irish women, (Cassidy, 1997) linked to a rise in disposable income, translated into marked improvements in the material environment (comfortable seating, cleanliness, toilets) and alcohol products that included ‘new lighter drinks’ such as lager and vodka (Molloy, 2002:81). This phenomenon paved the way towards the contemporary spaces of alcohol consumption and transformation of the social and material environment of the public house.

As a cultural activity that is consistently undergoing change, the consumption of alcohol and the practice of ‘blissful public congregation’ (Oldenburg, 1999:1) in the public house, is the manifestation of a multiplicity of material and abstract processes. Social, material and abstract processes integrate in a complex and a specific way, to produce the social world of the drinker. Alcohol consumption as a cultural practice is a routine leisure-time activity that is ‘central to Ireland’s social life and sociability’ (Tovey and Share, 2003:371). To limit analysis of social drinking and the role of the public house in social life to the ‘leisure’ aspect, however, would be a

restrictive exercise. The public house, while primarily a place where alcohol is consumed and a place associated with leisure activity, is also understood and utilised as a community resource despite a steady decline in the number of licences issued. (Scarborough, 2008:57). As a location of informal association, entertainment and refreshment, the public house is a place where social 'events' take place, milestones are marked and where social bonds are established and maintained. The importance of the public house as a 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1999) of informal interaction, therefore, elevates the status of the pub beyond that of 'drinking place', to a place of informal association, friendship development and social connectedness.

Associated primarily with sociability and alcohol consumption, the public house throughout its history has become firmly established as a meeting place where people congregate to consume and interact in an 'expression of identity and lifestyle' (Bennett and Watson, 2002:207). As a place of free association and consumption, the public house with its inherent drinking practices, has specific meaning and is acknowledged as a significant aspect of Irish culture. Spatial practices such as drinking, are key factors in the production of social space such as the public house, and it is 'through their reproduction in people's everyday experience that the meaning of a place is secured' (Allen and Pryke, 1994:473). The practice of social drinking in Ireland as the 'coming together of local, national and global cultural strands to form a new and ever-evolving cultural fabric' (Inglis, 2008: 227) implies the convergence of a multiplicity of influences that together reshape and transform the social drinking experience.

As a place that has a history, is associated with a diversity of social activities and is culturally embedded in Irish society, the public house has a symbolic as well as a functional role. Alcohol consumption practices and informal social interaction in designated drinking places during a period of rapid social change, utilizes elements of Oldenburg's and Hunt's work to explain the 'processes' that determine the social world of the drinker. Oldenburg's conceptualisation of the essential nature (and decline) of public places of association, places firm emphasises on the importance of place. The presence (or not) of a local, informal and accessible environment adds to or subtracts from daily social experience: 'when certain kinds of places disappear, certain experiences also disappear' (Oldenburg, 1999:295). For Oldenburg, considered urban planning that will lead 'toward better times...and places' (1999:284), reinforces the importance of public places of association that 'meet needs beyond the individual's capacity to recognise them' (1999:289).

While Hunt also acknowledges a decline in community and growing problems of social isolation, he does look beyond the concept of public places of informal association to the changing nature of social institutions and changing social needs and practices that alter throughout the life-course². Changes such as the growing 'commercial provision of leisure' (Hunt, 2005:165) and 'life-stage position' (2005:162), each have a direct bearing in

²² Both Hunt (2005) and Oldenburg (1999) emphasise the benefits of informal social communication and active participation in the community for the promotion of emotional wellbeing. Oldenburg's analysis of 'third place' offers a framework through which the public house may be interpreted, while Hunt's 'life-course' theoretical analysis of people's experiences throughout the life-cycle helps to explain changing patterns of social drinking over time.

determining leisure and lifestyle practices at any given time. Oldenburg focuses on the weakening of social ties due to the decline in spaces of free association, while Hunt extends the scope of analysis taking into account continuity and change over time, along with the life-stage position of the individual in a 'social world' that is in a continuous state of transition. Hunt explains changes in informal social integration that take into account the presence of alternative *places* of interaction, such as work and formal organisations (2005:147) as well as new *modes* of interaction for example, the increasing usage of communications technologies (2005:29). Informal social life therefore, is not only determined by place, it is also life-style specific and is shaped by social (contextual) processes and by the growing use of communications technologies.

Economic processes associated with the sale and purchase of alcohol products, are essential elements of the transactions that take place between drinkers and bar-workers. Concepts such as 'product' and 'labour,' essential aspects of economic processes, translate into 'concrete abstractions that make possible the relations of production' (Lefebvre, 1991:69). The purchase and consumption of alcohol, is also subject to abstract political processes whereby the social experience of drinking is strictly organised and controlled, through enforceable regulatory controls (Molloy, 2002:28) and Respondent S, (Garda Superintendent)³. While the cultural and economic processes of alcohol consumption are interconnected at all levels, the overarching political process of regulation, imposes a structural hegemony that influences both the

³ Interview conducted at Dublin Metropolitan Region Headquarters, Harcourt Square Dublin 2. 12/05/2004.

interactive leisure practices of drinking and the economic practices of consumption. This assertion is the central argument throughout the study, insofar as the act of consuming alcohol as cultural practice extends beyond the cultural domain, taking place in a structured and a controlled environment. Social and consumption practices (as well as business and regulatory procedures) are in a continuous state of transition, indicating that the lived experience of the drinker reflects and is reflective of the wider (contextual) changes that are taking place.

The micro level experience of drinking that defines the social world of the drinker is determined by cultural, economic and regulatory processes that control and shape social life. The experience of informal association associated with consuming alcohol in the public house in the company of others, therefore, is not an independent or autonomous practice. While taking into account factors such as taste and freedom of choice, the act of consuming alcohol is from an economic perspective bound up with the exchange of money and commodities and political determinism in the form of rules and controls. The notion of alcohol consumption as a casual, informal self-determined practice and the public house as a location of informal association is governed and shaped in a way that determines accessibility, quality of experience and the implicit benefits ascribed to informal association within a leisure environment.

As abstract economic and political processes manifest themselves materially, the contemporary drinking experience is in thrall to a multiplicity

of structural obligations and constraints that transform social drinking practices. In light of these assertions, the pub as a ‘great, good, place’ (Oldenburg 1999) as ‘neutral ground’ (1999:22), and ‘where conversation is the main activity’ (1999:26) is also transforming in accordance with prevailing processes of modernisation. The contemporary public house is on the one hand a traditional public house with its’ familiar products and services, while on the other hand it will have undergone dramatic transformation in order to keep pace with the changing lifestyle choices of the C21 drinker and with the economic goals of the drinks industry.

2. 6. Economic processes: the distribution and consumption of alcohol.

The shifting emphasis away from production, an economic process, to the realm of consumption, a process that is culturally generated, establishes new links between culture and economy. The rapid circulation of subjects and objects that characterise the post-modern economy is the ‘taking to excess what has already been found in the modern’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:13). In a ‘period of rapid change, flux and uncertainty’ (Harvey, 1989:124), shifts in contemporary consumption practices are reflective of a changing social environment. New products and services along with patterns of consumption generated at the cultural level, call for the adaptation of economic practices in the ‘new regime of accumulation’ (Harvey, 1989:124). While abstract economic principles remain unchanged, their operation at the micro-level is largely consumer and therefore culturally driven. As ‘stakeholders whose goodwill is vital to any business’ (Marshall, 1993:95), consumers expect

products and services that satisfy their changing needs in terms of variety, standard and value.

While definitive economic principles apply in the post-modern environment, their integration or overlap reveal a subtle shift. The forces that drive economic growth no longer rest only with the producer, nor is the scope of development producer-determined (Harvey, 1989:102). In a culture of general prosperity (Clinch, et al, 2002:31), the rise in consumer spending translates into a powerful force within the economic system. The application of economic principles at all levels of the drinks industry, relating to product supply and demand and target marketing, is modified to take into account increased consumer spending. While the introduction of new products (food and alcohol) reflects changing lifestyle choices, service delivery is 'context-dependent' (Lash and Urry, 1999:204) insofar as the social and material setting is of equal significance in generating a social space of consumption and interaction. Alcohol consumption within the environs of the public house is considered 'essential as a means of initiating social contact' (Ferriter, 1999:205), however, the practice of consuming alcohol in the public house is accepted as being in decline. This phenomenon will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

In line with the strategic reconfiguration of economic practices, is a re-definition of work practices. The changing role of the bar-worker where 'labour is in many cases part of the service product' (Lash and Urry, 1999:200) impacts considerably, on the experiences of service-

providers/receivers. For the drinker, the introduction of a partial self-service system that reduces both labour time for the producers, and consumption time for the consumers, is but one example of the 'speed-up in the turn-over times of capital' that endorse the 'values and virtues of instantaneity' (Harvey, 1989:286. Evident in the contemporary public house, the concept of self service is manifested in the presence of cigarette vending machines, queues of people carrying trays at self-service food zones and the disappearance of 'floor-staff'. This in effect, means a reduction in production time for the producer but more consumption time for the consumer, for example, having to go to the counter, wait for service and carry drinks to the table/seating area.

The 'deconstruction and reconstruction' of worker's skills creates an adaptable and a flexible workforce, deemed essential to the new 'flexible modes of accumulation' (Harvey, 1989:230). Flexibility for the bar-worker sees movement in two different directions. Firstly, there is the acquisition of new knowledge and skills associated with an expanding range of products (up-skilling), for example, in the mixing of cocktails or training in the handling and serving of food. Secondly, there is the replacement of manual skills (de-skilling) with technology (Braverman, 1974) for example, automated pricing of beverages that records transactions as well as keeping account of stock. Where labour, the giving of service is widely accepted as part of the product, the quality of interaction between provider and consumer is a significant feature of service delivery (Lash and Urry, 1999:200-01).

Where the purchase of a product is bound up with the quality and efficiency of service, personal characteristics of the provider such as appearance, attitude and personality all come into play. The skills to ‘interpret and modify’ social interaction with customers transform service employees into ‘reflexive cultural analysts’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:201). The use of ‘emotional’⁴ work at the ‘moment of delivery’, calls for a mix of ‘mental, manual and emotional labour’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:202) that marks out a rise in contemporary consumer expectations. For the social drinker, service-provider qualities such as efficiency and friendliness in a welcoming environment are all crucial elements of the public house experience. Where ‘aspects of personalised service’ are ‘rationalised to further the sale of something’ (Mills, 1956[1951]:182), the performance of service (labour) also plays a significant part in furthering economic goals. Factors such as product(s), service, the service-provider and consumer preferences, together generate the social experience of the public house drinker.

The Irish public house as a place of productivity, the operation of the drinks trade and developments in consumerism connected with ‘consistent self-gratificatory activity’ (Corrigan, 1998:13) together characterize social drinking as an economic process. The productive potentiality of the public house as economic space is planned according to marketing principles coupled with the prevailing consumer culture. The establishment (and realisation) of socio-economic goals is based on a techno-economic

⁴ In the public house ‘high-contact systems’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:200) of interaction are present between service provider and service recipient. As well as performing a ‘service’, bar-workers are also expected to smile, engage in friendly conversation and to respond courteously to customer needs

relationship to a resource. What is 'used', 'managed' and 'controlled in the present' has at the same time a potentiality that takes cognisance of the 'immediate, near and distant future' (Adam, 1998:57). The position of the consumer in the capitalist production process is crucial insofar as 'consumption forces people into an economizing and controlled labour force if they want to be able to live as proper consumers' (Corrigan, 1998:20).

In contrast to Corrigan's critique of the development of capitalism, Baudrillard sees consumption 'not as the free play of consumer desires' but as 'yet another area of life controlled by the productive system' (Corrigan, 1998:20). Social relations of capitalism, while having the appearance of being weighted in favour of the producer, is in reality one of struggle and conflict. As economic goals such as growth and profit are dependent upon consumer activity, relations between providers and end users must for the provider, be productive. In keeping with the 'increasingly dominant' position of the consumer, there is a tendency for producers to become more 'consumer oriented' (Lash and Urry, 1994:274). While economic processes (the sale and purchase of alcohol) are culturally produced, cultural processes (trends and practices related to alcohol consumption) are at the same time shaped by economic structures and practices. Consumers and consumption practices while located within the realm of economics (sales, purchases, profit) are also firmly located within the cultural sphere, where factors such as life-stage position and lifestyle choices influence product preferences and consumption practices.

The connection between cultural and economic processes is one of inter-dependence, where each interacts with the other in a relationship which sees both subject to political organisation and regulation. The consumption of alcohol as a cultural activity is understood as being embedded within an economic framework and subject to regulation at all levels. Each ‘sphere’⁵ (Fornas, 1995:49) therefore, is examined, taking into account the empirical realities of ‘economy’ and of ‘culture’ along with the constraining influences of power and authority that ultimately characterize and structure alcohol consumption practices.

2. 7. State and civil society: a corollary of political processes.

In Ireland, political engagement with the providers and consumers of alcohol is evident in an ever-increasing array of constraints, duties and responsibilities pertaining to alcohol. Control over sale and consumption of the product (alcohol) at the micro-level, through to the collective action of organizations such as the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA), Road Safety Authority (RSA) or Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) will be shown to have a far-reaching effect upon the public house experience. The aims and aspirations of such ‘civil society’ (Edwards, 2005) groupings are to further shared vested interests and values through purposeful, collective action. A civil society framework provides a forum for individual and collective social action, while exposing the course of political and social transformation. ‘Civil society’ is ‘simultaneously a goal to aim for, a means to achieve it, and

⁵ Social spheres which ‘simultaneously frame and enable’ (Fornas,1995:49) cultural activities also have the potential for disharmony, when the demands or rules of individual spheres generate conflict.

a framework for engaging with each-other about ends and means' (Edwards, 2005). 'Cause-centred groups' (Coakley and Gallagher, 2000:274) that afford the opportunity, the support mechanisms and the necessary structures, in response to a social need, play a key role in the re-generation of the social world. The dominant relationship of the state over civil society organizations in Ireland (Murphy, 2009) however, reveals an uneasy convergence of sometimes opposing ideas and aspirations. Historically, the drinks industry and the behaviour of drinkers have been subject to regulatory controls that have shaped the social experience of drinking. For the contemporary social drinker the pursuit of collective goals and the realization of personal desires is a complex undertaking in a social world of 'affluence and individual freedom' (Tovey and Share, 2003:302). The production, distribution and consumption of alcohol is extensively controlled through processes of regulation and through the enforcement of regulation, the objective being to regulate (and reduce) the consumption of alcohol. The monitoring and control of social drinking therefore is characteristic of contemporary social life, where for example, drunkenness, hours of trading and drink-driving are subject to legal sanction.

While the institutions of civil society are structured and operate along 'bottom-up' lines in an attempt to effect social change, the state functions as an institution of coercive power that is imposed from above and is enforced by appointed agents of the state (Held, 1996:47). The state as a set of 'tightly connected governmental institutions concerned with the administration of a geographically determined population' (Faulks, 1999:2) operates as a

legitimate authority. Authority is exercised through a system of bureaucracy, ‘control through the use of regulation’ (Inglis, 2005:41) that permeates throughout the social world. For the social drinker the imposition of rules that govern alcohol and alcohol-related activities impact upon all elements of their experience. For example, drink-driving legislation imposes specific enforceable codes of practice that must be negotiated and resolved. When reference is made to the ‘legitimate authority of the state’ (Faulks, 1999:28), it is important to note that a considerable proportion of recent Irish legislation, originates from beyond state boundaries such as the European Union. For example, Food Hygiene legislation (see Chapter 6.5) adopted from European law, impacts upon the material environment of the public house where the reorganisation and usage of space has changed to meet the needs of consumers. The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) I.S. 340:1994 sets out hygiene policy in the catering trade to cover all aspects of the storage and handling of food. Standards refer not only to procedures and practices but to the material environment, for example, appropriate ‘plant and equipment [kitchen]’ (1994:ix) with emphasis on hygiene and temperature control. For workers, training and the development of new skills also means a change in work practices in a growing number of public houses where the product range has been extended to include food.

For the drinker, social organisation at the micro level is achieved through ‘legal-rational’ (Weber, 1978) authority, where social behaviour is ‘circumscribed and regulated ...through the systematic application of rules and procedures’ (Inglis, 2005:41). Regulatory controls that govern alcohol,

the drinks industry and the provision and consumption of alcohol shape all aspects of drinking as a social experience. The motivation to drink, knowledge of the relevant laws and of the sanctions, and the act of drinking, together generate a social world that is at once pre-determined *and* created by the individual at the moment of consumption⁶. Drinking is a social action or ‘unit act’ (Parsons, 1937:213) that is both material and ideal, objective and subjective and takes into account an array of factors such as cultural values, societal norms and individual motives that occur within a political economy of monetary transactions and structures of regulation.

2. 8. A ‘third place’ perspective of social drinking.

Informal connectedness associated with social drinking and experienced in the public house, fosters interpersonal relationships that grow and develop over time. Such relationships produce an important social networking system that provides emotional support, ‘personal benefits’ (Oldenburg, 1999:43) such as the sharing of knowledge and a forum for co-operation (Puttnam, 2000:119). The diminution or transformation of informal social relations, must, by implication, have a significant impact on daily social life. In a critique of contemporary American society, Oldenburg (1999) introduces the concept of ‘third place’, a public place of free association. For Oldenburg, ‘first’ and ‘second’ places refer to home and work respectively, ‘third places’ are defined as ‘happy gathering places’ (1999:ix) where people meet and interact informally, such as parks, cafes or

⁶ According to Marxist theory of the historical process, ‘men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please’ (Marx, ([1869]1969:15),

pubs. While acknowledging that third places are usually places of consumption and are subject to a variety of rules, Oldenburg does not address these issues, instead he *evaluates* informal social interaction as it is lived in ‘the core setting of informal public life’ (1999:16). The concept of ‘informality’ that on the one hand suggests casualness and lack of formality, conflicts with the notion of ‘rules’ that on the other hand imply a controlled environment.

In an analysis of ‘third places’, Oldenburg offers an idealistic depiction of places of free association (although he does address the realities of a ‘hostile habitat’ (1999:203), that does not dwell on their potential as places of conflict or their inaccessibility for some due to a variety of factors. A hostile habitat for Oldenburg distinguishes between ‘places’ where people are unique individuals and ‘non-places’, where people are ‘reduced to clients, customers, workers and commuters’ (1999:207). Social interaction in places outside the realms of domesticity and work, for Corcoran foster a ‘sense of attachment’ (Fahy et al, 2007:180) that enhances the ‘social fabric of daily life’ (Fahy et al 2007:175-197). Oldenburg’s perception of suburban living that implies an ‘absence of informal public life’ (1999:10) identifies a decline in places where social connectedness is fostered through relations of sociability and cooperation. A decline in neighbourliness and community is connected directly to an equal decline in the practice of informal face-to-face social interaction. To account for the changing trends in social practices and in spatial function and meaning, Oldenburg focuses on lifestyles and suburban design that he describes as ‘hostile to both walking and talking’

(1999:xiv), thus requiring public or private transportation. Reflected in a new way of living, social change in American society in the 1970s a decline in face-to-face social interaction was counterbalanced by the growing and gradual use of internet and mobile phone technology and the use of cars instead of public transportation.

The value of social interaction is further substantiated by Putnam who suggests that 'social connectedness matters to our lives in a most profound way' (2000:326). At the centre of 'social capital theory' is the concept that 'social networks have value' (Putnam, 2000:18-19). Social capital as the 'connections among individuals, social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Putnam, 2000:19) stems from the social bonds between individuals. The significance of location for Oldenburg, the *site* where social networking takes place, permeates throughout the evaluation of 'third places', while Putnam focuses on community groups and organisations that foster social cohesion through interactive mechanisms of 'bridging' and 'bonding' (2000:23). Oldenburg sees the consequences of the disappearance of 'familiar gathering centres' (1999:9), while Putnam measures the social costs when community organisations are no longer 'revitalised' (2000:16) and consequently, disappear. The value of drinking places is also put forward by Wilson (2005) as places where political identities are constructed. Places, spaces and practices are said to play a significant role in the formation of ideologies that shape thought and action. Places such as the public house, are according to Wilson, 'time tested' places where it is acceptable for strangers to meet and

exchange views, to 'listen and to learn'. For Wilson, places where people drink, are increasingly seen as political arenas that also provide a basis for alternative politics or mainstream notions of democracy. Garvey (2005) in a study of the Norwegian drinking party '*Vorspiel*' first of all identifies friendship formations that are both generated by and reflected in state policies. Secondly, drinking places were also revealed as locations of social cohesion and reciprocity.

The quality of social life for Oldenburg rests (idealistically) on the positive and functional nature of third places, the most important functions being that of 'uniting the neighbourhood' (1999:xvii), and as 'mixer' of people, and a place of 'assimilation' (1999:xviii). The public house for Oldenburg, is not only a site of social integration but can have an additional purpose, that of facilitating and fostering social cohesion. Social wellbeing is upheld as the outcome of informal face-to-face social interaction that is regular and uncomplicated. While stressing the importance of 'third places' and mourning their decline, Oldenburg's tone however, is one of optimism: that if private space cannot sufficiently fulfil social needs, then new informal public spaces such as virtual spaces of communication, can and will be recreated. Based on the principle that 'third spaces' are essential to social life the public house in Ireland as a 'third place' could be said to fulfil this vital role.

While Oldenburg refers specifically to the 'English Pub', a place where social drinkers 'like to give and enjoy friendliness' (1999:125),

comparisons may be readily made between Irish and English public houses. Comparisons may also be made between Oldenburg's 'American Tavern' (1999:165) and the contemporary Irish pub insofar as they also share some of the characteristics of 'third place', for example, the marked decline in the number of taverns which Oldenburg attributes to urban planning and the reconfiguration of 'neighborhoods' (1999:178). While the social and material processes that construct 'third space' in the English Pub and the American Tavern give the appearance of being present in the Irish public house, some of these assertions will be contested as the social world of the Irish public house is investigated. For example, the public house as a 'neutral ground' (Oldenburg, 1999:22) where 'conversation is the main activity' (1999:26), facilitates informal association and brings together people with similar interests and needs. Informal associations according to Oldenburg, are also formed for more pragmatic purposes, where people are sorted according to their 'potential usefulness', particularly in relation to collective undertakings, where 'collective accomplishments' (1999:xix) cannot be achieved by individuals. The public house in Ireland, however (as well as having all of the above positive attributes) can also be a divisive environment where class, gender and sometimes political differences occasionally give rise to disharmony and conflict.

Oldenburg's overall evaluation of 'third space' is one of presumption. The proposition that third space is highly significant to social life implies that changes such as the decline or loss of same can be measured; if social integration is constructive to social life, then social segregation or

disconnection must have the opposite effect. For Oldenburg the public house as ‘third place’ is an essential site of ‘informal association’, thus playing a crucial part in the health and wellbeing of users. Based on the presumed value of ‘informal’ (Oldenburg, 1999:xxii) social interaction, the public house as the routine location for drinking and socialising plays a key role in the quality of Irish life not only as a space of consumption, but as an established and therefore meaningful site of informal association of many types. My research indicates this site of informal association, particularly in rural areas, is in decline or it is being radically transformed due to the multiplicity of social, cultural and global processes that are at work.

During what was a seismic shift in the Irish way of living, evolving economic and political processes have been revealed as the driving forces that have generated social change. Improved health and wellbeing, access to education and employment and general personal prosperity coincided with the ‘emergence of an apparently vibrant economy and a confident culture’ (O’Hearn, 1998:57). An economically enhanced way of life for the majority, translated into the adoption of new lifestyle practices that were not ‘hemmed in by material privation’ (Fahey, Russell and Whelan, 2007:26). Furthermore, the public house evolved into a place where less apparent but more focussed economic and political structures manifest themselves as social phenomena. Consequently, the material environment of the public house along with drinking patterns and practices are to an even greater extent determined and controlled by structural means.

As a regulated space, the public house is according to Oldenburg's model of 'third place' or 'great good place' also a space of association. It is understood as an 'informal gathering place' (1999:xxviii), that promotes interpersonal relationships, and that serves the community in which it is located. The public house, particularly in rural Ireland is sometimes the only site of informal interaction within communities in the absence of sports/social clubs and activities. Scarbrough (2008), in reference to the concept of 'fourth place' Wenner (1997) argues that the contemporary public house is also developing not only as a place of association or community resource but as a 'manufactured' and commodified place of consumption. The complex world of the social drinker therefore, must be viewed from beyond the core practices and patterns of drinking in a designated drinking place. Sociological analysis of the social drinking experience calls for a multi-faceted approach to the topic that will explain the social processes that underpin the production, distribution and consumption of alcohol. Development of a methodological approach designed to accomplish this undertaking is outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The consumption of alcohol in a designated space is a social as well as a consumer activity. Evident throughout the research project is the perceived value of human social relations and the importance of ‘places of informal association’ (Puttnam, 2000 and Oldenburg, 1999) that facilitate interaction. As the primary location of social drinking, the public house has moved beyond the narrow definition of ‘ale house’ or ‘gin palace’ (Molloy, 2002) to encompass an array of services and uses in accordance with its location and the community which it serves. Drinking as a cultural activity and the public house as a cultural ‘icon of the everyday’ (Bennett and Watson, 2002:xxii) have a long history, that stretches from documentation by ‘medieval historians’ (Molloy, 2002) to present day newspapers and general media. Despite ongoing changes, the public house as ‘third place’ (Oldenburg, 1999) is imagined as a public place of informal association and retains its identity as an essential part of the community in which it is located. Places of consumption such as ‘public’ houses along with ‘private’ drinking spaces (the growing trend of drinking in the home) contextualizes the social world of the drinker by locating drinking in isolation or in the company of others. Engagement with social drinkers and with members of the drinks trade (publicans, managers and bar-workers) throughout the research process facilitated an in-depth investigation and analysis of social drinking along with the significance and the importance of the public house for the drinker and to the wider community in contemporary Irish society.

3. 1. Formulating the research question.

The formulation of a ‘research question’ came about in response to a growing (personal) interest in changing alcohol consumption practices and their impact upon social life. Increasing constraints that apply to the distribution and consumption of alcohol are perceived as having a profound impact upon the social world of the drinker. The Irish public house as a social setting is also undergoing radical change, as the material environment, the products and services are developed to keep pace with the demands and expectations of consumers. Change as an ongoing process can be studied in a number of ways (Kane, 1997) in so far as it can be either measured by degrees over a period of time or explained in terms of ‘before and after’ (1997:19). While ‘degrees’ of change can be observed over time accounts of change tend to fluctuate between references to the past and the present, along with some projected allusions to the future. As well as the individual experiences of drinkers, a multiplicity of social factors that are prevalent in Irish society during this particular (research) period are taken into account when identifying and defining the basis for change.

Within the context of Ireland’s new-found affluence at the turn of the twenty first century, an awareness of rapid social change and new ways of ‘being’ and ‘doing’¹ also raised many questions. The broader question of how human social experience is changing and how micro-level lifestyle practices within a specific social context come into being was refined and a

¹ McWilliams (2005) optimistic and humorous perspective of Ireland’s ‘new elite’ has seen the addition of new descriptive nouns, for example ‘hi-co’ and ‘decklander’ to the English language

more focused 'topic of inquiry' was sought. The series of events and conditions that brought about the 'Celtic Tiger' phenomenon was perceived to have many positive and advantageous elements however a contradictory argument was beginning to emerge. The implication was that changing circumstances could equally be held accountable for other more destructive practices in society, such as the excessive consumption of alcohol, rise in traffic accidents etc. Newspaper headlines such as "Prosperity is Blamed for Irish People Topping the Drink League" (Irish Times, 27/5/2002 p3) makes a direct connection between prosperity, increased alcohol consumption and alleged subsequent personal, social and economic costs.

Social issues such as domestic violence, addiction, public disorder and criminal behaviour are often linked to the misuse of alcohol scientifically and anecdotally, thus constructing an adverse impression of alcohol and of the drinks industry and a wariness or disapproval of drinking practices. Alcohol therefore, is perceived on the one hand as a harmful presence in society, while at the same time alcohol consumption in Ireland is acknowledged as a routine traditional practice associated with informal social interaction and sociability. Preliminary research into the drinks industry and into drinking practices by this researcher, paved the way towards the structure of the 'research question' that moved away from negative discourses surrounding alcohol consumption, the drinks industry and the effects of alcohol on society. The research question instead, (in contrast to the well-documented inquiries into the negative aspects of alcohol misuse), focuses on the social role of alcohol in Irish society, on

related practices associated with routine, moderate (unproblematic) consumption practices and on the structural constraints experienced by drinkers and by drinks providers.

Due to the routine and regular practice of alcohol consumption and the role of the public house in Irish society, an examination of social drinking practices and of the contemporary Irish public house was undertaken. Investigation of public house drinking presented an opportunity to explore some of the processes that determine social life at the micro-level. The broader question ‘how social life is generated and experienced at the micro-level’, translates to the more focused working title ‘how consumption of alcohol and the social world of the drinker are constructed and experienced at a cultural level’. In this thesis it is argued that drinking practices and the social world of the drinker while primarily cultural are shaped by and emerge through an array of social (economic and regulatory) processes, that take the form of constraints and obligations and are located within the broader global context.

A vast body of research data (World Health Organisation ‘*Global Information System on Alcohol and Health*’ established in 1997); Health Research Board (HRB); Health Service Executive (HSE) exists relating to excesses in alcohol consumption and the potentially damaging consequences of alcohol misuse for the individual and for society. This research concentrates on the changes over time to social or moderate drinking practices considered as ‘non-problematic’. This research also

explores and presents a deeper understanding of how global processes transcend national boundaries and are manifested at the micro-level of Irish social life. Alcohol consumption practices that are defined as ‘social’ or ‘moderate’ are by and large a neglected area of social science research. This study approaches the topic of alcohol consumption and locates it in a space somewhere between ‘damaging effects to the individual and to society’ and the ‘marketing of Ireland’s leisure and tourism industry’.

3. 2. Methodological considerations.

Social research is guided by principles that apply to the researcher and to research procedures, governing the collection, generation and analysis of data. Social science is the process of broadening the body of knowledge, ‘integrating new phenomena, new ideas, with an older frame of reference’ (Greer, 1979:50). The existing body of knowledge surrounding alcohol is mainly concerned with scientific evidence of ‘alcohol related harm’ (Strategic Task Force on Alcohol, 2004). Human and economic costs to society are measured and political responses (the purpose being to reduce alcohol intake) are guided by expert knowledge and specialist recommendations. The aim of this research project is to look beyond the therapeutic model of alcohol supply/consumption directives (a direct response to the misuse of alcohol) that are guided by quantitative analysis of population, pure alcohol consumed per capita and economic costs (Hope, 2007). Instead, this research project proposes to examine the individual responses and experiences of social drinkers as they encounter changing

business practices aimed at increasing sales, and rules and constraints that seek to reduce alcohol consumption. When the social world of the moderate drinker is described, it must be noted however, that the terms 'moderate' or 'social' drinker are defined as such by individual respondents, therefore meanings can vary. Human beings as 'symbolic, subjective creatures' (Macionis and Plummer, 1998:38) construct meaning, therefore, views and descriptions of the social world are personal (individual) interpretations and as such are relative.

A quantitative approach that might produce a numerical picture of alcohol consumption levels or count the economic costs and benefits associated with the drinks industry, would not accomplish the objective of studying 'creative, spontaneous people' (Macionis and Plummer, 1998:37) who create the social world which they inhabit. A qualitative approach that is human-centred produces an understanding and an explanation of the drinking experience from the perspective of the social drinker. The undertaking at this point was to define the subject(s) of the study, the 'who', the 'what' the 'why' and the 'where' to be investigated. The formulation of an appropriate methodology, the 'how' would achieve that objective.

A 'research statement' (Kane, 1997:15-20) that described the research project was produced, setting out the purpose of the study, proposed research procedures and analytical framework. Based on the assumption that social drinking was a 'cultural' activity, a cultural framework of analysis was adopted, but later changed to incorporate

economic and regulatory frameworks. During the research process, however, as data was generated, two further ‘frames of reference’ (Goffman, 1975) emerged that were deemed essential to the production of a more comprehensive understanding of social drinking. Recurring themes that were expressed in political and economic discourses could not be set aside, therefore, the theoretical framework was extended to include economic and regulatory aspects of social drinking. The goal was to ‘obtain organised knowledge of social reality’ (Schutz, 1975:27), (as opposed to the common-sense knowledge of everyday life) through the medium of social science. Preliminary field research in conjunction with a review of the literature established a start-point from which the research methodology developed. Progress, however, was impaired due to unforeseen personal circumstances² and to methodological and theoretical complexities that called for revision of the research plan.

3. 3. Literature review and documentary analysis

A crucial part of research design is the review of literature that not only informs but is the foundation upon which theoretical concepts are formed and research strategies are constructed. A review of ‘accumulated knowledge’ (Neuman, 1997:88) relevant to the topic of inquiry is an essential part of the research process. The purpose of a literature review is to establish acquaintanceship with the research and subsequent publications by other researchers in similar or related fields. Literature that connects

² Throughout this project, the research and writing was set aside for prolonged periods due to illness and bereavement.

prior research with the current project, a 'context review' (Neuman, 1997:89), locates individual projects within the wider field of knowledge. Familiarity with existing research undertakings and findings is essential, prior to forming a relevant and clearly defined research question. An historical review that traces development over time applies both to the subject of research and to the advance of knowledge. Analysis of the literature is a significant phase in the research process, in so far as it validates (or refutes) previously-held beliefs or assumptions.

Written documentation referred to in the course of this project provides the basis for an historical and a contextual understanding of the topic. Publications regarding previous studies (methodologies and findings) also inform the construction of a theoretical framework within which the social world of the drinker is investigated. Literature appropriate to this project was sourced and categorised as follows:

- ~ Historical analysis of social drinking in Ireland.
- ~ Public houses in Ireland: historical and contemporary places.
- ~ Celtic Tiger Ireland: the social context.
- ~ Official Government publications and press releases.
- ~ Publications that promote the interests of the drinks industry.
- ~ Publications highlighting the adverse effects of alcohol misuse.
- ~ Promotion of alcohol/drinking in relation to leisure and tourism.
- ~ Print and electronic media features on alcohol-related topics.
- ~ Cultural Theory: social drinking as an historical and routine practice.
- ~ Economic Theory: drinks trade as 'business', drinker as 'consumer'.

- ~ Political Theory: regulation pertaining to alcohol, alcohol providers and drinkers.
- ~ Life-course Theory: life-stage connections to alcohol and to the public house

Written texts must be approached with an ‘informed, critical attitude’ (Kane, 1997:98), while bearing in mind the *purpose* of reading. Literature gives an in-depth and multi-dimensional analysis of the topic and identifies themes that are appropriate to the (theoretical) classification of data that can reshape or resolve the research question. Official documents used in this study such as Acts of the Oireachtas and Commissioned Reports are indicative of formal concerns relating to drinking practices. Official publications (sources of expert knowledge) were also central in the construction of the theoretical frameworks, an underpinning of empirical data. Historical accounts of public house environments and of drinking practices over time illustrate processes of social change and the lived experiences of drinkers at any given time.

Knowledge and understanding of the past and of contemporary society through the medium of literature contextualised and guided the research process. Newspaper reports on alcohol-related matters have a tendency towards sensationalism³, however, they are useful insofar as they generate debate and stimulate curiosity about the subject. Such articles were treated with caution and where reference was made to studies or

³ Seaton (1998) argues that the trend towards increased ‘tabloidisation’ with emphasis on sensational stories and trivia reflects the values of media ownership and are profit driven

events, original documents were sourced. While the content of print and electronic media cannot always be validated, it does however have an important function in that it generates awareness (or introduces elements) of a topic that can then be investigated further.

3. 4. Constructing a theoretical framework of analysis.

In the interplay between empirical data and concept formation, ways of interpreting social phenomena emerge and develop. The construction of a sociological framework based upon a ‘theoretical review’ (Neuman, 1997:90) presents different theories to explain the same social phenomenon. Theories are evaluated and compared, and are adopted according to their usefulness in explaining the social world of the drinker. Oral descriptions of the social drinking experience, participation observation conducted in three public houses in conjunction with a documentary analysis of literature connected to the topic produced an empirical social reality (data). In the process of producing data, findings generate concepts that develop and shape the theoretical framework of analysis appropriate to this study. In adopting an ‘inductive approach’ (Neuman, 1997:57) theoretical frameworks developed over time as data was generated and analysed.

Social drinking as a routine and regular activity among respondents (drinkers)⁴ is conceptualised first of all as a ‘cultural’ activity, based on the prominence and abundance of public houses, the entrenched role of alcohol

⁴ The term ‘drinkers’ refers to those who consider themselves ‘social’ or ‘moderate’ drinkers and public house users.

in social life and the frequency and quantities of alcohol consumed. The Irish public house, as the place where alcohol is routinely consumed has a position and a status that is acknowledged in Ireland as well as abroad. As social drinking is perceived primarily as a cultural practice, the lived experience of the social drinker began with an examination of the cultural processes that define contemporary alcohol consumption practices. A cultural perspective that presents an ‘entire way of life’ (Williams, 1961) model, focuses on the way institutions shaped ‘thinking’ and structured ‘feeling’ about routine social experiences. A ‘poly-dimensional’ (Fornas, 1995) theoretical model that expands the scope of cultural theory identifies ‘causes and determinants’ and ‘effects and meanings’ that converge and interact. Social drinking as a cultural activity may be interpreted as ‘traditional’ in so far as it is firmly rooted in the Irish way of life and in the Irish psyche *and* as an activity that is inherently ‘post-modern’ (Bell, 1976).

The cultural tendency of ‘increasing reflexivity and self-referentiality in everyday life’ (Fornas, 1995:5) was reflected in respondents attitudes towards alcohol and social drinking, that were shown to change over time and throughout the life course. As a theoretical perspective, the ‘life-course’ (Hunt, 2005) conceptualisation of alcohol consumption, explained perceptions and practices both contemporaneously and retrospectively. Social drinkers who were surveyed ranged in age from 20s to 70s⁵, therefore accounts of their relationship with alcohol and with the public house encompassed varying time-spans. During the interview

⁵ Selection of respondents from such a broad age span was based on an assumption that the drinking experience and relationship with alcohol changed throughout the life-course.

process, individual's stories evolved as sequential, biographical and historical narratives that identified 'life-stage' appropriate attitudes and activities that evolved in a process of revision throughout the 'life-course' (Hunt, 2005). The 'life-course' model of conceptualisation and analysis also proved valuable as it highlighted 'life-stage' specific economic and regulatory constraints that drinkers identified and explained within a 'life-stage' position context.

Recurring themes loosely identified as 'economic' and 'political' permeated the data irrespective of source. Consumers cited monetary considerations and regulatory constraints as forces that must be negotiated as they are fundamental elements in the purchase and consumption of alcohol. Drinks providers when speaking, made constant references to 'the business' and to various pieces of (prohibitive or obligatory) legislation that control the drinks industry. The work of (Faulks, 1999) that explores institutions and power and (Marshall, 1993; Joseph, 1989; Bell, 1996) who examine the connections between society, business (capitalism) and culture each contribute in different ways to the construction of a framework that sociologically explains the social world of the drinker.

Further analysis of 'informal social life' (Oldenburg, 1999) associated with alcohol consumption and the Irish public house developed during the interview and participation observation phases of the research process. (Putnam, 2000), examines the consequences of social disconnection, (Bennett and Watson, 2002) using a number of theoretical

approaches, explain the social organisation of (contemporary) everyday life while (Oldenburg, 1999) argues the importance of informal public life and informal public meeting places.

In the following chapters, the integration of social processes that define the drinking experience and theoretical approaches that demonstrate evidence of institutional conflict and consensus, explicate the social world of the drinker. When social structures, such as culture, the economy and the political converge, functionalist models emphasize the ‘orderliness of society’ while conflict theory anticipates ‘dissent and conflict at every point of the social system’ (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004:254). Theories and their concepts are used for ‘a mental viewing of complex phenomena which are otherwise not so easily discerned’ (Fornas, 1997:7), thus creating a framework that encompasses the empirical data and the research methodology.

3. 5. The qualitative (methodological) approach.

For this project a qualitative research methodology was adopted. Throughout the research process discourse centred on description and meaning of the social world being investigated. Accessibility to the site and the interpretation and sociological explanation of a specific social world forms the basis of the qualitative research project. On the premise that the ‘very business of sociology is one of interpretation’ (Wuthnow, 1987:17), preliminary understanding of the social world of the drinker is achieved

through the personal accounts of interviewees. Taking into account the particular setting and the purpose of the investigation, research methods were specifically formulated that would endeavour to answer the 'research question'. Subsequent analysis of data conveys a coherent and consistent representation of the social world in question. Qualitative social researchers generate data that is 'intrinsically meaningful' (Neuman, 1979:328) therefore the objective is to *understand* and to *explain* a social phenomenon.

Qualitative research methods focus on the production, understanding and interpretation of the social world from the perspective of those who inhabit and experience it. For the researcher, comprehension of the social world is accomplished by 'pondering the possibilities gained from deep familiarity with some aspect of the world' (Becker, 1998:66), in this instance the social world of the drinker. The qualitative method of research investigates the social *experience* of drinking (as opposed to explaining the consequences of drinking), from the perspective of the drinker. It is through their experiences as expressed and understood by the drinker that the structural constraints (economic and legal) that impact upon the public house drinker are uncovered. Data from primary sources (drinkers) takes the form of 'text, written words, phrases or symbols describing or representing people, actions, and events in social life' (Neuman, 1997:418) that are subsequently coded and analysed. Data from secondary sources such as publicans and functionaries in areas of security, health and law

enforcement⁶ explains the social framework within which the drinker operates thus contextualising drinking practices. The experience of the social drinker (as described by the drinker) when located within a wider cultural, economic and regulatory framework presents a deeper understanding and clarification of the topic. Contextual factors when taken into account and a ‘first-order interpretation’ (Neuman, 1997:335) of how the drinker understands and experiences the social world of alcohol consumption, together contribute to the reliability and the validity of the research data. The phenomenon of alcohol consumption when explained by providers and consumers, reaffirms the intensification of structural constraints that penetrate all areas of the cultural activity, economic relations and the legal/political framework. This form of ‘methodological triangulation’ (Kane, 1997:52) examines the same social phenomenon from different perspectives, using a variety of sources and diverse investigative strategies.

As qualitative research concerns itself with the meaning that people attach to the social world, the objective of the researcher is to understand, interpret and analyse. This methodological approach using multiple techniques and strategies ‘verify and strengthen the validity of the research results’ (Kane, 1997:52) in a systematic and justifiable way. Once the ‘topic of inquiry’ has been decided and the method(s) of data collection are established as practicable, the researcher then has to reflect on their position within the research process. Due to the interpretive nature of qualitative

⁶ Accounts of social drinking experiences contained continuous references to legal constraints and legal obligations that called for further investigation that extended beyond the experiences of the drinker.

research, 'researcher integrity' (Neuman, 1997:332) becomes an issue that goes beyond honesty and trust. Firstly, the researcher must be mindful of their position within the research process, that they alone choose the topic of inquiry, the interviewees and other additional sources of data. The researcher formulates the method of inquiry, the interview questions and analyses data within a theoretical framework, therefore their choices will have a bearing upon the direction and the outcome of the research. Secondly, while 'opportunities for the dishonest and unethical researcher exist in all research' (Neuman, 1997:333), qualitative research is said to have a higher dependence upon the researcher's interpretations and upon their personal and professional integrity.

Within the social sciences the selection of the research topic, the research methods that are used, the 'academic freedom' (Neuman, 1997:469) of the social researcher and issues surrounding funding⁷, can each have a bearing on the research process and consequently upon the research findings. Terms such as 'objective', 'value-free' and 'unbiased' when used in the context of social research give rise to much debate. The positivist approach of a value-free, unbiased and objective science claims that 'value neutrality is guaranteed by logical-deductive, formal theory and a complete separation of facts from value-based concepts' (Neuman, 1997:470). The assertion that the scientific community is 'free of prejudice and governed by free and open discussion' (Neuman, 1997:470) further supports the positivist position of certainty and legitimacy. An ontological (positivist)

⁷ This research was carried out independently insofar as the project was not commissioned.

position that professes to ‘see reality as a lawful succession of observable phenomena’ (Diggins, 1996:258) assumes a society that is unchanging rather than transitional.

Non-positivist (interpretive) research allows for an investigation of the social world of the drinker at a particular time and a particular place, within the cultural, economic and regulatory context in which it is located. Meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with others and with their social environment therefore, reality is not fixed but changes according to place, over time and throughout the life-course of the individual. Investigation of social drinking practices and the public house environment during the research period took into account the life-stage position of drinkers, as ‘age cohorts are likely to be influenced by same economic and cultural trends’ (Hunt, 2005:23)’ and because lifestyle choices change throughout the life cycle as well as over time. Observation of drinking practices, observation of the working environment within which drinks providers operate and analysis of pertinent press and statutory documentation, meant that the experiences of social drinkers may be understood from a personal as well as a contextual perspective. A qualitative approach that is concerned with social meaning, achieves considerable insight into the day-to-day lives of subjects and the social setting, as the collection of data and systematic analysis of data are organized and located within the research process.

3. 6. The research process

This social research project was undertaken following preliminary research into the proposed topic and the existing body of knowledge. The feasibility of carrying out the study was tested in terms of accessibility and co-operation, and a preliminary research plan was developed. Elements of the research process while occurring independently in a series of ‘steps’ that also interact, allowed for changes in direction and order along the way. While ‘steps’ in the research process are interactive and ‘blend into each other’ (Neuman, 1997:11), each one is a separate component essential to the totality. First steps in the research process such as the selection of a topic and formation of a research question, was a time for personal reflexivity. Concerns regarding the choice of project and personal capability and commitment were voiced in consultation with my research supervisor. In-depth discussions where the fundamentals of research methods and appropriate framework(s) of analysis were explored provided both clarity of procedure and the confidence to proceed. The potential problems and possible pitfalls associated with research were also addressed at this point.

Once the topic of inquiry was decided upon, a research plan was set out and preliminary fieldwork commenced, however, it soon became clear that the ‘plan’ was undergoing change. For Wiseman, the ‘constant interplay of data gathering and analysis at the heart of qualitative research’ (Bynner and Stribley, 1979:113) means that data generation is often a non-linear process where improvisation and flexibility are called for. The

research process began to change direction when unanticipated but relevant sub-topics come to light, in this instance, the aforementioned regulatory and economic aspects of social drinking. The need to broaden or refocus the research topic or to restructure the theoretical framework during the course of research (a key strength of qualitative research) was evident at all stages throughout the research process.

The interrelationship between empirical research and social theory is a crucial element in making sense of and explaining the social world. Social theory ‘frames how we look at and think about a topic’ (Neuman, 1997:56) by defining concepts and assumptions through which the social world may be interpreted. Recordings of what people said, observations of how people behaved and documentation relevant to the ‘topic’ are all concrete aspects of the social world of the drinker from which data was generated. For the qualitative researcher encounters with ‘concrete human experiences – talk, feelings, actions’ (Macionis and Plummer, 1998:39) not only inform but also guide the research process. My decision to begin the study by entering the field as ‘participant observer’ was based on previous encounters with the social drinking experience in public houses. The public house, therefore, was the start-point for data collection that developed to produce a sociological explanation of the social world of the drinker.

3. 6. 1. Participant observation: the case studies

In order to fully understand the experiences of the social drinker, investigation of the drinks industry and the operation of the drinks trade were deemed necessary. When selecting sites to conduct ‘participant observation’ (Zelditch, 1978:122) consideration first of all was given to accessibility, co-operation and suitability. In consultation with the ‘gatekeeper’⁸ (Neuman, 1997:351), three sites were selected and permission obtained for unrestricted access to all aspects and all areas of the public house environments and their operation. The methodological approach was an overt case study analysis of a rural public house in the Galway⁹ and a city premises in Limerick¹⁰ and an urban premises in Dundalk¹¹. Selecting and gaining access to an urban and a rural site (based on an assumption that drinking experiences differ) was achieved following preliminary meetings with the proprietors. ‘Gatekeeper approval’ (Neuman, 1997:352) was crucial in establishing a rapport and a level of trust that developed throughout the study process. The ‘gatekeeper’, (a publican known personally) set up meetings and introductions with fellow business colleagues who had agreed to participate in the study, but did not become otherwise involved for prejudicial and ethical reasons.

⁸ The ‘gatekeeper’, a retired publican (while not an interviewee) spent incalculable time relaying his experiences, suggesting areas of investigation and most importantly, arranged meetings with colleagues who agreed to participate in the research.

⁹ ‘O’Neills, Gort, Co Galway.

¹⁰ Dolans, Dock Road, Limerick

¹¹ O’Briens, Blackrock, Dundalk, Co Louth.

Living and working on site for periods of three days at each location began with on-site observation and progressed towards interaction with workers and customers through the performance of simple tasks such as glass collecting and placing food/beverage orders. Disclosure of researcher identity and clarification of the purpose of research (to learn), implied the presence of a non-threatening ‘acceptable incompetent’ (Neuman, 1997:359) whose role was to observe and to question. Explanation of the relevance of questions and subsequent use of data, relating to particularly sensitive topics such as profits, worker conditions, criminality or the relationship with local Garda, was instrumental in producing open and revelatory responses. In light of information received and observations made, it is crucial that the researcher ‘is and should act the learner, indicating no inclination to evaluate the host’s activities’ (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973:25) and is in effect an objective outsider.

The selection of three diverse settings provided an opportunity to compare and contrast the experiences of social drinkers according to urban/rural positioning. There was also a marked contrast in terms of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ environments, described as such by respective proprietors. More importantly a case study approach that incorporated observation and explanations of back-stage activities, contextualised the social world of the drinker in a way that would otherwise be hidden. The sites that were accessed were according to the hosts, reflective of other sites in so far as they all operate within a comparative framework and have similar goals and aspirations. As valuable sources of data, a case-study of

the public house provided considerable insight into the operation of the drinks trade, at the retail level. This ethno-methodological approach that ‘delves into the sense-making process in any social encounter’ (Macionis and Plummer, 1997:160) exposed and clarified an array of social processes such as the knowledge framework and the business model within which the drinks industry functions.

Observation of social relations within the public house provided answers to the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ questions relating to social drinking. During this early phase in the research process, when my role as researcher was to ‘observe and interact’ (Neuman, 1997:32), the experience was one of exhilaration (new and exciting project) and anxiety (self-doubt and apprehension). The case study provided valuable insights that supported and validated interview content and forged links with documentary and other media sources of data. Links were established between researcher and proprietor during the periods of ‘participation observation’ that were maintained for the duration of the research period of 5 years.

Unimpeded access to the relevant sites proved an invaluable source of data, facilitating the documentation of change over time, particularly in the area of structural constraint. As well as the stated ‘participant observation’ locations, a further geographic spread of public houses were also included in the study. This involved visits for short periods during week-day trading hours where informal conversation with proprietors and bar workers took place. This was followed up by longer visits during busy

Friday/Saturday night trading where drinkers and workers were observed but not approached. Note-taking and photography completed this phase of the research.

Locations of the public houses included in this project are as follows:

Gort, Co Galway

Limerick City

Dundalk, Co Louth

Mallow, Co Cork

Dublin City

Annascaul, Co Kerry

Banagher and Tullamore, Co Offaly (same proprietor)

Strokestown, Co Roscommon

Dingle, Co Kerry

Kilkenny City.

Dungarvan, Co Waterford.

3. 6. 2. The interviews

Interviews conducted with social drinkers was the chief source of data for this research project, supported by further interviews with publicans/proprietors, security and law enforcement personnel and a food hygiene consultant. Selection of interviewees followed exploratory informal interviews/conversations where my requirements and expectations were discussed. Prospective interviewees (drinkers) were

informed about the background and the purpose of the project. Participants were also informed of the significance of their roles in the study and of the importance of their personal experiences of public house drinking and its meaning in everyday life. As drinking experiences were found to vary greatly according to age, gender and demographic location, a variation of quota sampling, 'dimensional sampling' (Kane, 1997:93) that took into account various characteristics of the research population was applied. To obtain a broad and objective description of the social world of the drinker, while bearing in mind that everyone claims some acquaintanceship with social drinking, criteria for selection was as follows:

- ~ Respondents must not have been previously known to the researcher
- ~ Respondents considered themselves 'social' or 'moderate' drinkers'
- ~ Gender-balance was established as far as possible.
- ~ Age-profile ranged from 20+ to 70+ years
- ~ Demographically, an urban/rural sample of drinkers was selected.

A total of 12 drinkers/public house users were selected and invited to participate. Time and place arrangements were agreed and interviews were conducted and recorded where possible, otherwise notes were taken. All recordings were subsequently transcribed and coded thematically. The next stage involved interviews with drinks providers who retail the product (alcohol) and who operate the location of consumption (the public house).

Due to their diversity, public houses were selected according to the following criteria:

- ~ Urban/rural location
- ~ High/low capacity
- ~ Traditional/modern ambience
- ~ Products/services availability
- ~ Target markets
- ~ Geographic spread (Republic of Ireland)

Recurring themes such as ‘legal constraints’, ‘door policy’ and ‘security’ and the frequent involvement of the Garda in alcohol-related anti-social activities, emerged during interviews with both drinkers and drinks providers. At this juncture it became apparent that interviews with a law-enforcement agent and a security services operative would afford a greater insight into the links between social order and drinking and the legal frameworks within which the drinker and the drinks provider operates. Subsequently, an interview with a Garda Superintendent and a Security Services provider/trainer was conducted.

The subjects of ‘food’ and ‘pub dining’ as a relatively new and developing concept consistently arose in the course of the interviews with social drinkers and proprietors. As this was a new departure for a considerable proportion of public houses, an array of new skills and operational procedures were acquired and put into practice. As the provision of food for public consumption requires specific skills and is

conducted within an exacting regulatory structure, an interview with a Food Hygiene Consultant was conducted. Law enforcer, security operative and food hygiene consultant, as key ‘informants’ (Neuman, 1997:374), related how their specialist knowledge and skills play an active role in the restructuring of the ‘field’. The public house environment and the drinking patterns and practices therein, were described in terms of legal and regulatory constraints that ultimately impacted upon the social world of the drinker. Objective (professional) insights into public house drinking, contributed in a significant (expert) way to the research project, offering alternate perspectives and deeper understanding of the field of inquiry.

Following the selection of respondents, and their agreement to participate, all prospective interviewees were contacted for a pre-interview briefing for the purpose of:

- ~ Explaining the project
- ~ Giving an indication of the questions/topics.
- ~ Discussing audio recording and photography
- ~ Allowing time and opportunity for questions from interviewees
- ~ Offering time to consider participation in the project
- ~ Arranging the date/time/venue for formal interviews

The following table showing interviewee profiles sets out the age and gender categories of drinkers who participated in the study. Publicans and managers are categorised according to urban/rural demographic:

Table setting out age and gender profiles of 22 Respondents:

Interviewees.			
<u>Interviewees/respondents in the order in which interviews were conducted</u>			
1. A.	(M. K.)	Male.	60yrs.+ Consumer/Drinker
2. B.	(M. C.)	Female.	20yrs.+ Consumer/Drinker
3. C.	(J. McG.)	Male.	40yrs.+ Consumer/Drinker
4. D.	(S. R.)	Female.	30yrs.+ Consumer/Drinker
5. E.	C. McN.	Female.	40yrs.+ Consumer/Drinker
6. F.	(N. B.)	Male.	30yrs.+ Consumer/Drinker
7. G.	(M. D.)	Publican. (Limerick City).	
8. H.	(D. L.)	Publican. (Mallow, [rural] Co Cork).	
9. J.	(A. B.)	Female.	60yrs.+ Consumer/Non-Drinker.
10. K.	(J. H.)	Bar Manager, (Dublin).	
11. L.	(S. T.)	Male.	70yrs.+ Consumer/Drinker.
12. M.	(N.C.)	Female.	50yrs.+ Consumer/Drinker.
13. N.	(G. C.)	Publican. (Annascaul, [rural] Co Kerry)	
14. P.	(B. L.)	Female.	20yrs,+ Consumer/Drinker
15. Q.	(J. G.)	Publican. (Banagher [rural] and Tullamore [urban] Co Offaly).	
16. R.	(E. T.)	Food/Hygiene Consultant (Dublin)	
17. S.	(C. McC.)	Garda Superintendent (Dublin metropolitan Area).	
18. T.	(T. C.)	Male	50yrs.+ Consumer/Drinker
19. U.	(D. R.)	Publican. (Kilmacow, [rural] Co. Waterford)	
20. V.	(P. L.)	Security Consultant, (Clonmel, Co Tipperary).	
21. W.	(M. B.)	Female	70yrs.+ Consumer/Drinker
22. X.	(T. M.)	Publican. (Gort, [rural] Co Galway)	

All interviews were conducted face-to-face. Nineteen interviews were recorded and notes were made during and following the remaining three

interviews. Interviews varied in length, from approximately an hour to two and a half hours and were conducted in the following locations:

- ~ Public houses
- ~ Respondents homes/gardens
- ~ Hotel foyer
- ~ Garda headquarters.
- ~ Security/food hygiene consultant's office.

Interviews were semi-structured and topics were introduced in a way that allowed respondents go into detail and to assign meanings to their individual experiences¹². Due to age differentials, the diversity in experiences and the focus of the questions, an array of 'mixed messages' (Neuman, 1997:375) emerged due to the respondent category, diversity, age-position and experience of informants. Contrasting perspectives of the same social phenomenon while enriching the quality of the data, however, proved challenging at the level of analysis

3. 6. 3. Photographic representations

Photographs that provide visual representations of the social setting (an additional 'text') have a two-fold purpose, insofar as they compliment audio recordings and field notes, and are used as an additional analytical tool. Visual representations of the site of analysis are advantageous both to the researcher and to the reader. Firstly, for the researcher, photographs are

¹² This method allows for what Becker describes as 'volunteered' information as well as 'question directed' statements (Bynner and Stribley, 1979:315-316)

an aid to memory. Visual representations of the site can be accessed long after the researcher has left the field. Representations of events, social actors and social practices can be re-read and re-interpreted at any stage in the research process and may also be made available to the reader.

Photographs can also support or help illustrate verbal accounts of social experience. For the reader, visual representations depict what is contained in the written text, thus enhancing (and verifying) written descriptions and explanations. Recent advances in computer applications and digital imagery means that 'visual inscriptions of data are a major part of the way that different fields of science to conduct experiments, render information and communicate ideas' (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001:279). Images produced through the medium of photography as 'unmediated copies of reality' (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001:362) are on the one hand acknowledged as evidence of people, objects and actions that depict a setting or event from the past. On the other hand, it must be borne in mind the possibility to manipulate visual imagery by technological (digital) means, thus there exists the potential to misinform or to mislead.

As a representation of the 'real', photography creates a further 'text' that contributes to the research methodology, particularly at the analysis stage. 'Representations' of the public house and of the activities of drinkers take the form of written texts where photographic images create meaning. For Barthes, images have a 'denotative' and a 'connotative' meaning, however, what is 'meant' may not always be what is 'understood'. Language

has rules regarding the expression and interpretation of meaning, while in photographic images, 'denotation is what is photographed, connotation is how it is photographed' (Fiske, 1982:91). Images can function as evidence or can produce in the viewer complex feelings and interpretations that stem from cultural values and beliefs. The 'myth' (Barthes, 1964), refers to the hidden set of rules, which are specific to certain groups but are ideologically presented as universal. Cultural meanings are given to images that in turn affect the expectations and uses of images. Images produced by cameras result from 'subjective choice', the decision of the photographer regarding what (and what not) to photograph.

Photographic evidence of what is perceived as 'real' adds to the documentary qualities of the research method. Photography, therefore, is valuable as a vehicle that documents and conveys a specific reality. The photographs used in this project were produced to depict visually aspects of the setting (the public house) and as an addendum to written descriptions of social phenomena¹³. Photographic images included in this thesis are objective insofar as they represent places, people or events captured at specific moments in time. As well as being used as aids in the course of fieldwork, the images also become sources of data in their own right. As such they are interpreted alongside data produced from oral and documentary sources.

¹³ While photographic images as 'evidence of the real' (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001:18) belong to a system of representation that is increasingly challenged in terms of 'truth-value', the images used in conjunction with this text are described in terms of content and purpose.

Photographic images support this text by visually conveying what has been observed and described, for example:

- ~ Modern technology incorporated into a ‘traditional’ setting
- ~ Mobile images that inform and advertise.
- ~ Hybridization of the contemporary public house.
- ~ Historical images producing a contemporary space.
- ~ Public display of Legal Notices.
- ~ Smoking Zone that segregates and unifies.
- ~ Domestic consumption practices

The use of photography in the course of the research process extends the research method in a way that enriches and enhances data. The inclusion of photographic images within the written text provides additional information that can be interpreted and analyzed by both reader and writer. Images are also used in the development of the theoretical argument (through a visual depiction of explained phenomena) as they also convey fragments of information that may *not* be contained in the written text.

3. 7. Analysis of data.

Throughout the research process an ongoing analysis of data was taking place, generated by thematic categorisations and sequential patterns. In qualitative research, outcomes of initial data analysis ‘guide’ subsequent data collection therefore, analysis is a ‘dimension of research that stretches across all stages’ (Neuman, 1997:420). Recurring themes regarding the

social drinking experience fell loosely into three separate categories, the desire to drink, the stated 'inconveniences' and 'constraints' associated with drinking and the monetary implications. Themes that refined the research question also developed the preliminary theoretical framework that identified cultural, economic and regulatory processes as the defining categories of analysis. Data is generated and analysed at all stages throughout the research process. Where 'further data gathering takes its direction from provisional analysis' (Becker, 1975:313) it broadens the scope for ongoing revision of the research method and of the research focus.

Central to the process of analysis was the categorization of people, places and activities¹⁴. Field notes made during participant observation and audio recordings of interviews were coded and organised according to the three categories: 'culture' (the lived experience of the drinker), 'economy' (the business model and monetary transactions that define the relationship between drinker and provider) and 'regulation' (the structural framework within which drinkers/providers are legally obliged to operate). Theorising drinking practices as a cultural experience, as participation in an economic process and as operating within politically defined boundaries, call for three separate but interconnected levels of interpretation. The next step in the process was the coding and the organisation of data into three separate categories. Categories or frameworks of analysis that utilize the above concepts as 'analytic tools', (Neuman, 1997:421) are set out in detail in the following Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

¹⁴ Interviewee profiles as set out in 3.6.2 Participant observation conducted in three public houses; Dolans's, O'Neill's and O'Brien's.

3. 8. The research methodology: an overview

This research project was designed and undertaken to examine current changes in social drinking practices, taking into account the growing trend of consuming alcohol in domestic space as well as within the changing environment of the contemporary public house. The transformation of the Irish public house and changing trends in social drinking diverges into two separate areas of investigation, in recognition of the sharp rise in ‘off sales’ alcohol purchases. A research methodology was developed that would investigate and generate understanding of the social world of the drinker and of the social processes that structure and shape the social drinking experience. A review of theoretical and empirical literature pertaining to the topic of inquiry was the starting point from which the research method developed. Literature, electronic and print media contextualises ‘fieldwork’ data obtained from primary sources, locating the research in time and place-specific social context.

A series of interviews in conjunction with participant observation and photographic representations generated the necessary data. The greater part of empirical data was sourced from social drinkers and others directly (or indirectly) involved in the drinks trade for example, bar-workers, food-handlers, security personnel and law-enforcement agents. Observation of social drinking and of drink-related practices and of the back-stage operation of the public house as a regulated business was also a crucial element of the research process. The generation of data therefore, has three

distinct elements: source of data in terms of accounts given by respondents and documentary sources; the information/knowledge that is sourced; and the researcher whose agenda, objectivity and interpretive standpoint have a crucial bearing on the entire project.

The research methodology devised for this sociological project is broad insofar as it approaches the social world of the drinker from the experience of the drinker, the operation of the public house and the legal framework within which the drinks industry functions and the drinker is obliged to behave. Individual accounts of the drinker experience revealed a multiplicity of interpretations surrounding motivation, drinking practices and the constraints and obligations that drinking in the public house entails. Participant observation over specific time periods and at diverse locations developed further my understanding of the subject through close scrutiny of work, leisure and consumption practices. Previous studies along with media commentary provided further insights into alcohol use/misuse, the public house and the consumer. As a multi-functional space of work, leisure and consumption, the public house is an arena that is determined by social processes that are cultural, political and economic. The strength of this methodology, therefore, lies in the multi-dimensional approach to the subject.

The advantages of a multifarious approach to drinkers and to the public house are numerous, for example, perspectives of alcohol and of the pub coming from diverse sources (drinker, publican, Garda) can vary

considerably. Observations did not always reflect what was expressed in the interview. Contradictory evidence that required further clarification revealed additional information (or explanation) that might otherwise have been overlooked. The construction of a theoretical framework of analysis was guided by the thematic nature of the data. The culture of consuming alcohol for example, when re-interpreted as an economic and as a regulated activity showed inherent rules and constraints that challenge the notion of the 'relaxed, casual informality' associated with public house drinking. Themes such as the drinks industry as 'business', the drinks trade as 'highly regulated' along with the legal framework that restricts drinking practices, emerged from drinking experiences as expressed by drinkers. This methodological approach was broad and flexible and allowed for the development of a theoretical framework that would best explain the phenomenon of public house drinking. The uncovering of social processes such as the economic implications of drinking and the structural constraints surrounding the production, distribution and consumption of alcohol was initiated by micro-level experiences of drinkers. Interplay between empirical evidence and theoretical interpretations of a social phenomenon (the public house drinker), produced a sociological analysis that strongly reflects the scope and adaptability of the methodology.

The social world of the drinker at the micro-level is examined within the context of rapid social change and domestic prosperity¹⁵, for the purpose

¹⁵ A micro-level analysis of Irish society, a 'celebration of success' (McWilliams, 2005)
An analysis of the advantages/disadvantages of 'increased prosperity' (Fahey et al, 2007)
Ireland's economic progress, economic policy and the 'challenges of globalisation' (Clinch et al, 2002)

of identifying the source and the consequences of changing trends in social drinking. The validation and presentation of evidence and the analysis of data were carried out under supervision in a way that endeavoured to safeguard the moral principles of social research. For example, recorded and written transcripts of interviews were made available for submission and verification, where authenticity and objectivity could be monitored and guided. According to Kane, no scientist can be ‘completely objective’ but can ‘report methods and data as completely and accurately as possible, and let readers make their own analysis’ (1997:213). While interpretive research methods are subjective and the research process is a work in progress from the research idea through to the ‘writing-up’ stage, objectivity is aspired to through continuous mindfulness and explanation of research practices and procedures as they develop.

Chapter 4. Cultural Perspective: the Public House and Social Drinking.

This chapter explores the Irish public house and its inherent drinking practices from a cultural perspective. A social history of the pub reveals a place that is in a continuous state of transition, a space showing changes in spatial reconfiguration, decor, products and practices. Transformations within the public house such as the introduction of food and entertainment and the growing regulatory role of the owner radically alter the nature of informal social interaction. Changing social norms such as newly developing tastes in leisure and consumption practices indicate consumer expectations and choices as they evolve over time and according to individual needs. Regulatory obligations pertaining to the drink driving issue and the smoking ban are shown to have a far-reaching impact on the contemporary pub and its key position in social and community life. The regulatory role of the owner, controls that apply to the drinks trade and obligations regarding alcohol consumption practices impact on social drinking patterns at a cultural level. In this chapter cultural determinants that shape drinking practices and the public house experience, are explored in terms of personal autonomy and social and structural influences.

4. 1. The social morphology of the Irish public house.

As a site of informal association, leisure and consumption, the public house and inherent drinking practices are undergoing transformation on all

levels. Abstract processes that manifest themselves materially and socially generate the social world of the drinker. For example, the concept of globalisation¹ (an abstraction) where coming into contact with other cultures through the medium of information technology and travel, generates an awareness of and a desire for alternative lifestyle and consumption choices. As the place where alcohol is consumed, the public house is an environment that is also symptomatic of global processes while at the same time it is an accepted symbol of Irish culture. Global processes such as connectivity to and communication with other cultures, combined with domestic ‘accelerated growth’ (Whelan and Layte, 2007:79) bring about cultural change that alters life-style practices and therefore drinking practices at the micro-level.

The connection between global processes and consumption practices at the micro-level was articulated in different ways by publicans and bar-managers who participated in the study. The following example typifies perceptions of how wider influences impact upon expectations and social practices at a local level;

‘yeah, I think people are getting more sophisticated, basically, yeah, I think the Celtic Tiger has opened up people’s minds to travel, to look around and see different things from travel. When you go and see things through travel, then you want from it, that’s how I see it’ (Respondent G, publican, Limerick City)

Awareness or experiences of alternative leisure and lifestyle practices that are subsequently adopted at the micro-level are concrete manifestations of

¹ See Inglis (2008) for a unique (personal) insight into the way globalisation manifested itself in Ireland, rapidly transforming the cultural, economic and political fabric of Irish society.

global and economic processes. Such practices that over time become routine and commonplace have been integrated into Irish culture². The knowledge of and desire for exotic alcohol products along with the relatively new practice in Ireland of combining food and alcohol, is symbolic of the Celtic Tiger period and has re-defined the social world of the Irish drinker. The following account of cultural change summarises lifestyle practices in terms of contemporary expectations regarding refreshment and entertainment;

‘well I think people expect a lot more now, and from a pub –I think – say five years ago, people went into a pub, a pub was a pub, they had their drink and whatever, but I think people want more from a pub now. They expect service and they expect standards now a lot higher than they would have five years ago...I think before people wouldn’t think...a lot of people, say working class wouldn’t go out for a meal, make a big occasion of it. I think what’s happening now, a lot would go out for a meal, you know, and make a night out of it, go for a drink, go for a meal, and go to a band – whatever was on, they want to be entertained’ (Respondent G, Publican, Limerick City)

The new wave of domestic prosperity at the beginning of the 21st century translated into unprecedented (higher) levels of disposable income that greatly strengthened the position of the consumer. The following table shows rates of consumer spending 2000 – 2010:

Annual Spending on Goods and Services in Ireland 2000 – 2010

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
50,604	55,706	62,114	67,202	70,899	76,927	83,979	91,948	93,863	84,173	81,442
(millions of euro)										

Source: Consumer Market Monitor, Smurfit Business School (2011:7)

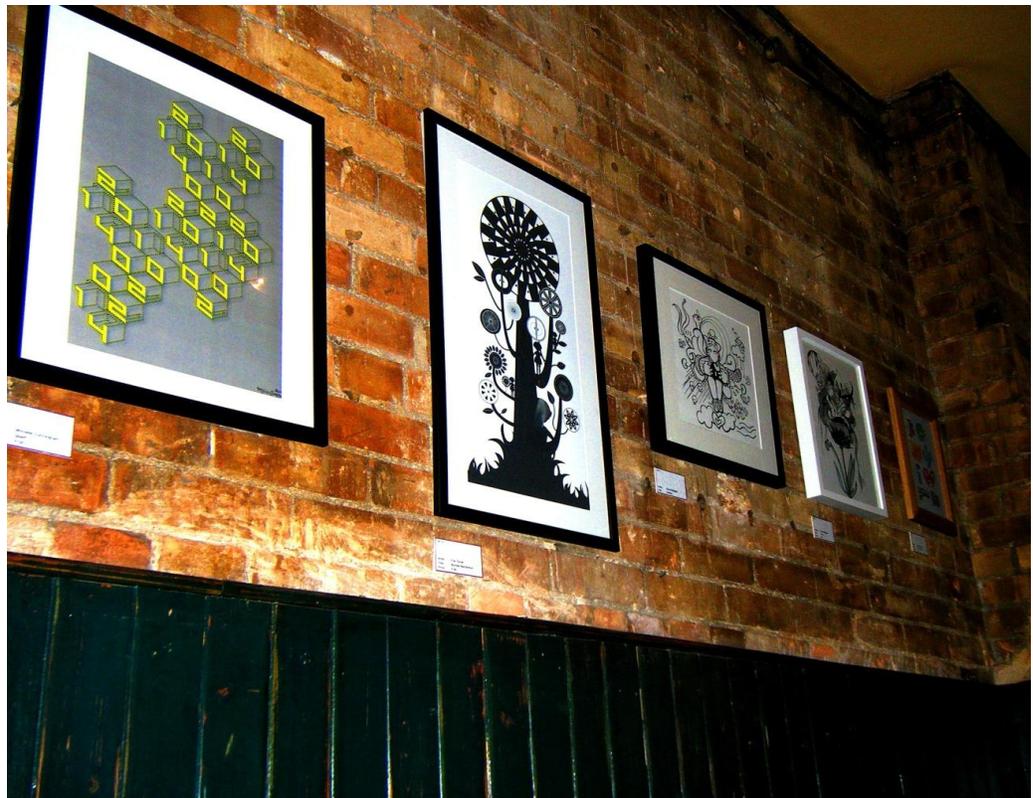
² Entertainment in the public house such as the ‘Ballad Boom’ in the 70s where Irish folk singers and musicians performed traditional lyrics and tunes has been by and large replaced by electronic media generating American and European popular music. This can vary from easy-listening ‘background’ music to the DJ who presents a genre such as ‘80s Pop or contemporary ‘Dance’.

A continual rise in consumer spending from 2000 to 2007 with a record increase of 8.6% in 2007 that impacted favourably on the drinks industry was followed by a steady downward trend. Underlying economic processes coming into play during the period 2000-2010, defined by ‘rising income and material living standards’ (McGinnity et al, 2007:201) transformed lifestyle practices and expectations regarding the quality and diversity of consumer goods and services. Higher standards in products and services were called for and publicans recognising the business potential, responded with enthusiasm (the impact of economic processes upon drinking practices will be explored in-depth in the next chapter). As well as growth and diversity in the choice of beverages and food, a range of amenities and services were established and are now considered commonplace. The following excerpt from a description of a typical public house environment indicates how technology and new business practices have been incorporated into the traditional public house experience:

‘internet access areas, digital TV,...replaces pool and darts, cocktail menus, happy hour, promotions – maybe free pints, t-shirts, key-rings’ (Respondent P, drinker, female, age 20+)

The transition from the male dominated ‘gloomy and functional ambience’ (Tovey and Share, 2003:374) of the traditional public house to the contemporary ‘cool sophisticated interiors’ that include ‘bespoke artwork’ (AM:PM. Irish Hospitality & Style February/March 2004), has greatly altered the public house experience. The following image shows a section of wall in a Dublin city centre public house where examples of modern art are displayed in an otherwise traditional environment. Amateur artists display their work for a

limited period and sales transactions are carried out by bar workers. Commission is not paid on sales, which is of major benefit to the aspiring artist, considering the financial costs (to the artist) of exhibiting in a commercial art gallery. Thematically, the continuously-changing ‘art exhibition’ is at once part of the decor *and* is one of the features that construct the unique identity of this particular public house:



4. 1.1. Images along with name of artist, contact details and price.

The public house, as a constructed environment is always planned and developed (or evolves) to meet the needs of existing and potential clientele therefore, new and innovative methodologies are applied. As the site of

informal association and the primary location of alcohol consumption practices, the pub is diversifying, and giving way to a new (additional) range of possibilities, while retaining some 'traditional' properties. Public house interiors in terms of décor and furnishings, that 'range from the humble to the grandiose, from the cosy to the palatial' (Taylor, 1983:16), create an 'ambience' that respond to consumer desires and preferences while at the same time operating as a marketing strategy.

The following familiar image of a section of a public house bar shows a representation of pub 'humour' that is commonly seen in cartoon or textual format or by the placement together of unrelated or inappropriate objects such as road directional signs and chamber pots. The image features an eclectic collection of 'random artefacts' (Scarborough, 2008:61) that 'decorate' the bar area, and are positioned in full view of the customer. A photograph of a young man (a regular) placed in position prior to emigrating, a miniature 'hurley' and the lyrics of a ballad composed by a 'regular' marking a local commemoration are also evident. While the visual image constructs and communicates the notion of 'community', the 'business' that is the retail and purchase of alcohol, (the presence of spirit bottles and glasses) is also evident.



4.1.2. Image of miscellaneous 'objects' and products.

For the social drinker, adaptation to new lifestyle practices that are politically determined but experienced at the micro-level, takes place in an environment that is also shown as politically generated. The public house underwent radical changes that may be attributed directly to political processes. For example, the Public Health (Tobacco) Act (2002) changed the public house environment spatially and socially when the traditional practice of consuming alcohol and tobacco together was prohibited. The greatest impact in this

respect for drinkers was the disruption to social intercourse due to movement between smoking and non-smoking areas.



4. 1 3. This image of a solitary smoker in a ‘smoking area’ (created by removing sections of the glazed roof) contrasts sharply with the familiar images of drinkers/smokers consuming in the ‘smoky haze’ of the traditional pub

4. 2. The Irish public house: a history of transformation and stasis.

With Ireland's entry into the EEC in 1973, changes to a traditional way of life in terms of new products, practices and social re-organisation had a major impact upon Irish society and Irish consumer practices. The importation of products from other European countries for example, meant an increase in the consumption of wine during the 1980s and 1990s (Molloy, 2002:88). As well as the cultural shift towards wine consumption, the way in which the more traditional drinks were consumed also changed. Observations made by a Limerick publican of how the preference for colder drinks has come about, again identifies how external factors initiate change;

'when Budweiser came to Ireland, they wanted that Budweiser be served at 3.75degrees... and that became... and people said nobody's going to drink that, that's too cold. Guinness was around 4degrees or around 4.75degrees... would have been the norm a few years ago. That's why the extra cold came in, Guinness have brought in their extra-cold so you can get a regular pint of Guinness or an extra cold' (Respondent G, Publican, Limerick City)

The change-over to cold drinks came about with the launch and rising popularity of light beers that were introduced to Irish customers through advertising campaigns and drinks promotion 'events' aimed at younger drinkers particularly students. More importantly, the arrival of 'cold' beers also had an effect on the way indigenous products such as Guinness is served and consumed:

'drinks are getting colder...people want their drinks colder...beer for instance must be chilled, when we came to Limerick six years ago, you had a half-warm Guinness and a half-cold Guinness. That

took me by surprise, it was an on-going thing in Limerick at the time. You had to have a warm barrel, not chilled at all for when people asked for a half-and-half. That's gone now. (Respondent G, publican, Limerick City)

The growing diversity in alcohol products along with diversity in consumer profiles means that while new products and services are embraced, the desire for traditional products and practices remains. The public house is an environment that is at once a milieu of global processes while at the same time it is symbolically representative of an Irish cultural tradition. While the contemporary 'modern bar' operates alongside the 'traditional pub', my research shows that the greater proportion of public houses are in effect a fusion of 'new' and 'old' styles. For example, a 'warm' pint of Guinness and a bottle of Smirnoff Ice may be consumed by an open fire, while an internet access point, modern sound technology or an ATM facility may be positioned close by.

The following image shows an internet access point located in a passageway between the bar and the toilets in an urban public house (precursor to present day 'wi-fi' facility). A combination of the 'old' and the 'new' constitutes the vast majority of contemporary pub environments where present-day expectations are met in a traditional (but often pseudo-traditional) environment:



4.2.1. Internet access point.

This above image showing an ‘old-world’ dusty brick wall with recently positioned cables and a communications technology unit is typical of ‘modernising’ endeavours evident in contemporary pubs. The public house as a ‘habitat that permitted the individual to know and enjoy many people’ (Oldenburg, 1999:284) has had numerous functional roles that extend beyond leisure and recreation purposes. New ways of experiencing the public house that in some instances blur the boundaries between work and leisure time have their origins in traditional ‘pubs-cum-shops’ (Molloy, 2002:78) where groceries as well as alcoholic beverages were sold and where business was conducted. In

contrast, the following images show a ‘traditional’ type public house (built 1830) that serves the community and has not changed in over 30 years:.



4. 2. 2. This image of a public house and grocery (petrol pumps out of shot), in Strokestown, Co Roscommon is one of the few remaining in Ireland.



4. 2. 3. This image shows a well-stocked general grocery shop and a door to the rear clearly marked ‘BAR’.



4. 2. 4. This image shows original shop counter and shelving. The only evidence of recent change was the dedicated ‘smoking zone’ at the rear of the bar area.

In keeping with the traditional (multi-purpose) operational model, the contemporary public house functions in much the same way but with different purposes and functions. The following observation of contemporary drinking practices identifies the public house as a place not wholly confined to leisure-time activity:

‘in Ireland in the 70s and 80s there wasn’t the same profit motive that seems to exist now, the same drive for wealth, especially among younger people, now if you go into a pub in the Dublin area, at say, lunchtime, you would meet up with legal people, banking people, insurance...money people basically, they would be... I get the impression... very career minded... in the pubs with people they are trying to impress’ (Respondent C, drinker, male, 40+)

The contemporary public house has changed from being a place where alcohol was consumed and food was purchased for home consumption, to a place where food may be consumed and alcohol is available through the 'off-sales' outlet. The Irish pub as 'part of our cultural heritage' (Molloy, 2002:91) transformed into a place where diverse activities such as dining, entertainment, and business were carried out against a backdrop of alcohol consumption. As new products such as food and entertainment augment the drinking experience, a 'context-dependent' (Lash and Urry, 1999:204) service delivery enhances the material as well as the social aspects of the public house experience. Change in the public house environment and in the lived experience of users, implies that time is a 'fundamental dimension of life and culture' (Fornas, 1995:18). Individuals are 'viewed as purposeful agents engaged in projects that take up time through movement in space' (Harvey, 1989:211), therefore, their transactions or social encounters require a location and a time in which to take place.

The contemporary public house when utilized as a community resource, translates into a meeting-place or venue that may be adopted to facilitate an array of communal activities according to individual drinkers as well as to local (immediate) needs. Events such as fund-raising or card-games are routinely held in public houses and a prime example is the well-publicised 'clinics' held regularly by TDs and other elected representatives in public houses throughout the country. The following venues in the Kildare and Limerick areas are but an indication of the widespread use of public houses for this purpose:

‘Clinic’ locations (Public Houses) availed of by currently serving TDs.

Emmet Stagg TD (Lab)	Willie O’Dea TD (FF)
Castletown Inn, Celbridge	Shanahans Bar, Mungret
Manzor’s, Clane	Colin’s Bar, Dooradoyle
Ryvale Tavern, Leixlip	Shannon Bar, Castleconnell
Caulfield’s, Maynooth	Black Swan, Annacotty

(Sources: personal and constituency websites)

The contemporary Irish public house, a place of leisure and entertainment and an accessible and informal site for relaxation and refreshment, has diversified in line with social and commercial trends. What was considered a ‘local’ and ‘traditional’ phenomenon has in more recent times been ‘incorporated into the broader leisure and tourism industries’³ (Tovey and Share, 2003:371). Both in Ireland and abroad, the promotion of the ‘Irish pub’ as a holiday and tourism ‘must’, has elevated what was an ‘Irish’, ‘traditional’ and ‘local’ phenomenon to its current legendary position in the global market.

4. 3. Modes of interaction in the social drinking environment

As a routine activity, the consumption of alcohol in the public house can only be described as a multiplicity of practices, encounters and experiences. Drinkers as they consume in an acknowledged traditional environment,

³ According to the ‘Discover Ireland’ website the Irish Pub ‘holds a special place in our heart’, where the friendly staff help visitors with planning and by providing information and ‘make phone calls and bookings or dole out recommendations as required’

participate in an array of processes as they purchase a variety of goods and services, while at the same time interacting socially in a process of cultural engagement. The form and quality of cultural engagement is defined according to such factors as life-stage position, geographical location and lifestyle preferences. While life-style choices, a cultural phenomenon could be said to be individually determined by ‘purposeful agents’ (Harvey, 1989:211), they are however, also subject to a multiplicity of underlying structural and systematic processes that will be explored further in the next two chapters. Cultural processes are always time and place specific and define human experience as ‘communicative encounters between interacting subjects and symbolic texts within contextual frames’ (Fornas, 1995:3). Social meaning is constructed when interaction between individual creativity and social structures, in this instance, define the role of the public house and generates the social world of the drinker. Contemporary lifestyle practices surrounding alcohol consumption imply ‘sets of habitual actions’ and ‘reflexively expressed attitudes of taste’ (Fornas, 1995:97) that are realized in the public house or other location where alcohol is consumed.

The ‘informal association’ (Oldenburg, 1999) aspect of the public house remains a core value however, modernising processes such as availability of food and entertainment along with the rise in consumption of non-alcoholic beverages has meant that informal association is no longer confined to leisure purposes. Empirical evidence shows that leisure-time association has broadened to include other forms of association, for example, business

meetings. A rural publican (Respondent H) makes a clear distinction between ‘social’ and ‘business’ drinkers that defines diversity and purpose:

‘one time a pub was just for – out for a drink , and that was it, it can be a source of anything now, an awful lot of business is done in the pub, meetings, and fellows meet, have coffee and sandwiches, business is transacted over the laptop computers. You’d see a fellow having a cup of coffee and his computer on’ (Respondent H, Publican, Mallow, Co. Cork)

The traditional Irish public house is conceptualised as a place of informal association where strangers and people who are known to each other are free to interact. According to the ‘lived culture’ (Williams, [1961] 1980:66) of drinkers, informal social interaction is expressed as a communicative process, with a potential for emotional or companionable alliances. Encouraged by the effects of alcohol, a ‘psychoactive substance’ (World Health Organisation, 2009), people co-mingle in an environment that is conducive to the formation of social bonds and to the establishment of intimate relationships. The following examples of informal social interaction that develop into enduring personal relationships typify that which is synonymous with the public house:

‘I met my fiancée in a bar, knew a couple that come in sometimes, met here three years ago, got married six months ago, might not have gone up to the girls sober, the few drinks helps all right’ (Respondent F, drinker, male, 30+).

Face-to-face social interaction, when combined with the consumption of alcohol in the public house, is a life-style practice where the social drinker traditionally enjoyed a ‘good-hearted atmosphere in which honest expression triumphs over sophistication’ (Oldenburg, 1999:125). Interaction between

drinkers in the contemporary public house is life-stage specific and varies according to the age-profile of drinkers and to the capacity and location of the public house. Low capacity ‘local’ pubs tend to have a regular clientele, where people are known to each other and would be on first-name terms. The following (remembered) description of a public house and people, who drank there, implies the importance of human social interaction and communication over products and amenities:

‘I go into a pub – in Kinlough, Co Leitrim, real country pub, just had lino on the floor, wouldn’t have a ladies toilet and the gents would be very basic indeed, newspaper in the trap if you were lucky, and the guys who go in there would be farmers, have Wellington boots on, they would be treading cowshit into the pub – that’s a country pub to me’..... ‘any pub in the middle of Temple bar, wouldn’t have much to do with what you’d call community life, pubs are fundamental to where you’d go to meet people, it’s where you’d go to get information, go just to meet your friends and neighbours’... ‘you will have gathered that I am a pubaholic, a pubaphile, so I might have a tainted view, but I still do feel from a social perspective, that there is nowhere better, I can’t think of anything better’ (Respondent C, male, drinker, 40+)

In his description of a Co. Leitrim public house, Respondent C expresses awareness of poor aesthetic quality and limited amenities, while at the same time conveying the appropriateness of its’ primitive material nature within a rural setting that has a purpose and is conducive to a specific way of life.

As already stated, interaction between drinkers is a crucial element of the public house experience, while at the same time the relationship between drinkers and bar workers also has a significant but different quality. Social relations between drinkers and bar-workers are multi-faceted and complex.

Where the giving of service is an element of the overall product, the quality of interaction is a significant feature of service-delivery. The act of service is social therefore the quality of efficiency, along with the personal characteristics of the service-giver such as appearance; attitude and efficiency are all taken into account. Where the delivery of service calls for the service-giver to smile, act pleasant and friendly, special skills are required to ‘interpret and modify’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:201) social interaction at the moment of delivery. The exercise of ‘emotional labour’ transforms service workers into ‘reflexive cultural analysts’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:201) as they bring a human (relational) element to the task. The genuineness of interaction between drinker and service-giver, however is called into question, with the proposition that ‘one of the striking features of the contemporary service industries is the degree to which a superficial veneer of emotional engagement is slicked upon a substratum of impersonal relationships’ (Inglis, 2005:48). The transaction of giving/receiving an alcoholic drink in exchange for money therefore, is recognized as having a ‘performative character’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:202) that is inherent in the giving and receiving of service.

While the public house holds the position that is unique in Irish culture, workers who interact with and give service to customers, enjoy a similar status. The role of ‘publican’ or ‘barman’ is both a functional and a symbolic one that transcends that of service-provider therefore the relationship between bar-worker and drinker cannot be reduced to that of service-giver/receiver. While the bar-worker is said to ‘work with incredible speed, against a jumbled

background of bottles, glasses, mirrors, ornaments, and gewgaws - (showy but inexpensive objects, especially ornaments)' (Taylor, 1983:17), the role of the worker extends beyond that of service. Friendliness, conversation and a willingness to perform additional tasks, (for example, to call a taxi at the request of a customer) is in general, expected. As well as having local knowledge of social and community events, bar-workers also need to possess a working knowledge of complex social, legal and political superstructures that apply to the drinks trade. Responsibility for enforcing social order while operating within a complex legal frame-work can be a source of conflict in the relationship between drinker and bar-worker. Respondent Q⁴ for example, while attempting to justify action taken regarding refusal of service, reveals the potentially sensitive relationship that exists between travellers and settled community:

'don't mind serving our own regular travellers, never any trouble between travellers and locals – it's when there's a family feud, had to close when there was a funeral, not too comfortable doing that, I talked to them after, they understood my anxiety – still come in occasionally' 'the Equal Status leaves us all vulnerable, obliged to serve everyone, but we're still responsible if there's an accident, if staff or customers get injured' (Respondent Q, publican, Banagher and Tullamore, Co Offaly)

The above excerpt is but one example of how a set of attitudes and actions, (demonstrating ethnic or cultural differences that are deeply rooted in Irish culture) can determine social drinking practices. On the one hand, accessibility to the public house at point of entry can be problematic for some. On the other

⁴ Respondent Q is proprietor of 'O'Connell's, Banagher (rural) and O'Connell's Tullamore (urban), Co Offaly.

hand the public house has over time, ‘opened up’ to a much broader customer base, with the introduction of a range of products and services in addition to the traditional ‘alcohol’ product. Global processes through which alternative lifestyle practices are disseminated, translate into new and other ways of *doing* that alter the social world at the micro-level. Social relations in the contemporary public house demonstrate how ‘the cultural conditions of modernity shape not only our experiences of other people but also the environment in which we operate on a day-to-day basis’ (Inglis, 2005:48). The public house as a place of informal association, on the one hand would appear to facilitate free association with an ever-increasing range of products and services, while on the other hand an array of culturally imposed barriers re-define the nature of social relations at the micro level.

4. 4. Temporal perspective of social drinking.

From a historical perspective, alcohol consumption, the public house as ‘place’ (Giddens, 1984:118) and practices of informal association are deeply rooted in Irish history and culture⁵. When the social world of the contemporary drinker, however, is explored, a multiplicity of social processes that shape practices of consumption and social interaction at the micro-level begin to emerge. In order to explain the social experience of alcohol consumption from a cultural perspective, traditional drinking practices (from the literature and

⁵ Molloy traces the history of brewing and drinking in Ireland (according to medieval historians) back to the arrival of a ‘brewer and a hospitaller’ (2002:1) to Ireland.

from field research) —are juxtaposed with empirical ‘life-course’ (Hunt, 2005) accounts. The life-course perspective documents changing attitudes that transform or modify drinking practices as well as revealing the presence of an array of societal, economic and legal structures that shape the contemporary social world of the drinker. Social drinking practices according to my data are shown as culturally determined activities that are time and place-specific and that also change throughout the life course of the drinker.

Biographical accounts of relationships to alcohol and to the public house, read as a linear journey through the ‘life stages’ that may be conceptualised in two distinct ways. Firstly, a changing attitude towards alcohol consumption comes about through the process of maturity. Respondent A recalls early and present-day drinking behaviour:

‘falling off the bar stool, spent about a year getting in as much as I could, have a couple of pints and then drink brandies to get real effect, woke up in a phone booth in O’Connell St., disgusted with myself, some have to have a near-death experience to realise, develops from the fact that you go out, feel good and you keep at it, then you fall apart, sixteen, too young to be out. Now get to a certain level, try and hold it. (Respondent A, drinker, male, age 60+)

Temporal qualities of maturity whereby ‘identity is open to choice, transformation and negotiation’ (Hunt, 2005:49), are present and in operation throughout the life-course. Evidence shows how contemporary society ‘provides the means for a purposeful construction of self, largely through lifestyle preferences’ (Hunt, 2005:49), that comes into being through institutional channels. Links between social drinking and the construction of

personal identity are implied thus; 'we are what we consume: selfhood becomes a matter of lifestyle choice and the construction of an 'off-the-shelf' image which may change dramatically throughout our lives' (Hunt, 2005:49).

Secondly, social context at any given time plays a central role in the development of consumption patterns. Factors within the social environment such as socio-economic position and peer influences have a direct bearing upon lifestyle choices, thus shaping drinking practices throughout the life course. Lifestyle choices, therefore, as part of the acculturation process and the construction of self, indicates that 'identity formation is a work done by the subject in co-operation with other subjects' (Fornas, 1995:235). The following (positive) perception of 'the pub' came about through the process of socialisation in early life:

'remember...I was young, didn't know what it [pub] was, but my parents would be laughing ...and happy' (Respondent D, drinker, female, age 30+)

My data shows that for a 23year old female, first experiences of drinking (usually earlier than allowed by law) was considered a significant milestone due to the effects of alcohol, the clandestine nature of illegal drinking and associated elements of risk:

'at sixteen and seventeen I went with my sister 'cause she was older, when I started work, they were all older than me, felt all grown up, in the pub with people older than me, brilliant being under-age, didn't feel bad 'cause there were a few people same age as me' (Respondent B, drinker, female, age 20+)

Social (interactional) influences, and political (organisational) systems that influence human social behaviour, indicate the relationship between the individual and the social institutions in society in the production of the social world. Social action is the coming together of the concrete (practices) and the abstract (institutions and systems), and is always socially and culturally determined. Cultural processes therefore, as expressed through the life-course experience of drinkers, a ‘genetic or historical’ description (Smith, 2001:3), provides a conceptual pathway towards a deeper understanding of time-specific cultural norms. As the acknowledged location of drinking practices and of informal association, the Irish public house has over time achieved a status and an identity that is recognised globally. The public house experience in contemporary Irish society carries a multiplicity of meanings that takes into account its history (temporality) along with an ever-increasing diversity of places, products and practices.

While alcohol consumption practices would throughout history appear to be culturally determined, the indications are that drinking practices are also shaped by social factors that are beyond ‘cultural’. Drinking practices that historically are time and place-specific, are also life-stage specific, for example, the choice of public house can be life-stage specific. Preferences, in terms of products, ambience, material environment and fellow-drinkers are exercised. This research shows that when the public house experience and alcohol

consumption practices are articulated, the narrative⁶ reveals a personal history, a ‘life-path’ (Harvey, 1989:211) of attitudes and lifestyle activities that change throughout the life course. While life-style preferences and practices are primarily cultural, in order to understand how they operate, it is necessary to identify the underlying abstract processes that form the basis of all social action.

As well as being time and place specific, the relationship between the social drinking experience and the public house evolves over time and throughout the life course of the drinker. The life experiences of Irish drinkers varied according to ‘when precisely in the history of that society they were born’ (Hunt, 2005:22). As the ‘single most appealing location for relaxation and social intercourse’ (Molloy, 2002:*xii*), the public house and the practice of consuming alcohol therein, has been a feature of Irish social life for over 800 years. A ‘third place’ of ‘informal association’ (Oldenburg, 1999:*xxii*), the public house is acknowledged as a location for social congregation and interaction and for a diversity of associated functional (use) roles that are always time-specific. While life-style preferences and practices are primarily cultural, in order to understand how they operate over time, it is necessary to identify the prevailing underlying abstract processes that form the basis of all social action.

⁶ All social drinkers (Respondents) without exception alluded to their relationship with alcohol and with the public house in terms of a personal history that evolved and changed over time

4.5. The 'Life-course' dynamic: time, place and the life-stage position.

Social drinking practices as well as being time-specific are also 'life-stage' (Hunt, 2005:162) specific in so far as taste, lifestyle and consumption preferences change throughout the life course. The 'third place' conceptual framework of the public house as a 'core setting of informal public life' (Oldenburg, 1999:xi) changes over time in accordance with the life-stage position of the drinker and according to the cultural norms at any given time. The following biographical account from a now 50 year old male demonstrates how changing perceptions and practices within a specific time-frame and throughout the life-course have a direct bearing upon alcohol consumption practices and public house usage:

'it was exciting the fact that we were able to go into a pub...seemed to be buzzing with activity and one of the memories I have is that everyone was very jolly, lots of laughter and joviality...would meet up with friends from school, pig out on lemonade and go a bit mad, pubs were great, very enjoyable, only fun was to be had there' (Respondent C, drinker, male recalls his experience of going to a public house, when 8 years old, in the company of his parents)

Memories from childhood of a 'fun' but predominantly adult environment at aged 8 years took on a very different meaning at 14 years. The public house was the place where the physiological effects of alcohol was experienced for the first time as having a positive (personal) impact that enhanced the quality of interaction with others:

'I remember it very well, going into a pub with my brother Rory, instead of going in expecting it to be an enjoyable experience, I wanted to buy a drink to prove something, had a pint followed by another pint and I think maybe a third one and then for the first

time I understood what drunkenness was, then went to the youth club, found I was very lucid, very chatty with all the girls which I wouldn't have been prior to that, really felt full of confidence, full of beans and did very much enjoy the experience, this false confidence came to the fore...I'd be the centre of attention' (Respondent C, drinker, recalls his drinking experience at age 14)

For Respondent C, early experiences of alcohol enhanced the quality of social interaction in terms of feelings of wellbeing, confidence and popularity among peers. The practice of consuming alcohol developed further as a regular activity and was incorporated into many aspects of social life:

'central theme of the holiday was the pub, knew I would be landing at such and such a time, have the first Guinness, could start to relax, you were on holiday, your holiday hadn't started until you were in the pub' (Respondent C, drinker, male, recalls his drinking experience at age 16)

At this point the biographical account undergoes a subtle but significant shift in focus. A social life that was defined by 'heavy drinking' (Respondent C) was gradually replaced by a lifestyle and life-stage events that meant a change (reduction) in alcohol consumption practices:

'I had a career to consider and I wasn't drinking seven nights a week and ringing in sick if I had too bad a hangover, so I more or less became a weekend drinker, got a mortgage in 1991 for the first time, so was restrained from that point of view, I had more social responsibility, met my wife' (Respondent C, drinker, male, recalls his drinking experience at age 30)

The social construction of the 'mid-life' stage (Hunt, 2005:177-183) came about when contextual factors such as work and financial constraints were considered in a reflexive and perceptive way:

'in 2001 we had a young son, living in a very rural part of Ireland, don't have access to anyone who would baby-sit, visits to the pub

became few and far between, I found myself the following morning - not up to looking after a one-year-old who needed attention from a father he hadn't seen much of all week' (Respondent C, drinker, male, recalls drinking experience at age 40)

'I still drink a fair bit when I am away on business, I'd like my capability to be less than it is, I do drink a lot, I mean in terms of volume, because I am now a father, that's one of the reasons I drink a lot less, the pub is not the centre of my world, I have responsibility to be there for my son and to look after him, I sense that alcohol has damaged my brain over the years, don't now if it's the aging process, certainly I find the memory letting me down and the power of concentration, I feel alcohol has had something to do with it, so I wouldn't like to see youngsters drinking spirits and drinking early, it's very dangerous and irresponsible, we are more aware of problems now than we were 20 years ago, we have a more socially responsible attitude, drinking, drug-taking, driving fast, driving dangerously' (Respondent C, drinker, male, age 45 years)

For Respondent C, reflecting upon his relationship with alcohol and with the public house was both a nostalgic and a revelatory exercise. Each excerpt was expressed in tones (emotions) appropriate to the memory which may not be obvious to the reader, however, the audio version of the interview gave an account that was articulated with sentiment and feeling. While acknowledging a 'too close' (Respondent C) relationship with alcohol, the concept of 'problematic' consumption practices or addiction did not arise. For Respondent A, the relationship with alcohol that was equally intense during his teens and twenties has diminished over time:

'went out and spent a about a year binge-drinking, as often and as much as I could, until it led to one night where I was nearly knocked down by a bus... for the following weeks I didn't drink at all, I think a lot of kids do it, some take longer to come to their senses... this is killing me, I've seen one of my own... he was at it, binge-drinking, the whole thing was to get as much into him as possible... a phase we go through... but it's different now...people enjoy life more with a drink...a glass of wine with a meal is nice (Respondent A, drinker, male, 60+)

Changes in attitude towards alcohol and a corresponding decline in the significance of the public house in everyday life reflects a developing sense of responsibility in ‘negotiating significant transitions’ (Hunt, 2005:49) that for Respondents A and C has continued throughout the life-course. The individual experiences of drinkers, relate to life-style preferences in terms of what drinkers *do*, what they *desire*, and what is *prohibited*. Change in ‘definitions of ourselves and of the world, in our modes of response and adaptation, and in our orientation and values’ (Kelly, 1983:55) changes individual perceptions and practices. Drinking practices that change throughout the life-course, in accordance with life-stage position, are also structured contextually, as social norms and expectations are time and place-specific. For example, for Respondent B, female, early twenties, drinking in a public house during late teens and early twenties is perceived as a culturally-appropriate rite of passage, connected with friendships, fun and leisure:

‘if you’re in college somewhere different during the week, working in Dublin not your home town, get to meet new people – friendships and relationships, meet up and have fun’. ‘want a good atmosphere, important to social life, it’s where you meet people, expect to have a couple of drinks with friends, have a laugh’ ‘started with pints of cider, get to sample other drinks and mix them, 2 or 3 times a week, go whenever the others would be going’ (Respondent, B, drinker, female, 20+).

Changing attitudes towards alcohol that reshape social drinking practices and the relationship with the public house, is a process that alters life-style practices and therefore drinking practices throughout the life-cycle. Along with global processes such as connectivity to and communication with other cultures and domestic ‘accelerated growth’ (Whelan and Layte, 2007:79), an array of

cultural processes bring about social change that over time re-defines the lived experience of the drinker.

4. 6. Environment in transition: disruption of conventional social drinking.

While life-style preferences and practices are primarily cultural, in order to understand how they operate, it is necessary to identify the underlying abstract processes that form the basis of all social action. While diversity in products and services make each drinking experience unique, close examination of underlying social structures reveal an array of rules and systems that apply to all alcohol-related practices. While perceptible (material) differences in places and products are evident in all public houses, unseen (abstract) structures are in place that overarch the public house experience at all levels. The individual experiences of drinkers, relate to personal preferences in terms of what drinkers *do*, what they *desire*, and what is *prohibited*. Legally defined constraints and obligations that shape the activities of drinks providers and consumers impact considerable upon the social world of the public house drinker.

The most significant change that disrupted traditional drinking practices in the public house came about with the Introduction of the Public Health (Tobacco) Act, 2002 (Section 47) Regulations 2003 on 29th March 2004, that imposed a ban on cigarette smoking in enclosed places of work came into effect. Traditionally, the practice of drinking and smoking in the public house was an accepted leisure time activity. Despite strong reaction to the proposal of

a ban, immediate compliance levels of 94% were considered high. Due to a general acceptance that a ‘clean-air’ environment is of universal benefit to the health of workers and drinkers’ alike, very little resistance was observed and the public house experience for all users changed radically. In this excerpt the ‘smoky atmosphere’ associated with the traditional public house environment, in terms of ‘odour’ has been identified as one of the key changes:

‘used to smell of beer and fags – no mistaking where you were, soon as you walked in...now you’re met at the door – smell of soup or it could be stew but.....they don’t call it that’ (Respondent L, drinker, male, 70+)

The establishment of designated ‘smoking areas’ beyond the public house environment, proved disruptive to drinking and talking. Smoking areas that had seats, tables, heating and Television became new areas of social interaction, the formation of a ‘subculture’ (Marcionis and Plummer, 1997:112) of smokers, united by the act of smoking. Strangers with the common bond of smoking met as they smoked and interacted temporarily, before rejoining their (non-smoker) friends. The practice of smoking has mobilised drinkers between smoking and non-smoking areas, that on the one hand disrupts group (or couple) interaction, while at the same time opening up the possibility of further group formation. Where well-designed, user-friendly smoking areas were established, it was however, common practice for this space to be occupied by smokers and non-smokers alike, however, according to the data, this practice has gradually diminished due to raised awareness of the harmful nature of passive smoking. The public house in terms of hygiene, décor and smell, took on a new identity, becoming a more desirable environment, particularly for

non-smokers. Figures released by the Office of Tobacco Control quoted a 97% compliance rate on all inspected premises for 2008 (Irish Times, 6/4/2009).

For drinkers who encounter opposition at the point of admission, the implementation of the 'Equal Status Act (2000) has re-structured official policy regarding access to the public house. The Equal Status Act, (2000) prohibits discrimination in the provision of services including access to public places and facilities for refreshment and entertainment. Potential drinkers cannot be discriminated against on nine separate grounds: Gender, Marital Status, Family Status, Religion, Age, Disability, Sexual Orientation, Membership of the Travelling Community and Race, Nationality or Ethnic Origin. Refusal of access must be specific and must not breach any of the 'grounds' specified.

With the advent of the mainly urban 'Superpub', a 'licensed premises where over 1,000 people can be comfortably (*sic.*) accommodated at the one time' (Molloy, 2002:90), crowd control and monitoring has become an issue. As well as verifying the age of potential drinkers, the establishment and implementation of a more comprehensive 'door policy' proved problematic for some drinkers. The presence of security staff (bouncers) is perceived mainly in two ways: where access is denied, their action is perceived as unfair and discriminatory:

'we didn't even get near the door, I was wearing runners, they [security staff] all do it now, no point in getting worked up, only belittling yourself, if you react, not the kind of people to say they are sorry, nothing you can do about it, speaking to management – a waste of time, you're used to it now, you'd expect it'.... 'glamorous,

that's the kind of people they want, why should you have to be a certain person to go to a pub?' (Respondent, D, drinker, female, 30+)

Secondly, there is the perception that the presence of security staff is essential, particularly in cities and towns, due to the concentration of drinkers in a limited space. The construction of an ideology legitimises the actions of those with decision-making power. The creation of a 'meaningful symbolic phenomena' (Thompson, 1999:56) serves to establish and sustain relations of domination. The publicans' aim to protect his customers, to exclude 'troublemakers' (Respondent Q)⁷, creates a collective identity among those present and the implied exclusion of others:

'I believe publicans should have the right to refuse service as they see fit, some people should be barred, refused service and ejected, drink has an adverse effect on some people, makes them aggressive, undesirable company, danger to themselves and other customers – and the staff' 'travellers and druggies and you know – the wrong type – it should be the publicans decision'. (Respondent, Q, Publican, Banagher and Tullamore, Co Offaly)

Access to the public house in terms of location and transportation is an equally problematic issue For Respondent C, male, mid–forties, has recently re-located from a densely populated urban area to an isolated rural setting. The local public house as the 'place where conversation with strangers is permissible' (Kelly, 1983:157) is located 4 kilometres from his home. Access to this resource is essential in so far as it is perceived as the chief source of new friendships, local knowledge and a means of integration into the community;

⁷ Respondent Q, proprietor of O'Connell's Bar, Banagher, Co Offaly and O'Connell's, Tullamore, Co Offaly..

'I go maybe once a month to a local pub near us and formed some very reasonable relationships with people there. Was always able to get the low-down on who was who and what was what. If you wanted something doin', someone would steer you in the right direction''people had to desist from drinking and driving because primarily, the police are much more on the case'...not the thing to do any more.'(Respondent C, drinker, male, 40+)

In the experience of Respondent C, absence of public transport or 'designated driver'⁸, means that travelling home from the public house having consumed alcohol becomes problematic. Enforcement of drink-driving laws that may result in a conviction has changed drinking practices particularly in rural areas. Social drinking in the public house for rural dwellers is a pre-planned event and the organisation of transport, as well as the added financial costs are factored in to any leisure activity that involves the consumption of alcohol.

Penalties were increased to a maximum fine of €5,000, with mandatory disqualification from driving through the 'Road Traffic Act 2006', however this varies according to the level of alcohol present (www.citizensinformation.ie). The decision to organise alternative transport, not travel or take a calculated risk and drive, is made after due consideration. The dilemma posed by a desire to interact socially and consume alcohol and the risks associated with driving home from the public house is articulated as follows:

⁸ The concept of the 'designated driver' emerged when drink-driving legislation grew increasingly more restrictive. The 'Desi' voluntarily abstained from alcohol and took responsibility for transporting his fellow-drinkers. This became a reciprocal arrangement, operating mainly where distance and public transport are problematic for the drinker.

'the nearest pub to us is a mile and a half and you have to drive, there's no alternative, even to get a taxi home, it would have to come out from Strokestown, it's a bit awkward from that point of view' 'now Kilglass, one of the smaller towns, that's one of the reasons I go there a lot less now, I'd go and perhaps stay until two in the morning and then drive home on extremely quiet roads, I mean our road is very narrow, you'd never meet a roadblock or the police there, but then I heard on one or two occasions, the guards were actually outside this pub at a time when people would be driving out the gates, so that did put me off, made me nervous about wanting to go in there. That's kinda clipped my wings a bit, living in the middle of a rural area' (Respondent, C, drinker, male, 40+)

This account by Respondent C is but one example of how the social world of the drinker is re-defined according to abstract processes that manifest themselves materially in ways that re-shape drinking practices. The desire to consume alcohol in the company of others in the public house, must take into account the means of *'arrival at'* and *'access to'* the public house and for smokers, the *'ban'* that is now in place. Access to the public house was in the past largely unproblematic, unless one was *'barred'* (denied admission). As a rule, refusal of admission was generally associated with *past* misbehaviour, and not because of any possible *future* misdemeanour. Traditionally it was socially acceptable (to smokers and non-smokers alike) for alcohol and tobacco to be consumed together in the public house. At the micro-level, the logistics of going to the pub, gaining admission and managing the prohibition on tobacco are but examples of a multiplicity of structural changes and their responses. Structural shaping of human (drinking) behaviour is carried out through increased monitoring by law enforcers, security staff and bar-staff, with the aid of electronic means such as CCTV. Due to increasing

constraints that impact on alcohol consumption practices, a reflexive planning of leisure and social life is now routine and calls for a strategic and reflexive approach. When individual desires to socialise come into conflict with structural constraints, negotiation and compromise becomes necessary to resolve the dilemma.

Examples of change in the contemporary public house, such as issues surrounding access, restricted drinking practices, a prohibition on smoking and the establishment of a dining service, all impact upon the public house drinker. Descriptions of the public house and of alcohol consumption practices that typify social drinking in Ireland, indicates the presence of a multiplicity of social processes. The social world of the drinker comes about as a consequence of underlying organizations and systems that determine how individuals operate within structural boundaries. The public house as a place of informal association and alcohol consumption (practices that are embedded in Irish culture), is experienced according to an array of external (non-cultural) processes that in turn disrupt and re-shape the social world of the drinker. Where contemporary changes are perceived to have a restrictive or prohibitive effect on drinking and a disruptive effect on social interaction, individual strategic responses can be seen to play a crucial role in the re-creation of alternative drinking practices.

4. 7. Changing structural forms that establish new social norms.

This study of the public house and its' users, reveals some of the changes that affect drinkers, publicans and bar-workers. Processes of global connectivity, domestic prosperity, and political systems through which power is exercised, are manifested in the material sense in day-to-day drinking practices. The public house as 'habitat' (Beauman, 1992:190) is a bounded space, a 'territory' (Nash, 2000:5) within which day-to-day social drinking practices in interaction with others can obscure the presence of unseen social structures. As a location of abstract processes, that define social relations within set boundaries, it 'provides constraints and resources within which social agents manoeuvre to produce changes in their environment' (Nash, 2000:5). The lived experience of the drinker therefore, may be interpreted as a consequence of functioning structural forces that reshape the social world over time. Global processes, as an 'economic phenomenon, involving the creation of world-spanning free markets and the global reach of capitalist systems of production and consumption' (Inglis, 2005:112), find expression in the products and services that are available for consumption at the micro-level.

Figures provided by the Revenue Commissioners over the twenty year period 1986 – 2006, show that the consumption of wine, boosted by a sharp rise during the mid 90s, increase by 523%, cider consumption increased by 647%.while beer and spirits increased by 32% and 46% respectively (Hope, 2007:1). Measurement of trends in alcohol consumption, however, can be

problematic, for example, when figures based on VAT and excise yields fluctuate in accordance with changes in taxation rates. For example, an 11% drop in cider consumption followed a Budget rate increase of 87% on cider in 2002 and a 20% drop in the consumption of spirits in 2003 followed a significant Budget rate increase of 42% on spirits (<http://taxpolicy.gov.ie/wp-content>). While taxation policies are shown to influence the type of product (beer/cider/spirits/wine) consumed, changing of brands links to promotional advertising, changing trends and personal taste. Data showing yearly growth in alcohol consumption over a ten year period (2001-2010) reads as follows:

Growth in Alcohol Consumption (2001–2010)

Year	Beer	Cider	Spirits	Wine
2001	0.4%	10.9%	3.5%	12.4%
2002	-0.5%	-11.3%	5.2%	12.8%
2003	-2.5%	1.1%	-20.1%	8.1%
2004	-0.9%	2.0%	2.8%	14.3%
2005	-0.3%	4.5%	2.4%	4.0%
2006	-0.3%	3.7%	5.0%	7.2%
2007	-0.6%	-0.9%	7.2%	7.2%
2008	-5.2%	-11.0%	-7.4%	-3.2%
2009	-6.5%	-5.9%	-18.5%	-6.9%
2010	-0.9%	-2.5%	11.7%	10.9%

(source: <http://taxpolicy.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/11.22-General-Excise-Duties.pdf>)

The increase in wine consumption over the past 60 years is demonstrated in the following table:

Total Wine Sales 1950-2011 (millions of cases)

(cases: 12 X 750ml bottles)

1950.	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2006	2007	2008	2009.	2010	2011
0.2	0.3	0.6	1.3	1.7	4.8	8.2	8.7	8.4	7.6	8.7	9.0

Source; 2011: The Irish Wine Market (IWA)

Taking into account the growth in population (Central Statistics Office) and increases in excise duty (Revenue Commissioners), alcohol consumption in general, per head of population is shown to have peaked in 2001, and decreased by 5.9% in 2004 due to a drop of 21% in the sale of spirits (Hope, 2007:3).

4. 8. Ireland’s changing consumption practices: the social context.

In the late 20th century and early 21st century, Ireland experienced rapid social and economic change. Ireland’s economic success during the 1990s and early 2000s is a well documented phenomenon (Allen 2007; O’Hearn, 1998). During this period, Ireland’s economic progress and rapid changes to the Irish way of life was acknowledged globally. High levels of employment and improved infrastructure were but two factors that paved the way towards increased levels of production and consumption along with enhanced ‘lifestyle’ practices that reflected ‘individuality, self-expression and self-consciousness’ (Tovey and Share, 2003:496). Within a growing culture of consumerism that

‘elevates having over being’ (Coulter, 2003:25), Irish society was in a process of rapid transition that was said to be progressive and that materially, would benefit all of society⁹.

Increases in spending power during the first decade of C21 saw a phenomenal increase in the consumption of leisure goods and services. According to CSO figures Irish Public Service salaries that amounted to 33% of Government expenditure in 2000, increased to 37% in 2005 (CSO, 2013). In the same period the average industrial weekly wage for a male worker increased from €396.55 in 1999 to €575.21 in 2006 (CSO, 2013). While disposable incomes from employment increased, welfare payments also increased, for example, Old Age pensions increased from €99 per week in 1998 to €147 in 2002 and Child Benefit increased from €40 per month to €118 in the same period (Clinch et al, 2002:34). Developments in the communications highway provided an immediate source of information as well as a way of communicating across great distances. The affordability of travel as well as accessibility to a growing number of destinations opened up new possibilities and new markets to the Irish consumer. An intensification of global processes increased people’s mobility and enhanced modes of communication formed instant links over great distances. Knowledge of and a desire for new and diverse lifestyle practices led to an increase in the availability of products and services and in the movement of people (travel).

⁹Whelan and Layte, however, assert that despite an overall reduction in social and economic inequality, that social and occupational mobility ‘remains substantially tilted’ in favour of the more advantaged in society (Fahy, Russell and Whelan, (2007:85)

According to the Central Statistics Office, expenditure by Irish travellers abroad shows a steady increase during the period 2000 – 2011 that peaked in-2008:

Tourism and Travel Estimated Expenditure.

Period	expenditure by Irish visitors abroad (€million)
2000 year	2,804
2001 year	3,224
2002 year	3,952
2003 year	4,158
2004 year	4,180
2005 year	4,773
2006 year	5,318
2007 year	6,163
2008 year	6,912
2009 year	5,473
2010 year	5,211
2011 year	4,762

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2012.

New opportunities to travel, use of communication technology and media output such as travel documentaries and ‘make-over’ (home-improvement) shows, generated a growing awareness of prestigious or more exotic leisure and lifestyle products¹⁰. The adoption of new middle class lifestyle practices in Ireland mirrored those in Goldthorpe’s 1968-9 study of newly ‘affluent workers’ in the UK (Giddens, 1997:258). Eating and drinking in Ireland gradually moved from the domestic sphere to the public domain. According to the ‘Food and Drink Industry Ireland (FDII) consumption of food outside the home increased

¹⁰ Hunt, (2005:54) makes definitive connections between patterns of consumption, social status and life experience while Corrigan (1997) examines theoretical approaches in terms of wealth, conspicuous consumption (Veblen) and consumption as an indicated of economic/cultural capital (Bourdieu).

from 20% during the 1990s to 35% (CSO expenditure figures) IBEC Report (2006:16). The desire to experience new products locally generated consumer demand and economic competitiveness. The variety and the extent of food and alcohol products increased, in keeping with the growing demand and the public house environment underwent a radical transformation thus facilitating a more affluent and sophisticated consumer. The growing variety of products, improvement in the quality of service and modification of the material environment of the public house, fulfilled new consumer demands and expectations that in turn boosted the drinks trade and generated further revenue for the Irish economy.

A consequence of social change in times of rapid economic progress is the necessity for people to adapt to new ways of living and new ways of being. In an evaluation of societal change, a 'quality of life balance sheet' (Erikson, 2007:268) outlines the positive and negative aspects of change. While incomes increased and unemployment figures plummeted, underlying anxieties were expressed regarding the rapidity with which society was changing. On the one hand, improved material conditions were said to be 'to the advantage of everyone in Ireland' (Erikson, 2007:276), while on the other hand, there was the passing of the traditional ways of life. Incompatibilities between 'traditional' and 'modern'; 'global' and 'local'; religion and secularity and between rural and urban emerged during the 'boom' that produced some unease and disruption in day to day social life. Celtic Tiger Ireland was characterised by a type of 'collision culture' (Kuhling and Keohane, 2005) in which aspects of accelerated

modernity came into direct conflict with persistent traditional values and expectations. Social life underwent radical transformation in response to a rapidly growing state of prosperity that was characterised mainly by changing work, leisure and consumption practices.

As well as growth in quantities of alcohol consumed that is posited 'largely as a result of economic growth' (Tovey and Share, 2003:372), practices of consumption were also undergoing change. Changes to the way alcohol products such as alco-pops 'designer drinks' (Brain and Parker, 1997:17) and canned beers were packaged and marketed, indicated changing trends in social drinking. On the one hand a study commissioned by the Portman Group shows that alco-pops are perceived by young drinkers as 'too weak, too expensive and too childish' (Brain and Parker, 1997:75). On the other hand, European sales (UK and Germany and Ireland rank highest) of flavoured alcoholic beverages (FABs) increased by 21% in 2002 to a total value of (€4.5bn), with young female drinkers the 'key target market' (Mosher and Johnsson, 2005). While the consumption of food and the increasing diversity of alcohol products available in the public houses were on the increase, domestic consumption of alcohol was also increasing. Despite the on-going development of new products and services (that ordinarily would generate further business), other factors such as price-differentials between 'on' and 'off-sales' and increasing alcohol-related regulatory constraints, were having the opposite effect. This is indicated by a drop in the number of licensed premises and by declining alcohol sales through public house outlets; from 83% in 2001 to 63% in 2007 (Lambkin, 2010).

Precise estimates regarding the increase or decrease in alcohol consumption are problematic. Sales/revenue figures do not include estimates of alcohol purchased and consumed where beer, wine and spirits are privately purchased and imported from abroad. Figures relating to ‘cross-border shopping’ in Northern Ireland where alcohol is the second most common purchase after food (Lambkin, 2010) are also problematic and cannot be calculated. The following table for example, shows litres of pure alcohol consumption per adult in Ireland (2000-2005) by beverage type, where figures are calculated according to taxes and excise duty paid to the Irish Government on alcohol products distributed through Irish wholesale/retail networks:

Average Weekly Household Expenditure on Alcohol (2009 - 2010)

Alcohol consumed (public)	Urban.....	Rural.....	State
	€.....	€.....	€
Spirits (e.g. gin, vodka & whiskey).....	1.21.....	1.14.....	1.18
Liquers & cocktails (e.g. Baileys & Daiquiri).....	0.38.....	0.14.....	0.29
Spirits with mixer.....	1.56.....	0.94.....	1.33
Table wine	2.53.....	1.47.....	2.13
Champagne, sparkling wines & wine with mixer.....	0.10.....	0.01.....	0.06
Fortified wine, port, sherry, vermouth & Martini.....	0.02.....	0.02.....	0.02
Ciders & Perry.....	1.24.....	0.91.....	1.12
Alcopops & alcoholic soft drinks.....	0.24.....	0.20.....	0.23
Beers (including pale ales & stout)	4.04.....	3.12.....	3.70
Lagers & continental beers.....	5.78.....	4.85.....	5.43

Source: Household Budget Survey 2009 – 2010 (first results) March 2012

Alcohol consumed at home-

Spirits (e.g. gin, vodka, whiskey & spirits with mixer).....	1.80.....	1.70.....	1.76
Liquers & cocktails (e.g. Baileys & Daiquiri).....	0.18.....	0.20.....	0.19
Table wine.....	5.25.....	3.87.....	4.74
Champagne, sparkling wines & wine with mixer.....	0.19.....	0.09.....	0.15
Fortified wine, port, sherry, vermouth & Martini.....	0.08.....	0.09.....	0.08
Ciders & Perry.....	0.56.....	0.44.....	0.51
Alcopops & alcoholic soft drinks.....	0.09.....	0.05.....	0.07
Beers (including pale ales & stout).....	0.38.....	0.34.....	0.37
Lagers & continental beers	3.46.....	2.28.....	3.02

Source: Household Budget Survey 2009 – 2010 (first results) March 2012

While the perceived rise in alcohol consumption is attributed to an increase in disposable income, an apparent perceived drop in consumption (the way in which alcohol was traditionally consumed) may be connected to regulatory changes such as the introduction of penalty points (October 31st, 2002), random breath testing (December 1st, 2003) and the smoking ban (March 29th, 2004) (Lambkin, 2010). Raised living standards (McGinnity) are said to have ‘yielded a net improvement to the quality of life in Ireland’ (Fahy et al 2007:215), however, as domestic alcohol consumption becomes routine practice, questions regarding the associated practices of informal association and social integration begin to emerge. While representatives of the drinks industry express a decline in trade, health professionals and enforcers of law and order express concern regarding the consequences of excessive drinking and recommend strategies for ‘promoting moderation’ (National Alcohol Policy, 1996).

4. 9. Contemporary tastes and practices: their impact on the public house.

A marked change in beverage preference indicates a cultural shift in leisure and lifestyle choices that can be linked to a rise in foreign travel that commenced during the 1990s. An example of the increasing popularity of the ‘package holiday’ by air is the claim by ‘Budget Travel’¹¹ to have carried 400,000 passengers during 2006 (www.budgettravel.ie/aboutus/company-profile). The introduction of the ‘super-ferry’ such as Brittany Ferries’ ‘Pont-Aven’ with capacity for 2,400 passengers and 650 cars on the Cork to Roscoff route (www.brittanyferries.ie/1121), established close links between Irish drinkers and French lifestyle practices surrounding food and wine. The flow of goods, information and the mobility of people, results in the adoption of alternative lifestyle practices that are experienced at the micro-level. The origin, variety and exotic nature of food and drink as described by a food critic, epitomises that which is now readily available in Irish hotels, restaurants and public houses:

‘garlic mushrooms were great – crispy on the outside, but not so crumbed up that you couldn’t taste the mushroom and the garlic inside’... ‘seafood chowder was a little bit starchy’... ‘the nicest house red, a merlot shiraz blend – “French wine made by Australians” under the Fox Mountain label, just the right temperature’... ‘main course of tagliatelle with smoked chicken and a creamy pesto sauce’... choice of venison, beef or pork sausages’... ‘Tiramisu and a couple of cappuccinos’ (Mulcahy, Orna, Irish Times, 10/6/2000)

¹¹ An Irish Travel Agency specialising in budget-priced sun-holidays from Ireland to Europe and to other world-wide destinations.

Mulcahy's (2000) review of dining in a South Dublin public house describes a sophisticated 'product' and life-style practice that has not only developed in accordance with consumer expectations, but is also driven by economic motives. Rapid change in available products and customer expectations was highlighted by Respondent H¹² in the following description of 'traditional' practice and the need to adapt to change:

'I remember the day having the microwave in the corner of the bar, a burger is thrown in from the refrigerator underneath, obviously never killed anyone either. Food is developed, has developed and is awfully big in pubs you know, and if you don't develop with it, you are going to be left behind. (Respondent H, Publican, Mallow, Co. Cork)

The pub dining experience is, according to participants¹³ in this study, the preferred option for casual dining. For workers whose time is limited, the quality and price of food, fast and efficient service in an informal atmosphere was described as both a 'practical' and a 'pleasant' option. For visitors to Ireland, dining and drinking in the public house is an essential component of their visit, where product and ambience are of equal importance. A full-bar service that compliments the 'pub-grub' dining experience, has to some extent replaced the more formal restaurant dining or informal café dining, where a wine licence, limited drinks license or the absence of a drinks license is the norm. Pub-restaurant fare or 'bar-food' service is enhanced by an accompanying glass of wine, beer or cider.

¹² Respondent H is proprietor of O'Hara's, Mourneabbey, Mallow, Co Cork.

¹³ Respondents expressed a clear demarcation between social drinking in the pub as a leisure activity and having an alcohol-free lunch in the pub during the working day.

The increasing popularity of the ‘pub Sunday lunch’ was referred to by Respondent E as follows:

‘pubs are more comfortable, kids first experience of going out for Sunday lunch, best thing is I don’t have to cook it, every a bit boring though, all the same, beef, chicken or lamb, have to control the kids while they are there, grand to sit and have a few drinks as well, but the kids have to be out by a certain time.’ (Respondent E, drinker, female, 40+).

Convenience, accessibility and the informal nature of the public house environment was described as an important resource for Respondent J¹⁴. Due to a chronic debilitating medical condition, a visit to the local town was a challenge as well as a weekly chore. Implicit in her account of the public house as an ideal location for necessary rest and refreshment, was the notion of personal safety and security that came about through routine use over a period of time:

‘on Saturdays, in town during the day, park the shopping bags, see the mothers and their children’... ‘have tea and sandwiches, read of the paper when I get tired, no-one bothers you, you go when you’re ready’. (Respondent J, drinker, female 60+).

Traditionally, the public house was acknowledged primarily as the place where alcohol was consumed in the company of others, however, further changes in consumption practices means that non-alcoholic beverages are now commonplace. The availability of non-alcoholic beverages in public houses has become socially acceptable on three counts. Firstly, while it was acceptable for

¹⁴ Respondent J (Midlands town) suffered chronic arthritis and also experienced breathing difficulties. Physical mobility was both painful and limited therefore the simple task of shopping was carried out in stages and over considerable time.

workers to consume food in the public house, alcohol was usually omitted and was replaced by an alternative, chosen from a growing variety of non-alcoholic drinks. Secondly, enforcement of drink-driving laws along with a media (graphic) campaign showing the consequences of drinking and driving, heralded the arrival of the ‘designated driver’, a move supported by the drinks companies. Cultural change such as pub-dining and attitudes towards drink-driving constraints, has legitimised non-alcoholic beverages as a ‘drink of choice’ and as socially acceptable. While the consumption of non-alcoholic beverages is now commonplace, the following excerpt is an indication that this was not always the case;

‘remember once, I must have been on antibiotics or something, had about 3 bottles of Ballygowan, - overheard someone say, something like – never knew that, that she must be dried-out [alcoholic]’
(Respondent M, drinker, female, 50+)

While the public house environment changed in order to adapt to the preparation and service of food, a further major transition was also underway. Changes to the public house environment such as the re-organisation of space, in keeping with the work-place ban on cigarette smoking, have had a definitive effect upon the drinking experience. Changes to the public house environment in terms of cleanliness, odour, and the absence of a ‘smoky haze’ along with the construction of the designated ‘smoking area’, has re-defined the experience of all drinkers. An independent scientific report; ‘The Health effects of Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) in the Workplace’ 2003, concluded that bar staff are a ‘unique risk group’ (Guidance for the Irish licensed trade, Public Health (Tobacco) Acts 2002 and 2004, Section 47 – Smoking Prohibitions).

Legal obligations under the Act, apply to drinkers, bar-workers and owners, each carrying responsibility for the implementation of the ban. Initial reaction to the proposal was mixed, ranging from regret at the demise of traditional ‘drinking and smoking’ practices:

‘I’ve never smoked, you know the ban has been for all work places, you know it sells papers by homing in on the pub side of it, and I’ve only been to the pub 5 or 6 times since the ban came into place’... ‘I cannot say I’ve never been an anti-smoker, so I can’t say it’s a pleasure to walk into a pub now that they are smoke-free, ‘that smoky fug in the air was part of the atmosphere’ (Respondent C, drinker, male, 40+).

...to the more reflexive expression of distaste:

‘I don’t smoke, had never really thought much about it, I think it’s disgusting, and if you’re eating...well...I was in the North couple of weeks ago and someone lit one at the next table...not nice...it’s something that has been brought to our notice, how really bad it is’ (Respondent E, drinker, female, 40+).

As examples of changing cultural practices, the consumption of food, the prohibition on cigarette smoking and the introduction of exotic alcoholic products, has considerably altered the profile of the Irish public house. Changing life-style practices throughout the life-course show how people ‘create and recreate their identities as much from their leisure activities and their activities as consumers as they do from their work and employment’ (Bennett and Watson, 2002:207). While there is a desire for new products and services, there is equally a wish to retain some traditional aspects of the public house experience. The traditional public house was perceived as an accessible space where people interacted socially while consuming alcohol, with an ambience of warmth and welcome, presided over by a friendly publican or bar-

man. The following description by a rural publican of his customers, his public house and the products and services that are on offer, demonstrates a mindfulness of the role of the public house in the community. As the family and community become routinely associated with a particular public house, they in turn become commodified as they contribute to the *identity* of the public house:

'I figure out the pub is a kind of extension of the family'... 'our customers would be the like one family...if you can have things provided, you know, things like...after matches – do a meal, we form a 'club' feeling, it's then you get a good atmosphere'.
(Respondent H, publican, Mallow, Co Cork)

The relaxed and leisurely atmosphere of the traditional public house that was conducive to conversation has gradually become a place of accelerated consumption practices. The more comprehensive menu of alcoholic products, food and entertainment is welcomed, but the traditional model of an accessible place for informal association is fundamental. Conflict between 'traditional' and 'modern' is implicit in the following critique of a 'local' that has recently 'modernised':

'should be able to sit down in comfort, and be able to talk, primarily to talk, have to pick the pub obviously, 'Roost'[public house] is atrocious with the music, absolutely out, ideal pub would be a country pub with no music, quiet atmosphere, not a large drinking emporium where there is no control over what's going on'.... 'nooks and crannies where you can talk' (Respondent A, drinker, male, 60+)

When consumers in the public house participate in a cultural and economic process, 'they are purchasing far more than a material product,

such as a drink or a meal, they are also purchasing an experience or ambience' (Bennett and Watson, 2002:207), that extends beyond refreshment. The public house in Ireland on the one hand is acknowledged as 'part of a living tradition; it is part of our unique culture and it deserves to be cherished and celebrated' (Molloy, 2002:92), while on the other hand changes to accommodate contemporary life-style practices are demanded. The public house as a space of 'informal association' (Oldenburg, 1999) is perceived as a desirable place to be, in terms of accessibility, friendliness, and due to the casual and relaxed nature of the environment. The importance of connecting with others in a social environment is implicit in the following assertion:

'major part of my life – weekends – might miss out on meeting people if you didn't go, lose track of people if I didn't, way of keeping in touch'... 'reasonably comfortable, not disturbed too much by background music, not interrupting conversation, main place where everyone I know goes to chat, let themselves go, relax' (Respondent, P, drinker, female, 20+)

While acknowledging that public houses play a significant role in community and personal life, some recent changes came in for criticism. Structural (political and economic) forces that redefine the social world of the drinker are perceived as restrictive, costly in monetary terms and having the effect of recreating an environment that is lacking in warmth and friendliness:

'it's [pub] definitely not central any more, a much more impersonal experience, no attempt to have rapport with bar-staff, crowds, foreign staff, language barrier, reluctance to be chatty, might be misinterpreted, food everywhere- very much standard, tackier places' (Respondent F, drinker, male, 30+)

Consumption of alcohol in the public house is a cultural pursuit that has a history, is routinely and widely practiced and is an integral part of Irish social life. The practice of ‘informal association’ (Oldenburg, 1999) that links with alcohol consumption in the public house is according to my data more important than the ‘products’ (alcohol, food, entertainment). In the next chapter factors such as increased spending power, marketing of new products and services and global economic forces that influenced Ireland’s alcohol consumption patterns, will be identified and explained. An economic perspective of social drinking practices will take into account the ‘business’ of the drinks industry, the economic costs/benefits of alcohol in society and the micro-economic transaction of selling/buying alcohol. Social (interactional) processes and political (organisational) systems influence human social behaviour, thus indicating the relationship between the individual and the social institutions in society that produce the social world. Social action that is shaped by societal influences, is the coming together of the concrete (practices) and the abstract (institutions and systems), and is always socially and culturally determined. Cultural processes therefore, as expressed through the life-course experience of drinkers, a ‘genetic or historical’ description (Smith, 2001:3), provides a conceptual pathway towards a deeper understanding of the role of structural forces in contemporary drinking practices.

Chapter 5. Economic Dimensions of the Drinks Trade.

In this chapter economic processes that power the drinks industry are identified and superimposed upon the cultural process of alcohol consumption, to reveal how specific underlying (monetary) structures shape contemporary drinking practices. The public house as a profit motivated and market directed enterprise is for the drinker a consumer space where economic transactions are conducted. The drinks trade as a highly regulated business is the integration of economic policies and political institutions that go unnoticed at all stages of the supply and consumption of alcohol. Shifts in consumer practices surrounding alcohol consumption call for economic strategies such as aestheticization and related inducements in an effort to boost business and to open up new markets. Spatial reconfiguration such as drinking/dining, smoking/non-smoking, gendered divisions and securitization of space, are revealed as a response to social change *and* as a revision of business practices. While the focus of this study is the social world of the drinker, bounded by structural frames, from the *perspective* of the drinker, economic processes however, are approached from beyond the micro-level experience of the drinker. This chapter shows how drinking practices are driven, shaped and controlled according to overt as well as less-apparent entrepreneurial activities of the publican that are inherently profit oriented.

5. 1. The pub as a profit-driven and market oriented business.

Alcohol consumption practices when perceived as cultural processes are interpreted as routine social activities that determine a specific lifestyle experience. As well as having a ‘cultural’ significance, alcohol consumption practices are also said to have an ever increasing ‘economic’ import. Viewed from a cultural perspective, factors such as ‘tradition’, drinking as part of the Irish way of life and the construction of personal identity as defined through specific routine practices, take precedent. When the social world of the drinker is investigated, the perceptual ‘shift’ from viewing drinking as a cultural activity, to drinking as a *commodified* cultural activity, calls for a different analytical lens through which the social world of the drinker may be interpreted. A theoretical perspective that is expressed through a cultural discourse such as that which describes refreshment, leisure, and informal social connectivity, is now replaced by an economic discourse for example, the sale and purchase of products, marketing and advertising strategies and profit-oriented goals. When the focus shifts to the drinks industry and to the retail of alcohol products, publicans and their representative organisations articulate the construction of a social (commercial) world and a profit oriented stratagem within which the drinker functions as an active participant as consumer. The process of ‘colonising more and more dimensions of social life’ (Lukács, 1971:92), a process of commodification, is evident in the rise in additional alcohol-related products and services. A gradual shift from drinking at leisure in the ‘traditional’ type public house, to the more organised modes of alcohol consumption in the ‘contemporary’ public house, is indicative of dynamic profit-motivated and turnover-driven policies.

A perceptual framework that explains the contemporary public house as the location of a growing variety of products and services is according to the Marxian concept of 'commodification' (McLellan, 1977:343), the 'cultural' being made marketable. When leisure and lifestyle activities are given an exchange value, producers are 'dependent upon the needs and capacity of others to buy' (Harvey, 1989:102), therefore, economic processes associated with drinking practices take on a new significance. While alcohol has always been a commodity that was bought and sold, contemporary marketing strategies aimed at the drinking population have been intensified to target specific consumers. Promotional advertising, that for example, actively markets alcohol to age-specific drinkers, targets 'narrow bands of consumers' (Corrigan, 1998:68) in what has developed into a highly competitive environment. Diversity in new (branded) products and the incorporation of ancillary products such as food and entertainment and a 'shift away from the consumption of goods and into the consumption of services' (Harvey, 1990:285) are further dimensions of the contemporary economic processes that target and respond to the changing expectations of the social drinker. Pro-active marketization of alcohol and alcohol-related products imply an industry-driven dominance, with the publican as the agent of change, however, a rise in consumer spending power (as well as changes in taste/preferences) would suggest that the drinker also plays a significant role in social change. New products and services such as food and entertainment means a wider choice of 'products' are presented to the consumer, however, the notion of 'choice' is said to be about changing brands rather than encouraging increased intake. According to representatives of the drinks industry, alcohol advertising was 'simply about brand-switching rather than increasing overall consumption' (Allen,

2007:128). This assertion is borne out by the decline in spirit sales and the sharp increase in wine consumption.

Economic processes that permeate all stages of the drinks industry from production to consumption, establishes the (economic) relationship between the drinker as consumer and the drinks provider. The use of advertising is but one of the ways of establishing an economic link between provider and consumer, despite the imposition of new restrictions on advertising alcohol products that are in operation since July 1st 2008 (www.rte.ie/newsarchive). Drinks industry in-house drinks promotions, the convenience of casual dining and the diversity and informality of 'pub' entertainment serve as marketing mechanisms when directed at specific target markets. The following account of pro-active marketing and advertising by a city publican indicates the importance of developing a 'product' or 'brand' and reaching out to potential customers through a range of media:

'we've somebody doing marketing on an ongoing basis, e-mailing companies for parties, Christmas, birthdays, organise bar, food, a band... we advertise in 'Hot Press' – 'Irish Music Magazine'.... 'we would be big with tourists because of the traditional music, we have a website, we would have between fifteen and twenty thousand hits a month, mainly Americans, - Americans and Europeans, we find that's a great format – a great format, we would be in all the tourist magazines as well – and in the in-flight magazine done by Shannon Development'
(Respondent G, publican, Limerick City)

The relationship between drinker as 'stakeholder' and drinks provider 'stockholder' (Marshall, 1993:8) that is established through the medium of advertising influences the choices that are made regarding when, where and what products to consume and crucially, *who* consumes. Advertising, as a means of informing or introducing potential as well as existing consumers to new products and services, promotes and

influences spending and consumption and therefore, plays a key role in the construction (and categorization) of retail (drinking) spaces.

From the perspective of the publican, implicit economic processes that underpin the provision and consumption of alcohol, fall broadly into two categories. Firstly, customer eating and drinking behaviour is observed and evaluated. Unstructured meal-times and the practice of eating breakfast on the way to work in the form of the jumbo breakfast roll (JBR)¹ according to Share, ‘expresses much about contemporary Irish society: a society of speed, mobility, enterprise and excess’ (Corcoran and Share, 2008:185) and has brought about diversification in commodity production, services and consumption practices. Information regarding drinkers and drinking practices as the ‘pleasure-seeking activities of the consuming actor’ (Corrigan, 1997:15), is incorporated into a business strategy for the purpose of securing economic goals. Secondly, new products and services are developed and actively promoted, taking into account the market potential associated with local development that is recognised and exploited. For example, Respondent G, a publican in Limerick monitors local area plans and planning applications, new infrastructure, apartment and hotel developments. For Respondent H, increased local business activity is the motivating force behind plans to extend the range of products and services:

‘ a big cash-and-carry – just opened up across the way, like, with about 100 employees, and that has started us into food in a very small way, say for breakfast rolls and things like that., when you do this you have to be in tandem with the health board, so we are in the process of building a kitchen and will definitely be going into food in a – a bit like our bar-trade – in a basic but a good way, you know what I mean like, that it wouldn’t be Darina Allen cooking, but basic. We hope to open a steak

¹ JBR is a large bread-roll, usually filled with sausages, rashers of bacon, black/white pudding and fried egg (hot), ingredients that constitute the ‘full Irish’ breakfast, wrapped in tinfoil and sold from supermarkets and garage forecourts.

house, 2 or 3 choices of steak – beef steak, salmon steak and chicken steak, something like that, from 9 in the morning till 9 at night, that’s our ambition’ (Respondent H, publican, Mallow, Co Cork)

Respondent H, while embracing change, is conscious (and somewhat apprehensive) regarding forthcoming changes. Development of dining space in what H described as ‘empty’ (under-used during the day) drinking space, means change of use, change in clientele and an upgrading of worker skill-sets.

Social change is described in a positive way by Respondent B. Moving between discourses to articulate opinions and experiences, the following account constructs a graphic description of ‘place’ and of how it has a bearing upon an individual (drinking) experience. On the one hand a personal/cultural experience is expressed, while on the other hand a consumerist narrative describes a setting that is constructed in a way that will appeal to potential drinkers:

‘place is all done up, bright and clean, like to have a seat and be able to see who’s around, we dress up to go out, we like to look good, be able to see what the others are wearing, no use bothering, making the effort if it can’t be seen, first you have to see and be seen, good lights in the toilets too- and clean mirrors – that’s important’ (Respondent B, drinker, female, 20+)

Alcohol consumption, along with other cultural pursuits, while they have always been to some extent commercialised, are becoming increasingly more so in recent times, therefore, socio-economic issues take on a new relevance. At a time of rapid social change, the cultural pursuit of consuming alcohol in the public house has transformed from drinking at leisure in the company of others to a fast-paced consumption-oriented lifestyle practice. Time constraints that govern home and work life, due to increasing ‘work-life tensions’ (McGinnity et al, 2007:210) also extend to leisure time activities. While the traditional-style public house was

historically defined by a welcoming and sociable ambience, the contemporary pub is equally appreciated as a place that has evolved to accommodate changing trends and the accelerated pace of modern living.

5. 2. Patterns of consumption and the pub as a consumer space.

The early 21st century in Ireland was a period of unprecedented prosperity. In an increasingly affluent society (that meant an increase in disposable incomes) not only consumption practices changed, but also the way in which people interacted socially. Characteristics of prosperity that shaped social life such as money, travel and access to communications networks had, by implication, a profound effect upon the social world of the drinker. In the interplay between global and local processes ‘collisions have brought about complex and unpredictable results’ (Smith, 2001:231). Global forces such as the ‘Single European Market’ (SEM) (Traill, 1998:35), paved the way for the dissemination of commodities (such as alcohol) that are consumed at local level. This study of the social world of the drinker in Ireland conducted during a period of prosperity and rapid social change, takes cognisance of the transformative (global) economic processes that determine consumption practices and produce consumer spaces at a local level.

High levels of employment, increased disposable incomes and the re-evaluation of leisure-time activities, created conditions that were receptive to global forces and thus favourable to the drinks industry. In making a connection between work and leisure practices, an ‘era of time-compression’ (Kenny, 2001) where people work harder and play harder is identified. This, from the point of view of the drinker

calls for drinks that signify indulgence, such as Baileys and the instant gratification of high-energy drinks such as vodka and Red Bull. An increasing diversity in spaces of leisure such as the public house environment and its' products, when experienced at the cultural level, contribute to the construction of identity² while at the same time playing a crucial role at the economic level. For example, Respondent Q describes the social world of the drinker (in this instance the younger drinker) in a constructive and positive way. On the one hand, they are young and fun-loving, while on the other hand they are generous spenders and therefore, desirable consumers:

'it's a young people's pub, [Tullamore] love the atmosphere they create, a small space at one end for older customers – oldies always complain about the prices, check their change, and don't spend nearly as much, always whinging about something, this is a huge contrast with the young crowd who are generally good humoured, out for a good time, know how to enjoy themselves, are well educated, well mannered, a lovely generation of people' (Respondent Q, publican, Banagher and Tullamore, Co Offaly)

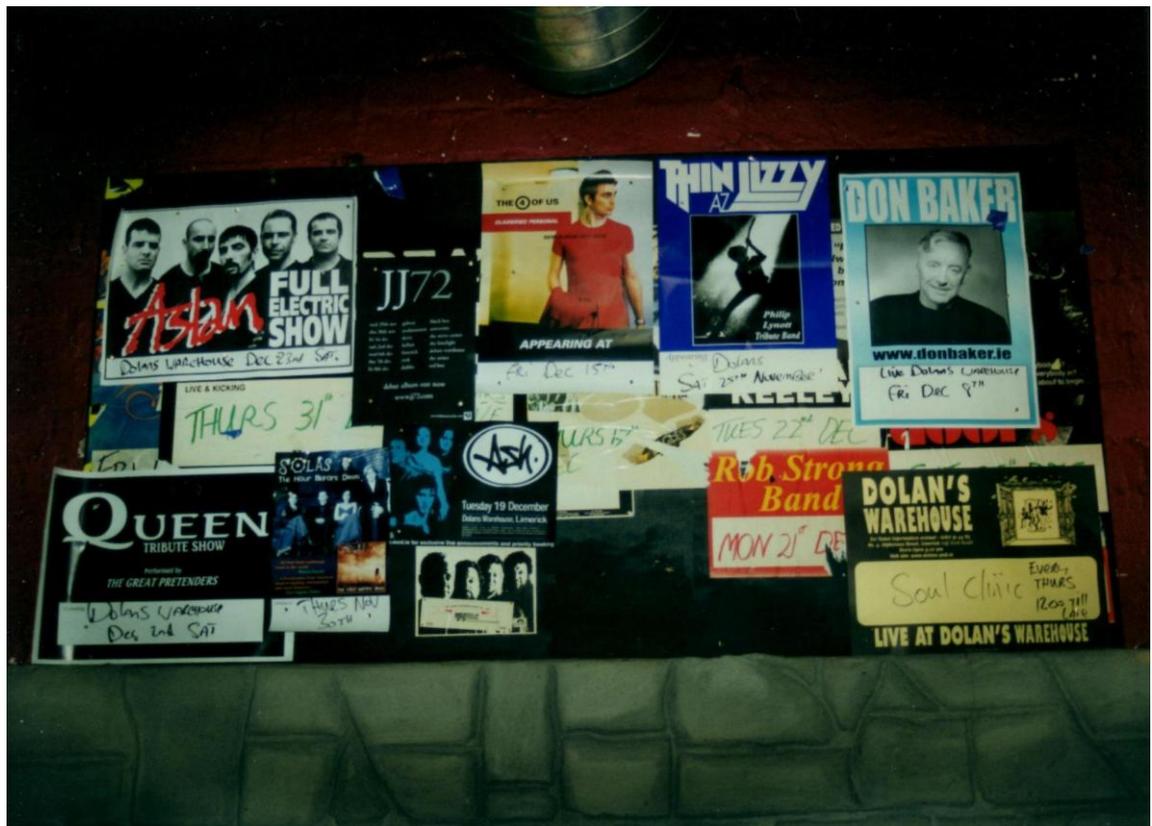
Respondent K identifies two separate categories of drinker, the 'regular' and the 'transient' drinker:

'the regulars that come in, they have 6 or 7 pints, then they go home'... 'with the younger generation, they come in and they drink and they drink and they drink, simple as that. The younger generation have so much money to spend, they don't care, they will go from bar to bar, they will drink as much as they want, to hell with the consequences' (Respondent K, bar manager, Dublin)

'Regulars' were known, were conventional in their drinking habits and drinking times, and have established relationships with fellow-drinkers and with bar-workers. Younger drinkers were considered transient and unpredictable, were said to 'spend more and drink faster' and therefore 'need watching' (Respondent K). Respondent

² Engagement in leisure time activities, defined by choice and life-stage position, allows people to 'validate or affirm their own desired identity image' (Hunt, 2005:162)¹

G, however, actively targeted younger drinkers (students) to a multi-purpose space; bar, restaurant, music/comedy venue



5. 2. 1. An array of posters advertising upcoming events (as well as old posters showing past events), reaffirm the perception of (Dolan's) public house as a 'venue'.

Changing drinking patterns generated new drinking spaces. While categories of drinkers were perceived and often handled differently, the aim was to effectively harness the increased spending-power of *all* drinkers. New products and new ways of spending on leisure activities (for example, the 'hen party' event) for the consumer were both a challenge and an opportunity for drinks providers. Increased leisure time and expanding leisure industries together reconfigured drinking spaces and transformed some of the conventional aspects of social drinking.

Figures produced by the drinks industry indicate a significant increase in spending on alcohol in conjunction with an expansion of ancillary products and services. According to an E.S.R.I. Report (2004), commissioned by Drinks Industry of Ireland (DIGI), a 29.5% increase in sales over the previous four-year period, was experienced countrywide. The average turnover of the public houses surveyed was €383,377.00 for 2003, a considerable increase from the 1999 estimate of €245,982.00 per premises. As well as an 18% increase in retail space a 59.2% increase in sales of bar-food was also shown. Growth within the drinks industry according to the ERSI report, shows not only an increase in spending, but also indicates how money was spent, for example, refurbishment, local charges, insurance premiums and live/electronic entertainment. The public house is developing in accordance with changing abstract (hidden) structures and forms, changes that become evident when for example, regulatory constraints, technological systems and commercial activity reform drinking places and practices.

The exchange of commodities for money calls for efficient systems of production and circulation, that together constitute the ‘turnover time of capital’ (Harvey, 1989:229). On the one hand, new markets are created for commodities that are already produced or on the other hand, commodities are produced to fulfil social expectations and desires. Respondent G whose licensed premises is located close to the University of Limerick campus, organises promotions and events that appeal to the student population. A weekly ‘student night’ during term time included student-oriented leisure interests such as drinks promotions, live music performances, DJs and comedy nights:

‘you know what you like, what you think other people like, we would have to gauge what people want, we have changed things from what we had

when we opened first'... 'know what will bring them in'... 'you're not going to get people of a certain age coming out mid-week, so we gauge for students, 18 – 25 year olds – Wednesdays or Thursdays'
(Respondent G, publican, Limerick City)

The planning and 'staging' of such 'pseudo-events' (Boorstin, 1992:9) for the purpose of making money, also costs money, therefore, each target market when identified is strategically and actively pursued. The development of new markets (such as the student population), the expansion of entertainment, 'big-screen' sports events, live-music performances and the introduction of the 'pub lunch' are the norm in a growing number of pubs (venues).

Investigation of the social world of the drinker in early 21st century Ireland, reveals two forms of drinking patterns. Firstly, my data shows that drinking in the public house or other licensed premises in the company of others is in decline and secondly, the practice of drinking in domestic space is a growing phenomenon. Changing alcohol consumption practices are attributable to various factors such as personal taste, the life-stage position of the drinker and regulatory controls that impose constraints and obligations. While 'individual choice' suggests an influential consumer and would support the view that production is 'increasingly controlled by consumer demand' (Bennett and Watson, 2002:149), this assertion however, is a somewhat simplistic one. Economic methodologies such as market research shape consumption practices, through the identification of 'problems', 'to which goods and services can be developed as solutions' (Bennett and Watson, 2002:149). The shift from public to private drinking is a phenomenon that is testing the viability of the public house and bringing about a restructuring of the drinks industry.

The upsurge in technological development in the 1970s that changed modes of communication, human mobility and production processes, brought about radical changes to social life as well as to the processes of capital accumulation. My data shows that changing perceptions of the world, a consequence of reduction in spatial barriers that made the world seem smaller, a phase of ‘time-space compression’ (Harvey, 2001:123), when combined with increased disposable incomes, altered the social world of the drinker. To summarise, the drinker is a consumer with increased spending power, who is equipped with the knowledge of alternative lifestyle practices, availability of an extensive range of products and who is in a position of power when making choices regarding what and where to drink. The publican in response to consumer expectations is now in the position where pro-active strategies must be adopted as they are considered essential in maintaining or improving market share. Marketing strategies such as product promotions enhanced drinking environments such as customer-friendly smoking areas and solutions to transportation issues, are not only a response to consumer demands, but are also pro-active business policies. Changes that are essential to maintaining economic viability (while indicative of the presence of external regulatory forces that mediate the relationship between provider and consumer) are evident in varying degrees within the environs of the contemporary public house. As a wider range of goods and services become available products of consumption are said to be ‘increasingly aestheticised’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:274), thus generating wider appeal and increasing consumer satisfaction. The public house when interpreted according to an economic perceptual framework is viewed as a site of economic activity, where alcohol, food and entertainment may be purchased and consumed. It is also a place of productivity that is profit-motivated and market oriented.

5. 3. Economic strategies that re-define drinking spaces.

The casual and relaxed nature of the public house, despite having an appearance of informality, is a highly structured environment that operates in the interest of capital. Economic processes manifest themselves materially through the exchange of goods and money (consumers), work practices (workers) and the accumulation of capital (public house owners). As a place of consumption and for consumption, the public house operates within an economic framework, where economic processes are actualised through a hierarchy of business practices³. In order to explain the public house as a location of production and consumption, labour relations and strategies of capital accumulation are looked at from the perspective of the producer/provider in this instance the owners and the bar-workers.

A growing awareness of new consumer products and alternate (exotic) life-style choices has changed consumer expectations. Economic processes such as ‘distribution and exchange’ (McLellan, 1977:350), the ‘productive forces of labour’ (McLellan, 1971:384) and ‘accumulation of capital’ (McLellan, 1971:413) in contemporary society, develop according to global as well as local influences. Global processes, as an ‘intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’ (Giddens, 2000:64), are expressed in the following account:

‘they know ...want what’s out there to be had, people expect a lot more – than say twenty - or even ten years ago, good quality drinks and

³ In his sociological analysis of business organisations and hierarchies, Joseph (1989) offers insights into (profit-making) organisations, and into industrial relations between employer and employee occurring in a ‘changing occupational structure’

reasonably priced food, and entertainment, they want to be looked after.
(Respondent G, publican, Limerick City).

The mobility of people and products is not only geographical, but is also increasing in pace. The increasingly rapid circulation of subjects and objects, such as ‘capital, labour, commodities, information and images’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:13), is symptomatic of the post-modern economy.

The following images show mobilised imagery and information, communicating ‘venue’ and ‘product’ at two highly competitive locations:



5. 3. 1. Mobile images inform potential customers in the town of Dingle of ‘mighty sessions nightly’ in the ‘Droichead Beag’ public house.



5. 3. 2. An image and information-laden vehicle seen in the Co Galway area promotes a public house, music and a brand of beer. The ‘Elm Tree’ pub (once a thriving bar/music venue that has now ceased trading) was popular in the Western region due to its association with traditional music. An image-carrying vehicle presented a constant reminder to potential consumers as it moved through local towns and villages. The concept of mobile imagery however, is not confined to the drinks trade but plays a key role in advertising products, places or events.

Music and sport play a key role in the identity and in the economic viability of a considerable proportion of public houses. The following description by Respondent H of live-music performance as a business incentive is defined from production through to consumption in economic terms:

‘we have music on Saturday night, I’ve a very settled Saturday night crowd, mostly couples out, a one-man-band basically, my bar isn’t big enough for more than that, if you want to talk, you talk, if you want to listen, you listen, anything more would be too expensive, when you can’t operate a cover charge coming the door and the one-man-band is a hundred pounds for the night, so you have to take in £300 or £400 to pay

for the band and you have extra staff to pay on top of that, can't operate a cover charge because it's a public house like' (Respondent H, publican, Mallow, Co Cork)

'Social fields', such as religion and sport, generate 'oceanic feelings of selflessness and otherness which create and maintain a sense of belonging' (Inglis 1998:75). The public house as a venue with a 'cinema-size' screen, food and alcohol, has in many respects reinvented the way in which sporting events are experienced. Sport as an activity brings together people (participants and spectators) who have a common interest. The time, costs and inconvenience associated with travel as well as unfavourable weather conditions are of no consequence when the public house is transformed into a pseudo-sports arena or race-track. The combination of a 'virtual reality' (Lanier, 2010) presentation (simulated) and a crowd atmosphere (real *and* simulated) along with seating, warmth, food and alcohol constructs a public house experience that is appealing, convenient and relatively inexpensive. For respondent G, comfort and convenience compensates for the absence of 'co-presence''(Goffman, 1967:1) between team and supporters:

'yeah, just listen outside (noisy cheering can be heard from another area of the pub) there's a match on in there, we have a 'big screen' for the matches, it's cinema size,, we would advertise it, there's a menu available, basket food, something you could have in your hand, yea, all the atmosphere, without going to the trouble of travelling to it, yea and a drink if they want to' (Respondent G, publican, Limerick City)

Public houses in Ireland have distinct and separate identities, for example, traditional versus modern, music versus 'quiet' bar and according to the drinking practices of 'local' or 'transient' clientele. The non-existence of a *typical* public house makes way for diversity in standards and thematic identities that are conceptualised and experienced individually at the micro-level. For example, '*Dolans*' (associated with music and 'restaurant' food) is situated between a 'sports'

(GAA) bar and a ‘quiet’ bar, each offering a different environment and different products that meet the expectations of specific consumers. Functionality, comfort and appearance (theme-parking), while defining product and service quality for the drinker, also ‘improves the public image of the business as a whole’ (Marshall, 1993:103). When designers and creators of public house space produce ideas and images that are drinker-oriented, the sub-text always carries implicit economic undertones favourable to the drinks-provider. The concept of the ‘sports bar’ for example, links alcohol to sporting activities. Where local team jerseys are sponsored, a highly visible fusion of sport, a named pub and an alcohol product generates a unique group identity. The relationship between sporting organisations and drinks industry sponsorship, however is a contentious issue. During an Oireachtas Debate on 17th April 2013 regarding the power of alcohol advertising/sponsorship Dr Bobby Smith utilizes Gidden’s (1991) analogy of the ‘juggernaut of modernity’. Smith argues the necessity to ‘apply a brake on Ireland’s runaway drinking culture’...and to...‘take our foot off the accelerator... *alcohol promotion via advertising and sponsorship acts as that accelerator*’. Studies (Department of Health 2001 and United States 2006) quoted by Dr Smith and Professor Barry claim a definitive connection between exposure to alcohol advertising and (harmful) drinking behaviour. Government Ministers, however, disagreed with this claim and supported the continuing sponsorship of events by the Drinks Industry (<http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/19716/>)

As a place of economic activity, that is socially constructed in terms of ‘meaning and materiality’ (Cresswell, 2004:30), the public house may have a traditional or a modern prospect, or more likely, will include elements of each. The

‘design component’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:15), conveying the symbolic value attached to goods and services, plays a major role in the construction of a ‘modern’ or ‘traditional’ identity. Representation and imagery that is expressed through the medium of architecture, theming and branding, is crucial to the achievement of pre-set economic goals. While mindful of consumer demands and expectations with regard to material change, the utilisation of technology (sound, light and computerisation) and design not only enhances visual aspects of the environment, but also contributes to economic efficiency. The public house in Ireland has throughout history undergone change in keeping with societal norms at any given time⁴, keeping pace with consumer demands and expectations and in accordance with prevailing business practices and regulatory norms. The changing nature of the public house experience is a consequence of higher expectations regarding quality of leisure spaces and increased participation in leisure-time activities that ultimately serve the economic goals of the drinks industry.

5. 4. Integration of processes that underpin the social drinking environment.

Central to the generation of the public house environment (and economy) is knowledge, the utilisation of design (creativity) and modern technology. Technological changes at the operational level, calls for understanding and expertise that is economically motivated, and that has a significant bearing on the social drinking experience. Any study of location (in this instance the public house), cannot be confined to analysis of face-to-face social interaction without reference to the influence of the material environment. Social drinking in the public house

⁴ In ‘*The Story of the Irish Pub*’, Molloy (2002) makes reference to an array of activities (marriages, storage of dead bodies) and identities such as ‘coach house’, ‘spirit store’ and ‘lounge bar’ that have changed throughout the history of the public house.

environment as the ‘trajectory of this interaction’ can be seen as ‘influenced by cultural symbols, motifs and myths that are also integral to on-location practice’ (Rojek, 2007:71). Design techniques that enhance the public house environment, producing a desirable leisure space, work hand in hand with new worker skills and expertise and modern technology, to create a desirable place of informal association that in turn will boost economic activity.

While the public house as ‘built environment’ (Gottdiener, 1985:124) is imbued with multiple properties on a structural level, that determine provider/consumer practices, the place (location) is also an object of consumption. Production of a desirable (marketable) environment that extends beyond its use value⁵ centres on innovative design, standards of material comfort and most importantly its visual qualities. The visualisation process and the interpretation of visual images are central to how people represent and construct meaning in the process of communication. As cultural and economic activities are ‘symbolic communicative’ (Fornas, 1995:134) processes, the construction of visual imagery plays a key role in the social world of the drinker and to the economic operation of the drinks trade. As non-material forms of production, images and ideological constructs are key features of ‘disorganised capital’ ... ‘everyone becomes a hermeneutist, reading and interpreting a wide array of signs and images’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:260). Concepts of image and ideology, while closely linked, operate on two separate levels. Ideologically the Irish public house is perceived as a time-honoured institution, synonymous with the Irish way of life, with specific characteristics that fulfil certain expectations. The coming together of images and a

⁵ Sturken and Cartwright (2001) make the distinction between the practical (functional) ‘use value’ of objects and ‘exchange value’, an ‘assigned’ value inherent in contemporary consumer culture.

set of beliefs relating to those images, define practices of social interaction and consumption by which the public house is identified and experienced. New technologies such as lighting, sound, entertainment and security, and ‘visual’ characteristics such as décor and furnishings, transform the public house environment to produce a space that has consumer-appeal and is business-oriented.

5. 5. Design and aesthetics.

Conor Kenny,⁶ designer with the ‘Irish Pub Company’⁷, makes reference to the ‘drink shrinks’ (Kenny, ‘*Meet the Drink Shrinks*’ Irish Independent. 5/4/2001), when explaining how competitive publicans use psychology and environmental design to mould their customer’s tastes. Modern-day ‘lighter, brighter premises’ (Molloy, 2002:81) have followed on from the earlier comfortably furnished lounges associated with the appearance of women drinkers in public houses during the 1970s. The ‘design and fit-out’ www.januscontractsltd.com of public house interiors is about maximising profit through the considered application of colour, lighting, design and music. Lighting levels for example, are important to and reflected the life-stage position (and personal preference) of Respondent W:

‘hate anywhere that’s too bright, not kind to girls of a certain age, that’s why I prefer Mulcahy’s it’s dim and a bit old fashioned and the music’s not too bad, at least we can talk, different to what the young people want’
(Respondent W, drinker, female, 70+)

The contemporary public house is an image-laden environment, representative of an array of styles that are constructed in support of hidden

⁶ Conor Kenny and Associates are sales and marketing consultants, working with the hospitality and tourism sector.

⁷ The Irish Pub Company was established in 1991 for the design, manufacture and installation of *authentic* Irish pubs, that are culturally and commercially successful on a global scale.

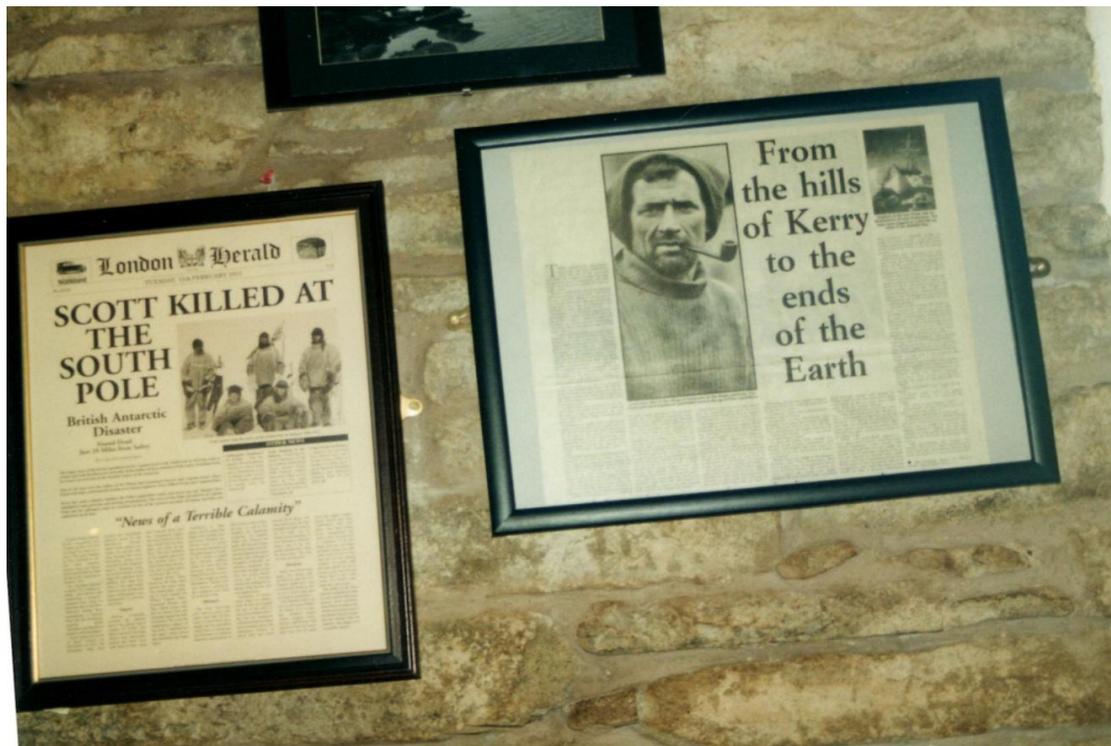
economic processes. Surface changes that are not obviously linked to economic processes, conceal the underlying principles of commercial productivity and profit. The ‘traditional’ Irish public house, whether authentic or a modern construct, uses images and artefacts that are visual representations of Ireland’s history and way of life. The significance of visual imagery at a time of rapid social change is supported by the assertion that in ‘periods of confusion and uncertainty, the turn to aesthetics becomes more pronounced’ (Harvey, 1989:328). Symbols of the past are said to evoke a sense of nostalgia that is associated with a simpler and better way of life. In contrast with the traditional public house is the modern ‘style bar’ that is redesigned in a way to influence customers to drink less beer and to ‘splash out on more exotic and expensive tipples’ (Kenny, 2001). The importance of design and the incorporation of technology into the creation of an image-rich environment is validated and reaffirmed when the ideas and aspirations of dedicated hospitality interior designers are put into practice. Descriptions of public house environments, for example, the following extract from a magazine feature⁸ on Scraggs Alley, Carlow, emphasise visual qualities and an ambience that suggests a desirable but unconventional place that is functional but bizarre:

‘new and improved main bar fits in sympathetically with the comfortable, traditional ethos of the venue’...‘has a warm welcoming palate of seasoned timbers on the floors and ceilings, with functional and cosy wood and leather furniture’...‘is scattered with authentic bric-a-brac from days of yore’...‘furniture consists of church pews and chunky wooden tables’...‘heavy central bar glows with sultry red and yellow down-lighters, creating a warm clubby cocoon’... (AM:PM, Irish Hospitality and Style, Issue 12, p. 27-28)

Where the environment is created to influence drinking behaviour, a ‘subtle but powerfully subliminal manipulation of our moods’ (Kenny, 2001) has the potential to

⁸ ‘AM:PM Irish Hospitality and Style’, a magazine dedicated to the hospitality industry (6 published per year) contains features, news and advertising relevant to public house, night club and related venues in Ireland and abroad.

shape consumption practices. The following images for example, claim a familial link between a pub and ‘local hero’ that is bound up with identity and locality:



5. 5. 1. A public house in a rural Kerry village exhibits images and artefacts that tell the story of a local South Pole explorer...



5. 5. 2. ...and a local brewery produces a lager bearing the name of the explorer.

Designers to the hospitality industry (O'Donnell O'Neill Design) identify the necessary elements in the planning and execution of any design and fit-out project. Firstly there is the teamwork approach, where designers, artists, lighting and sound specialists work with fabrics and products to actualise a concept. Secondly, an understanding of human psychology (knowledge of the clientele and their expectations) is crucial when designing and constructing a leisure environment, as 'people expect visually stimulating surroundings, especially during their leisure time' (O'Donnell, O'Neill, AM:PM, Issue 14, 2004:27). The significance of design and technology to the functioning of the contemporary Irish public house was evident at 'Vintra 2004', (hospitality industry exhibition) at Dublin's RDS, Simmonscourt⁹. Exhibits fell broadly into three categories, food and beverage, utilities, and image creation. Bearing in mind that the target market was the hospitality industry, new foods such as pre-packaged snacks and beverage products mainly wines, accounted for a mere 20% of the goods on exhibition. This figure, however, is understandable as the wholesale supply of mainstream alcohol products is already firmly in place.

The second category of products at the Exhibition, utility requirements, included storage, refrigeration, hygiene and waste disposal solutions, and were marketed as essential and cost-effective components of the modern-day hospitality industry. Aspects of technology such as 'hi-tec' utilities are promoted as labour-saving, efficient and therefore of economic benefit. Image creation, however, accounted for the greatest proportion of exhibits, with approximately one third of exhibitors offering products and services that changed the aesthetic qualities or altered the ambience of premises for prospective clients. Image-design experts

⁹ This researcher visited the exhibition, talked to some exhibitors and their clients, sourced literature and made notes.

advocate the use of interior architecture, décor, furnishings, fine art and artefacts, mood music and lighting, a ‘systematic organisation of ambience’ (Baudrillard, 1994:366) as an investment. Notions of ‘concept creation’ and full ‘design and fit-out service’ are brought to life for potential clients with the aid of ‘virtual walkthrough’ (AM:PM, February/March 2004) modelling.

Companies such as the Irish Pub Company offer ‘complete interior solutions’, that make possible the planning and delivery the ‘customised’ public house. The ‘Victorian Dublin Pub’ conveys an image of comfort and hospitality with lavish interiors such as brass fittings, stained glass, mirrors and tiles. A ‘Country Cottage Pub’ replicates the traditional Irish cottage with white-washed walls, wooden beams and open fires. The rival to this traditional imagery is the concept of the contemporary urban bar, described by the designer as having a ‘look and identity’ that combines ‘modern urban cool with suburban comforts’, a ‘cool sophisticated interior’ that includes ‘bespoke artwork’, giving a fresh perspective to what was a traditional suburban bar’ (AM:PM, Irish Hospitality and Style, February/March 2004). Design projects which centre on the ‘aestheticization’ (Lash and Urry, 1994:4)¹⁰ of drinks products and of the public house environment, while experienced on a cultural level, are achieved directly and indirectly through the medium of modern technology. Design and technology when used to generate ‘concepts of belonging’ (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001:218), are essential elements firstly in the cultural sphere and secondly in the economic sphere of the Irish public house.

¹⁰ Lash and Urry (1994) show that the design component and aesthetic nature of consumer goods and the ‘sign-value or image embodied in material objects’ play a central role in post-modern economies.

5. 6. Securitization: human and technological surveillance.

Technology, as well as having an impact on aesthetic qualities, also has a major import into the securitization of space and in monitoring work and consumption practices. Bar-workers perform a multiplicity of tasks, possess a variety of skills and assume roles and responsibilities appropriate to the position held. Technology, such as glass-washers, automatic tills and the presence of surveillance technology, reduces labour costs either by increasing worker efficiency or by eliminating manual tasks. Electronic recording of cash and stock movement and CCTV monitoring of worker and drinker behaviour (for example service at the bar or some distance from the bar, at a table), plays a critical role in planning the operational duties and activities of the bar-worker. As well as having a direct bearing on the number of workers employed, (where man is replaced by machine), on worker skills and worker time-frames, technology is also used to source and analyse information. Technology, therefore, has a multiplicity of roles firstly, the replacement, reduction or enhancement of the role of the worker and as a crucial support to economic processes by generating information regarding worker and customer behaviour.

As a control mechanism, particularly of worker behaviour, surveillance technology functions in accordance with Smith's 'principle of the panoptican' (2001:125) to shape service, monetary transactions and worker/drinker relations. While workers and drinkers alike are aware of the presence of CCTV surveillance, their attitude is one of passive acceptance, having some bearing on workers as they execute their tasks. While surveillance may have little relevance to drinkers and how

they consume, it may be the catalyst that affects a more rational and judicious response to acrimonious situations *and* may constrain extreme or unacceptable behaviour. The dawn of the ‘information society’ for Lyon, whereby ‘microelectronic technologies’ (Giddens, 1992:271) impact upon labour, knowledge, information and communication, also make possible the monitoring of place, people and products. Sophisticated electronic security systems that monitor cash, stock, workers and drinkers, operate to control behaviour and to provide information and are marketed as essential in the planning and operation of a profitable business.

The security and safety of workers and drinkers is mainly an urban concern, linked to the location and capacity of the pub and to the age-profile of drinkers. Security personnel and security systems are present in varying degrees and are a routine element of the experience of the social drinker. Justification for a (human) security presence is explained by a security consultant as follows:

‘in this day and age it’s important to have a secure environment, crowded places give opportunity for theft and other anti-social behaviour, a visible security presence, the uniform and CCTV is a deterrent to would-be perpetrators and gives a sense of safety and security to businesses and their customers, must have knowledge of the law and know what their responsibilities are when problems present’ (Respondent V, security consultant, Clonmel, Co Tipperary).

The public house is a site characterised by a multiplicity of technological operations that shape place, products and practices, but more importantly, they facilitate the recording and storage of information that may be drawn on at a later time. As a constructed environment, the public house may be temperature, light and sound controlled and work and consumption practices may be monitored electronically. Technology is a phenomenon that is all-pervasive in contemporary society, impacting on social processes, environmental quality and ultimately on day-to-day

activities. With emphasis on ‘know-how and efficiency’, and doing things ‘competently and swiftly’, Corkery identifies the aims of technological systems and operation as the basis of ‘high-performance, profitable production’ (Breen, Conway and McMillan, 2003:11). From the perspective of the bar worker, efficiency in the delivery of service is linked to the efficient use of time, that again is inherently profit driven. As bar-work is highly visible, it is of a ‘performative’ nature. According to my data, the watchful ‘eyes’ of the proprietor, fellow-workers, drinkers and the camera lens generate a form of self-consciousness that influences the performance and efficiency of service tasks. As well as the material environment and created ambiance of the public house, workers and the standard of work/service practices are central to economic processes.

5. 7. Knowledge: the application of information and expertise.

Along with growing profit margins and increases in the flows of people and commodities, and technological competence, is the growth of productive knowledge (local and expert). Electronically generated knowledge regarding consumption habits, beverage preferences, individual spending and the time spent in the public house is an essential aid to efficient business planning. Information produced by cash registers that record the product, price, time of purchase and identifies the server, when used in conjunction with CCTV recordings, provides a comprehensive profile of consumption (and labour) patterns and practices. In the rapidly evolving social and leisure environment of the public house, knowledge is a key component of the productive process. Technology, as the ‘facilitator of the information age’ (Tovey and Share, 2003:477), generates awareness of change within local and global

markets. In a pro-active approach, research, anticipation of consumer expectations and the meeting of those demands guarantee continuity and growth. To reach and sustain the desired level of consumer activity, 'access to the latest technique...product...scientific discovery, implies the possibility of seizing an important competitive advantage' (Harvey, 1989:159), a key element underlying all business practices. Profit-margins relate directly to specialised knowledge such as local knowledge, an awareness of consumer practices, changing consumption patterns and new products. Respondent G, for example, familiarises himself with plans for apartments, hotels and infrastructure that ultimately will have a bearing on his business:

'local development plan for the next ten years was launched last week, hotels, a new bridge up the way, looking good for the future.'
(Respondent G, publican, Limerick City).

The sourcing and application of expert knowledge (where knowledge itself becomes a commodity), is an essential element in the contemporary complex world of business. Due to the developing market for food and the introduction of legislation regarding food hygiene standards, capital investment is considerable however, the rewards are equally substantial:

'it is going to cost money, to get a consultant in costs money for training, I mean the average cost is around £500, then there are structural changes, if a kitchen is not up to standard, they might have to spend a lot of money on it' (Respondent R, food hygiene consultant, Dublin)

Networking at community level between businesses and organisations, generates awareness of issues such as local planning or the influx of new businesses that have the potential to damage (or benefit) indigenous trade. In the relationship between business rivals (publicans), such knowledge is an essential element, whether

shared or used strategically in an advantageous way. When knowledge is shared and joint strategies are agreed, it is perceived as mutually beneficial to business in any given area. Planned 'events' such as sponsored competitions (pool, card games, quizzes) or themed sport or musical entertainment, call for a strategy of co-operation, that is ultimately beneficial. Agreement among publicans is considered expedient, insofar as individual businesses (in their turn) benefit, but not necessarily at the expense of 'rivals'. The subtle shift from competition to co-operation indicates a shared understanding of the market and the position of each publican, while retaining an appearance of competitiveness. Co-operation between publicans reveals a process of manipulation that in reality favours providers at the expense of the consumer. Products and potential consumers are brought together in an economically expedient manner that ensures continuity of a traditional cultural practice and continued participation in an economic process.

5. 8. The re-spatialization of social drinking.

In the 'pub business' or more broadly the 'drinks trade', the aim is to maximise alcohol sales in the most cost-effective way. When the social world of the drinker is examined, the places, the products and practices of consumption all show evidence of business policies that expand and encourage social drinking. The consumption of alcohol in an informal environment, such as the traditional intimate "local" or 'large through-lounge' (Featherstone, [1982] 1991b:173), while having the appearance of a relaxed and routine social activity, is organised and managed within an economic framework that reflects class, gender and age-position. Social drinking also takes place within a spatial context that is appropriate to the community in

which it is situated, the geographic location of the public house, to consumer preferences and to the life-stage position of drinkers.

The following images illustrate gender/spatial configuration in a rural public house on a typical Sunday afternoon (rural public house, Co Cork). In the first image (5.8.1), what appears to be a gathering of unattached males, congregate at the bar to talk and to consume alcohol. The second image (5.8.2), that shows evidence of the presence of females, refutes that assumption; it shows the same location at the same time, photographed from the same vantage point, but from a lower angle. The feet that are visible belong to female ‘significant others’ seated away from the bar and close to an open fire. While the women face the fire and engage in conversation, drinks and crisps are ‘sent over’ at regular intervals, otherwise there is little communication between men and women:



5.8.1. Drinkers at the bar are exclusively male



5.8.2. An exclusively female group of drinkers.

The development of drinking space takes into account the life-stage positions and the lifestyle preferences of regular and potential customers. Strategies that have the potential to increase capital turnover are planned and put in place for example, Respondent G recounted the purchase of additional retail space, the re-organisation and refurbishment of existing (productive) space and the financial risks involved:

'everything you see is new, the doors, the roof, windows, electrical, originally the bar was over there, where the restaurant is now was a café, we bought the café next door and this is it – the restaurant. Inside was a food store, Fitzgibbons Frozen Foods, - they moved and we bought the place, yea, bought the two of them, (café and food store) – at the same time about four years ago' – I took the chance, we have changed a lot from when we first opened six and a half years ago – had to do it' (Respondent G, publican, Limerick City).

For respondent G, growth in capacity could only be further achieved by extending the rear of the premises and converting the first floor space.



5. 8. 3. Dolan's.

Spatial expansion through change of use or acquisition of new retail/service space meant a transformation of social and retail spaces that generated changes of spatial usage and identity:

'changed the name of the restaurant, used to be 'Dolan's' – associated with the pub and pub food, now it's called 'Sean Chara' – separate from the pub. (Respondent G, publican, Limerick City).

A re-drawing of spatial boundaries, that in this instance changed the identity of the pub-restaurant, created a space for fine dining that ultimately gave status to the dining experience and justified price increases. Despite the separate identity of the 'Sean Chara', it is important to note that the restaurant (with a-la-carte menu) was serviced from the kitchen and by staff who also provided 'pub-grub' to bar customers.

The creation of new spaces of consumption has re-shaped the social world of the drinker in a variety of ways. Expansion into public (pedestrian) space, (a feature of an emerging café culture) and into private (open) space has taken place in response to the implementation of the ‘Public Health (Tobacco) Bill, 2001’. Adoption of the ‘continental’ practice of eating and drinking out of doors has meant a further adaptation of outdoor space that has re-defined work and consumption practices. New service spaces as well as already operational spaces are marketed independently, for example new ‘off-sales’ outlets or restaurant services are ‘packaged’ and introduced to specific target groups. Food/entertainment packages are offered that are seasonal or for special occasions such as family celebration, fliers promoting off-sales of alcohol are circulated, offering competitive prices and free delivery. The aim of new business practices is to promote growth therefore products and services are developed as *additional to* and not *at the expense of* the already existing business model, for example the following outline plans for a re-deployment of space:

Upstairs we have lots of space, potential for more – have in mind to expand the restaurant to a 100-seater, make it a lot better, we have only 40 at the moment – we need the space at weekends, - and a small venue called the ‘Loft’ for acoustic gigs’. (Respondent G, publican, Limerick City)

For Respondent H, an atypical course of action with the potential to increase the flow and strengthen the loyalty of customers also had a spatial dimension:

‘mainly it was a mans bar, and we have tried to change it, to get a good share of the women, as well as the men, unfortunately it’s not in a good tourist area though we’re only twelve miles from Blarney, yea, I think I’ll mind my own corner, think up things – we’re twinned with a pub up in Castlebar, ...do exchange trips... that’s what we have to do, things like that, just an excuse, like, an excuse to get them out for a drink, (Respondent H, publican, Mallow, Co Cork)

The growth and viability of the business according to Respondent H called for more than provision of food, drink and entertainment. In his view organised trips to Castlebar and to local race meetings extended spatial boundaries beyond the pub that established deeper bonds between drinkers. ‘Trips away’ were said to strengthen drinkers’ attachment to each other *and* to the public house thus re-affirming their continued custom and their status as ‘regulars’.

For the product/service provider, the notion of ‘growth’ is an essential element of the economic process. As the ‘corner-stone of capitalism’s ideology’ (Harvey, 1989:180), growth is directly connected to the role of the labour force in the process of capital accumulation. Efficiency, skill, flexibility and the concept of ‘emotional labour’ (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993:88-115) are essential to the quality and operation of the social world of the drinker. Work practices according to Marx’s ‘division of labour’ (McLellan, 1977:249), explains labour as a commodity that is bought and sold. According to the Marxian model, the value of bar-work in terms of skill, experience and responsibility is ‘determined by the same laws that determine the price of every other commodity’ (McLellan, 1977:251-2). The temporary nature (part-time or seasonal work) of a considerable proportion of bar-work has ‘created some of the social conditions for the fluidity and insecurity of identities that typify what can be called post-modernity’ (Harvey, 2001:14). The link between growth and technology that influences outgoings such as wages, insurance premiums, state taxes and the costs of maintaining a retail/service environment to the desired standard, also plays a key role in monitoring, analysis and in the operation of cash-flow.

As well as the reconfiguration of public house space, my data shows that an increase in the domestic consumption of alcohol meant a re-spatialization of drinking practices. As a life-style practice associated with prosperity, Goldthorpe's (1968) study of consumption in the UK found that 'affluent workers' tended to be more home-centred, spending money on their homes and socialising at home. In the Irish context, McWilliams' (2006) in his satirical portrayal of Celtic Tiger Ireland, coined the term 'deck-landers' to describe those who engaged in DIY home improvements that produced spaces conducive to entertaining within the domestic environment. The reallocation of drinking practices from public to private space came about as a consequence of changing cultural norms, inspired by shifting economic and regulatory forces. While leisure-time spent in the (limited) company of others in domestic space is increasing in popularity, socialising, drinking and dining in public places of consumption is also prevalent.

The following image of a family home (5.8.4) shows preparations made to welcome friends to celebrate a birthday. Drinks consisted of a keg of Murphy's, a keg of Heineken and an array of spirits and 'mixers', however, the most popular drink was wine. The meal consisted of a smoked salmon starter, a main course of lamb and vegetables, followed by a cheese board. Some furniture had been borrowed from friends and neighbours.



5. 8. 4. Entertaining at home.

Changing patterns of alcohol consumption that proved less costly and required little effort and organisation were embraced, but at the expense of informal interaction and connectedness with the wider community in an established leisure environment. Choices made by drinkers regarding product and place of consumption, pose a new challenge for established publicans, who are forced to respond to new chosen lifestyle practices. The notion of individual real or imagined ‘choices’ relating to drinking practices, will be explored further in the following chapter when the consequences of social and legal constraints will be evaluated

5. 9. Reform of the drinks trade in a changing political economy.

Drinking practices, in the public house or in the domestic environment, are shaped by underlying economic processes that are determined by the prevailing

climate of prosperity at any given time. The public house as a site of economic activity is re-constructed in anticipation of or as response to new consumer expectations in an innovative and (economically) productive manner. From the perspective of the consumer, prosperity and a re-evaluation of leisure and lifestyle activities has greatly contributed to changing patterns and locations of alcohol consumption. Global processes such as the transmission of information, human mobility and communication, produce awareness of alternative life-style practices and ways of being, however, the ‘desire to defend and preserve valued ways of life’ (Smith, 2001:231) continues. Despite a desire to retain elements of traditional drinking practices, new practices appropriate to contemporary living are adopted that broaden and reconfigure leisure-time activities and that impact upon the commercial viability of the alcohol retail industry.

A reflexive approach to leisure and lifestyle activities, particularly to alcohol consumption, takes into account factors such as value-for-money, regulatory constraints such as the prohibition of tobacco consumption in the work-place and issues surrounding transportation between the public house and home. When purchasing alcohol products, price-differentials between ‘on-sales’ and ‘off-sales’ outlets, influences decision-making that consequently, has a significant outcome for the drinks trade. The disparity between ‘off’ and ‘on’ sales prices (a factor that contributes to the growing trend of consuming alcohol in domestic space) has meant a restructuring of retail practices as the traditional model of purchasing and consuming alcohol in the public house is revised. The establishment of ‘Cheers’ and ‘Next Door’ off-sales outlets by the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA)¹¹

¹¹ The Licenced Vintners Association (LVA), one of the oldest Trade Associations in Ireland was established in 1817, to protect and promote the business interests of Publicans in the Dublin area.

www.lva.ie and the Vintners' Federation of Ireland (VFI)¹² www.vfi.ie, (representing the interests of publicans) contest the position of independent off-licenses, supermarkets and garage forecourt outlets.

Alcohol, however, is 'no ordinary commodity' (Barbor, 2003), therefore as a 'product' it circulates within a highly regulated environment. External forces such as regulatory controls play a central role in shaping the development of customer-oriented products and services designed to appeal to drinkers. While the introduction of the Public Health (Tobacco) Act (2002), (a regulatory constraint) has had a phenomenal impact upon leisure practices, the economic consequences for the drinks trade was at the time the subject of much debate. Consequences of the smoking ban, were the creation of new drinking spaces within the public house environment, and more importantly, beyond the boundaries of the public house. Practices as diverse as smoking in newly designated smoking areas, smoking and drinking in domestic space, or efforts to abstain from smoking, had economic as well as social consequences for the drinker and for the drinks-provider.

A further disruption to the social world of the drinker that also impacts negatively on the drinks trade, comes about with introduction (and enforcement) of regulations that prohibit drink/driving, the Road Traffic Act, (2006). The lack of adequate transport facilities was stated by publicans as responsible for the decline in business despite efforts to organise a public transport service particularly in rural areas. While the 'designated driver' a (non-drinker) who takes on the responsibility

¹² The Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) is a national trade organisation that promotes and protects the interests of Vintners and Publicans.

of transporting drinkers is now a common phenomenon, another solution to a local transport issue was outlined as follows:

'with the drink-driving laws, most of them (customers) would either have someone bringing them and taking them home or we would do it ourselves, we would take people home around Christmas, from middle of November to the middle of January, we have our own two cars, I drive one and my wife would drive the other or our daughter would, I suppose – Saturday nights for the 3 weeks before and the 3 weeks after Christmas, I don't get out of the car all night long – it's what you have to do'
(Respondent H, publican, Mallow, Co Cork)

The public house as a place of economic activity is therefore, a site of political organisation and control, where the sale, purchase and consumption of alcohol are strictly regulated. Conceptualisation of the social world of the drinker as a consumer, takes into account economic relations between supplier and purchaser as well as the regulatory controls associated with alcohol consumption. A 'theoretical triangulation' (Kane, 1995:52) approach examines economic processes according to the way in which they are linked to and influenced by regulatory and cultural processes. When the public house as an abstract space of capital accumulation (a process) is interpenetrated by abstract spaces of regulation and new (emerging) cultural ideologies, their 'transformative' (Harvey, 1989:344) functions challenge the assumed dominance of capitalism. While Harvey argues that because capitalism is 'expansionary and imperialistic, cultural life gets brought within the grasp of the cash nexus and the logic of capital circulation' (Harvey, 1989:344). The changing nature of drinking practices in the public house as acts of 'reflexive consumption' (Lash and Urry, 1994:57) are explicitly cultural, and as such are explained from the perspective of the drinker. Contemporary lifestyle choices and practices, however, are not only governed by taste and spending power/choices, but by forces beyond the cultural and the economic.

The cultural aspect of social drinking is rapidly and increasingly dominated by *regulatory* processes where an array of obligations and constraints play an important role in shaping the social world of the drinker. If consumer practices were based exclusively on socio-economic position and on the ready availability of desired products and services, barriers such as regulatory constraints would not need to be taken into account. In the relationship between product-provider and consumer, the exchange of product for money is a less than straight-forward procedure, in so far as the regulatory controls that apply regulate transactions at the economic level and determine drinking practices at the cultural level. Having given voice to economic interests whose motivation and actions shape a cultural practice, the next chapter will address how political processes impinge upon the ‘cultural’ and the ‘economic’, thus contributing to the production of the social world of the drinker.

Chapter 6. Alcohol Supply and Consumption: the Political Approach.

Having identified and explored contemporary drinking practices from a cultural perspective and as participation in an economic activity, some of the political processes that shape the social world of the drinker will now be identified and analyzed. Licensing laws and practices in Ireland have a long history of revision where new laws and amendments are brought into being. Alcohol misuse as a serious social problem is of concern to society in general and to policy makers in particular. Political campaigning around alcohol from Fr Matthew's pioneer total abstinence movement to the work of the current Task Force continues. While acknowledging the history and the extent of political control, that in the drinks industry has evolved and changed over time, this chapter will present some examples of political debate and regulatory processes that came about during the course of this research project.

6. 1. Licensing laws and practices: a historical perspective.

Cultural practices, in this instance the consumption of alcohol, are subject to organisation and control – therefore they are politically determined. State control exercised through 'legal and administrative order' (Craib, 1997:138) that permeates through all areas of the drinks industry, impacts upon drinkers, drinks providers, products and practices. According to Cassidy and McGrath the licensed vintner is 'at the coalface of the implementation of social policy on the safe use of alcohol' (2008, preface), however, the drinker as a consumer also plays a key role in the prudent use

(or misuse) of alcohol. While on the one hand, Marshall's approach¹ to political action gives the impression of an egalitarian system, Fornas², however, identifies power structures that 'tend to invade the lifeworld' (1995:71). If drinking practices are explained exclusively as a project of capitalism, processes not wholly determined by producer/consumer relations may be overlooked. When the drinks industry is explored at the economic level, this cannot be successfully accomplished without taking into account the cultural context as well as the principles and the organisational systems within which capitalism operates. Finally, when regulatory processes that define and shape drinking practices are discussed, their cultural (societal) origins and underlying economic influences must be taken into account.

It is not the intention to trace the evolution of the licensing laws or other fields of legislation that are relevant to the drinks industry and that regulate the cultural practices of drinking, however, some references to historical political processes give insight into how contemporary drinking practices are shaped by law. For example, local authorities in the growing urban areas of ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt implemented the 'control of alcohol production, distribution and consumption' (Barbor, 2003:4). During the period 1914 – 1921, laws prohibiting 'all or most forms of beverage alcohol' (Barbor, 2003:4) were adopted in the United States, Canada, Norway, Finland Iceland and Russia and in Ireland, Brehon Law makes references to beer, mead and wine (Molloy, 2002:12). Political control of the drinks industry and of alcohol consumption practices that originated and

¹ Marshall (1993) argues that all stakeholders in a business share the same democratic rights, therefore can involve themselves in the decision-making process through political action.

² Fornas (1995) argues that the state through a bureaucratic system and 'shared acknowledgement of legitimate power' imposes regulation upon society.

developed along with the industry itself, can be seen to have evolved within a cultural and economic framework that is present at any given time.

The drinks industry and drinking practices in Ireland have been subject to regulation from as early as the 6th century. The present day ‘licensing code’ (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008) has its roots in earlier laws that have changed over time in response to social and cultural conditions. Described as ‘lengthy and complex’ (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008), the present code relating to licensing dates back to 1833. Information relating to the provision and consumption of alcohol in Ireland comes mainly from legal texts dating from the 12th century, however, much of their contents were documented during the 6th and 7th centuries. Norman (licensing) law applied to the establishment and operation of the tavern, the forerunner of the present day public house. The first taverners were ‘off-sales’ wine merchants who imported and supplied wine to the nobility therefore, the off-license ‘begat the pub’ (Molloy, 2002:17). Legal texts also give account of social changes over time, for example when licensed taverns became places of ‘fluid and flexible individual tastes’ (Bennett and Watson, 2002:209), where business was conducted and food and alcohol was consumed. By the 1600s the words ‘tavern’ and ‘alehouse’ were used interchangeably to describe places that sold beer and wine, while the term ‘public house’ (abbreviated to ‘pub’ in the Victorian period) was used in legal documentation and in conversation. Dublin City Corporation records for 1667 show that over 1,500 premises sold alcohol, the continuing increase in trading licenses indicating changes in social life and revealing a significant (growing) source of revenue to the exchequer (Molloy, 2002:29).

In view of the growing trend in alcohol consumption towards the end of the 1600s, further legislation was introduced that restricted hours of trading. The Lord's Day Act, 1685 as well as introducing new procedures for the annual renewal of trading licenses, also prohibited Sunday trading "during the hours of divine service" (Molloy, 2002:31). The constabulary were responsible for the implementation of licensing laws, (considered an exercise in political control rather than a control over the sale of alcohol) as unlicensed trading was permitted at public social events such as races, fairs and during court assizes. Legislation introduced by William of Orange in 1700 decreed that all 'pint vessels in pubs bear an assay mark' (Molloy, 2002:37), thus ensuring that drinkers were given the correct measure, a concept that developed over time and applies (along with set hours of trading and licensing regulations) to the present-day drinks industry.

6. 2. Alcohol: social costs and benefits.

While re-stating that this study centres on the drinking practices of the moderate or social (non-problematic) drinker, the misuse of alcohol merits some discussion due to the indirect impact of misuse upon the drinks industry in general and on social drinking practices in particular. The politicisation (control) of alcohol, the drinks industry and drinking practices in Ireland developed over time along cultural and economic lines. The potentially destructive impact of alcohol as a drug upon social life is evidenced along with the significant beneficial role of alcohol to the economy. Alcohol as a substance that is potentially addictive has mind altering properties that change human behaviour, and can have profound health, social and legal consequences when misused. A public health approach to the misuse of

alcohol, a 'psychoactive substance' (www.who.int/globalatlas/default.asp.) endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), recognises that 'alcohol contributes to a wide range of health, social and behavioural problems in terms of its toxicity, its potential to create dependency and its negative impact on human behaviour' (Strategic Task Force on Alcohol, Second Report, 2004:5). The 'overall aim of the National Alcohol policy, launched in 1996, is to reduce the level of alcohol-related problems and to promote moderation for those who wish to drink 'Working Together to Reduce the Harms caused by Alcohol Misuse' (February, 2006:4) (www.meas.ie). In Ireland, research is carried out by The Health Research Board (HRB) for the purpose of improving people's health and wellbeing. Data is used to establish health information systems that in turn are used by health professionals and by social policy-makers in their work. Research-based evidence that attempts to quantify the 'burden of alcohol harm' to the drinker and to the wider society, identify a 'range of health and social problems' (Hope, 2008) that are linked directly to the misuse of alcohol. The 'Strategic Task Force on Alcohol' (STFA) was established by the Minister for Health and Children in January 2002; the brief was to 'recommend specific, evidence-based measures to Government to reduce and prevent alcohol related harm in Ireland' (STFA: Second Report. 2004:5).

As well as taking cognisance of personal 'alcohol related harm' (STFA, 2004) as a social 'cost', economic 'costs and benefits' that also play a key role in the formation of social policy, must be taken into account. In terms of 'benefit' figures for 2002 show that the number of liquor licenses issued included 9896 to publicans, 808 to off-license outlets and 279 special restaurant licenses. Average weekly expenditure on alcohol was calculated as 5.5% of total household expenditure,

amounting to a total outgoing of almost €6billion in 2002 (STFA, 2004:12). Excise duty receipts accounted for almost €1billion, while VAT yielded €897million, giving a total of approximately €1.8billion to the exchequer from alcohol taxes alone. In terms of ‘cost’, figures such as those issued for 2003 that show an overall cost to the exchequer of €2.65billion includes €433million for healthcare (as a consequence of the misuse of alcohol) and €147.5million as the cost of alcohol-related crime (STFA, 2004:20). Research projects such as ‘Alcohol Consumption in Ireland’ (1986-2006) supported by statistics compiled by the STFA inform social policy at the highest level. Recommendations such as the Responsible Serving of Alcohol (RSA) programme (STFA, 2004:27) and support for non-government organisations (NGOs) and networks deemed as ‘competent in informing and mobilising civil society, with respect to alcohol related problems (STFA, 2004:31), underpin the formulation of policy and drafting of regulations that apply to the alcohol industry in Ireland and consequently to social drinkers. A considerable proportion of legislation associated with alcohol and with practices of consumption originates with the misuse of alcohol, however, most policy-making during the past century has been ‘incremental, deliberate and respectful of people’s rights to drink in moderation’ (Barbor, 2003:4). Despite having respect for individual choices regarding alcohol consumption, short and long-term consequences of alcohol abuse form the basis for a set of regulatory codes by which the problem drinker and the social drinker alike are bound.

The presence of alcohol in Irish society and the manner in which alcohol is consumed, gives rise to conflict on two levels. Firstly, at the micro-level, the consumption of alcohol as a social and cultural practice for the individual is a pleasurable activity that is always in opposition to the potential for personal damage,

a consequence of alcohol misuse. Secondly, at a societal level, the costs and benefits of the drinks industry are measured. Cost to the exchequer for example, €2.4 billion in 1999 (Drugnet, [Health Research Board quarterly Newsletter] 2004) is balanced according to economic costs in terms of health and social wellbeing vis-à-vis the significant social and economic benefits to the Irish economy. The merits and demerits of the drinks industry and of alcohol consumption practices are ongoing subjects of debate, often resulting in the establishment of groups and organisations devoted to modification/liberalisation/constraint of alcohol distribution and consumption. In the next section organisations that were active during the period 2000-2005 are examined in terms of their origins and objectives that ultimately paved the way towards transforming the social world of the contemporary drinker through new forms of regulation or amendments to existing regulation.

6. 3. Political role of indigenous organisations and interest groups.

Contemporary social drinking practices along with the broader drinks industry is governed and is shaped by an array of legal constraints and obligations. Some contemporary regulations, for example, ‘diminished responsibility’ due to intoxication, date from pre-Christian times and have roots in Brehon Law (Molloy, 2002:12). Research, identification and resolution of the problematic aspects of alcohol consumption, is an ongoing political issue³. Regulations and laws evolve as researchers and experts construct strategies that address an array of problems associated with the use and misuse of alcohol. Imposed regulatory constraints, perceived as contrary to ‘business interests’ and sometimes perceived as oppositional

³ The impact of the misuse of alcohol upon society is a subject for discussion and action where expert knowledge and legislative power come together, for example health budget allocation and crime rate/justice matters.

to consumer (drinker) demands, generate new structures and new practices that change and re-shape the social world of the contemporary social drinking experience.

The drinks trade from its commencement has been subject to regulation that over time is becoming increasingly more complex and fragmented. The complexity of alcohol-related laws linked to a changing economic and cultural climate, impacts (from the perspective of the drinks provider) at the level of consumption⁴. Laws that apply to the drinks industry in Ireland originate from a variety of sources such as indigenous organisations and associations that represent social, cultural and business interests and from external sources such as European laws that have been adopted into Irish law. Civil society according to Hegelian philosophy, is ‘premised on the recognition that the ‘general good’ can only be realised through the enforcement of law and the conscious direction of the state’ (Held, 2002:132). Organisations currently in existence represent separate ‘interests’, such as those of the publican, the bar-worker, those who advocate and justify the control of alcohol and who consequentially, claim to represent the interests and wellbeing of the drinker/consumer.

The following named organisations are some examples of representative bodies that further business interests; trade unions/industrial relations groups; health and safety authorities and advocates for equality, each having close association with the operation of the public house:

~ Business interests are represented by two key groups; the ‘Vintners Federation of Ireland’ (VFI) (www.vfi.ie) and ‘Licensed Vintners

⁴ Marshall (1993:21) argues that knowledge of the changing economic and political environment and the ability to adapt to change, is essential to the survival of the modern business.

Association' (LVA) (www.lva.ie) whose task is to lobby Public Representatives on behalf of drinks-providers.

- ~ As the organisation that formalises the relationship between workers and management, the trade union movement through the process of 'industrial relations' (Joseph, 1989:117) provides a buffer in times of conflict. Trade Unions exist to represent and support their members, to improve the wellbeing (pay and working conditions) of workers. In the power relationship between workers and management, trade unions 'direct conflict through legitimate channels' (Joseph, 1989:134), for example, operating through the social partnership agreement 'Programme for Prosperity and Fairness' (2000-2003) and through collective bargaining mechanisms.
- ~ The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) a national 'state sponsored body' with 'responsibility for securing health and safety at work', (www.hsa.ie), played a central role in the campaign for 'smoke-free workplaces' that resulted in a smoking ban in all 'enclosed spaces' of employment (www.hsa.ie/eng/Workplace_Health/Smokefree_Workplaces/). While some restrictions already applied to the smoking of tobacco products in accordance with the 'Tobacco (Health Promotion and Protection) Act 1988 and the Tobacco (Health Promotion and Protection) Regulations 1995, legislative changes under the Public Health (Tobacco) Act, 2002 meant major changes in the public house environment that restricted freedom to smoke and altered drinking practices.
- ~ The 'Equality Authority' (www.equality.ie), an independent State body established in 1999, works towards the elimination of discrimination in

employment and in access to goods and services, safeguarding the rights of workers as well as consumers.

- ~ Legal processors (lawyers) and law enforcers (Garda) play key roles in the drinks trade due to the 'Statutory' frameworks within which the industry operates

The bulk of new regulatory controls, apply to and impact upon alcohol and to the manner in which it is retailed and consumed. With health and societal wellbeing at their core, an array of organisations, have over time strove to control or modify drinking practices using appropriate strategies. A health strategy published by the Irish government to tackle excessive drinking set out proposals for 'promoting moderation in alcohol consumption' (National Alcohol Policy, 1996), followed the endorsement of the 'European Charter on Alcohol' in December, 1995, along with 48 member states of the World Health Organisation (WHO) European region. The objective of the 'health promotion strategy' was to encourage people to take responsibility for their own health and to provide the necessary environmental supports to achieve this. The information that 1 standard drink (SD) contains 10grammes of pure alcohol was widely and intensively circulated. The expectation was that quantifying measures of alcohol for example, 1 SD = 1/2 pint beer = single measure spirit = small glass of wine (STFA, 2nd Report, September, 2004:49) would enable drinkers to monitor intake. The aim of programmes that inform and educate is to create a mindset in relation to alcohol where mature and reflexive thinking will lead to the making of 'right choices'. These aspirations may be compared with the work of Fr Theobald Matthew in Cork in the 1800s. Fr Matthew's Temperance Movement was founded in response to the 'detrimental effects' of excessive

consumption of alcohol on family life. While modern-day self regulation calls for moderation and a ‘common-sense’ approach, Fr Matthew favoured total abstinence from all alcoholic beverages (Hyland.1995).

Present day policies are formulated in an attempt to put into effect a co-ordinated approach when developing initiatives that target the individual or that have a broader environmental objective:

- ~ Professional bodies such as the ‘Strategic Task Force on Alcohol’(Kiely, 2004) and the ‘Liquor Licensing Commission’ (Holmes, 2003) whose remit is the health and welfare of drinkers and the wellbeing of society, play an active part in the creation (through the legislative process) of the social world of the drinker.
- ~ ‘Mature Enjoyment of Alcohol in Society Limited’ (MEAS) (www.meas.ie) however, deviates from the single interest model insofar as its mission is twofold. Firstly, the objective is to promote social responsibility among producers, marketers, distributors and retailers of alcohol in Ireland and secondly, in partnership with Government and other appropriate bodies, to promote the mature enjoyment of alcohol amongst consumers. While MEAS’s origins lie in the umbrella group Drinks Industry Group of Ireland (DIGI), MEAS has ‘no economic purpose and is operationally independent from drinks industry companies’ www.meas.ie.
- ~ The European Alcohol Policy Conference, Warsaw (June, 2004) was attended by participants from 32 countries including Ireland. The theme was ‘bridging the gap between scientists, policy makers and programme implementers’ (Rutherford, 2004). The ‘WHO European Alcohol Action Plan’ (2000-2005)

reflects member States individual action plans to prevent and reduce alcohol related harm. According to the WHO Status Report on Alcohol Policy, single policies are less effective than several policies working together in a co-ordinated way. The Irish strategy for example, combines increased taxation on alcohol, stronger laws and education/media programmes that particularly target young people. In order to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm, Hope, in her presentation concludes that ‘as alcohol is no ordinary commodity’...‘we have to adjust our attitudes, behaviour and environment’ (2004:23)

In the RTE investigative documentaries, ‘*Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*’ (28/11/2002); ‘*Juvenile Crime*’ (alcohol and drugs) (1/12/2003), links were established between the rise in anti-social behaviour and alcohol consumption patterns particularly among teenagers. In response to excesses in alcohol consumption such as those highlighted and supported by experts in health and justice fields the following programme was launched. The project ‘Respect Alcohol, Respect Yourself’, (National Campaign to Highlight Risks Run by Young Drinkers), a joint initiative by Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and MEAS, was launched on April 7th 2003. A ‘hard-hitting’ campaign, aimed at young drinkers highlights the dangers of alcohol abuse such as ‘accidental injury, short and long-term health problems, violence, anti-social behaviour or becoming a victim of crime’ (www.meas.ie/newsdeskarchive). As well as the programme aimed at young drinkers, the MEAS Code of Practice ‘requires drinks producers, distributors and licensees to ensure that alcohol is sold and promoted in a socially responsible manner and only to those 18 years and over’ (www.meas.ie). Organisations that represent

the interests of drinkers, the drinks industry and the wellbeing of society, emerge from an array of single-issue concerns and develop into collective political action that has the potential to achieve legal/official status. Drinkers as a social group, however, tend not to organise formally for the purpose of influencing legislative processes that alter drinking practices. Instead, drinkers respond in an expedient manner where regulatory changes are managed as and when they arise.

Having established a link between increased alcohol consumption practices and social harm (Mongan, Hope and Nelson, 2009) tensions between business interests and policy-makers became evident as two contesting processes actively compete. Bearing in mind that Ireland in the early 2000s was experiencing a period of increased prosperity, the assumption that alcohol consumption rates had also increased was challenged. According to claims made by publicans through their representative organisations the Vintners Federation of Ireland (citing the Household Budget Survey 2000), alcohol and tobacco purchases are steadily decreasing, showing a 0.4% drop in the period 1995-2000, however, the *amount* spent increased by 45.6% over the same period. Contrary to the assertion that the drinks trade is in decline are counter-claims that alcohol abuse is on the increase. Organisations such as L.V.A. and V.F.I. exist to promote the clear objectives of those they represent, namely, the publicans. Drinkers, as a social group, come together to consume, are largely without representation and do not organise politically. The State as defender of the common good, operates with ‘legitimacy’ and ‘authority’ (Held, 2002 and makes its’ presence felt at all levels of the alcohol industry, from production and distribution to purchase and consumption.

Conflict between business interests, consumer desires and preferences and the general wellbeing of society, culminates in a set of rules that are largely defined by alcohol *misuse*. Crucially, it is within this legal framework that the *moderate* social drinker is obliged to operate. Mindful of the fact that this project concerns itself only with mainstream social (unproblematic) drinking practices, misuse of alcohol cannot entirely be set aside. Alcohol-related anti-social behaviour and the prevalence of alcohol addiction play a central role in the formation of legislation that controls the sale and consumption of alcohol. In the conflict between societal health and wellbeing and business interests, evidence that might suggest a decline in the *frequency* of visits and a reduction in the *time* spent in the public house, (Household Budget Survey, 2000) is contested as the quantity of alcohol consumed or the age profile of consumers is not stated. It is against this background of (visible) excesses in alcohol consumption and alcohol-related anti-social behaviour that the endeavours of diverse ‘interests’ are activated and come into being, for the purpose of controlling and reducing alcohol consumption rates.

6. 4. The drinks industry: operating within structural (statutory) boundaries.

Participants in the research process (publicans) expressed concern regarding recent and forth-coming regulatory changes and their anticipated impact upon business. For publicans, organisations such as the Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) and the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA) play a central role in safeguarding the drinks industry, particularly when changes in legislation are imminent. The VFI, a ‘strong National Trade association for pubs outside of the greater Dublin area’, functions to ‘promote and protect their [publicans] interests and

to advise members on topics such as licensing laws, employment legislation, planning matters and much more' (www.vfi.ie.) The VFI, according to their mission statement, 'keep watch on all proceedings of the Oireachtas with a view to taking steps to promote/protect the interests of members' (www.vfi.ie). The LVA, founded in 1817, 'represent the publicans of Dublin and protect and promote their strategic business interests' (www.lva.ie). Highlighting the importance and anticipated implications of legislation to the drinks industry, the LVA claim to 'work closely with the government and civil service on alcohol policy and taxation, as well as legislation and licensing issues of relevance to our members' (www.lva.ie). When there is conflict of interests between the state and the drinks industry, representation and negotiation carried out by the LVA on behalf of members, 'given the highly regulated nature of the licensed trade' is regarded as a 'critically important function' (www.lva.ie) calling for cooperation and compromise.

Vintner's organisations (LVA and VFI) as well as acting for and negotiating on behalf of members on all matters relating to the industry, pay particular attention to statutory issues. Alcohol as a drug has been identified by the WHO as the 'fifth largest risk factor for the global burden of injury and disease...and the third largest factor in industrialised countries' (Hill, 2004:45). The aim of scientific studies such as the '*Global Status Report on Alcohol, 1999*' and the '*Global Status Report: Young People and Alcohol, 2001*', is to 'raise international awareness about the need for alcohol policies... and the encouragement of effective policy making by member countries' (Hill, 2004:46). International studies along with statistics from Irish organisations such as the Health Research Board and Alcohol Action Ireland, inform policy-making and help shape regulatory controls at all levels of the drinks industry.

For the publican a working knowledge of new or amended regulations, (for example, changes to the Liquor Licensing Act that have a direct impact upon the drinks trade), is essential to the lawful operation of a public house. The LVA and the VFI monitor changes in the law relating to the sale and consumption of alcohol and to the operation of a public house, offering support and advice regarding the necessary responses appropriate to changing regulatory controls. Comprehension of regulatory changes, the provision of information and direction to members, and the establishment of operational guidelines, equip publicans with the knowledge and the confidence to operate within legal/official boundaries. While publicans as an organised group have structures in place to represent, protect and inform, drinkers, on the other hand rely on media debates and government press releases for information on any proposed changes that might impact upon heretofore routine alcohol consumption practices. During the course of this research, issues that were of concern to social drinkers, for example, right of admission to a public house (an issue raised by the Equality Authority) became subjects of public debate. Increased presence of door-security gave rise to ‘access’ issues that in some cases, culminated in violence. A lowering of blood-alcohol levels for drivers sparked further debate, particularly among rural drinkers. The proposal and implementation of a smoking-ban, however, gave rise to the greatest controversy, from the time it was first mooted until its implementation.

According to my research global processes manifest themselves in two distinct ways. Firstly, a hybridization of cultural ideas and practices where ‘local difference is eroded by the rise of global cultural preferences’ (Smith, 2001:230) occurs as a consequence of increased human mobility and of the upsurge in

communications technology that exemplifies post-modernity. While the adoption of global cultural ideas and practices (for example, the consumption of food in the public house), might not have an immediately apparent ‘political’ consequence, the practice of serving and consuming food has become a highly regulated activity. As well as the National organisations that effect legislation relating to the distribution and consumption of food and alcohol there is also an array of *external* factors that regulate the social drinking environment. External forces that are perceived to ‘restrict the freedom of action of governments and states by blurring the boundaries of domestic politics’ (Held, 2002:352) filter through to take effect at the micro-level. In Ireland, the provision of alcoholic beverages, food and entertainment is subject to ever-increasing regulations that set standards, apply limitations and impose obligations and responsibilities upon providers. The European Union has, according to the Department of Foreign Affairs, been a ‘leader in the field of consumer protection’ (www.eumatters.ie) as EU regulations that apply to the food and drink industries are adopted and implemented.

Secondly, the adoption of European Law in areas of employment, equality and consumer protection has played a significant role in the administration of the contemporary Irish public house. European Law that has a direct bearing on national policy-making, in turn transforms legal structures and administrative practices that permeate the public house environment, the drinks industry and consumption practices. Indigenous organisations such as ‘LVA’ and ‘VFI’ advance business interests and bodies such as ‘MEAS’ and ‘HSA’ adopt a public health approach to alcohol. Global or external forces (a relatively recent concept) impact upon the drinks trade, the drinkers and upon alcohol-related activities, in ways that are

symptomatic of post-modern Ireland. The traditional practice of consuming alcohol without food (Stivers, 2000:10-30) over an indefinite period underwent a gradual transition when food became available in the public house and consumption of food outside of domestic space became a routine practice.

6. 5. Food hygiene regulations: the global (European) factor.

When laws relating to the supply and consumption of food, along with food hygiene regulations were incorporated into the Irish legal system, costs and benefits to the public and protection for the consumer had cultural, economic and regulatory implications. The ‘Food Safety Authority of Ireland’ (FSAI) a ‘statutory, independent and science-based body, dedicated to protecting public health and consumer interests in the area of food safety and hygiene’ (www.fsai.ie) was established. The ‘Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act, 1998’ granted considerable powers to officials who monitor the handling of food and who enforce food legislation. In reference to the origin of Irish law, the FSAI claim that ‘most if not all our legislation derives from Ireland’s membership of the European Union’ (www.fsai.ie). Food Hygiene regulations, according to Respondent R⁵, a food hygiene consultant, are devised and implemented for the protection of consumers. In the transition from serving alcohol to providing food and alcohol (40% of public houses), the role of the Environmental Health Officer is to advise regarding ‘legal obligations under food safety law including structural design and layout, training, food safety management systems and registration with the Health Service Executive

⁵ Respondent R is a food hygiene consultant who advises proprietors and managers in the hospitality industries and delivers training to food-handlers. His remit is two-fold: to safeguard public health (consumers) and to facilitate compliance with food-hygiene laws.

(HSE)' (www.hse.ie). In the interest of consumer protection, standards and guidelines for bar-workers who also handle food are established and monitored:

'they[EHOs] literally walk in off the streets and they look for four things, first thing they look at is the structural hygiene of the premises, dirt not lodging, easily cleanable, there's no pests coming into the place. Second thing they look for is operational hygiene... the standard of hygiene practiced by staff working in the kitchens, how they handle the food. Third thing is personal hygiene, are they showered, is their hair clean, is it covered, have they clean uniforms on. The fourth thing they look for is HACCP documentation that would include delivery check sheets, temperature check sheets, cooking check sheets... a whole plethora of other documents relating to the handling of food on the premises. (Respondent R, food hygiene consultant, Dublin)

Trained bar-workers, who then put into practice the necessary knowledge and skills when handling food, play a crucial role in the protection of consumers, however, the publican has overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with the relevant regulations. The knowledge that enables bar-workers to identify potential (health) risks and the ability to reduce such risks translates into a range of new practices that are not only carried out, but are also recorded:

'HACCP stands for 'Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point' ... hazard is a potential danger that might occur and cause food poisoning, it's the responsibility of the proprietor to anticipate those hazards and eliminate them... if they cant be eliminated CCP points must be put in place... flies, for example, the ordinary housefly or bluebottle is a hazard, very easy to eliminate by putting up fly-screens on doors and windows,... bacteria too small, so to prevent growth of bacteria to dangerous levels, the chef has to put in place CCPs. such as storage – all storage has to be below 5 to inhibit the growth of bacteria, personal hygiene standards have to be adhered to, cross-contamination must be avoided' (Respondent R, food hygiene consultant, Dublin)*

While the financial costs of structural (environmental) change and training are considerable, monitoring and strict enforcement of food hygiene regulations along with the consequences of non-compliance can be a source of conflict:

'there are two main areas of conflict at the moment. First, it's between the Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) or 'law enforcers' and the

proprietors of the food business. A 'food business' may not have the money to get everything right and the EHO wants everything to be right. The second conflict occurs between the suppliers of food to premises that have HACCP in place. If a pub or restaurant has HACCP in place, it is recommended that they only purchase from suppliers that have HACCP or similar quality control themselves' (Respondent R, food hygiene consultant, Dublin)

Changes in business practices such as restructuring or change of use of the public house environment, retraining of staff and the time spent in the administration and monitoring of the necessary procedures, all incur additional financial investment. Despite the imposition of added financial costs, compliance with Food Hygiene regulations is advantageous and can benefit the business in a variety of ways. For example, as well as establishing standards that confer prestige on products and services, it also offers a degree of protection in the event of legal action taken by customers:

The 'upside' for the proprietor... of the food business... if HACCP is in place, and hygiene training done... there's a lower risk of high claims... in the case of a person claiming that they have a case of food poisoning, for example, if the proprietor produces documentation saying they have been taking temperatures, everything done right, the judge may throw the case out because the person (claimant) can't prove that the restaurant was negligent, that's the main incentive, (Respondent R, food hygiene consultant, Dublin)

While Food Hygiene regulations could be said to have a greater impact on business practices and on the material environment of the public house, the benefits for the consumer although less visible, are highly significant. The power and the performance of the EHO while not explicitly evident to the consumer, plays a crucial role in securing standards and practices in all areas and all stages of food preparation and consumption:

the Health Inspector can now walk into a food premises and close you down, they can insist the place be cleaned up or structural [physical structure] changes made if things are really bad and there is immediate

danger to public health'... . 'at the end of the day, it's all done for the safety of the consumer, the whole aim of all these regulations is to reduce the instances of food poisoning to the consumer.(Respondent R, food hygiene consultant, Dublin)

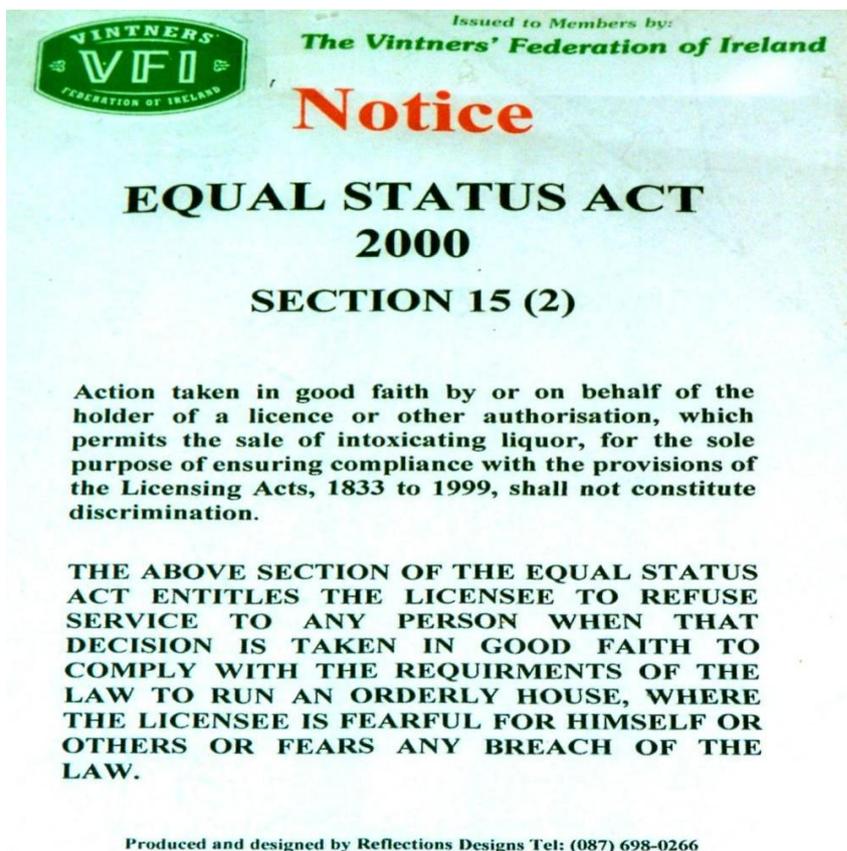
The operation of Food Hygiene regulations in the public house is but one example of how external forces impact upon business practices at the economic and regulatory levels, and on food and alcohol consumption at the cultural level. A new business model that embraces diversification and work practices such as up-skilling and the performance of an expanding range of tasks are essential as new products and services develop. For the social drinker, the availability - particularly of hot food has radically altered the public house experience. Flows of people throughout the day have increased, and food orders within particular time-frames can exceed alcohol orders. (Respondent G, publican, Limerick City and Respondent N, publican, Annascaul, Co Kerry).

The transformation of drinking spaces into dining spaces (lunch-time trade) has altered what was traditionally a leisurely space of alcohol consumption into a place that is newly defined by the presence of time-conscious diners and the aroma of food that permeates throughout the public house. While food safety legislation is put in place for the benefit of the consumer (a health and social gain), it impacts considerably on the drinks trade as an added financial liability. Food Hygiene Regulations are but one aspect of the global forces that permeate the social world of the drinker. In the next section, analysis of the public house as a regulated environment operating within statutory constraints and obligations is undertaken.

6. 6. Directives that influence accessibility and security

Regulatory changes while perceived by drinkers as damaging (or as socially beneficial) to traditional drinking practices, were sometimes interpreted differently by publicans. For example, the ‘Equal Status Act’ (2000) ‘to promote equality and prohibit types of discrimination, harassment and related behaviour in connection with the provision of services’, secured for members of minority groups right of ‘access to and the use of any place, facilities for....entertainment, recreation or refreshment’ (www.equalityauthority.ie). The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, John O’Donoghue T.D. described the Equal Status Bill, (1999) on passing the final stage in the Dail, as ‘a groundbreaking measure which has the potential to positively affect many areas of Irish life’ (Government Press Release, 19/4/2000. info@justice.ie).

For publicans, managers and bar-workers, the politicisation of the Drinks Industry, of the public house as a place ‘produced through the reiteration of practices’ (Cresswell, 2004:82), has an ever-increasing impact on work practices. As well as performing a service function, the bar-worker/publican also plays a crucial role in the implementation of government policy, for example compliance with the Equal Status Act. Management and workers in the public house however, are according to law ‘obliged to keep an orderly house’ (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008:20) and to control the behaviour of drinkers and their drinking practices. The following image of a publicly displayed notice, shows attempts to clarify the disparity between acts of ‘discrimination’ and the running an ‘orderly house’:



6. 6. 1. Equal Status Act 2000.

This prominently displayed notice (bearing the VFI logo) states that in reference to the Equal Status Act granting access to public places of refreshment, is the proviso that 'action (to exclude) taken in good faith'...'shall not constitute discrimination' (Equal Status Act, (2000), section 15-(2)).

While all aspects of legislation carry a varying degree of sanctions, legislation such as the Equal Status Act, 2000' that protects the rights of minorities and affords mechanisms for 'redress' (section 21), is also perceived to have further consequences. Closely linked with 'Equal Status Act' (2000) anti-discrimination legislation is the concept of 'security' and the presence of security staff who implement a 'door policy' whereby potential customers are greeted, vetted and are allowed (or refused) entry. A consequence of prosperity, increased leisure-time and

the diversity of goods and services, is the increasing flow of people in the public house that calls for crowd monitoring and control. The Irish Security Training Authority (ISTA) was established in 1998 for the purpose of training staff for the ‘night time leisure and entertainment security industry’ (www.securitytraining.ie). Door Supervisors and Door Stewards who are the ‘first point of contact with the patron’ (ISTA) are expected to behave in a professional manner, be vigilant and have a working knowledge of the Intoxicating Liquor Act(s).

Where location and capacity of a public house merits a security presence, door stewards are perceived as having a role that is both practical (active involvement) and preventative (deterrent):

‘where there’s an increasing number of people in ever decreasing spaces, it is important to know what’s going down, take control if you have to... know when to act... how to act... and signs that let people know about the cameras ... is often enough (Respondent V, security consultant, Clonmel, Co Tipperary.⁶)

Introduction of the Private Security Services Act (2004) has instituted a new industry; the training, recruitment and placement of security personnel. Respondent V, director of a security agency is mindful of the negative public image of door/security staff that is perpetuated in the media. His stated goal is to enhance the status of security work and the reputation of security officers through education and training:

‘training of security personnel is complex... each worker should have a knowledge of the laws that apply to the hospitality industry, they should know what their responsibilities are, what their limitations are, when to call in the gardai and such like. The long-term goal for those in security work is to have a respected occupation... some prestige... that dissociates itself from the current reputation of criminals and bullies that

⁶ Respondent V, based in Clonmel, Co Tipperary recruits, trains and supplies security staff to public houses, nightclubs shopping centres and factories.

have on occasion appeared before the courts on serious criminal charges’ (Respondent V, security consultant, Clonmel, Co Tipperary)

Respondent T,⁷ a regular city-centre social drinker, supports the role of door security staff⁷ as essential for the safety and comfort of drinkers and bar-workers. In justifying the role of door staff and the implementation of door policy as an essential service, particularly in large-capacity urban public houses, the focus shifts from protection of drinkers to defending the decision-making rights of the publican:

‘every asshole and knacker is running the publicans business for him... with the help of the courts, judges are biased against door people...don’t like the word bouncer. It’s an important job, the protection of customers and staff from drunks and troublemakers...three good reasons for refusing admission –age, IDs can be suspect... under the influence of alcohol or other substances and what is believed to be a potential troublemaker... by their attitude and appearance... not clothes, accent or colour’ (Respondent T, drinker, male, 50+).

Access to the public house in terms of travel (transportation) can also be problematic when location of the ‘local’ is beyond walking distance or not served by public transport. Statistics show that on average 120 people – drivers, passengers and pedestrians lose their lives in alcohol-related road accidents each year, ‘Alcohol Action Ireland’ (www.alcoholactionireland.ie). For drivers, the legal blood alcohol limit of 80 milligrams per 100 millilitres ‘Road Traffic Act’, 1994, (section 49(2)) must not be exceeded. Anti-drunk-driving campaigns such as ‘Just Two Will Do’ (1984) ‘captured the sociability of drinking in Irish society’...and claimed that a maximum of two drinks ‘made it almost impossible to go over the limit’ (Cassidy, 1998:169). In 1992 a Television advertising campaign that evoked personal culpability used images that conjured up ‘feelings of anticipated guilt at the very idea

⁷ Respondent T is a retired Garda with ‘door’ experience in public houses and nightclubs.

of being responsible for an accident or death' (Cassidy, 1998:170). The shift from general acceptance of a legally defined amount of alcohol (for drivers) to consumption of non-alcoholic beverages or use of alternative means of transport has created new regulatory boundaries and new drinking practices that impact mainly on the drinker. In response, MEAS (www.meas.ie) launched the Designated Driver Campaign in 2003, supported by Budweiser (who awarded prizes) and Coca-Cola who agreed to provide beverages free of charge, three non-alcoholic drinks, in 'participating venues' over a specific time period to the 'designated driver'.

6. 7. Consequences of regulation for the drinks trade and for drinkers.

In a critique of contemporary regulatory amendments, Respondent A, male drinker, argues against the emergence of further rules and constraints and instead favours the traditional way of managing 'problem' drinking. For Respondent A, changes over time in the way bar workers operate (using initiative) and changes in drinking practices (from leisurely consumption to getting drunk quickly, drinking 'shots') are evident. In A's opinion, some 'common-sense' methods have been actively discouraged and replaced by operational methods that have a legal or structural basis. Refusal of service for example, must now have a legal basis which is stated and implemented in a way that complies with Equality legislation. While hypothetically a system of operational procedures is in place, the following opinion indicates that in practice, commercial interests often dictate:

'there's enough laws in the system to control it, in the old days if someone drank too much, they wouldn't be served...people get known, messers wouldn't be served... was more control then,... staff not doing it now... pack as much in,... sell as much as they can... society picks up the pieces' (Respondent, A, drinker, male, 60+)

Traditional values and ways of being are replaced with ‘rational’ (Weber ([1905] 1998; 1946) or considered courses of action that are structured and systematised. New procedures that are put in place for their efficiency rather than for ‘customary’ or ‘time-honoured’ motives have a bureaucratic or legal-rational basis. Political control and social organisation in a democratic society manifests itself as a system whereby ‘power is exercised by the people as a whole’ (Macionis and Plummer, 1997:442) for the purpose of maintaining social order and for the betterment of society. Society as ‘an organised community that controls a certain territory, locality or place; that is structured by institutions that distribute positions, roles and statuses to these individuals; and that is reproduced over time’ (Fornas, 1995:50), encompasses human agents, their values, their actions and the structures within which they operate.

Amendments to the ‘Tobacco Health Protection and Promotion Act’ (1995) controlling smoking in the workplace, meant the implementation of a smoking ban in the public house. This controversial phenomenon was considered a major challenge to the drinks trade, and a disruptive influence that would change the nature of social interaction and social drinking in Irish pubs. In the lead up to this occurrence, the proposal of a ban was vehemently debated. The 2002 report *‘The Health Effects of Environmental Tobacco Smoke in the Workplace’*, commissioned for the Office for Tobacco Control and the Health and Safety Authority, provided the ‘scientific basis for the government’s workplace ban’ (Houston, 2003). Introduced as a public health issue for the protection of workers, the proposal to ban cigarette smoking in the workplace was perceived as problematic – when the workplace in question was a public house. The ‘Irish Hospitality Industry Alliance’ (IHIA) was established to co-

ordinate a campaign to challenge the proposed ban. The IHIA argued that the ‘impending ban would interfere with civil liberties, would interfere with the ‘social fabric of society’, would have a negative impact and would not be properly enforced’. It was also predicted that over 64,000 jobs would be lost in the hospitality industry.

According to research carried out by McCaffrey et al, visiting 38 Dublin pubs pre-ban and again one year post-ban, the following conclusions were arrived at. The number of customers present at the time of the survey (post-ban) had increased by 11%, staffing levels had shown a decrease of 8.82%, however according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) this figure had increased to pre-ban levels by November 2005 (McCaffrey, et al, Irish Journal of Medical Science, vol 175, no 2, April, May, June, 2006:38). The most significant outcome, however, was the level of compliance with the new law. Despite speculation to the contrary, a press release from the Office of Tobacco Control (31/05/2004) showed that 97% of the premises inspected during the first month complied with the new law.

Prior to the enactment of the Public Health (Tobacco) Act, 2002 and Public Health (Amendment) Act 2004, vested interests such as the drinks industry in general and drinks providers in particular as well as legal and health professionals debated the merits and anticipated disadvantages of the proposed ban. Involvement of the state in what was considered a personal consumption and lifestyle choice, culminated in a legally binding prohibition on the practice of tobacco consumption in all workplaces (with some exceptions) from 29th March, 2004. Public debate that explored competing oppositional views regarding health issues on the one hand, and

individual freedom of choice on the other, raised awareness and altered perceptions regarding tobacco consumption among smokers and non-smokers alike.

The proposition of separating alcohol and tobacco consumption prior to March 2004 for smokers and non-smokers alike, proved difficult to imagine. Despite predictions to the contrary, the transition in the public house from a smoky to a smoke-free environment was accepted. Respondent P, female, aged 20 +, a non-smoker, regarded the preliminary information campaign in advance of 29/3/2004 as successful and expressed a new awareness of the harmful effects of passive smoking. As a consequence, Respondent P now actively avoids being in the company of someone while they smoke. For Respondent M, female, age 50+ and a smoker, the 'ban' was interpreted somewhat differently. While accepting the damage to personal health caused by tobacco, the 'right' to consume tobacco products was perceived as an individual choice, despite evidence of harm to others caused by passive smoking. While the wishes of smokers were (up to a point) respected, the health of workers (and non-smokers) was protected. The demise of the practice of consuming alcohol and tobacco products in the public house in the company of others is considered one of the most prolific leisure-time social and cultural changes in recent times.

Intensification of drink/driving legislation, the problematic of 'bouncers'⁸ and the establishment of separate zones for smokers, was of concern to publicans and drinkers alike. Business interests came into conflict with the wishes of drinkers and with 'common good' policies, culminating in an array of new directives that were instrumental in changing the social drinking environment. New practices at the

⁸ Slang term for door-staff or security guards operating in public houses and night-clubs.

micro level, such as those instituted by ‘Food Hygiene’ laws, ‘Equality’ legislation and ‘Health and Safety’ regulations, reshaped the social and material conditions of the drinking experience. For the drinker who for example, may share space with diners, have to negotiate admission or may relocate to consume tobacco, the informality⁹ of the drinking experience is contested. The traditional public house was understood as a place that was accessible at point of entry without barriers such as security personnel, monetary charge or a restrictive ‘door policy’. In some instances where proof of ‘right of entry’ was required, this procedure implied the right to refuse entry. For drinkers (car users), the inconvenience and monetary costs of alternative transportation, is presented as the cause of the decline in rural public house numbers and the rise in domestic consumption of alcohol.

6.8 Politicization of alcohol: the function of the State.

Policies that are put in place to regulate the distribution and consumption of alcohol transform business practices and reshape social drinking patterns. For the contemporary publican and the social drinker, imposed changes arise mainly from legislation that prohibits or restricts practices that are no longer considered acceptable and impose obligations that also have a legal (compliance) status. The following are but some examples of directives/sanctions that accompany new or amended legislation that reshape the drinks industry, the drinks trade and drinking practices:

- ~ According to the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 2003, publicans who supply alcohol to a customer whose demeanour and behaviour indicates

⁹ Oldenburg (1997) and Putnam (2000) argue the importance of informal social life associated with public and accessible places such as the public house.

drunkenness, are liable to a fine of €3,000 for a first offence and €5,000 for a subsequent offence. Equally, the sale of alcohol to people under the age of 18 years carries similar penalties (www.irishstatutebook.ie/2003/en/act/pub/0031/index.html).

- ~ Drinkers, under the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 are expected to behave with due respect to others, are expected to leave when asked to do so by the license holder or a member of the Gardai, failure to do so can lead to arrest or on-the-spot fine of €300.
- ~ Under the Road Traffic Act, 1994, it is illegal to drive or be in charge of a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol. If convicted, a fine, or imprisonment or both may apply. Disqualification from driving for a period decided by the court depends on the level of alcohol consumed.
- ~ The Public Health (Tobacco) Act, 2002, as well as setting out terms of prohibition also provided for the enforcement of the ban. The body known as the ‘Office of Tobacco Control’, first established in 1999, received statutory status in 2002 with the enactment of section 2 of the Public Health Tobacco Act, 2002 (www.otc.ie). Key functions of the office linked directly to enforcement of the Act, was ‘the maintenance of a register of retail premises’, to ‘coordinate a national inspection programme in cooperation with the health boards’ and to ‘conduct compliance testing on tobacco products’ (www.otc.ie).

Intensive regulation and political controls (enforcement) that apply to alcohol and to the drinks industry are sometimes perceived to undermine the autonomy and agency of the publican. New or amended legislation that translates into additional

fiscal costs, further obligations or statutory constraints that in effect limit free market processes, is perceived as contrary to capitalist goals¹⁰. Restrictions or impediments to the sale of alcohol are interpreted as follows:

'weakens the power of the publican, who believes that he is no longer fully in control of his business' (Respondent T, drinker, male, 50+).

Legislative constraints put in place to control the drinks trade are further underpinned by a strict enforcement policy. Legal constraints and obligations (and the potential sanctions) that permeate the drinks trade and the public house environment is a source of tension and anxiety and a threat to commercial viability. For Respondent U, political processes that manifest themselves as legal constraints are perceived as an obstacle to economic goals, and as an impediment to social drinking at the cultural level. For example, a request for alcohol at 'closing time' is at once a cultural manifestation (on the part of the drinker) and a commercially advantageous opportunity (for the publican) that has the potential to breach regulations relating to the supply and consumption of alcohol.

Political processes that control the drinks trade manifest themselves in several ways, for example laws that pertain to under-age drinking. According to the Intoxicating liquor Act 1988 (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008:25-29) under 15s, (who must be accompanied by parent or guardian) and under 18s must leave the public house at 9pm (one hour later during months May - September).

¹⁰ Marshall (1993:22) argues that in a mixed economy an awareness of the political forces and knowledge of political processes that make decisions and produce new laws, is an essential element in the operation of any business.



**INTOXICATING LIQUOR ACT
1988
SECTION 35**

Restriction on persons under the age of 18 years, being on licensed premises during extended hours.

It is an offence for a person who is under the age of 18 years to be on that part of the premises, being a part of the premises in respect of which an Exemption Order under Section 4 or 5, of the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 1927 or Section 10 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 1962, is in force, at any time during the period in respect of which the Exemption Order has been granted.

Issued to Members by:

The Vintners Federation of Ireland

N.B. Section 35 requires that the above Notice shall be displayed in a conspicuous place in the part of the licensed premises which is used on foot of an Exemption Order.

6. 8. 1. Intoxicating Liquor Act 1988.

The above notice regarding ‘under-age persons on the premises’, must by law be displayed in a ‘conspicuous place’. The dilemma for the publican in relation to under age customers or families with young children is multi-dimensional as the desire for profit and consumer demands are played out within a legal framework. This framework imposes a set of ideal conditions which publican and drinker alike are expected to adhere to, however, use of discretion in certain circumstances is argued for. Citing factors such as the provision of food, live music performance, rural location and a clientele who are mainly local families and transient car-ferry passengers, Respondent U identifies regulatory processes as a barrier that separates commodity and potential consumer:

'do I turn people away? ... can I afford to turn away business? ... small children, technically they are out by 9 but it should be ok if they are quiet, when families come off the ferries, I'm breaking the law if there are kids eating after that time, do I risk it?, I could be closed down for a week'.
(Respondent U), publican, Kilmacow, Co Waterford

'had phone calls from people asking if they could bring their children to hear the music, young kids learning should have a love for it as well, what they learn in school should be encouraged by hearing good players, live music should be accessible to children, they should be brought to sessions by their parents, see real performers. A love of music is intergenerational, should be with their parents and grand-parents'
(Respondent U), publican, Kilmacow, Co Waterford)

Respondent U, a rural publican, presents an argument that prioritizes the *business* standpoint, within the context of *excessive* regulatory controls that complicate economic processes and their ultimate goals. Due consideration, however, is also given to shifting cultural expectations and to changing lifestyle practices that are also subject to regulatory constraints. The expectation that adults when accompanied by children have access to food and music performance in a public house becomes problematic when regulatory constraints impose a legal minimum age limit. Growth in goods and services that accompany traditional alcoholic products and should in effect enhance commercial activity, may well come into conflict with some regulatory controls that are considered overly restrictive and that apply to both the provider *and* the consumer.

6. 9. Political structures: defining micro-level experiences.

According to the 'social definition of culture' (Williams, 2006:32), the drinker as a consumer is motivated to consume, while at the same time consumption and lifestyle practices are constantly reshaped and reconstituted through political intervention. Regulatory processes that come into conflict with every-day cultural

practices of consumption and with economic elements of the drinks industry plays a key role in the social drinking experience. Laws that impose new obligations and prohibitions, impact upon the social world of the drinker by establishing rules that tend to control and limit traditional drinking practices. When the social world of the drinker, irrespective of life-stage position is investigated, what is revealed is an increasingly regulated social and cultural activity. Regulations that determine alcohol/food consumption practices are according to interviews with a food hygiene executive and law and security officers¹¹), societal in origin and political in character. For example, the safeguarding of public health through the micro-management of food and beverage handling is achieved through the enactment and enforcement of legislation. While changes are implemented and managed at an ‘official’ level, drinkers and drinks providers may respond in ways that are not always acts of compliance, but are instead acts of resistance, such as ignoring standards and practices as set out by the HSE (Environmental Health). According to my data, reaction to new structures and practices is also a reflexive exercise where ‘social practices are constantly re-examined and reformed in the light of incoming information’ (Giddens, 2000:38). The harmful effects of passive smoking, for example has a direct bearing on the generation of an alternative set of drinking/smoking practices.

The Public Health (Tobacco) Bill 2001 and The Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2002 were enacted primarily for the protection of workers in their workplaces, for example, public buildings, public transportation, schools and hospitals. The proposal to implement a smoking ban in public houses (as work-places) in

¹¹ Respondents R, S and V respectively.

compliance with the Public Health (Tobacco) (Commencement) Order, 2004 proved controversial from when it was first mooted. The proposed ban was debated on three distinct grounds; as a public health issue, as the prohibition of a particular practice (consuming alcohol and tobacco together in the public house) and as the destruction of an economy (the drinks trade). The practice of consuming alcohol and tobacco together in the public house was a long established tradition that was about to end. The debate evolved to encompass two distinctive points of view. Firstly, the ban was attributed to a 'nanny state' (Clifford, 2002) that campaigned to demonise smokers and interfere in the traditional cultural practice of smoking and drinking at the same time in the public house. Opposition to the ban emanated from the drinks industry who believed the ban would be 'unworkable' and who also predicted job-losses and possible un-viability of the trade due to an absence of drinkers who were also smokers. Due to the close links between alcohol and tobacco consumption, tobacco legislation was perceived by the drinks trade in economic terms that would have serious implications for drinkers and consequently, for the trade.

To show how reflexivity manifests itself at the micro-level, a close examination of 'pre' and 'post' implementation of the 'Public Health (Tobacco) Act' (2002) was undertaken. Unfavourable reaction to the initial proposals that would impact upon drinking practices was followed by (unanticipated) changing attitudes and responses to tobacco consumption. Section 47(1) of the 'Public Health (Tobacco) Act' (2002) that in effect separated the traditional practice of drinking and smoking, was initially perceived as a highly controversial phenomenon that would prove 'totally unworkable' (Irish Independent, 17/10/2003 p.6), would be impossible

to enforce, the unwelcome intervention of a ‘nanny state’ and an attack on personal freedom (The Sunday Tribune 31/08/2002 p16). Along with public debate on job-losses, the demise of the traditional public house and the social consequences of a ban was an active public health awareness campaign that highlighted the detrimental effects to the physical health of smokers, but more importantly, the damaging effects of *passive* smoking. An independent report “The Health Effects of Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) in the Workplace” 2003, offered scientific proof that ETS causes lung cancer, heart disease and respiratory problems. Smokers who initially voiced their opposition to the proposed ban and publicans who anticipated economic ruin came into conflict with the opinions of health professionals who produced hard evidence regarding the harmful effects of tobacco consumption. At the cultural level, public debate through which ‘certain meanings and values’ (Williams, 2006:32) were expressed, instituted a sea-change in the social definition of smoking, that changed fundamental attitudes to smoking and in particular, to smoking in public.

Public debate raised awareness of the harmful effects of smoking to smokers and to passive smokers alike that over a short space of time brought about a radical change in attitudes to smoking and to smoking practices. While the aim of the ban at an institutional level was to ‘provide for the prohibition or restriction of tobacco smoking in certain places’ (Public Health (Tobacco) Act, 2002) a newly developing consciousness of potential personal harm and harm to others played a major role in changes to public tobacco consumption that reached beyond the environs of the public house. Awareness of the harmful practice and the growing undesirability of smoking translated into a change in consumption practices when in the company of

others, that in some instances extended to other places such as domestic spaces and the car:

'I would be embarrassed to smoke in somebody's house, it's like it's 'dirty' not the thing to do, or I wouldn't smoke in someone's car I mean one time it was ok to light up after a meal, have one with the coffee... but I think it was a good thing, makes you health conscious' (Respondent C, drinker, male, 40+)

Proposed changes in the political and legal systems that would radically change a heretofore routine practice became the subject of extensive coverage on TV, radio and in the print media. On 24th March 2004 a total ban on smoking in the workplace was put in place. While limited restrictions had already been in place in accordance with the 'Tobacco (Health Promotion and Protection) Act, 1988 and the Tobacco (Health and Protection) Regulations, 1995,¹² the proposed changes proved the most controversial. New ministerial powers under Section 47 of the 2002 Act paved the way towards a prohibition of consumption of tobacco products that would allow people to work and interact together in a smoke-free environment. Under Section 16(h) of the 'Commencement Order', 2004, the smoking of a tobacco product in a 'specified place' makes reference to 'a licensed premises insofar as it is a place of work'. The public house environment was considered harmful to the health of its inhabitants due to the continuous high levels of tobacco smoke. The focus of this perceived damage was the health and wellbeing of bar-workers, whose interests were represented collectively by individual trade unions (Government Press Release 28/03/2004).

At an operational level, the prohibition of smoking in the public house had for the social drinker, further unanticipated consequences at the social as well as the

¹² Applied to public transport and public service buildings such as schools and hospitals.

environmental level. The most significant spatial transformation was the absence of tobacco smoke in the atmosphere, as the smoky haze and distinctive odour was up to this point in time an accepted feature of the 'Irish Pub' experience. Visibility was much improved, drawing comments in relation to lighting (brightness) and décor. The most noticeable environmental change, however, was in relation to odour. Where previously, smoke acted as an effective camouflage, its absence revealed a whole new range of undesirable odours, the most problematic of these being body odour, stale beer and toilet odour. An increase in the use of hygiene products (particularly surface-cleaners and aerosol 'air freshener' types and the co-mingling of a range of odours, has become an important as well as an unanticipated feature of the 'taken-for-grantedness' (Bennett and Watson, 2002:187) of the contemporary public house.

As an example of the politicisation of social life that shapes human social behaviour, the processes that apply in this instance to the prohibition of smoking, can also be seen to apply to another politically initiated alcohol-related cultural practices. The regulations that apply to drinking and driving, that over time have changed, has not only meant a physiological change (reduction from 100mgs to 80 mgs alcohol per 100 mls. blood), and a graduated increase in penalties, but a change in attitude towards drunk-driving and a level of intolerance that is growing. According to research carried out by the Road Safety Authority (whose logo is 'Working to Save Lives'), alcohol is found to be a 'contributory factor in one in three fatal collisions' (www.drinkdriving.ie).

Research into attitudes to drink-driving revealed the following:

- ~ 57% of respondents agreed that ‘just one drink impairs driving’
- ~ 73% of respondents believe ‘there should be more roadside breath-testing’
- ~ 67% of respondents agree that ‘penalties for drink-driving offences should be more severe’. (Road Safety Authority Study, 2006)
- ~ 67% of respondents support a ‘lowering of the drink-driving limit’ (Health Promotion Unit Survey, 2002)

For social drinkers who routinely consume alcohol in the public house, regulatory processes that are imposed and enforced, restrict or prohibit social behaviour associated with traditional drinking practices, for example the heretofore spatially unrestricted consumption of alcohol and tobacco. Changes to social life however, are not entirely attributable to political forces and in making the distinction between convention and law, it becomes apparent that ‘custom and other non-legal principles control a great sector of human behaviour’ (MacIver, 1965). For example, discussions that intimated resistance to the anticipated smoking ban were dissolved through a discourse of health awareness that translated into practices of compliance and acceptance. Media, for Barendt, through a ‘public-service remit’ (Seaton, 1998:109), plays a crucial role as a platform for debate, and as the means through which information is disseminated and received. Reflexivity (in response to new ideas/information) as a process of self regulation, where ‘thought and action are constantly refracted back upon one another’ (Giddens, 2000:38), bridge the gap between concept and action when lifestyle choices are made. Global processes such as the mobility of people, images and ideas transcend national boundaries in the same way that European law also transcends national boundaries and is adopted into

the Irish legal/political system. The import of European law and the enactment of Irish law is shown to have a significant impact on business and on business administration practices relating to alcohol and to the drinks industry. Social drinking in the contemporary Irish public house takes place in a highly regulated and continuously changing environment. New products, services and lifestyle choices have transformed drinking practices and have had a profound effect upon the drinks trade. According to my research findings, however, the State, the legal framework within which the drinks industry operates and the law enforcement agencies are the dominant forces that construct, govern and constrain the social world of the public house drinker.

Chapter 7. Structural Forms and Micro-level Social Drinking Experiences.

In this Chapter a ‘bottom-up’ approach to structural determinants is taken. Ways in which the public house is perceived, its role within the community and the reality that is the social world of the drinker is approached through the experience of the social drinker in order to explain the formal structures that generate the social world of the drinker. The Irish public house is a ‘meaningful location’ (Cresswell, 2004:7) of interplay between cultural, economic and regulatory processes. Business organisation and systems of administration and regulation however, can sometimes come into conflict with individual human desires and aspirations. In the public house environment, leisure and consumption practices limited by legal constraints and obligations, generates a degree of conformity (largely consented to) among drinkers. Having identified and examined some of the social processes (culture, business and regulation) that shape the experience of social drinking, I now propose to show how contemporary drinking practices are experienced within structural mechanisms that are encountered and negotiated.

7. 1. The Irish public house: perceptions and expectations.

Empirical evidence relating to the importance of informal social life that upholds the views of Putnam, (2000:319) and Clinch et al, (2002:23), categorizes the Irish public house as one of the key places of collective congregation. Further evaluation of the Irish public house from the perspective of the social drinker, identifies a place of sociability and inclusion that conveys images of a social world defined by connectivity with fellow drinkers while consuming alcohol. Place as ‘locale’

provides the setting for interaction that is also ‘essential to specifying its contextuality’ (Giddens, 1984:118). Such a view however, of an all-encompassing environment of conviviality and acceptance, does not always reflect the reality. On the one hand, social connectivity within the public house may be limited where small social groups congregate and interact independently of each other, or when groups only occasionally come together, for example, Christmas, birthday or other ‘significant transitions of life’ (Hunt, 2005:49) milestone occasions. On the other hand, a public house can be an exclusive venue, targeting a select clientele that by implication, actively excludes others.

An exclusive or restrictive environment that in effect creates homogeneity among clientele facilitates peer group and friendship formation, based for example on socio-economic position or leisure pursuit preferences. Drinkers may experience constructive exclusion mechanisms such as music played at high volume or specialized genres of music¹ that while appealing to a specific audience, effectively creates conditions for the exclusion of others. The positioning (or lack of) seating actively encourages some while deliberately deterring others. Themed bars (Brown and Patterson, 2000:348) that serve niche markets operate in the same way, targeting a specific profile of drinker. Sports bars dominated by multiple television screens showing only sporting fixtures makes for an uncomfortable environment that actively deters drinkers who are not sports fans. ‘Gay Bars’, ‘Student Bars’, ‘Old-man Pubs’ (a type, but not confined to elderly males) or ‘Traditional Music Bars’ as ‘highly-symbolised’ (Share, 2003:8) places, while serving a specific customer profile,

¹ Respondent Q, proprietor of ‘O’Connell’s’ explained the use of recorded/live music as a subtle but effective way of targeting the desired ‘age set’ of drinkers.

constructively exclude others who believe they do not belong and therefore, might not be welcome.

While ‘themed’ (Brown and Patterson, 2000) bars appeal to a specific clientele and public houses that actively promote food and entertainment meet different needs, the existence of the generic public house, is of equal importance to the social drinker. According to my data, the value and significance of the ‘ordinary’ quiet public house with core products (alcohol) and limited ancillary products and services is described as follows:

‘a mediocre place, quiet, just background music, usually a bit dull, can go in and sit down, have a pint, you’re not going there for fun, people aren’t locked[drunk], can read the paper, have a chat, go to the toilet and then leave, not very exciting – but it’s functional’ (Respondent F, drinker, male, 30+)

The concept of the public house therefore, has a multiplicity of meanings that vary according to those who define them. Interpretations of environment, products and services and of the category of social drinker are subjective, insofar as they are individual opinions of specific spaces. For Respondent F (male, aged 30+), the description of his ‘local’ in Tullamore as ‘*dull*’ and ‘*quiet*’ is not a disparaging one, but strongly indicates attachment to a social space that is both utilized and valued. Critical assessment of two popular Dublin themed bars, pinpoint the superficiality of the space; where for Respondent F efforts to create distinctive but exclusive places have failed:

‘tackier and glitzier theme pubs – like Pravda, Russian murals on the walls, if they are trying to create an atmosphere, don’t think it’s effective ’cause it doesn’t carry forward to creating an atmosphere, only way it might work would be with music, more than what’s on the walls, very shallow, Zanzibar with bongo drums and tribal spears, pure tack (Respondent F, drinker, male, 30+)

Interpretations of the public house are diverse insofar as variables such as location, the age-set of drinkers and their life-style preferences all come into play. The significance of alcohol and relationship to the public house is unique to each individual drinker and must be borne in mind when perceptions and expectations are evaluated.

The public house in Ireland has evolved over time as a place of social integration, as a place of consumption and in the way in which it is regulated. In the early 21st century, a time of rapid social change, social drinking patterns also changed, reflecting the diversity of leisure and lifestyle practices that were adopted at this time. Social drinking in the contemporary public house changed and developed as some 'traditional' elements associated with social drinking merged with the 'modern'. Traditional qualities such as the welcoming ambience, (once epitomised by the friendly greeting, the warmth of an open fire and a smoky atmosphere) are recreated in the contemporary public house with music and lighting (see Chapter 5, subsection 5). The friendly barman/publican was always central to the public house experience, where he (she) was known by name and where relationships were established with regular drinkers over time. The shift from family owner/operated public houses to new management structures and transient bar staff has also meant a change of focus for the drinker.

Depersonalization of the service provider² (despite in many instances the display of a name-badge) has made way for a re-focusing on the more abstract

² Bar workers are recognised as such according to their uniforms (with logo) in 'Dolan's', 'O'Shea's', 'O'Shaughnessy's' and 'O'Neill's'.

‘quality of service’, in terms of speed and efficiency. For example, Respondent D values competence and usefulness above the personality of the service giver:

‘well, you’re going in to talk to your friends, not to anyone else, oblivious to staff really, so long as the drinks don’t take too long...or if a fight broke out, easy enough when it’s packed, someone bumps into you...and if he’s a hot-head... it happens’ (Respondent D, drinker, female, 30+)

While the functionality of the bar-worker grows in terms of complexity and efficiency, the more personal (traditional) form of social interaction with drinkers is in some instances, in decline. The changing relationship of the service provider is but one aspect in the public house experience that occurs in a new highly-technical environment that is also the setting for a growing range of new products and services.

In modern society the ‘expansion of personal choice...an unending series of options’ (Macdonis and Plummer, 1998:673) means that diversity in the range and availability of products and services is expected. In order to meet the growth in customer needs and expectations, the implementation of strategic business practices meant a hybridization of the ‘traditional’ public house that came from two distinctive sources. Firstly, elements from the past were incorporated into the present-day environment, and secondly, products and services were developed that would satisfy changing leisure and consumption preferences. Elements of the past such as visual images and artefacts, share space with the wine-drinker who no longer asks for ‘red’ or ‘white’, but instead orders a merlot, shiraz, chardonnay or sauvignon blanc. Images that represent Ireland’s past are many and varied. For example, ‘reminders of the old world’ (Fennell and Bunbury, 1988:32) such as Irish heroes and Irish writers that adorn the walls and artefacts such as musical instruments (De Barras Bar, Clonakilty, Co Cork) and enamelled advertisements that adorned Dan Foley’s,

Annascaul, Co Kerry, (no longer trading) link the present to the past. Due to the almost continuous (personal) usage of modern communications technology, wi-fi internet access is expected and is used in what has the appearance of a traditional environment.

The public house in Ireland while associated with Irish culture and leisure-time activity is a 'site of everyday life and experience' (Bennett and Watson, 2002:184) that meets a diversity of needs. Analysis of social drinking and of the role of the public house in Irish social life, reveal functions that extends beyond leisure and consumption. The public house, while primarily a place associated with leisure activity where alcohol is consumed, is also perceived as an accessible community resource that meets functional as well as communicational needs. As a site of 'extensive social interaction' (Share, 2003:6) the public house is acknowledged as a place where human relationships are formed and nurtured thus creating an environment of belonging, contentment and security. The public house is a place where information is sourced and given, where a diversity of subjects such as politics and sport are debated and where opinions are formed.

The value of the place where topics ranging from local sports fixtures to world affairs are argued or where personal dilemmas are discussed and resolved, copper-fastens the relationship between the social drinker and the public house. The belief that the relationship between people and their environment 'translates into harmonious relations with other people' (Oldenburg, 1999:48) implies both an

optimistic and a constructive point of view. For Respondent L³, the public house in his rural village was the place where information and stories were exchanged:

'we'd always go in to Ted McGowans, [Gurteen, Co Sligo], people that stayed or people that left [emigrated], when they came back, you brought the news and you got news' (Respondent L, drinker, male, 70+)

Alternatively, the public house is also experienced as a place of exclusion and disharmony that does not always live up to the more popular assumptions regarding 'accessibility and accommodation' (Oldenburg, 1999:32):

'moved to Dublin, very different scene, much more impersonal experience, 'regular' idea has evaporated, wouldn't really talk to bar staff a lot of foreign staff, language and culture barrier – reluctant to be chatty, much more impersonal'... 'we'd never say we'll meet you in 'the pub', 'cause you wouldn't know which one' (Respondent T, drinker, male, 50+)

The public house environment operates within legal structures and according to an appropriate business model, thus shaping the experience of social drinking. While perceptions of the contemporary public house are varied, the expectations of social drinkers have developed in line with wider practices of consumerism and within the regulatory norms that apply. Factors such as the urban/rural location of the public house (and the drinker) and the age-position of the drinker, when placed within a wider context of social, economic and political change, have according to my data a direct bearing on how places and practices of social drinking are experienced.

³ For Respondent L, living alone in rural Sligo, regular communication with others took place in four locations: the local shop, post office, Mass on Sunday and the local pub. The shop, post office and Church afforded 'chance meetings', while the pub was a place 'where you can wander in when you like'.

7. 2. Contextualising social change.

Work and leisure schedules and time-frames in twenty first century Ireland account for the increase in food consumed outside the home, and consequently the provision of food in public houses. While the practice of public house dining is on the increase, the practice of consuming alcohol in domestic space is also growing. The customs of consuming alcohol in the public house and dining at home changed to meet newly evolving social needs associated with ‘accelerated suburbanisation’ (Corcoran et al. 2007:196). The concept of the ‘pub lunch’ in terms of food quality, value, and promptness of delivery, provides what is perceived as an essential service, within the necessary limited time-frames. Equally, the domestic consumption of alcohol indicated by the increase in ‘off-sales’ outlets and development of the ‘electronic marketplace’ (Holmes, 2003:30) has grown. Domestic alcohol consumption practices, however are not only a response to drink-driving legislation, the smoking ban or the price differential between the ‘on’ and ‘off-sales’ prices of alcoholic beverages, but are also motivated by a new conceptualisation of leisure and consumption.

Following-on from changes in social and economic circumstances, a proactive and purpose-full approach to leisure time and leisure activities developed in accordance with individual preferences, convenience and current trends. Leisure time and leisure activities took on an added significance in response to changing ‘labour market trends’ (McGinnity et al, 2007:200) that showed not only a general increase in the numbers in employment, but a marked increase in women’s participation in the labour force. A re-conceptualisation of leisure time in keeping

with re-configured domestic circumstances and changing work-leisure routines called for adaptability and flexibility when planning leisure time activities. The tendency was for Irish people to ‘see and understand themselves less in terms of their ethnicity, nationality and religion and more in terms of personal tastes, identities and lifestyles’ (Inglis, 2008:22). As new patterns of consumption evolved (see Chapters 4 and 5) the way in which food, drink and entertainment was experienced, had significant implications for both work and leisure time.

The growing trend of domestic alcohol consumption as a lifestyle choice has emerged not only as a consequence of changes in retail and consumption practices. While the public house was undergoing change, the domestic setting and domestic consumption patterns were also in transition. Domestic space was enhanced and reorganised to facilitate entertaining in the home and cooking developed as ‘a creative middle-class pursuit as opposed to a working-class chore’ (Corrigan, 1998:109). According to CSO Retail Sales Index, home improvement materials sales such as hardware, paint and glass increased by 22% between 2000 and 2007 (O’Carroll, 2007:253), thus creating new domestic spaces of leisure for family and guests. The inclusion of alcoholic beverages in the weekly shopping basket became routine, and a domestic stock of wine, beer and spirits (in that most recent acquisition – the ‘drinks cabinet’) is now commonplace. While this is usually an allocated (existing) space in the kitchen or living-room, all contemporary made-to-measure furniture suppliers and fitters offer bespoke ‘drink cabinets to suit your room setting and lifestyle’ (http://modernirishfurniture.com/storage-units_-_drinks-cabinets.html).

The following image (corner of an urban-semi kitchen) shows a bespoke wine-rack and an assortment of glasses. Underneath storage contains a selection of spirits, glassware, spirit measures, bottle opener/corkscrew and a range of ‘mixers’.



7. 2. 1. The Drinks station. .Dedicated to the storage and service of alcohol and described as the ‘refreshment corner’, this ‘bar’ is restocked regularly when ‘special offers’ or ‘wine deals’ are promoted in local outlets.

Consumption of wine with dinner, or the offer of a drink instead of the customary non-alcoholic beverage has become the norm, contrasting sharply with the earlier custom of consuming alcohol only on special occasions such as Christmas or for ‘medicinal purposes’. The consumption of alcohol for its health-giving properties⁴, is a custom that relates back to early advertising campaigns by ‘Guinness’⁵ which claimed ‘it feeds exhausted nerves’ ‘it enriches the blood’ (Allen, 2007:126). Remedial motives for consuming alcohol, such as hot whiskey for a cold, brandy for upset stomach and Guinness as an iron supplement, are rarely expressed in modern Ireland and moreover the curative properties of alcohol are strongly contested.

Evidence of an increase in domestic alcohol consumption may be seen in the growing number of off license, supermarket, garage forecourt outlets as well as online off-sales services. Figures that show age-specific drinking patterns identify the popularity of domestic consumption as a growing routine practice. The following table shows locations of alcohol consumption among six different age groups over a twelve-month period:

Location of alcohol consumption (2012)

(% of drinkers who had consumed alcohol in stated locations over the past 12months)

Aged.....	(18-24).....	(25-34).....	(35-44)	(45-54).....	(55-64).....	(65+)
HOME.....	90%	90%	84%	74%	84%	85%
PUB.....	95%	93%	87%	86%	85%	80%
PARK etc.....	18%	8%	3%	1%	0%	1%

Health Research Board (2012)

⁴ Guinness was supplied to maternity hospitals and given to nursing mothers. Guinness was mixed with milk and given as a ‘tonic’ to children and the elderly. Brandy ‘settled the stomach’ and Whiskey and Rum were taken to relieve colds and ‘flu.

⁵ The first national advertising campaign for Guinness in British newspapers in 1929 introduced the slogan ‘Guinness is Good for You’. (Davies, 1998).

In the context of new-found prosperity and enhanced living standards, the routine consumption of alcohol in domestic space was perceived instead as an indicator of sophistication (Respondent G) and as a practical solution to less-favourable (restrictive) changes associated with the public house. The Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) argues that ‘members are closing their watering-holes because of a lack of business brought about by the smoking ban, stronger drink-driving legislation and random breath testing’ (www.vfi.ie). Such claims establish a comprehensible connection between the rise in domestic consumption and the fall-off in on-sales of alcohol and constraints on alcohol-related activity. Drinkers who according to Share are becoming ‘increasingly aware of the ‘meanings’ of the activity of going out (or staying in) for a drink’ (2003:7) demonstrate an array of conscious and innovative solutions to the ‘problem’ of going for a drink. Issues such as transportation, alcohol retail price differentials and new tobacco controls, have together paved the way towards the practice of domestic alcohol consumption. When contextualising social drinking practices, human factors such as socio-economic position, life-stage position and individual lifestyle choices as well as the ‘shift from a culture of self-denial to a culture of self-indulgence’ (Inglis, 2002:35) must be taken into account. While products, services and the regulatory frameworks are always in transition, what remains constant is the evolutionary nature of human creativity that initiates (and adapts to) social change at any given time.

7. 3. Impact of regulatory mechanisms on social drinking practices.

Economic and regulatory processes and the systems through which the public house is obliged to operate provide but a structure that aims to organize and co-

ordinate the act of social drinking. The structured organisation of the place, the products and the people (drinks providers or consumers) produces an environment that is continuously and strategically controlled and managed. In the course of this research the public house was revealed as a socially constructed environment where 'meaning and materiality' (Cresswell, 2004:30) underwent unprecedented change, a transition that re-defined the ways in which it was perceived and the manner in which it was experienced. The consumption of alcohol (an individual lifestyle choice) took place within a structural framework and in accordance with an array of mechanisms brought into being for the purpose of controlling and reshaping social drinking practices.

Excessive drinking practices (Hope, 2008) laid the foundations for change that had a clear objective to reduce or modify the quantities of alcohol consumed. Public health issues also came to the fore during this period that had far-reaching consequences for social drinkers regarding alcohol/tobacco consumption (Kiely, 2004) and Allwright, 2004). As a consequence social drinkers in the public house encountered an array of structural controls designed to reshape attitudes towards alcohol as well as attitudes towards drinking behaviour. In the course of the study three areas of legislation have been cited by social drinkers as instrumental in changing their perceptions of drinking as well as their drinking practices. Along with an array of existing regulations, new or amended laws regarding Equality, Drink-Driving and Tobacco Consumption are impacting upon the social world of the drinker in the form of structural constraints that are enforced and are subject to legal sanction.

7. 3.1. Changing tobacco consumption practices

The law that applies to tobacco consumption was identified by drinkers and publicans alike as central to the reconfiguration of the public house environment and to the re-creation of contemporary drinking/smoking practices. For drinkers, the obligation to relocate (move away from the ‘group’ in order to consume tobacco) was viewed in a number of ways and as follows by Respondent T:

‘didn’t think it would ever happen, it’s a different place now, a nuisance where you have people who do and don’t together, but you can’t argue when it’s your health – that’s what did it – place is so clean, and when you go to the smoking area, you see it [smoking] for what it is – a filthy habit - ha ha...’ (Respondent T, drinker, male, 50+)

For Respondent G, an urban publican, the negative impact of tobacco (and other) legislation is linked to the declining economic viability of his business:

‘pubs are getting a hammering from every angle,, overcharging bla bla... greedy this... greedy that... spent €38,000 on a ventilation system, 38 air changes per minute, three times the recommended.. initiative brought in by the Vintners Federation, certified by a company in England, you won’t go home and smell your clothes of smoke... another nail in the coffin of pubs, more regulations, European law being fed into the system here, maybe we feel inferior, want to be better Europeans’ (Respondent G, publican, Limerick City)

The practice of social drinking closely connected to the construction of a ‘meaningful lifestyle’ (Hunt, 2005:49), is further complicated by changes in the social drinking environment that call for a revision of customary drinking practices. For example, the reality of separating alcohol and tobacco consumption in a social drinking environment is experienced in different ways by smokers and by non-smokers. The implementation of the Public Health (Tobacco) Act (2000) despite the ‘self-serving nature of the hospitality industry’s economic arguments’ (Allwright, 2004), brought about radical changes for public house users to the pre-2004 cultural

practice of consuming alcohol and tobacco in the same place and at the same time. Smoking zones within the environs of the public house ‘designed’ (www.members.aol.com/mcdondes.) to accommodate consumers of tobacco have been interpreted in different ways by smokers and non-smokers.

The new facility for smokers (who are obliged to move from non-smoking zones), has become a mechanism that spatially segregates people while at the same time producing a new social grouping or the splitting of groups into yet smaller groups, albeit on a temporary basis. The moving of smokers to a dedicated space creates a new social space inhabited by those who consume tobacco within a short time frame. This has led to an increase in movement, as drinkers/smokers move between their primary group location, dedicated smoking area, toilet and the bar. The obligation to relocate and the practice of tobacco consumption together form the basis for a new social re-configuration, where people interact apart from their respective primary groups. Such informal and unplanned encounters are often viewed in a positive light however the opposite view is also taken. For the smoker, there are elements of inconvenience (as well as an implicit sense of exclusion)⁶ caused by temporary dissociation from the group:

‘well if you’re out with your friends in a group and some of us do [smoke], it can be a bit of a nuisance, hopping up and down, ‘mind me seat’ you miss out on stuff [conversation], but what can you do? – but there can be good craic as well- with other smokers, like you are all together, doing something bold [mischievous], because of the way it’s [smoking] is outlawed’ (Respondent F, drinker, male, 30+)

⁶ Inglis, (2008:232) in his account of conversation in McLaughlin’s pub in Ballivor observed that when two people rejoined the group (having gone outside to smoke) that ... ‘meanwhile there had been a switch in the conversation’ ...

For non-smokers, the social consequences of the prohibition and the construction of dedicated smoking zones are viewed somewhat differently. Despite the disruption caused when people move between smoking/non-smoking spaces, smoking zones are used by non-smokers – but by choice. On the one hand non-smokers inhabit a smoke-free environment, while also free to use dedicated smoking zones, described by Respondent B as an ‘added attraction’ (with some reservations) that can complement the regular public house environment:

‘generally quite nice, even though I don’t smoke...would go out there, for ‘quiet time’...easier to talk, easier to ‘chat-up’ the ‘opposite sex’...sometimes they[smoking areas] are nicer than the actual pub, it’s something new and different, feels ‘continental’ because they are sort of ‘outside’... but then some of them are disgusting’ (Respondent B, drinker, female, 20+)

While the consequences of a policy initiated for ‘worker protection’ (Allwright, 2004) has greatly altered the social and spatial aspects of the public house, the concept of a smoke-free environment is approved by smokers and non-smokers alike. What may be interpreted as one of the ‘changed conditions of our common life’ (Williams, 1971:285), the separation of alcohol and tobacco consumption in the public house took immediate effect to achieve the desired goal of a smoke-free work environment. High levels of compliance (97%) with the law (Office of Tobacco Control, 2008) indicated not only a change in smoking practices, but a change in attitude by smokers and non-smokers alike. Publicans and drinkers agree that while the smoking ban accounts for the greatest transformation of social drinking practices, accessibility to the public house, a consequence of Equality legislation and (amended) regulations that govern drink-driving, play a crucial role in the organisation and control of the social drinker.

7. 3. 2. Implications of drink-driving restrictions.

For the social drinker in Ireland, accessing the public house can pose certain challenges that must be addressed and overcome. For example, the intensification of drink-driving legislation, impacts upon drinkers who are also drivers. Among the wider drinking population, however, points of view and practices regarding drinking and driving vary. For respondent B (an urban dweller), the concept of drink-driving has little relevance:

'drinking and driving? - practically non-existent I would say, you think its only 'aul fellas' down the country who cant get a bus...but must have their pints...people just don't do it any more' (Respondent B, drinker, female, 20+)

For respondent P, however, the existence and the purpose of drink-driving legislation and the potential risks associated with driving following consumption of alcohol are acknowledged. Proximity to the public house therefore has significance, endorsing Oldenburg's a view that 'third places thrive best in locales where community life is casual, where walking takes people to more destinations than does the automobile' (1999:210). For Oldenburg, 'third places' include a wide range of public access spaces, for example hairdressers, cafes, libraries, that are casual, sufficient in number and within easy access in all communities. The Irish public house however, as 'third place' while having many of those characteristics is revealed as a more restricted and less accessible environment. In Ireland where car-dependency has increased and public transport is deemed to be inadequate, particularly outside of urban areas, accessing the public house can be problematic. In cities, established 'night-link' bus services operated by Bus Eireann (www.buseireann.ie) provide late night transportation, rural areas however, do not benefit from a similar service. Solutions

to the transportation problem have been sought at a local level where hackney/mini-bus drivers, publicans and drinkers came together to discuss the operation of a service such as times, routes and rates:

'it's not an easy one, it would have to be demand-driven, people live in all directions, down boreens, mightn't want to go at the same time, so you just do your own thing ...take responsibility for it' (Respondent E, drinker, female, 40+)

For Respondent E, the freedom to choose nights out at short notice, duration of time spent in a public house and the choice of different public houses, outweighed the benefits of any organised form of transportation that would have time and place constraints. Lack of an adequate public transport system also generated some debate at government level where Transport Minister, Martin Cullen and Rural, Gaeltacht and Community Affairs Minister, Eamonn O'Cuiv discussed the feasibility of a 'drink-link' night bus service (McDonald, Irish Independent, 8/1/2007). The current rural hackney licence scheme in conjunction with the Rural Transport Scheme as proposed by Minister for State Alan Kelly is perceived as a 'bottom up' approach to issues of social inclusion and rural isolation (www.ruraltransportnetwork.ie). Debate at national level however, focussed on the decline in business and ultimate closure of rural public houses (Irish Independent, 13/5/2006, www.news.bbc.co.uk 6/5/2007 and www.drinksindustryireland.ie 27/10/2010) rather than the plight of the rural drinker. Revenue Commissioners figures regarding the issuing and renewal of public licences show considerable fluctuation in the number of public houses trading from year to year. The highest number of licences issued in 1980 (13,716). Between 2000 and 2001 the number of licences issued increased from 7,466 to 11,303. The figure dropped to 8,381 in 2007, further decreasing to 7,509 in 2011.

Rules that govern the blood-alcohol limits for drivers are given due consideration when planning a visit to the public house however, impulsive decisions that in effect disregard the rules are sometimes taken:

'well I have to think about it, make plans to get a lift, not a spur-of-the-moment thing, I know it's the sensible thing to do...but I have 'took a chance' taken a lift home ...knew the driver had a few on him, would be uncomfortable about it the next day...but you forget quickly'
(Respondent P, drinker, female, 20+)

While experiences and perceptions of drink-driving may vary, the imposition of legal sanctions occurs in District Courts throughout the country. According to statistics issued by the Courts Services, 'orders in respect of drink-driving offences' show a decline (www.courts.ie) as per the following figures over a six year period commencing 2007:

Drink-driving offences (District Court) 2007 - 2012

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
30,257	28,215	24,467	21,153	18,669	12,636

source: Annual Reports of Courts Service (2007-2012)

The legal blood-alcohol limit in Ireland is 80mgms of alcohol per 100mls of blood (drinking limits and recommendations, Road Safety Authority, www.rsa.ie). A 2006 amendment to the Road Traffic Act (1994) gave Gardai the power to conduct 'random breath testing' without previous justifiable indicators such as accidents, traffic offences or evidence of drunkenness (www.citizensinformation.ie). Increased Garda powers *and* increased Garda activity coincided with a high profile advertising campaign that together raised the consciousness of all road users. Personal safety and the safety of others in conjunction with fear of arrest generated a mindset that caused a re-evaluation of the practice of drinking and driving. This was particularly pertinent to drinkers who customarily drove to the public house.

Strategies as outlined by Respondent E such as organising alternative transport (and on some occasions, overnight accommodation) became part of the public house experience and extended to other circumstances or occasions where alcohol might be consumed:

'well, it's in your face...all the time...the papers, the telly, people talk...even if you're asked to a wedding... it's where will we book, wouldn't dream of driving home...it's weigh up the price of a room against the price of the taxi, unheard of ten, fifteen years ago... now it's part of the deal [expense]... what has to be done' (Respondent E, drinker, female, 40+)

For Respondent F the responsibility of appointing or acting as 'designated driver' is a complexity of benefits and disadvantages:

'if it's my turn, that's it, it's only fair, happy to take my turn, I mean this limit...80... what does it mean, will one put me over ...or two, you hear of the fella that lost his licence after two pints, it's stupid 'cause you just don't know...but it's great if you are out during the week... 'I have the car'... no one pushes drink...downside, I suppose, you watch the mates get more relaxed, a bit silly,... hah... but who hasn't the 'head' in the morning?' (Respondent F, drinker, male, 30+)

Drink-driving restrictions alone, however, do not fully account for the option taken by a growing proportion of drinkers of *not* going to the public house and of actively choosing to consume alcohol at home. Domestic alcohol consumption according to my data stems from a combination of factors such as the inadequate public transport services, the smoking ban and the disparity between 'on' and 'off-sales' alcohol prices. In response to the pricing issue, representatives of the drinks trade justify pricing levels as attributable to 'high overheads...for example, local authority charges...waste collection and water' (O'Hora, 2006) as well as the administrative costs of licensed trading. For drinkers, factors such as transportation costs and low-cost alcohol is bringing about a change in leisure and lifestyle activities that is signalled by the use of domestic space over public space.

While drinkers tend to underestimate the prevalence of drink-driving, the practice of driving while over the legal (blood-alcohol) limit continues, thus demonstrating the disparity between a perception of compliance (Respondents B, E and F) and what is reality (District Courts records). Despite a marked decline in drink-driving offences, figures for 2012 stand at an unacceptable 12,636 offences (www.courts.ie). Bearing in mind that the above figures refer only to cases brought before the courts, the assumption may be made that actual figures are in fact higher. Such breaches of drink-driving laws challenge the notion that drinking and drink-related practices are *always* politically determined and take place within a framework of compliance. As structural mechanisms of control, external forces (drink-driving laws) that directly affect drinkers who are also drivers, do so by creating a legal framework within which drivers are obliged to operate. Regulatory constraints that problematize transportation and therefore accessibility to the public house, while structural in origin must be resolved at the level of the individual.

Where the distance between home and the public house calls for a mode of transportation, this can prove problematic outside of the greater urban areas:

'we are three and a half miles out, if there's no one to bring us... well, we have two choices... get a car to come out for us... or we could stay at home... no way I say... it's our only enjoyment... it's hard on anyone living in the country... but like everything else...we are getting used to it'
(Respondent E, drinker, female, 40+)

While legal structures establish ground-rules within which the social drinker is presumed to operate, drink-related activities are not always conducted within the parameters of the law. When perceived as a structural barrier that restricts and regulates social behaviour, drink-driving laws are interpreted as an inconvenience that are either overcome or are disregarded. According to my data, for some drinkers

the notion of drink-driving and personal danger/safety, are not necessarily connected. The presumption that accidents happen to other people, probably caused by speeding (Respondents A and E) demonstrates both a naivety and a potential disregard for the relevant laws, for personal safety and for the safety of others. While tobacco consumption legislation has immediate implications for the drinker *and* for the drinks provider, drink-driving legislation applies (directly) to the drinker who drives but ultimately to the drinks provider through a perceived loss of business.

7. 3. 3. Equality Legislation: consequences for the trade and for the drinker.

Perceived as a law that targets the drinks trade, the Equal status Act (2000) was put in place to address the tendency to exclude certain categories of people from places (including public houses) and from services that would ordinarily be available to the general public. For the bar-worker who operates within a legal framework, the non-discriminatory right to service can sometimes appear to conflict with the provisions (constraints) of the Liquor Licensing Acts and the (more liberal) directives of Equality legislation. The serving of alcohol to age-appropriate adults was on the one hand afforded legal protection, while on the other hand, a refusal of service as an action taken ‘in good faith’ (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008:41) to prevent disorderly conduct was also understood as a legal requirement. Overall responsibility for compliance with the Equal Status Act (2000) and the Security Services Act (2004), and the operation of a door policy (usually in urban and large-capacity public houses/venues), rests with the publican. The task of implementing said regulations however, is performed by door-staff or by the bar-worker. The argument is made that a ‘common sense’ approach to dealing with customers has

been replaced by legal structures particularly in relation to the refusal of service. According to Respondents G, (publican) H, (publican) and K, (bar manager) control of the public house environment is their responsibility therefore ‘local knowledge’ or the ‘intuition’ of the publican or the bar-worker should not be discounted. While the refusal of service was put forward as a health and safety issue, the Report of the Equality Authority (Hayes, 2001 and 2002) would claim otherwise.

The Equal Status Act, while put in place to protect the consumer and their rights to services, also impacts upon the drinks provider, in so far as it determines a right to service(s) that carry implicit fiscal costs along with additional social and legal obligations. Entry to a public house can reveal contra-indications of user-friendliness that originate from within the public house itself. The existence of a ‘door policy’, whereby people are excluded for specific reasons is sometimes encountered particularly in urban or densely-populated locations. In response to this practice of exclusion and in order to legally protect ease-of-access, the Equal Status Act (2000) that guarantee minorities a right of access to ‘places of refreshment’ was put in place. Reaction to the scope and effectiveness of the Act was mixed. Firstly, those who were not members of a stated ‘minority’ believed they did not have protection under the act however coping strategies were devised, for example, claiming to have a disability or to be of ethnic origin – when this was not the case. :

‘we were in the queue to get into the late bar, people being turned away for no good reason, one of the lads said he would chance it, had heard they couldn’t refuse travellers, put on a kind of an accent, they knew we weren’t, but didn’t take the chance, got in but I think it was because there was only three of us – mad it was’ (Respondent F, drinker, male, 30+)

Respondent F also claims that an acquaintance who suffers from epilepsy has exploited his condition in a similar situation

'they said not tonight lads, we are full up, it was only half ten, we didn't really believe them, so Joe says, like... I have a disability, they didn't ask what... but they pretended to reconsider... don't know if that was the reason, but anyway... eventually we got in' (Respondent F, drinker, male, 30+)

What this demonstrates is a transgression of the regulations by those who are (and are not) protected by the Act as the need arises. This subversion of a perceived over-rationalization of 'access' to the public house, is an example of agency overcoming structure. Security staff or bar-workers whose task it is to apply equality legislation also develop strategies that enable them to exercise control regarding access to goods and services:

'a good manner... able to deal with people is just as important as knowing the legalities... when you have to refuse someone... or ask them to leave, what you say and how you say it is what it's all about... say... someone has drink on them at the door... or you know they have form [history] how you handle it is the thing... if personal safety or safety to the staff... or the customers is at risk... then you do what you have to do... no argument (Respondent V, security consultant, Clonmel, Co Tipperary)

For bar-workers and door staff who implement a door-policy that includes the right to refuse entry or service, possible ways of excluding or refusing service are conceived that do not breach equality legislation. Respondent K, a bar-manager, comments on the Act, explains his motives for 'barring' people and for withdrawing service, while making a case for use of discretion:

'I am obliged to tell you why I wont serve you any more, the law as it is at the moment is a bad law, must be changed, if not for the sake of the barmen, but for the sake of the other people in the bar, I don't like where you have to give somebody a reason, you can't treat people the same, you must take everyone individually' (Respondent K, bar manager, Dublin)

Respondent K in light of his experience as bar-manager, holds the view that drinkers have varying patterns of consumption that potentially can lead to behaviour

that is at least inappropriate or at worst a pose a danger to drinkers and workers alike. A further cause for concern is the potential for conflict when the psychotropic effects of alcohol come into play.

'we bar people, every pub will bar people, troublemakers, people who can't handle their drink and get aggressive, in a pub atmosphere you always have a lot of slagging matches going on between people, joking around, and you have some people get too drunk, who cant take a joke, so they can get very aggressive very quickly, could pick up...throw a coke bottle at me, and it hit someone else, its not just protection for the owner and the staff but for the customers that are there at the time'... ' those people you cant afford to have on your premises'.(Respondent K, bar manager, Dublin)

Concern for drinkers and workers in a potentially hazardous environment is bound up with a desire to monitor and police the public house environment, to the point of excluding or ejecting drinkers that are perceived to have a *potential* for violence.

:

'it should be left up to the barman, that's the way it should be, I can understand that because of the travelling community and the coloured community as well – there's discrimination, that's why we have laws, if someone walks in and they are not capable of looking after themselves or in case they would cause an accident to themselves or others I would refuse them, for example if someone asks me for a pint of Guinness and I don't understand that person, now to be doubly sure I will ask them again and I'll know if somebody has had enough to drink, experience tells you a lot. You always ask a second time to make sure a person hasn't got a speech impediment, you have to be careful about that as some people do, but you can tell by the eyes, the way they walk, the slouch, it gives it away, then you turn around and say sorry sir I can't give you any more alcohol on these premises, if you'd like a cup of tea or coffee, no problem, sit down. On the other hand if someone come up and says 'give me a fucking pint of Guinness' – excuse my language, no, straight away, no that's it - out the door' (Respondent K, bar manager, Dublin)

Respondent K's views and actions would imply that excessive drinking or drunkenness or potential for violent activity are the only legitimate reasons for

refusal of service and that the safety of workers and customers must take priority in the management of what are work environments as well as leisure environments.

While recognising that discrimination on the grounds of disability, race or membership of the travelling community does exist, Respondent K claims it is his policy to exclude people only for drunkenness or disorderly behaviour. Observations by this researcher of various degrees of discord/violence in public houses can confirm that such incidents are dealt with in different ways. For example, a drinker who had threatened a bar-worker was escorted to the door⁷ and observed until he left the area. Assault by one drinker on another was interrupted by fellow drinkers, and all were asked to leave. This incident had further consequences for a group of travellers who were present as they swiftly left the bar, leaving behind drinks, jackets and a handbag. The publican who followed them outside had some difficulty convincing them to return as the travellers in question believed that *they* would be the ones to ‘get the blame’ for the incident if Garda became involved⁸). In some circumstances where ‘regulars’ behave inappropriately a level of tolerance is exercised, the drinker is escorted home and is allowed return⁹.

The Equal Status Act (2000) was put in place to ensure that ‘people are not treated unfairly because of general assumptions about certain people or because of something that someone else did’ (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008:39). While responsibility for compliance with the Liquor Licensing Acts that stipulates keeping an ‘orderly house’ rests with the licensee, implementation of the laws regarding who should or should not gain admission or receive service is one of the duties of the bar

⁷ Dolan’s, Dock Rd, Limerick. (2002)

⁸ O’Neill’s, Gort, Co Galway. (2004)

⁹ O’Brien’s, Dundalk, Co Louth. (2003)

worker. As well as the potentiality for disorderly conduct (in the opinion of a bar-worker), further reasons for refusal of service that ‘shall not constitute discrimination’ (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008:41) apply, for example the exclusion of wheelchair-users on ‘health and safety’ grounds or due to the prohibitive costs of installing ramps or other essential facilities.

While potential drinkers may encounter exclusionary measures (such as those addressed by the Equal Status Act 2000), refusal of service particularly in urban areas due to crowd capacity and to a more transient (not regulars) population, is attributed to other factors. Direct refusal of service as well as the more covert exclusionary measures that control access, are occasionally encountered despite legal protections and sanctions. Zanzibar in Dublin city centre is a popular venue, but access can be problematic:

‘there’s always a queue, like to give the impression the place is full, asks how many of you are there? So- if it’s more than three you split up, they have a clicker, counting people in...but when you get in, it’s not so packed – like they are doing you a big favour’ (Respondent D, drinker, female, 30+)

Recognising the dubiousness of ‘door policy’ operating in some public houses, Deputy Brian Hayes (FG) states that refusal of entry based on ‘a problem with certain city accents’ or on arbitrary ‘dress code discrimination’ (The Southside People, 23/03/2002) merits revocation of a licence. Despite strategies that aim to control drinkers and drinking behaviour, human action is not always compliant with legal rules and structures. While district court figures demonstrate considerable disregard for drink-driving legislation (www.courts.ie), ‘cases on hand’ under the ‘Equal Status Act 2000 show that during the period 25/10/2000-31/12/2000, membership of the travelling community accounted for 68.62% (35) cases (Hayes,

2001:40)¹⁰. In 2001, 350 cases were dealt with (some carried over from 2000) where members of the travelling community were denied access to ‘pub/nightclub’. While statistics show specific figures that connect ‘grounds’ and ‘status’ of individual complainants, analysis of cases in the Annual Report of the Equality Authority concluded that the ‘almost overwhelming volume of cases arising was unexpected and unprecedented particularly in the area of refusal of service to members of the traveller community’ (Hayes, 2002:40). The following table indicates casework activity over a twelve year period where members of the travelling community sought assistance from the Equality Authority regarding discriminatory practices such as the refusal of service or access to licensed premises:

Casework Files (members of the Travelling Community v Licensed Premises)

*Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003

**Equal Status Acts, 2000, 2004, 2011

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
*				3	24	34	29	22	29	24	16
**115	350	324	220	116	32	25	16	6	2	8	5

Source: Equality Authority Annual Reports 2000–2012

‘Casework’ figures for each year (advice, advocacy and legal action) show a downwards trend in ‘equality’ cases.

Samples of cases cited in the Equality Reports also show significant findings in favour of the travelling Community:

- In the case of Mr TM v a Public House (2010) the Equality offices made representations on behalf of the complainant, an apology was given and no further action was taken

¹⁰ Equality Authority Annual Report (2001)

- In the case of ‘McDonagh –v- The Castle Inn’ a “quota system” for travellers was said to be in operation, this was found to be “entirely inappropriate and unjustified”.
- In the case ‘Bernard, Richard and Thomas Joyce –v- Liz Delaney’s Pub’ a “judgement call” made at the door that proclaimed “regulars only” was deemed an excuse and a “convenient means of refusing access to individuals they do not want on the premises” (Hayes, 2001:41).

Oldenburg’s assertion that ‘third place’ is inclusive and accessible to the general public is based on the premise that it ‘does not set formal criteria of membership’ and is ‘open to all’ (1999:24). Concepts of openness and accessibility when applied to the Irish public house however, are questionable as the exercise of a ‘door policy’ establishes barriers that must be negotiated. Social relations at the point of entry, manifest themselves as a balance between individual creativity, and structural constraints, a process of negotiation within which the drinker and the drinks provider are expected to operate.

7. 4. ‘Pub-talk’: a unique discourse encompassing ‘topic’ and ‘narrative’.

The category of public house along with the life-course position and consumption choices of drinkers each have a direct bearing upon social relations at the micro-level of interaction. For Oldenburg, the public house as ‘third place’ is described as a ‘place of its own making, fashioned by talk and quite independent of the institutional order of the larger society’ (1999:48) however this is not entirely the case. Bearing in mind the structural frameworks within which the public houses

operates, drinkers and bar workers also perform in accordance with the social and cultural norms at any given time. The social world of the drinker is generated at the micro-level through face-to-face social interaction in an environment of leisure, refreshment and entertainment. In the public house environment ‘company and conversation’ (Oldenburg, 1989:229) with bar workers and fellow drinkers is expected and by and large can take precedence (for drinkers) over comfort, products, entertainment or services. Topics such as politics and sport interspersed with accounts of day-to-day personal experiences and concerns tend to dominate verbal interaction in varying degrees of depth, scope and passion:

‘when I was 15 or 16, I loved going into the pub, listening to the men... the kind of stuff you wouldn’t hear around... because they had a few drinks... they were, like... off-guard or something, now I suppose I’m like them, hah... but it’s the best part... talk about... it could be anything, sport, scandal, the price of cars’ (Respondent A, drinker, male, 60+)

The public house can be a forum that facilitates exchanges of views and information, problem-solving, the impromptu performance of recitations or songs, or the opportunity to ‘spin a yarn colourfully, to banter wittily’ (Taylor, 1983:25), however, there are exceptions where this is not the norm. As a ‘stage’ where the amateur performer’s talents are showcased, the public house environment is said to ‘raise participant’s spirits’ (Oldenburg, 1999:55) thus contributing to emotional and personal wellbeing. Defined by communicative practices, the public house is a setting where there is opportunity to participate in a multiplicity of discourses ranging from casual conversation to heated discussion and for debating an infinite range of topics. For example, debate/conversation in ‘O’Brien’s, Dundalk, Co Louth, 31/12/2004 ranged from the merits and direction of the Northern Ireland ‘peace process’ to comparisons between the hourly pay rates of care-staff in local private and state run nursing homes. As ‘O’Brien’s’ is a family run ‘local’, drinkers

and workers in general are known to each other, therefore workers were drawn into many of the debates and conversations. While drinkers were outspoken and actively disagreed with each other on certain issues, the publican/workers tended to be more circumspect or neutral in their input.

Conversation takes place on two levels, first of all there is the more generalised ‘oral culture’ (Tovey and Share, 2003:376-8) of ‘slagging’¹¹ and secondly, there are private or less generalised conversations. Slagging occurs in public houses where drinkers are known to each other and the practice is tolerated. For example, a male customer on walking in to the bar (‘O’Donoghue’s’, Ballina, Co Mayo, 14/7/2002) was greeted in a jocular manner with *‘so she let you out tonight then’* (referring to a customer’s significant other). While McNabb (1964) had some reservations about this form of interaction, authors such as Whitehead (1976) claim that ‘joking is relatively innocent and light-hearted in purpose; much of it is barbed and pointed and constitutes a guise under which men say outrageous things to each other’ (Bennett and Watson, 2002:223). According to Whitehead’s ethnographic study in “The Wagonner”, verbal exchanges in what was a predominantly male environment were indicative of gender relations within the wider community. Discourses that underpin masculinity and identity are regarded as ‘reinforcing men’s position of control and dominance in relation to wives and girlfriends’ (Bennett and Watson, 2002:199).

The prevalence of ‘low humour’ (Oldenburg, 1999:53) where jokes are made at someone else’s expense to a receptive audience forms much of the verbal

¹¹ Slagging , making fun of someone in a good-humoured way.

exchange between drinkers who are known to each other and with bar workers to whom they are also known. Derisory comments, for example *'will ye look at him, that haircut makes you look like Chris DeBurgh... ha ha... then you're smaller than most humans anyway'* ('O'Meara's', Camden St, Dublin) form part of the banter that is characteristic among social drinkers who are known to each other. To an outsider this form of interaction might imply rudeness or antagonism, however, it is said to 'communicate the strength of fraternal bonds' Oldenburg, 1999:53). A more generalised (and less personalised) jocular mode of interaction, known colloquially as 'the craic' (Trauth, 2000:147) and (McGovern, 2002:84) is part of the public house ambience that encompasses fun, laughter and having a good time in the company of like-minded fellow drinkers.

While the contemporary public house may be a predominantly male environment, gender relations have altered somewhat over the thirty year period since Whitehead's study. Firstly, the presence of women in public houses has increased, prior to the 1960s Irish public houses were 'almost exclusively male-only' (Molloy, 2002:80). Secondly, women, particularly young women who visited the public house have in some instances 'taken over the 'lads' mantle from the boys' (Corcoran, Evening Herald, 17/11/2001 p16, by adopting male behavioural traits both in the quantities of alcohol consumed and in the use and quality of language that can incorporate verbal sparring. Referring to a nationwide survey in the UK, (Plant, British Medical Journal, 2001) and figures released by the Royal College of Physicians (2001) 'ladette' behaviour is on the increase and giving cause for concern.

Despite an increase in the number of female drinkers and an increase in the quantities of alcohol consumed by Irish women (Cassidy, 1997:447), the public house is experienced as a male-dominated environment, for example the lone male drinker is a common presence while the lone female drinker is a rarity. The increasing presence of women has had a two-fold impact upon general discourse. Firstly, it has brought about a modification or a toning down of sexual innuendo and banter among males, or alternatively there is active participation by both men and women (ladettes) in banter, joking and ‘slagging’, which was previously considered a masculine discourse. Secondly, there is an intimate level of interaction where conversation between couples or between small group members is less public but more diverse in tone, content and purpose:

‘the three of us meet for lunch every Thursday, sandwich and a coffee, we have a corner that we sit, good for a goss... not toooo quiet... know what I mean’ (Respondent M, drinker, female, 50+)

The public house a ‘home away from home’ (Bennett and Watson, 2002:183) with relaxed and calming atmosphere, coupled with the physiological effects of alcohol creates an insular environment that is conducive to the sharing of confidences, the perpetuation of local gossip or formulation of solutions to global concerns. While harmonious relations and conviviality are associated with social drinking, consumption of alcohol can equally have other consequences when inhibitions are lowered and interaction becomes increasingly animated or impassioned. The potential therefore for disharmony exists and is recognised as varying degrees of disruption or conflict sometimes occurs. Face-to-face verbal interaction between worker and drinker however, is yet another type of relationship symbolized by the giving and receiving of service. A variety of attitudes and tensions are revealed in the following observations made by Respondent Q, where drinkers who represent

different life-stage positions communicate desires and expectations in verbal exchanges that are considered discourteous and rude:

'it's a very mixed bag from the twenty-somethings to the eighty-somethings, we have a lot of regulars, that when they come in you know exactly what they want, that's all they want, to be looked after, they come in, they sit down, the usual?. Yeah, then you have the younger people that come in, totally different breed of people, they're more arrogant, more 'whats keeping you'? and personally the one thing I've noticed - and its not a lot but its appreciated with people now, the younger generation - you never hear 'please' or 'thank you' out of them, its 'gimme this', 'gimme that', when say, the 35 upwards, its always please and thank you very much, they do appreciate it, customers generally, 99% of them are generally sound people' (Respondent Q, publican, Banagher, Co Offaly)

Verbal interaction between bar-worker and drinker demonstrates an unconscious, continuous merging of cultural, economic and regulatory processes that defines the relationship in different ways. For example, the following interaction between bar-worker and drinker as a drink is served demonstrates a microcosm of social processes and discourses that surround the sale and purchase of alcohol:

'Pat, you're a bit late tonight, that'll be €4.50'. (Respondent H, publican, Mallow, Co Cork).

A verbal response to a request for alcohol implies that bar-worker and customer are known to each other and implies knowledge of the customer's drinking habits. As Pat is a regular drinker it may be assumed that he is aware of the hours of business, yet it is the bar-worker who raises the issue of a legally-defined 'closing-time'. Also implicit in the discourse is the business or economic transaction of exchanging money for product and service.

When analysing discourses in relation to social drinking, it is crucial that the physiological¹² effects of alcohol are taken into account as the quantities consumed

¹² Alteration in the functioning of body and mind (in this instance brought about by alcohol) that can affect thoughts, perceptions and actions.

and the level of inebriation reached can have far-reaching effects on social relations between drinkers and between drinkers and bar workers. A lowering of inhibitions coupled with the expression of strong beliefs and opinions can instigate impassioned debate that has the potential to create tension or discord among drinkers. Tactlessness or insulting comments can have far-reaching consequences as the following account shows:

‘I was so stupid, it just came out all wrong, just as well Lisa was there - made us see sense, one of the down-sides I suppose, could have ruined a good night and wrecked a friendship’ (Respondent B, drinker, female, 20+)

While the consumption (effects) of alcohol contributes positively to the quality of social interaction and integration, the opposite can also occur, when alcohol-induced disharmony may develop into verbal or physical conflict. As an undesirable consequence of excessive (relative term) consumption the concept of inebriation (also a relative term) has a social and cultural as well as a medical and a legal classification that may also be defined within a sociological framework.

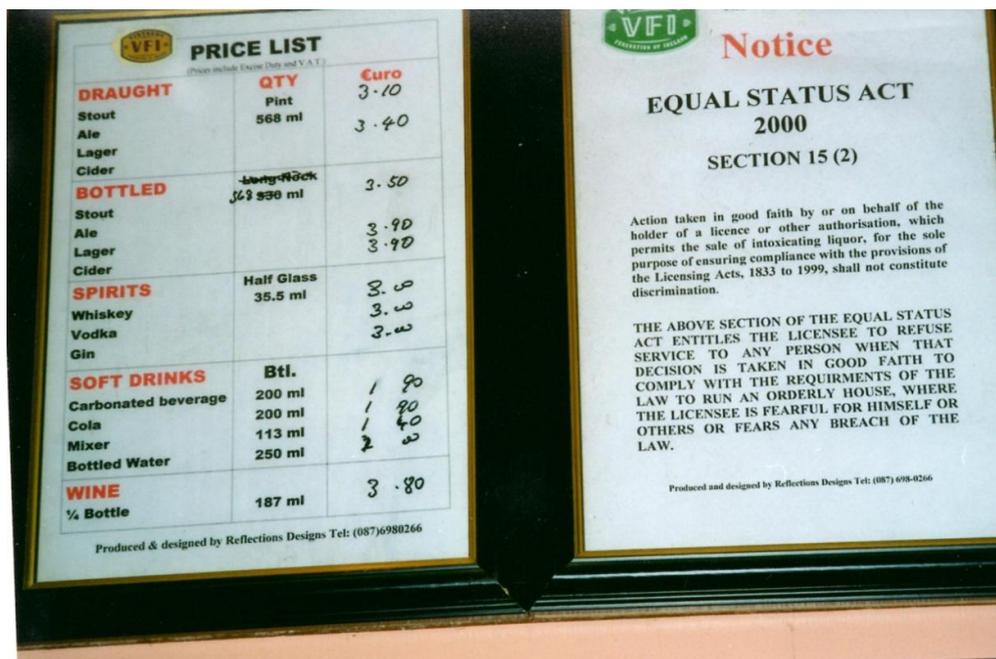
7. 5. The bar-worker: a complexity of functional roles and responsibilities.

The day-to-day activities of all bar-workers are highly regulated and require a working knowledge of regulations that apply to the operational aspects of the drinks trade. As well as performing a service role within clearly defined legal boundaries, bar-workers and manages while ‘balancing the interests of all concerned’ (Joseph, 1990:49) also operate as agents of the state in their capacity as law-enforcers. Due to the highly regulated nature of the drinks trade, simple bar-worker tasks such as serving a pint of beer is immersed in a legal quagmire of rules and laws. For

example, the *times* when service is permitted, the *quantity and volume* of the alcohol product and the *age* of the drinker, are but some elements of bar service that are governed by law and ultimately, are the responsibility of the bar-worker/publican.



7.5.1. Prominently displayed legal notice regarding hours of business



7.5.2. The price list.

Price lists for specific beverages must be displayed at the entrance to the pub.

Workers who are charged with monitoring and managing the alcohol consumption practices of others may also in some instances perform a ‘security’ role that has real potential for conflict. Electronic monitoring, that may perform many different functions along with control of drinking behaviour is indicated in the following observation:

‘one of the changes I’ve noticed is that even in the very rural pubs they have video cameras over the front door to watch the people coming in and out, they have other ones at the till, cameras on the cellar and cameras moving around, scanning the place, again, they are not there for the fun of it. Obviously the publican feels the need for some protection and to be able to analyse the video tape at some later stage’ (Respondent S, Garda Superintendent, Dublin Metropolitan Area)

Due to the increasing presence of dedicated security personnel particularly in large-capacity urban public houses, formal organisation, training and the establishment of a code of practice for security workers as outlined by Respondent V is being developed in conjunction with the setting up of the Private Security Authority, (2004) whose mission statement reads as follows:

‘it is the aim of the Authority to use the statutory and regulation powers provided to it to introduce positive fundamental change in the industry. Our purpose is to instil customer and public confidence in this multi-stranded, multi-faceted business with the introduction, control and management of a comprehensive, standard- driven licensing system for all individuals and individuals involved in the industry and to do so in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of the market’ (The Private Security Authority www.psa.gov.ie)

While the responsibility for maintaining ‘control of persons on or in the premises’ (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008:20) rests with the proprietor and his representatives, drinkers as individual consumers are equally deemed to be accountable for their personal behaviour. Drinker behaviour is defined according to what is socially tolerable and what is legally acceptable. Drunkenness while legally prohibited may or may not be socially acceptable to bar-workers or fellow drinkers. Anti-social acts

such as drug-dealing while legally prohibited may be perceived as a ‘service’¹³. On the other hand, behaviour that is interpreted as ‘nuisance’¹⁴, while sometimes unacceptable on a social level may not be legally proscribed. Social relations between consumer and provider that are politically mediated are perceived on the one hand as an impediment to the realization of economic goals while on the other hand they are credited with the reshaping of social and consumption behaviour.

When laws that control the drinks industry and regulate alcohol consumption practices are extended or intensified, those to whom they apply react in different ways. When legal limitations are changed or initiated, (for example, changes in blood-alcohol levels for drivers¹⁵ or new responsibilities regarding customer behaviour such as that which proscribes drunkenness¹⁶), each change is accompanied by clearly defined legal sanctions. Interpretation of changes that impact upon drinking practices and more importantly of the related sanctions, determines how change is received and responded to. For the drinks provider, compliance with increasing structural constraints poses a direct challenge to economic objectives while non-compliance means the possibility of sanctions. For the social drinker the public house experience is influenced by local and global processes, an amalgamation of structural constraints and obligations that specify who can drink, what people drink and have an indirect input into where people drink. Emerging trends in the way alcohol is consumed bring about new modes of interaction (within or beyond the public house) that transform traditional informal association.

¹³ Respondents G and K discussed the ‘scourge’ of illegal drugs in general terms. K related anecdotal accounts of ‘known’ pubs in the Dublin area where drugs may be sourced while G outlined the use of deterrents such as CCTV and preventative measures such as ultra-violet lighting in toilet areas

¹⁴ For G and K, when illegal activity is reported to the Garda, it is no longer the proprietor’s responsibility. Exuberant behaviour or drunkenness, however, when causing fear or discomfort to others, must be controlled but in a diplomatic way.

¹⁵ Section 10, The Road traffic act 1994 and Section 4, The Road Traffic Act 2010.

¹⁶ Section 4, Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994

7. 6. The Irish public house: changing paradigms of culture and consumption.

The public house in contemporary Irish society has evolved to meet the needs of social drinkers, in accordance with modern work practices and in line with the laws and regulations that encompass the drinks industry and drinking behaviour. Change, such as the feminization of drinking space, is according to Moss a 'post-millennium trend' (2010:63) that occurred in conjunction with the smoking ban across Europe and North America. Redecoration in bright colours, addition of more comfortable seating and the removal of pool tables and dart boards created a feminized space that appealed to women drinkers. In Ireland, the feminization of pubs and bars began with the creation of the 'lounge-bar', drinks such as wine, light beers and 'alco-pops' and an emerging cultural change that acknowledged the presence of women socialising in bars as an acceptable social norm. For the drinker, new products and services that changed the identity and the use of the public house built up 'taste or lifestyle patterns' that may be regarded as 'microcultures' (Fornas, 1995:104) and that has broadened the understanding of drinking spaces. The transition from drinking emporium to casual dining space (a time-specific use that met growing expectations) increased flows of people by creating a new purpose for which people visited the public house.

For the social drinker an increase in leisure-time and in disposable income along with transformation of the public house, growth in the diversity of alcohol and alcohol-related products, and an apparently 'unhampered market mechanism' (Fornas, 1995:72), together shaped the social drinking experience. Due to 'way of life' (Williams, 1958) changes, the concept of 'pub-grub' (59.2% increase years

2000-2004, ESRI, 2004) developed as an essential product/service in the contemporary public house. The designation of dining spaces, the construction of kitchens and ancillary work-spaces and the application of new skills, was undertaken in response to growing consumer expectations at the cultural level. Factors such as the smoking ban and development of dining spaces are according to my research, a disruptive influence that has dismantled the long established relationship between alcohol and tobacco and has made public and commonplace the act of consuming food. As well as the disruption associated with the separation of alcohol and tobacco consumption and the development of dining spaces, further structural transformations such as increasing price levels has meant that social drinking in the public house can be problematic in monetary terms. While drinkers acknowledge the positive (health and safety) safeguards inherent in tobacco-consumption legislation, escalating price levels however, are perceived less favourably:

'love the pub - hate the prices...it gets dearer after a certain time, you feel 'scammed'... like they take advantage of peoples drunkenness...don't care any more how much they're paying - so we bring in naggins...hurray for Lidl [supermarket noted for selling cheap alcohol]'
(Respondent B, drinker, female, 20+)

For Respondent F, the monetary costs of social drinking are minimised in the following way:

'we have to go out... just have to, parties in flats have taken people out of the pubs, we go down for a while, then it's back to some ones gaff for more, kinda like taking the pub home with you' (Respondent F, drinker, male, 30+)

While Respondents B and F continue to drink socially in the public house, strategies such as purchasing less 'on-sales' alcohol products and availing instead of 'off-sales' outlets demonstrates a consciousness of costs (and savings) associated with social drinking. Deterrents such as monetary costs, (problematic) accessibility or the

prohibition on tobacco consumption are but disincentives that in practice may discourage but do not eliminate the desire to interact with others while consuming alcohol in the public house.

For Respondent T social drinking in the public house has two distinct advantages:

'have been doing it ... enjoying it for years, you get out and meet the people... hear things, important that... and a nice couple of pints... you won't get that out of a bottle, drinking at home... wouldn't have any truck with that... a pub is a pub if you know what I mean... more to it than the drink' (Respondent T, drinker, male, 50+)

The public house while understood as a place where alcohol may be purchased and consumed is also interpreted as a place that is accessible and where friendliness and conviviality is the norm. For social drinkers, the public house is understood as a site of 'informal association' (Oldenburg, 1999) and as a public space that is accessible and open to all. It is a place that is widely perceived as inclusive, informal and friendly and where alcohol may be consumed in the company of others.

While Oldenburg argues that 'third places' are 'levellers' and where 'worldly status' (1999:24) is irrelevant, the Irish public house is to a large extent characterised by segregation and division. Further divisions exist such as places that are routinely (and known to be) inhabited by specific socio-economic groups or in accordance with the 'life-stage position' (Hunt, 2005) of the drinker. Class-difference is particularly noticeable in rural public houses where invisible boundaries separated for example, farmers/farm workers (in outdoor work clothing), business people (more formal attire) and '*dole boys*' (Respondent H), a group of young men who were supposedly unemployed. Although seated or

standing at the same bar-counter, served by the same bar-worker, drinkers did not interact beyond their own group or acknowledge the presence of others. In areas of high-density population, 'difference' is accommodated at separate locations where public houses with specific identities provide for a diverse population of drinkers with explicit needs and expectations. The consumption of alcohol whether in private or public space, is a phenomenon that is generated by cultural processes and according to a structural framework of organisational mechanisms. The social world of the drinker (the bottom-up perspective) while having the appearance of casualness and informality, is promoted and understood according to a discourse of refreshment, relaxation, entertainment and most importantly social interaction. This study reveals the reality underpinning alcohol consumption practices and alcohol-related activity where drinking patterns and performance of the drinks trade is monitored, structured and highly regulated and controlled.

Chapter 8. Conclusion.

This research project centres on the lived experience of the Irish social drinker, a social world that is highly structured and is traditionally located within the Irish public house. When alcohol consumption is the research topic, investigations into the damaging aspects of alcohol such as occurrences of addiction or misuse (Mongan, 2007 and Hope, 2008), tend to dominate. In the public arena, negative discourses surrounding publicans and the drinks industry, drinkers and alcohol-induced behaviour, permeates radio, television and the print media. Evidence of widespread over-indulgence in alcohol both anecdotally and statistically, is according to my research the rationale behind education programmes and information campaigns advising of the harmful effects of alcohol misuse. While the spotlight is firmly focused on visible, disruptive and potentially damaging drinking behaviour, the less remarkable practice of what is commonly referred to as ‘moderate’ or leisurely ‘social’ drinking is by and large neglected. Steering away from the excesses and the extremes often associated with drinking behaviour, this study instead, places the conventional or moderate social drinker at the core. Excesses and extremes will always achieve notoriety; the everyday and the ordinary however, do not.

8. 1. Social drinking: a ‘non-problematic’ practice?

The multiplicity of meanings pertaining to social drinking, meant that for this researcher, the identification and selection of social drinkers was a problematical and a revelatory task. Participants when describing drinking

experiences/histories particularly in relation to quantities of alcohol consumed, evaluated terms such as ‘moderate’, ‘social’ or ‘excessive’ drinking in very different ways. Drinking ‘in moderation’ is according to my research, a relative term, describing disparate drinking patterns and practices. Consumption practices (in terms of quantity and frequency) that are expressed as ‘normal’ or ‘average’ vary considerably among drinkers. ‘Social’ drinking is a term that is used to describe drinking in the company of other drinkers however the term is also used to differentiate between the ‘problematic’ drinker and the ‘normal’ drinker. For example, accounts of the *number* of drinks consumed over a specific period such as ‘two glasses of wine is my limit’ (Respondent E) or ‘could do five or six pints weekend nights’ (Respondent T) revealed vastly contradictory interpretations. The *frequency* with which alcohol is consumed also differed considerably among those who considered themselves moderate drinkers. For example, Respondents L, male, and W, female, did not consider alcohol consumption in the home as ‘drinking’, and did *not* include this now common practice when describing the *frequency* with which they consumed alcohol. As evidence of the particularized ‘reflexive project of self’ (Hunt, 2005:123), the views of drinkers differed greatly as regards what was considered ‘average’ or ‘normal’ alcohol consumption patterns.

When terms such as ‘excessive drinking’ and ‘misuse of alcohol’ (used by reporters/experts) and ‘moderate’ or ‘social’ drinking’ (as defined by the drinker) are used to describe alcohol consumption practices, the co-existence of *two* separate discourses *and* two polar-opposite views that describe a single practice emerge. Consequently, contradictory interpretations of drinking practices as described, meant for this researcher, a continuous verification of meaning, due to the diverse

perceptions and experiences of individual respondents. For the drinker, the concept of ‘social’ or ‘moderate’ drinking is subjective and unfixed therefore the *quantities* of alcohol consumed and the *frequency* of consumption are interpreted in vastly different ways. This anomaly became evident during the interview and data-analysis stages, calling for a deeper understanding and an ongoing clarification of social drinking as understood and experienced by participants.

For the purpose of this research project, ‘social’ or ‘non-problematic’ drinkers are categorised as ‘drinkers’ (see Chapter 3.6.2), people who define themselves as ‘normal’, ‘social’ or ‘moderate’ drinkers. The concepts of ‘moderate’ or ‘social’ drinking however, were communicated through a dialogue of ‘mixed messages’ (Neuman, 1997:375) that was either contradictory or unclear. Consumers of alcohol were selected for participation in the study *not* according to a pre-determined level in the frequency of consumption or because of the actual quantities consumed. This element of the methodology gave drinkers a ‘voice’, an opportunity to interpret and describe feelings, relationships and practices that are connected to the consumption of alcohol. Constraints that apply to the activity of drinking were expressed as problematic encounters that called for reflexion, planning and negotiation.

Drinkers who participated in the study were selected because *they* considered themselves social or moderate drinkers, despite a considerable variation in their drinking patterns and in their perceptions of alcohol and its potential physiological and psychological effects. The definition of the non-problematic drinker therefore, is an ambiguous one, where the self-defined ‘moderate’ or

‘social’ drinker may in reality (in physiological terms) be an ‘excessive’ drinker or may, according to WHO criterion belong to the category of ‘problem’ drinker. Routine drinking patterns varied from one individual to another, in terms of what was considered (and was justified) as being within acceptable (consumption) limits. Evaluation of the role of alcohol and of personal alcohol consumption practices is revealed as a reflexive process of ‘self-referentiality’ (Fornas, 1995:5) that for the individual drinker ultimately constructed their understanding of *and* their relationship with alcohol

Ways of thinking about alcohol and a possible explanation for such diversity in individual points of view arise first of all out of inter-generational mores that are passed on and adopted. Secondly, the proposition that the ‘concept of reflexivity primarily indicates a phenomenon of pictorial visuality’ (Fornas, 1995:210), particularly in relation to alcohol advertising is a factor that influences thinking and action in relation to drinking. In Ireland alcohol is presented and consumed in an environment of contradictory messages and images that on the one hand highlight the damage (costs) of alcohol-related actions (Hope, 2008) while on the other hand, alcohol is centrally located as a long-established feature of social life. Media images of anti-social behaviour associated with the misuse of alcohol and of road traffic-accident fatalities attributed to drunk-driving, appear alongside billboard, television and print media images of celebratory gatherings and social events where alcohol products are clearly in evidence. Alcohol-promotional images feature alcohol products and the act of consuming alcohol as central to social and leisure activities, while images of newsworthy events such as achievement (‘winners’ with champagne) or celebration (toasting with alcohol at birthdays and weddings) signify

that alcohol has both an affirmative and a symbolic role in Irish social life. Public service information calling for self-discipline and restraint along with advice to ‘drink sensibly’ www.drinkaware.ie, compete with messages relating to alcohol-sponsored events and information on promotional offers of low-cost multi-packs of lager and cider, ‘off-sales’ home delivery services and the launch of new or improved alcohol products.

Debates following publication of reports on the societal costs of alcohol (Holmes, 2003; Kiely, 2004 and Byrne, 2010) took place against a backdrop of discourses pertaining to leisure pursuits, tourism and sporting activities, each intrinsically bound up with alcohol. Currently, debates regarding the phasing out of links between sport sponsorship and the alcohol industry is gathering momentum (<http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/Debates%20A>). On the one hand, Kieran Mulvey, Chairman of the Irish Sports Council argues the need for funding (estimated at €30 million per year) provided by the Drinks Industry in the form of sponsorship, while on the other hand, Minister White prepares legislation that will prohibit the practice. Mixed messages regarding alcohol convey meanings that are in turn, interpreted in different ways. A multiplicity of perceptual standpoints determine what is regarded as ‘social’ and what exceeds or is no longer defined as ‘social’ drinking. Domestic consumption of alcohol (a practice more difficult to measure) contributes even further to the ambiguity surrounding the definitive nature of the social drinker. Alcohol consumed in the home, along with public house drinking was interpreted in different ways by each respondent. The *quantities* of alcohol consumed and the *frequency* with which alcohol is consumed that may, according to research (Mongan, Hope and Nelson, 2009), cause physiological and

psychological harm, is frequently categorised by drinkers as ‘normal’, ‘social’ or ‘moderate’.

The phenomenon of the ‘social drinker’ as arrived at through processes of ‘self observation’ (Fornas, 1995:210) is therefore, in itself problematic. The concept of ‘social drinker’ is transient insofar as it changes in accordance with continuously shifting meanings and interpretations that are appropriated, lived and that are made use of to justify individual drinking practices. For the researcher and for the reader, mindfulness of the phenomenon of ‘first order interpretation’ (Neuman, 1997:335), one that lies at the core of qualitative research, is critical. Individual interpretations of (their) social drinking practices in light of current research findings (Kiely, 2004 and HRB, 2009), suggests the need for a re-evaluation of the term ‘social drinking’. An informed review of routine drinking practices by the alcohol consumer, in light of emerging research findings (Hope, 2007 and 2008) is essential to the continued health and general wellbeing of the social drinker and to the betterment of the wider society. As an unanticipated ‘finding’, ambiguity surrounding the meanings of ‘social’, ‘moderate’ or ‘unproblematic’ when discussing alcohol consumption practices, call for caution and discernment when interpreting and analysing data. Due to a marked lack of clarity and understanding surrounding the concept of social drinking, the sources, the extent and the consequences of such beliefs and interpretations (for the drinker and for the researcher) warrant further investigation. While the qualitative nature of the study is its greatest strength however, for this researcher the undertaking to understand, interpret and generate meaning in an objective manner evolved into both thought-provoking and complex tasks in ways that were not anticipated.

The way in which drinkers understand and participate in pub culture when explored, revealed major ambiguities between the definitions of 'social' and 'problematic' drinking. Alcohol-related activity was perceived as a commonplace leisure and lifestyle activity that was 'normal' or otherwise unremarkable. Changing trends in the marketization and growing availability of alcohol products and in the public house experience were considered part of the broader cultural condition. Likewise, the intensification of structural constraints that are re-shaping drinking practices were interpreted as a component of a wider 'social order' or 'big brother' agenda. This sociological study that takes into account the motivations to drink, perceptions of the role of alcohol, drinking patterns and drinking places, affords a comprehensive insight into the social world of the drinker irrespective of social/problematic categorization. It is my view that the ambiguity surrounding perceptions of what is 'social' and what is 'problematic' (as perceived by the individual drinker) is of critical significance in any alcohol-related study and should be taken into account in future studies

8. 2. Drinking as an age-specific pursuit: the 'life-course' dynamic.

The concept of 'social drinker', (while open to interpretation), is primarily an affirmative term adopted by drinkers and drinks providers to indicate control, moderation and to reflect alcohol consumption patterns that are considered socially acceptable. The act of 'social drinking' is also understood in another way, that of drinking in the company of others (socialising), generally, in a public house. Social drinking in the public house therefore moves beyond the realm of 'consumption' where alcohol sometimes plays a secondary role to sociability and social

connectivity that evolves throughout the life course. Together, conversation and alcohol consumption produce a ‘talking/drinking synergism’ (Oldenburg, 1999:167), a totality that is considered greater than the sum of their separate ‘consuming’ and ‘interacting’ parts. The physiological effects of alcohol when leisurely consumed in the company of others, generates a mode of conversation or interaction that according to Oldenburg, is ‘enhanced by the temperate use of alcohol’ (1999:167). Discourses surrounding social drinking that imply control, moderation and limitation also encompasses the notion of informal association with others where friendship, conversation and fun form a crucial element of the social drinking experience.

The relationship between drinkers and alcohol along with readings of the contemporary public house link first of all to the ‘life- stage position’ (Hunt, 2005) of the social drinker at any given time and secondly, to changes in life-style preferences that develop throughout the life-course (see Chapters 2.2 and 4.5). The changing appeal of alcohol and the allure of the public house over time are implicit in the narrative (Respondent C), signifying a modification of social drinking practices as they are revised according to maturity, changing lifestyle choices or social circumstances. Leisure-time activities in Ireland and informal association in leisure environments have both a historic and a symbolic link with alcohol. The ritual of sharing food and drink has always played and continues to play a central role in the celebration of personal or communal achievements, and when ‘rites of passage’ (Hunt, 2005:124) from childhood to adulthood are observed. The history of social drinking and of informal association in ‘third places’ (Oldenburg, 1999) show age-appropriate changes in drinking customs, and changes in attitude towards

alcohol (Molloy, 2002:10) that are time and place specific. Analysis of social drinking practices shows that for the drinker, perceptions and experiences of alcohol evolve throughout the life-course. At different stages throughout the life-cycle, people 'exhibit varying attitudes to work family and leisure' (Hunt, 2005:162) that extends to include leisure and life-style choices.

Alcohol consumption according to my data is experienced differently at various stages throughout the life-course. While excessive drinking is associated with younger drinkers, this phenomenon shows a decline in the over 25s. Evidence show contemporary drinking habits as a 'taken-for-granted activity' for 77% of 16 - 20 year olds in Ireland (UNICEF, 2010), and misuse of alcohol by drinkers in their late teens, and early twenties. This has meant an intensification of campaigns such as 'rethinking our drinking PACING campaign', (2012) that aim to educate and that encourage 'sensible' drinking. The objective of campaigns that target young drinkers in particular, is to reduce alcohol intake through education and the promotion of self-discipline and restraint. Contrary to campaigns that deter the practice of drinking is the proliferation of media messages and images that promote alcohol as a desirable feature of youth culture *and* is specifically aimed at younger drinkers. The mediatisation of alcohol is both a complex and a contradictory phenomenon. While contradictory messages aimed at young drinkers (to entice or deter) might imply that social drinking is a practice that is life-stage specific, my data shows that the relationship with alcohol continues (but in a less overt way) throughout the life course. Occasional or moderate drinkers who claim to have '*matured*' (Respondent A) or '*got sense*' (Respondent L) described changes in their actions and attitudes would indicate a steady decrease in alcohol intake as well as in

the desire to overindulge. Perceptions of change however, (in light of the assertions in Chapter 8.1) must be borne in mind.

The notion that problematic drinking is associated specifically with younger drinkers and that drinking patterns are modified over time is however, an oversimplification. Media focus on youth drinking such as the excessive quantities consumed, alcohol-related accidents and injuries, along with anti-social behaviour and crime, generates the impression of an age-specific activity. While older age-group drinkers rarely achieve newsworthiness, their relationship with alcohol is sometimes ‘a common but under-recognised problem’ (Dar, 2006) that cannot be ignored. Drinking patterns and practices among older drinkers while seemingly less high-spirited or visible are expressed subjectively. Comprehension and interpretation of the term ‘social drinker’ (as discussed in the previous section) can, according to my research mask the reality as experienced by the self-defined social drinker. As alcohol consumption practices change throughout the life-course, so also does the perception and justification of drinking behaviour.

8.3. The Irish pub:: a multi-functional space or a disappearing place?

The public house as a ‘meaningful location’ (Cresswell, 2004:7) of informal social interaction is widely acknowledged as contributing positively to social and community life. Claims by the Commission on Liquor Licensing that the public house plays ‘an important economic and social role in rural villages’ (Holmes, 2003:93) implies firstly, the *value* of the public house as a place of social connectivity and secondly, that the public house may be the *only* appropriate venue

in smaller rural communities. While both urban and rural public houses each have similarities and differences, their presence and their purpose such as that of ‘social regeneration’ (Oldenburg, 1999:41) serve the communities in which they are located. For the social drinker, the public house as a traditional Irish institution is a constant presence that fosters a ‘habit of association’ (Oldenburg, 1999:72) thus playing a key role in counteracting the rise of individualism and social isolation and as such must be appreciated and cherished.

During the course of this research, the practice of routinely consuming alcohol in the public house was undergoing varying degrees of transformation. Firstly, the growth of ‘off-sales’ outlets indicated an increase in the domestic consumption of alcohol (see Chapter 5); the public house was no longer the only retail-outlet where alcohol might be purchased. Changes in drinking practices occurred when ‘readjustments to social roles and expectations’ (Hunt, 2005:124) manifested themselves in the life-style choices made throughout the life course. The transformation of drinking practices linked directly to *and* took place in a rapidly changing social and societal context (Whelan and Layte, 2007). Connections were made between increased spending-power and a rise in the consumption of leisure goods and services (Clinch et al, 2002). New ways of consuming and new locations of consumption along with a rapid growth and diversity of alcohol products and alcohol-related activities, that are ‘expressive of individual lifestyles and identities’ (Bennett and Watson, 2002:207) have fundamentally altered traditional drinking experiences.

Secondly, the public house, traditionally associated with informal association and alcohol consumption, has also been transformed in terms of material environment, goods and services. Changes to the material environment that in some instances meant a significant increase in capacity or restructuring to incorporate new products and services, transformed drinking space into a multi-choice space of leisure and consumption. Theming of the public house environment as a centre ‘geared towards pure escapism as typified by theme parks’ (Hunt, 2005:165) makes use of images, objects, lighting and music to create a distinctive setting with a specific identity. To accommodate a changing functionality, spatial re-configuration of interior and exterior surroundings such as elaborate smoking zones, food and entertainment spaces, created a new industry specialising in interior design (see Chapter 5). Interior lay-out design, images, and music that create an atmosphere of ‘belonging’ (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001:218), is an essential element in the re-affirmation of the public house as an informal and welcoming environment. The use of technology to produce visual, sound and lighting effects (O’Donnell, O’Neill, 2004:27) contributes to the construction of a specific identity that distinguishes each public house, thus appealing to a particular drinker/consumer. Modern interior design (Molloy, 2002:81) incorporates the strategic placement of bar-furniture in order to define drinking/dining spaces that ultimately translate into an increase in retail space. The appropriation (and marketing) of traditional drinking space for dining or entertainment purposes pre-determines (and promotes) the products and services that are available to a wide diversity of consumer needs at any given time.

Social change in Ireland associated with domestic prosperity, a ‘culture of self-indulgence’ (Inglis, 2002:35) and the confidence to embrace new ways of being marked a gradual but fundamental transformation in informal social life. New trends in the consumption of food and drink (an increase in drinking in private spaces and eating in public spaces) developed as a response to work, leisure and lifestyle changes defined by global as well as by local processes. A transformation of consumerist and lifestyle practices arising out of increased population mobility and communication on a global scale, significantly changed patterns of consumption and the relationship between drinkers and alcohol. At the turn of the 21st century, Ireland was a newly progressive society, where the ‘reconstruction of Irish identity within global parameters’ (Fagan, 2002) impacted upon all aspects of social life. As a consequence of Ireland’s growing economy and the mobility of the Irish population, opportunities to experience alternative ways of being became possible and were adopted and integrated into Irish culture.

For the social drinker an increase in leisure-time and in disposable income along with transformation of the public house, growth in the diversity of alcohol and alcohol-related products, and an apparently ‘unhampered market mechanism’ (Fornas, 1995:72), together shaped the social drinking experience. Due to ‘way of life’ (Williams, 1958) changes, the concept of ‘pub-grub’ (59.2% increase years 2000-2004, ESRI, 2004) developed as an essential product/service in the contemporary public house. The designation of dining spaces, the construction of kitchens and ancillary work-spaces and the application of new skills, was undertaken in response to growing consumer expectations at the cultural level. For the drinker, new products and services that changed the identity and the use of the public house built up ‘taste or lifestyle patterns’ that may be regarded as

‘microcultures’ (Fornas, 1995:104) and broadened the understanding of drinking spaces. The transition from drinking emporium to casual dining space (a time-specific use that met growing expectations) increased flows of people by creating a new purpose for which people visited the public house.

Spending on alcohol in the public house showed an 11% decrease in 2002, while the amount of alcohol purchased in off-sales outlets also increased dramatically by 13% in the same period (Respondent G 2002). Correlation between the amount *spent* on alcohol and the *quantities* of alcohol consumed however is ambiguous, due primarily to the price differential between ‘on-sales’ and ‘off-sales’ transactions. When factored in with other variables such as cross-border shopping and alcohol purchased (particularly wine) in France and other European wine-producing countries, figures become blurred and expenditure and quantities consumed prove incalculable. Quantities of alcohol consumed may be somewhat vague, however the variety of alcohol products on offer and the number of alcohol retail outlets show a distinct increase. Increases in ‘off-sales’ outlets and ‘off-sales’ purchases of alcohol is highly significant insofar as it is indicative of the shift from public to private space drinking. The comment ‘*cheaper to drink at home...the pub is for pints*’ (Respondent F, male, 30+) was a recurring sentiment expressed by younger drinkers (respondents), who are *not* exchanging private for public space drinking, but use both locations for different purposes. The consumption of wine, canned beer and vodka in the home was alluded to as an economic measure and to ‘*prepare ourselves for the night*’ (Respondent F). This action often precedes a visit to the public house for the explicit purposes of consuming ‘pints’ (draught beers/stout) and for the opportunity of integrating with other drinkers. The practice

of pre-drinking (prinking) is symbolic of C21 drinking practices that now stretch across the public and the private spheres.

For social drinkers in the ‘informal gathering place’ (Oldenburg, 1999) that is the public house setting, there is a variety of alcoholic beverages the company of other drinkers and in many instances, there may also be food and entertainment. The choice to consume alcohol in the home as an act of ‘self –realization’ (Gottdiener, 2001:147), evolved due to the wide availability of lower-priced ‘off-sales’ alcohol products *and* in response to the growing ‘problems’ of transportation and smoking restrictions. The shift from public space to domestic space as a site for the consumption of alcohol has had a far-reaching effect on the drinker/alcohol/public house relationship. Changing conditions inherent in the contemporary public house (such as pricing, smoking restrictions), and the constraints and obligations applying to those who consume alcohol (such as inebriation and blood-alcohol levels for drivers), have problematised the heretofore casual informality of social drinking.

The meaning and the status of the public house therefore, has developed in accordance with the social ‘mores’ at any given time, into the contemporary multi-functional and multi-identity model that is a time and user-specific space of consumption. Despite the re-organisation and use of space that on the one hand was both an innovative and an enterprising venture, the practice of social drinking in the public house is shown to have decreased and drinking and socialising in the home is developing as a regular practice. As one of Ireland’s oldest institutions, the public house is said to be ‘struggling’ (Hanley, Val. 2008) to retain a presence in many

communities, having experienced over 1,000 closures during the previous three year period.. On the one hand, growth in the range of available products along with a variety of (some unique) public house types, means that for the drinker, the Irish public house is not only a 'Great Good Place' (Oldenburg, 1999), but is a diversity of places. The decline of the 'local' public house, on the other hand, has a multiplicity of consequences, for example, the disappearance of a space of informal interaction and an increase in the trend of domestic alcohol consumption. The shift from 'on' to 'off-sales' not only has implications for the drinks trade, it also has a profound effect on the social drinker. Decline of the public house and the increase in domestic consumption is according to my data, the basis for unstructured and uncalculated alcohol consumption levels. The perceived destructive effect on rural communities (absence of a public place of informal association) such as 'rural isolation' and 'loneliness' (VFI,2012) and (Irish Examiner, 24/01/2013) is expressed by both drinkers and by representatives of the drinks trade.

8. 4. Transformative processes: their impact upon perceptions and practices.

The social world of the drinker is according to my data, a world that is always in transition (see Chapter 4.2). Changes are shown as attributable to an amalgam of social processes, encompassing the cultural, the economic and the regulatory spheres (see Chapters 5.9, 6.7, 7.6). Processes that impact upon the drinks trade and upon drinking practices impose constraints and obligations that manifest themselves at all levels of alcohol-related activity. Economic objectives of the drinks trade that operate in conjunction with regulatory principles play a key role in social relations (culture) at the point of interaction. Legislation such as the

“Liquor Licensing Act(s)”, and the “Public Health (Tobacco) Act(s)” in conjunction with the economic endeavours and aspirations of the drinks industry together produce, shape and control alcohol products, drinking environments, drinkers and drinking practices. Evidence of conflict when oppositional social processes converge (and seek to dominate) is exposed at the level of interaction, for example, when the desire to consume alcohol encounters prohibitive conditions. For example, circumstances where the public house and home of the drinker are located some distance apart and transportation is problematic, calls for decisive action that should ideally facilitate the drinker, while remaining within legal parameters. The question of transport, according to my data, however, is not only restricted by regulatory processes but may equally be influenced by economic forces that might preclude or allow for alternative (at monetary cost) transportation arrangements.

The most radical change that occurred in the public house environment during the course of this research was the implementation of the ‘smoking ban’. A prohibition on tobacco consumption in work-places (in this instance, the public house) was introduced for the protection of workers (Allwright, 2004) (see Chapters 4 and 6 above). Regulatory processes (Tobacco Acts) restricted the time-honoured cultural practice of smoking and directed the re-drawing of spatial boundaries that incorporated the creation of new and separate consumption spaces. For the publican, the Act that ‘makes it a crime to smoke a tobacco product in a licensed premises insofar as it is a place of work’ (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008) translated into an obligation to establish and service dedicated smoking zones. In order to comply with the law, smoking zones must be in an area that is either uncovered by a roof or, if a roof is in place, the enclosed section must not be more than 50% of the

perimeter boundary (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008). While regulatory processes underpin the construction of a separate smoking zone, economic processes are also at play. Conversion of existing retail space or the appropriation of external space for the use of smokers, is at once a legal obligation and a business stratagem when the standard of ‘smoking areas’ become a selling point, along with other qualities that popularises a public house. In effect, while compliance with the (Tobacco) Act is obligatory *and* necessitates considerable financial outlay, the prospect of facilitating a new social group (smokers) presented an unanticipated business-related opportunity.

For drinkers, Tobacco legislation meant a spatial relocation of tobacco consumption practices, a sudden and uncompromising set of circumstances that impacted upon smokers, non-smokers and workers. Implementation of the ‘ban’ was not only responsible for the reconfiguration of space, but altered the ambience (no smoky haze) and odour (smoke replaced by human, food and chemical smells) traditionally associated with Irish pub culture and with the public house experience. Odours that were a distinguishing characteristic of the traditional public house dissipated, exposing a fusion of new odours that previously were masked and therefore undetectable. While smokers might argue that the right to smoke was a personal decision and physical health issues the responsibility of the individual, evidence that smokers were causing harm to others (Health Effects of Environmental Tobacco Smoke, 2003) in close proximity, negated any argument to the contrary.

The practice of smoking in the company of non-smokers decreased, not only in the public house but in non-regulated spaces where people routinely interact. The culture of tobacco consumption in the company of non-smokers declined first of all, as a direct result of legislation and secondly, by the more effective proscription of tobacco products and smokers. In general, the prohibition on tobacco consumption in the workplace has to some degree changed smoking practices, but more importantly it has changed how people think about tobacco. My data further reveals that smokers tend not to consume in the company of non-smokers or children. Evidence also shows a rise in smoke-free domestic environments where smokers voluntarily go outside or to a utility space where ashtrays have been relocated for the purpose.

When the desire to consume alcohol or tobacco comes into conflict with legal structures that limit or prohibit an array of alcohol-related practices, or are oppositional to economic processes that power the drinks industry, the ‘illusory nature’ (Share and Corcoran, 2010:4) of informal and casual social drinking becomes evident. Alcohol products are more exotic and plentiful, public houses have diversified to meet consumer demands but more importantly, drinking patterns have also changed. Social drinking as a cultural pursuit takes place against a backdrop of social change, a consequence of prosperity, an economy that is vibrant and competitive (Clinch et al, 2002) and within an ever-growing framework of regulatory constraints and obligations. Legal controls that applied to alcohol and to alcohol-related activity became an inherent part of pub culture that manifests itself

in the drinking experience. As dimensions of ‘cultural capital’¹ (Smith, 2001:137), new lifestyle choices reshape not only the *practice* of social drinking but also indicate a reshaping of *attitudes* towards alcohol consumption and alcohol related practices.

8. 5. The social costs and benefits of alcohol: an economic conundrum?

Measurement of the figures relating to the fiscal (and social) costs and benefits of alcohol (see Chapter 6.2) is a problematic endeavour. In democratic societies, such as Ireland, a ‘socioeconomic system that systematically grants privileged position to business interests’ (Held, 1996:215) operates in a more convoluted way; given that the product in question is alcohol. When the social costs and benefits of alcohol in Irish society are calculated, social costs in terms of illness, injuries, crime and the economic costs associated with tackling these and other alcohol-related issues, are measured against social advantages and economic benefits such as employment, excise duties and associated revenues collected by the State. Economic discourses surrounding alcohol reveal varying degrees of conflict when the interests of the drinks industry, the interests of the State and the desires of the drinker are debated. Endeavours to achieve the desired balance between the economic costs and benefits of alcohol, is a continuous process of negotiation between stakeholders such as health experts (HRB) and the drinks industry (VFI and LVA). The imposition of politically defined controls may be at variance with the desires of drinkers and can also prove problematic for drinks providers. Drinkers and drinks providers are bound by structural constraints that may be

¹ Dimensions of ‘cultural capital’ Bourdieu, (1984 [1979]) such as ‘cultural tastes and preferences’ and the ‘ability to be discriminating and make distinctions between good and bad’ are socially located (Smith, 2001).

contrary to their desires or aspirations, for example, set trading times (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008:3) place a limit on alcohol sales, while for the drinker economic factors may dictate how and where money is spent on alcohol.

Economic transactions at the micro-level connected with the sale and purchase of alcohol are largely a drinker/drinks provider interaction. The act of purchasing and consuming alcohol in a way that is appropriate to the lifestyle and the socio-economic position (Corrigan, 1998:27) of the drinker support the objectives of the drinks trader who operates in a business environment. On the one hand, the drinks industry is a profit-driven entity operating according to the relationship that is fostered at the micro-level between producers and consumers. On the other hand, there are the greater monetary costs (and benefits) where 'economic gains in one dimension of life can carry a social, economic and health loss in another dimension' (Hope, 2004:15-24). For the state, the impact of alcohol on society gives rise to some disquiet when alcohol-induced harm is debated in terms of fiscal budgeting and when issues relating to illness and crime emerge. Active promotion and sale of alcohol comes into direct conflict with efforts (through education and the legislative process) to reduce alcohol intake for the purpose of improving general health and well-being among the Irish populace. Cultural processes in conjunction with economically-driven and regulation-motivated practices are according to my data, the transformative forces that generate the contemporary public house environment and the practices of social drinking

The cultural practice of consuming alcohol is shaped by social forces that determine what, why, where and how people drink. Choices made in relation to alcohol products are influenced by a combination of factors such as personal taste, advertising/promotions and peer consumption choices. Lifestyle choices regarding socialising and leisure activities along with legal constraints that may apply, determine the location and the frequency with which alcohol is consumed. Alcohol consumption in the public house as a cultural activity is shaped by social, economic and regulatory forces in a way that is unique to particular people, places, products and practices. Due to the nature of the product and to its physiological effect on the human body, practices surrounding the distribution and consumption of alcohol, have for centuries (Molloy, 2002) have been subject of intense regulation.

Providers and consumers of alcohol are obliged to operate according to set rules and within an economic framework that is unique to the product. Publicans and bar workers operate a business, conduct transactions and demonstrate knowledge and expertise in relation to their place of work, the product and the drinkers whom they serve. Drinkers are obliged to consume within a framework that takes into account age, behaviour *and* that applies outside the boundaries of the public house, for example bye-laws that prohibit drinking in public places or laws that relate to drink/driving. When compared with the public house, restaurants/cafes serving non-alcoholic beverages enjoy a much greater flexibility regarding times of business, age restrictions, product quality and pricing. Alcohol and alcohol-related activity is contained within a highly structured environment that is monitored and regulated. Everyday social action (public or private) is largely shaped by cultural and economic constraints and is governed by an array of regulatory controls and obligations. When

social action, however, is linked to alcohol consumption, the intensification of structural frameworks and establishment of exacting legal boundaries determine drinking patterns and practices in the public house. and in private drinking spaces.

According to Oldenburg's concept of 'third place' the public house is a location of informal association that is characterised as public, perceived as accessible to all and that would 'serve people's needs for sociability and relaxation' (1999:32). While drinkers' perceptions of the pub and of the social practice of drinking would concur with that of Oldenburg, recent transformations have impacted on the operation of the public house and on the experience of the drinker. Structural transformations such as the smoking ban and an intensification of drink driving laws have changed the way in which the public house is experienced. For smokers (see section 7.3.1), the requirement to relocate to a dedicated smoking zone is viewed as disruptive to conversation and as having implications for smokers and non-smokers alike. An unintended consequence of regular movement between smoking and non-smoking zones is the construction of the 'smoking group' who are drawn together by a common (activity) bond in a specific location. Transformation within the public house resulting from the introduction of the Tobacco Act is threefold. Material change in terms of a 'clean air' environment and the establishment of ancillary smoking areas are definitive transformations that have implications for the health of drinkers and workers, social interaction in term of having to adopt new smoking practices and in alcohol consumption practices, a consequence of the changed public house environment.

For the driver who drinks (or the drinker who drives), recent amendments to drink/driving laws (see Section 7.3.2) has meant a re-assessment of drinking behaviour that has for some drinkers, changed their relationship with the public house. For drinkers, there is the necessity to pre-plan travel arrangements when visiting the public house. For the designated driver (who would ordinarily consume alcohol) the undertaking to abstain while in the company of drinkers is not only a personal decision but a legal obligation. The presence of food and diners in the contemporary 'third place' (the Irish public house), has altered the material environment as well as the purpose of what was heretofore a drinking place. An assimilation of drinkers and diners or the rezoning of separate drinking and dining spaces is sometimes perceived as an inconvenience by drinkers who may be spatially confined and who object to the movement, noise and smells associated with the serving and consumption of food. As some examples of structural constraints that apply to public drinking/smoking/dining practices, they are cultural, have economic implications and are highly regulated. The drinker who consumes within a structured environment is subject to an array of constraints that conflicts with Oldenburg's romantic view of 'third places' in terms of accessibility, casualness and informality.

While the public house is understood as an accessible space of informal social interaction, the reality is somewhat different insofar as the drinker functions within a framework of constraints and obligations that ultimately shapes the drinking experience. Sometimes referred to as 'home away from home', the public house is subject to structural constraints in ways that do not apply to the home or to other public places such as cafes and restaurants. While food retail outlets operate according to the same Food Hygiene regulations, operational methods such as choice

of product, trading hours and pricing are variable. Consumption of alcohol and tobacco in the home is largely unstructured and due to the privacy of domestic space, it cannot be monitored or regulated. Rapid growth in off-sales purchases of alcohol, combined with unobservable drinking practices in private drinking spaces, creates a new set of circumstances that in turn makes the study of contemporary drinking patterns increasingly problematic.

The social costs and benefits of alcohol are continuously monitored, analysed and are dealt with in accordance with specific concerns that emerge at any given time. Programmes that promote moderation and self-discipline in relation to alcohol consumption are circulated through the media (a soft approach) and political structures are put in place for the purpose of motivating and achieving the desired objective. Laws and regulations pertaining to alcohol, first of all, govern the drinks industry and the drinks trade (see Chapter 6). Legal and regulatory constraints and obligations are also found to have far-reaching consequences for the social drinker that in effect, formalizes social drinking practices. Regulatory processes impact upon the public house environment, to the operation of the public house and apply to the product(s) and to the product and service users and providers (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008). The regulation of alcohol as ‘no ordinary commodity’ (Barbour, 2010) is based first of all on the ‘psychotropic’ qualities and their effects. Alcohol therefore is regarded a ‘controlled’ substance insofar as its use is monitored, managed and subject to stringent and exacting regulation. Changes in intoxicating drink regulations have come about primarily as a consequence of the rise in alcohol-related social harm (MEAS, 2006 and STFA,

2004) and scientific evidence that link alcohol with an array of physical and mental health issues (WHO and HRB).

Minister of State for Health, Alex White speaking in Dail Eireann 2/10/2012 stated that 1.5 million Irish drinkers engage in a 'harmful pattern' of drinking. The gravity of this situation has prompted a further strengthening of laws that targets younger drinkers. Proposed legislation will include the introduction of minimum prices for alcohol and a phasing out of the sponsorship of sporting events by the alcohol industry. Acknowledgement of the potential 'harm' associated with the misuse of alcohol produces the greater proportion of legislation surrounding the drinks trade. In response to the wider (growing) social and economic costs associated with the misuse of alcohol, Acts of the Oireachtas, such as the Liquor Licensing Act(s) formally structure the supply and consumption of alcohol. The granting of a licence to trade, for example, is subject to a multiplicity of conditions that are reviewed on a yearly basis. For the publican, acquisition of a vintners licence is a complex process, involving many arms of the State such as the Courts, Revenue Commissioners, Gardai and the Health and Safety Authorities. The importance of a Liquor Licence (a requirement of all alcohol retail outlets) is reflected in the severity of sanctions that may be imposed for any breach of licensing regulation. The forfeiture of a licence (cessation of trade) follows on from three current endorsements from a possible twenty-eight offences (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008:76). Temporary Closure Orders for periods between two and thirty days can be imposed when any one of sixteen conditions (Cassidy and McGrath, 2008:80) are breached. As Liquor Licenses expire on September 30th each year, applications for renewal must be made on a yearly basis to the Revenue

Commissioners. The complexity of the licensing procedure (along with the rigorous and enforceable sanctions that are in place) is but one strand of the regulatory processes that signifies the extent of State control in recognition of the potential dangers inherent in the excessive consumption (misuse) of alcohol.

For the purpose of controlling the costs and benefits of alcohol, the drinks industry is now highly regulated insofar as the product, the related practices and the places of consumption are all located within a legal framework. The economic benefits of alcohol such as a viable drinks industry, generated revenue in the form of taxes and excise duties along with the social benefits associated with moderate drinking and with 'third places'(Oldenburg, 1999) of informal association are an acceptable phenomenon. The costs of alcohol misuse however, generate action at the highest political levels that is publically (and sometimes controversially) presented as a solution to problematic drinking. An audit of the economic benefits of the industry and the economic costs to society is a task of mammoth proportions that ideally seeks to maintain a balance between the constructive and destructive effects of alcohol in Irish society.

For the legislature and for the wider Irish society, the topic of alcohol, alcohol consumption and the consequences of alcohol misuse are ongoing subjects for debate. On the one hand, social costs and benefits of alcohol are calculated in monetary terms shown as gains or losses to the Irish economy. Control of the alcohol industry on the other hand, is the remit of the political realm, where structures are put in place in the form of prohibitions, obligations and sanctions for the purpose of addressing any 'imbalance'. The introduction of Penalty Points

(2002) for example, meant a change in attitude as well as change in practices surrounding the notion of drinking/driving leading to a reduction in alcohol-related road traffic accidents (road deaths on Irish roads reached the lowest level on record in 2012. www.rsa.ie). Further restrictions for drivers in the form of Random Breath-testing (2003) again increased awareness of the dangers of drinking and driving *and* of the sanctions for non-compliance with the Road Traffic Act 1994 (MEAS, 2003).

Changes in legislation combined with media campaigns and visible evidence of enforcement of the law means that drinkers are compelled to re-evaluate established routine drink/driving practices. My analysis of alcohol consumption practices evaluating the social and economic impact of drinking indicates both a social benefit and a social cost that may be seen at the micro-level of the drinker and that permeates throughout society. Consuming alcohol as a cultural phenomenon is a routine social practice. The sale and purchase of alcohol is an act of participation in the economy. The social world of the drinker however (while demonstrating cultural endeavour and economic participation), is produced to a greater degree by political intervention. A cost/benefit analysis of the presence and the utilization of alcohol in society is determined broadly according to social and monetary costs associated with the *misuse* of alcohol. When strategies to combat misuse are put in place, this creates conditions under the *social* or *moderate* drinker is obliged to consume.

8. 6. Social processes that construct the C21 social drinker:.

The lived experience of drinkers in the social setting of the public house within a context of economic prosperity and rapid social change calls for a sociological analysis that takes into account people (drinkers), practices (consumption and interaction) and places. ‘People’ include social drinkers, bar-workers and proprietors as well as other functionaries² directly (and indirectly) connected with the management of drinking and related practices. ‘Practices’ took account of the production, supply and consumption of alcohol and of alcohol-related activities. ‘Places’ featured a sample of public houses based broadly on capacity, location and classification³. The social context within which the social drinker operates provides the framework for interpreting and understanding drinking practices and patterns of interaction at the micro-level. A qualitative approach that generates a ‘feel for particular people and events in concrete social settings’ (Neuman, 1997:328), shows the social world of the drinker as it is perceived by the drinker.

Case studies of public houses conducted over a period of time uncovered an array of underlying economic processes that shape the operational mechanisms of the drinks trade, and ultimately, impact upon the social drinking experience. Investigation of the drinks trade exposed less apparent political processes that control the distribution and consumption of alcohol on all levels. Early C21 changing socio-cultural conditions along with rapid growth in the Irish economy are shown to have instigated change in consumer behaviour that influenced leisure and

² Law Enforcement agents, Food Hygiene specialists, Security Personnel.

³ Due to the diversity of public houses in Ireland in terms of urban/rural, pub/restaurants, themed bars, customer capacity, samples from all of the above categories were used in this project

life-style activity. Economic processes that fuelled Ireland's prosperity in the late 1990s and early 2000s intensified consumer activity that in turn boosted the drinks industry through growth in the sale of alcohol and alcohol related products and services. As levels of expenditure on leisure activities increased, the quantities of alcohol consumed are also found to have increased, peaking in 2008 (see Chapters 4.7 and 5.1).

Drinking in the 'great good place' (Oldenburg, 1999:x) implies the consumption of alcohol in a place that is characterised by constructive (advantageous) social bonding. Despite this assumption, the potential for disharmony and conflict between drinkers, drinkers and bar-workers and between drinkers/workers and law-enforcement agents (a consequence of structural as well as social forces) is always present but in a less apparent way. Legally defined structures and constraints⁴ control the consumption of alcohol and regulate the drinks industry and impact significantly upon the social world of the drinker, as regulatory processes dominate all aspects of the production, retail and consumption of alcohol. Structural constraints that further limit or change drinking patterns also prove problematic for the drinker. An exploration of new avenues regarding alcohol consumption as well as changes in attitudes towards drinking together shows a reshaping of the social drinking experience. Strategies such as appointing designated drivers (in response to the restructuring of drink-driving regulations) or making the choice to consume alcohol at home (a consequence of reduced blood-alcohol laws and price-differential of alcohol between 'on' and 'off-sales') changed the casual and spontaneous nature of social drinking.

⁴ Acts of the Oireachtas that govern the drinks industry and that regulate drinking practices.

Rules and responsibilities surrounding alcohol consumption that are enshrined in legislation are shown to have the greater influence on contemporary consumption patterns, over and above any cultural or fiscal determinant (see Chapter 6). Motivated by the risk of prosecution, drinkers and drinks providers are largely compliant. Regulation surrounding alcohol develops in a continuum where changes or amendments to existing Acts are put in place. Introduction of Tobacco legislation however was a new departure for both the drinker and for the drinks industry. At stake were the health of workers and the survival of the drinks trade. Smokers also raised objections, as the notion of enjoying a drink without a cigarette was incomprehensible, however an ‘ethical imperative to protect one’s body’ (Rojek, 2007:120) grew out of a new raised awareness of the risks caused by tobacco. Arguments for a partial ‘clean air’ zone, smoke-free areas where food was served along with the installation of air-filtration systems were all ultimately rejected. The proposal to prohibit smoking in the public house was promoted as a public health issue that highlighted the dangers associated with tobacco consumption, including the dangers of passive smoking. Scientific evidence (WHO and HRB) that supported the ban on public health grounds gave weight and an authenticity to the argument that could not be refuted. The creation of a smoke-free environment emerged as a result of a successful campaign that raised awareness of ‘third-party’ (immediate) harm from passive smoking; not as a *potential* danger but a real and scientifically proven fact.

For the drinker, a prohibition on tobacco consumption in the workplace (Public Health (Tobacco) Act, 2002) brought about one of the most significant environmental (as well as social) changes in the Irish public house, impacting upon

workers and drinkers alike (see Chapter 6). For workers, the transformation of what was scientifically proven as a hazardous work environment was identified by Mulcahy et al (2005). Research carried out by Mulcahy, (Principal Environmental Health Officer, HSE Western Area), one year following the implementation of the smoking ban showed an air-nicotine reduction of 80% and a 70% drop in saliva cotinine (an alkaloid found in tobacco) concentration among hospitality industry workers. Along with positive indicators of a less-harmful to health work environment, came a change in work practices. An absence of tobacco-ash and ash-trays reduced the time and the effort previously given over to the cleaning and disposal of tobacco waste. The construction of dedicated smoking zones, however, extended spatially the area of service and responsibility for the bar-worker albeit to a lesser degree. For drinkers, a prohibition on the consumption of tobacco products in the public house produced numerous (and some unanticipated) consequences. While proposal of the ban met with considerable opposition at the outset (Clifford, 2002), the transition from 'smoky haze' to 'smoke-free' environment proceeded with minimum disruption or difficulty.

The argument supporting a total ban went from strength to strength as the dangers of passive smoking were brought to light. Despite some reported prosecutions for non-compliance, figures released by the OTC showed an unexpected 97% level of compliance in April 2005 and again in 2008 (Office of Tobacco Control). Changes occurred not only in smoking practices but in the way in which tobacco and smoking was perceived (Loscher, 2003). Strategies to encourage smokers to continue drinking in the public house include the construction of dedicated smoking zones that are user-friendly, insofar as they contain seating,

tables with ash-trays, heating and quite often, television. The unanticipated consequence of the spatial relocation of drinkers/smokers is the formation of a new social group, coming together for a common purpose.

Despite evidence of a rise in problem drinking, alcohol-related crime, violence, and accidents, social drinkers who defined themselves as such, firmly disassociated themselves from any categorization of ‘problematic’ or ‘excessive’ drinking patterns. Drinkers distanced themselves from any negativity surrounding alcohol, and instead embraced the positive term ‘social drinker’ and its assigned meaning; drinking in moderation. Categorisation of drinking patterns was inspired by factors such as drinker’s personal health and wellbeing, enduring relationships and friendships with family and friends and personal socio-economic viability. Moderate drinking practices within self-defined boundaries of acceptability and normality were cited by drinkers as indicators of what they considered a ‘healthy’ relationship with alcohol. While claiming to have knowledge of and an active compliance with alcohol-related regulations, those who deemed themselves ‘social drinkers’, often disregarded the recommended guidelines or suggested ‘limits’ and continued to drink (despite advice/information to the contrary) in what *they* considered a ‘normal’ or a ‘sensible’ manner. The term ‘social drinker’, therefore, is one that is self-referential, open to interpretation, is imbued with contradictions and is according to my research, time, place and age-specific. The enigma that is the social drinker, the time-honoured cultural practice of consuming alcohol and the fiscal status of the drinks trade in the Irish economy, guarantees the continuity of a Drinks Industry in Ireland. Drinking as a cultural activity, therefore, is a driving force in Ireland’s political economy.

8. 7. 'Topic', 'research process' and 'methodology': a critical evaluation.

The subject of alcohol consumption can be an emotive one. News reports and investigative journalism convey sensational (newsworthy) accounts of excessive drinking and gross misuse of alcohol, and questions relating to public order offences in Dublin's temple Bar (<http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2012/07/17/00446>) have been raised in Dail Eireann. Scientific research also reveals some alarming statistics regarding 'alcohol-related harm' (Hope, 2008, Mongan et al, 2009), highlighting drinking patterns regarded as detrimental to the individual and to Irish society. This researcher (while acknowledging the gravity and the extent of alcohol misuse) formed the opinion that studies relating to the consequences of misuse did not explain the social world of the public house drinker. Social, moderate or non-problematic drinking has up to now received little attention. Assumptions regarding the frequency and quantities of alcohol consumed and the affirmative values (or negative connotations) attributed to the public house merit sociological investigation due to the widespread practice of drinking and the prevalence of public houses in Ireland.

The formulation of a methodology that would explain the social world of the drinker was a complex undertaking. The diversity of 'sources' such as drinkers, representatives of the drinks trade, law enforcement/food hygiene/security agents, called for a research methodology that would incorporate the disparate views of all participants. Documentary sources that underpinned empirical evidence further extended the research findings, giving a broad perspective of a single social phenomenon. The scope and value of a research methodology that encompasses

social practices in specific social spaces over time, has been demonstrated throughout this project. A methodological framework of analysis that evaluates social practices, institutions and change over time, may also be applied or adapted for use in further studies that involve social action, time and place, for example activities in public spaces such as restaurants, libraries or schools.

The unavoidable interruptions to this research (already mentioned), was initially of concern to this researcher. In retrospect, however, connections with the 'field' over an extended period of time proved advantageous. The process of leaving and re-entering the 'field' afforded this researcher a first-hand opportunity to observe and experience change over time. The extended relationship particularly with members of the drinks trade, deepened the level of communication and trust that is evident in the findings. Observation of drinking practices over a prolonged time period showed changes in drinking patterns as they occurred. For this researcher, close connection with, and observation of social change over the 5 year time span greatly enhanced my understanding of the transitionality as well as the spatiality of the social world of the drinker. The protracted timeframe of this research project coincided with a period of rapid social, economic and political change in Ireland. In my view the vast changes in day-to-day social life, within the drinks industry and in the Irish political economy was particularly inspirational. For this researcher the unintended consequences took the form of renewed enthusiasm for the research task and an even greater engagement with the topic, that might otherwise not have occurred.

8. 8. The social world of the drinker: a summary.

In ‘third places’ where the ‘staging of selves and sociability’ (Oldenburg, 1999) is facilitated, social connections are created and sustained and support networks are established in an environment that is promoted as conducive to casual, informal association. Interaction at the micro-level operates through a number of discourses and practices giving the appearance of sociability, friendship and unity (Oldenburg, 1999), while at the same time operating according to an array of obscure structures⁵, principles and objectives. Evidence of a growing separation of alcohol from its traditional place of consumption, directed the research process towards two separate but closely connected areas of inquiry; ‘drinkers and the practice of social drinking’ and the ‘public house as a time-honoured and conventional drinking place’. The practice of public drinking is an observable and a structured phenomenon however contemporary trends in private-space drinking are less apparent and are of an unstructured nature. The public house as a contested space operates according to a multiplicity of determinants that according to my data, indicate a decisive move towards the constructive eradication of this particular space of ‘informal association’ (Oldenburg, 1999) and by implication a further rise in domestic consumption. With off-sales prices as a key contributing factor to private space consumption, current legislation regarding ‘minimum pricing’ should curtail the quantities of alcohol purchased for domestic use.

The desire to interact with others in a designated social space may be attributed to the fact that as people we are ‘an associating species whose nature is to

⁵ Legal structures (Held, 1996) and economic principles (Lash and Urry, 1999) dominate the social world of the drinker in an abstract way that manifests itself in the purchase/consumption of alcohol

share space just as we share experiences' (Oldenburg, 1999:203). For the social drinker, changes that restrict or reshape drinking practices (when perceived as an impediment to informal association) are not always welcome. Oldenburg argues that the modern urban environment 'reduces people to clients, customers, workers and commuters allowing them little opportunity to be human beings' (1999:207). The '*New Urban Living Study (2006)*'⁶ however, shows a more positive representation of urban life in Ireland (Fahy et al, 2007:175-197). For drinkers in urban areas a greater diversity of drinking places and the convenience of public transportation greatly enhance the drinking experience. Outside of the greater urban areas however, the number of licensed premises has decreased and the public transport system is largely inadequate. Socialising in the public house requires pre-planning therefore the spontaneity associated with social drinking is said to have largely disappeared. Economic and social change has on the one hand, meant a rise in 'living standards' (Clinch et al, 2002:43) in Ireland. On the other hand the shift towards individualisation is said to have brought about a decline in social capital an 'ineluctable [inescapable] consequence of modernity' (Puttnam, 2000:367). While constraints that limit informal association (bound up with social drinking) are experienced socially and materially, there are at the same time social processes and technologies in operation that unite individuals within local communities and beyond.

While, it must be acknowledged that 'informal associational life' (Corcoran, et al, 2007:183) is also experienced through social and community networks, for example, sports and religious organisations that permeate both rural and urban

⁶ For suburban dwellers, social embedding and social participation are seen as 'closely associated with' the quality of suburban life. Close relations with others produces a 'sense of empowerment' as well as 'sustenance' when problems arise. (Peillon, Corcoran and Gray, 2006).

communities, the function and the significance of the public house as a place that fosters social connectedness is not disputed. The public house as a place of 'informal association' (Oldenburg, 1999) is primarily defined according to the way it is inhabited by social drinkers (a cultural process) and in conjunction with the economic goals of the drinks industry. The public house environment along with its inhabitants and defining social practices come together to produce a unique 'great, good place' (Oldenburg, 1999). Despite changes that have redefined the social and cultural setting that is the Irish public house, this 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1999) continues to be promoted and presented as a welcoming and sociable environment that is available and accessible to all. As one of the 'great good places' (Oldenburg, 1999) the public house in Ireland is experiencing many challenges that have come about as a consequence of wider changes to modern social life. While 'tradition' at any given time has always been 'invented' (Fagan, 2002:140), the ongoing reconstruction of social life and of communicative practices is to a large extent influenced by external (global) forces (see Chapter 6.5). The Irish public house as the 'traditional' place of alcohol consumption has evolved throughout its history to become a place that is characterised by diversity in its environment, products and services and more importantly, in its meaning.

Social drinking as a life-style activity is produced by the interplay of local and global processes where Irish drinkers 'mix and match elements of Irish culture with other cultural elements from around the world' (Inglis, 2008:31). Such elements filter through at the cultural level through new methods of communication and new trends in consumption. At an economic level, unprecedented social conditions (education, employment, entrepreneurship) generated a state of

prosperity that facilitated spending, travel and the importation of additional and exotic consumer goods. As a cultural activity, social drinking is becoming increasingly 'commercialized and commodified' (Inglis, 2008:35). In the political sphere global processes also occupy a key position, for example, the adoption of European law into Irish law. The current proposal to introduce a 'fixed minimum unit pricing' (MUP) in Scotland is subject to a legal challenge that depending on the results, may be brought to the European Court of Justice. In Ireland the task of securing a MUP is in proceeding through the legislative process that may also involve the European Court, however, if ruled against, prices will be controlled through an increase in Excise Duties, a 'local' process. The above examples are but an indication of 'global' and 'local' processes that underpin social life. For the social drinker in contemporary Ireland, the desire to consume alcohol and to interact informally in a dedicated public space is a sociological complexity of processes and practices that are in a continuous state of evolution and flux.

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