



**Maynooth
University**
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Special Topic: Place Exploration

How is the Naas Community Men's Shed understood, negotiated, and visualised by its members?

Third Year Special Topic Research Project

Name:	Deirdre Moore
Department:	Sociology
Year:	3rd Year
Supervisor:	Dr. Mary Benson
Date Submitted:	22nd April 2021



Image 1: Irish Men's Shed Association (2021)

The Men's Shed Movement "is contributing positively to the lives of men, their families, and communities, and also saving men's lives" (Golding 2015:xi).

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge and sincerely thank my supervisor, Dr. Mary Benson for her invaluable advice, support, and encouragement in my Final Year. The successful outcome of this project can be attributed to her assistance, many helpful suggestions, and in her patience and confidence in my ability. To all within the Department of Sociology at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth thank you for enlightening me and expanding my sociological imagination over the last three years. I wish to acknowledge and thank the Naas Community Men's Shed members for their time, candidness, and sincerity. This research would not have been possible without these "shedders" or the Chairman of the Naas Community Mens Shed and the National Volunteer Coordinator at the Irish Men's Shed Association (IMSA). I hope this research illustrates the importance of the Naas Community Men's Shed in your life. Thanks also goes to my family, particularly my husband Tony and my sons, extended family, and friends for their love, support, and faith in me. To my college peers, your friendship and support have been invaluable.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract.....	6
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	7
(1.1) The Naas Community Men’s Shed: Setting the Scene	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	12
(2.1) Introduction.....	12
(2.2) Place.....	13
(2.2.1) Third Place	16
(2.3) Identity.....	18
(2.4) Community	21
(2.5) Gender.....	25
(2.6) Men’s Shed Movement.....	29
(2.7) Conclusion of Literature	33
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	34
(3.1) Research Question	34
(3.2) The Qualitative Approach.....	34
(3.2.1) The Case Study Approach.....	36
(3.2.2) Interviewing	37
(3.2.3) Sources of Data	39
(3.2.4) Photographic Representation	39
(3.3) Analysis of Data.....	40
(3.4) Ethics	42
(3.5) Issues of Positionality	44

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis	46
(4.1) Introduction.....	46
(4.2) Place.....	46
(4.2.1) Third Place	51
In line with Soukup’s (2006) argument technological interactions change participants’ experiences.	54
(4.3) Identity	54
(4.4) Community	56
(4.5) Gender.....	62
(4.6) Men’s Shed Movement.....	65
(4.7) Conclusion	67
 Chapter 5: Conclusion	 70
 Bibliography	 73
 Appendices.....	 80
Appendix A: Consent Form	80
Appendix B: Information Sheet	81
Appendix C: Transcript of Interview	82

Abstract

This research and case study evaluates and explores the experiences of participants of the Naas Community Men's Shed in Co. Kildare. The aim of the study is to examine how the Naas Community Men's Shed is understood, negotiated, and visualised by its members. Drawing on literature of various sociological understandings is pivotal in gaining an understanding of the subjective meanings attributed to membership distinct to this community and how these meanings are incorporated into the identities of these men. To gather data pertinent to the case study a qualitative methods approach was taken comprising of semi-structured interviews and an analysis of online visual representations is presented. The research found that Members of the Naas Community Men's Shed understand, negotiate, and visualise their participation in a range of ways. The research found that the Shed resembles a third place where sociability is nourished, and distinct characteristics are found which promote creativity. Findings in the research emphasise the significance of an online community in facilitating and maintaining connection for shed members during Ireland's nationwide lockdown as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Furthermore, the research found community is important for the Naas Community Men's Shed members and a crucial element of their membership is the collective sense of community within the shed and the engagement in projects to contribute or "give back" to the community. Additionally, while exploring the implications of the pandemic, a key finding illustrates that for these men the loss of the physical location of the shed, a loss of place is significant.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Men's Shed movement originated in Australia. Precursors to the movement set up unofficial "sheds" in Albury and Broken Hill in 1980, both in New South Wales. However, the first men's shed (by that name) opened in Tongala, Victoria, Australia in 1998. Men's Sheds have since expanded throughout the world and inspired by the grassroots movement Irish counterparts set up the first Men's Shed in Ireland in Tipperary in August 2009. The economic crisis from 2008 resulted in Ireland moving from almost full employment to a rate of 15 percent unemployment in 2011. Across the population the effects were uneven with men's employment falling by 20 percent (The Irish Times 2013). There was strong praise for the social outlet provided by The Irish Men's Shed Association (IMSA) for victims to the recession (Westmeath Examiner 2013). Barry Sheridan (2019), CEO, IMSA describes a "Men's Shed as a dedicated, friendly, and welcoming place where men come together". Men share knowledge, learn new skills, or re-establish interests. Good health is based on many factors including self-esteem, productivity, and community value (Sheridan 2019). Connecting with others supports an active mind and body and Men's Sheds provide a safe and busy environment where many of these crucial elements of life are found. Sheridan contends there is no pressure and "men can come and have a chat and a cuppa if that is all they are looking for" (IMSA 2021). "Women have the Irish Countrywomen's Association, and they are a massive organisation, doing great things, why can't men do the same" (Westmeath Examiner 2013). John Evoy, founding CEO of Irish Men's Shed Association (IMSA) proposed that the "arrival of the Men's Sheds in Ireland was perfectly timed" in terms of managing some of the challenges the country faced economically (cited in Golding 2015:xvii).

A dearth of literature exists evaluating mens' participation in Men's Sheds, with many studies emanating from Australian academics. This research has recognised camaraderie, socialisation, and skill development (Wilson and Cordier 2013). Weber (1978 [1922]), a founding father of sociology argues there is a need to explore the "world of interpretive beings"; they have a deep-

seated need to attach meaning to their actions (Susen and Turner 2011:7). This research aims to contribute to a body of knowledge on the sociological concept of place by gathering data which adds to the subjective understanding of how a location can be interpreted to inscribe meaning and identity.

Ireland has become one of the leading nations for Men's Sheds in recent years, having the most sheds per capita. Currently, there are over 450 sheds in Ireland, and at least 10,000 men visited a shed every week prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Irish Men's Shed Association 2021). Members of Men's Sheds are referred to as 'shedders'. Having worked in the recruitment industry for many years I have been exposed to candidates made redundant or retiring early seeking part time work to fill their days. Specifically, during the economic recession in Ireland from 2008 to 2013 I interviewed men who told me of their involvement in Men's Sheds due to the lack of work opportunities. Additionally, an interest in this project was triggered when we brought our children's old bicycles to a local Men's Shed where they were repaired and restored for children's charities. For these reasons I am intrigued to gain an understanding of the meanings members attribute to participation in the Naas Community Men's Shed focusing on "the degree to which we can clarify what goes on in such places, to reduce puzzlement – what manner of men" are these (Geertz 1973:16)? This research set out to explore the Naas Community Men's Shed and examine how members understand, negotiate, and visualise their participation. Specific investigations were undertaken to grasp knowledge of how the Men's Shed is understood as place, if its acts as a third place and if so in what way. How identity and community is understood and developed within the space was further explored. Furthermore, the meanings and significance of the gender separation of men from women in the Naas Community Men's Shed was discussed with participants. A key topic discussed also was how the loss of place was experienced during the restrictions associated with COVID-19. To best answer these questions and understand the experiences of the Naas Community Men's Shed members the collection of data was undertaken using a qualitative research

method which yielded information from 6 participants via semi-structured interviews. The data were personally transcribed, coded and analysed using thematic analysis.

This introductory chapter provides a general overview of the aim of the research and includes a sub-chapter which sets the scene of the Naas Community Men's Shed, its history, location, and activities. Chapter Two which forms the foundation of the study provides a literature review and a comprehensive insight into a range of theories and case studies on the themes of place, third place, identity, community, and gender. In addition, a review of material written on the Men's Shed Movement concludes the literature review chapter. An overview of qualitative research methods is provided for in Chapter Three. Chapter Four includes an in-depth analysis of the research findings. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study and presents a synopsis of the project.

(1.1) The Naas Community Men's Shed: Setting the Scene

The Naas Community Men's Shed in County Kildare came to fruition in 2014 with the initial purpose of bringing older members of the community together and providing activities facilitating the sharing of experiences. As described on the Naas Community Men's Shed Facebook page – “a Men's Shed is any community-based, non-commercial organisation which brings men together to share stories, skills, and teabags” (Facebook, 2021)!! The Naas Community Men's Shed has 58 members at the time of writing ranging in age from 49 to 86 years. This is an increase on previous membership numbers which the Shed Chairman attributes to the relocation of the Shed in 2019 to a larger house located on the Dublin Road in Naas. The house was provided at a nominal cost by a local businessman initially for 1 year, but this has been extended due to COVID-19 for a further two-year period. The building had been unoccupied for 15 years. The spacious premises is located on a third of an acre and several shed members fully refurbished both floors. There is an operational kitchen where lunch is prepared by a shedder whose former career was cooking in the Irish Defence Force. There is an assembly room, a small social area, a music room, a computer room, a small

office, and bathrooms on both floors. The shedders constructed a lean-to providing covered outdoor space which has been useful during the various lockdowns over the last twelve months and limited re-openings, as it sits 16 shedders socially distanced. The members re-erected their polytunnel brought from the old location as well as hen houses and beehives. There is a workshop divided into three sections, and a tennis court also used as a walking and soccer facility. A stream of projects from making bird boxes and feeders to badger and insect hotels promotes the exchange of skills with members often learning new skills from other shedders (IMSA 2021). Music is a popular pastime and a band set up by some members has been very successful playing gigs throughout the community including in nursing homes, at festivals and at the Naas harbour. Furthermore, music sessions are held at the shed weekly. In regular times, the shed is open six days a week from mid-morning to early afternoon with lunch at 12.30 p.m. and is always open to new members. The Naas Community Men's Shed facilitates social interaction and members are encouraged to share their skills, stories, and problems. If a member is missing a phone call will be made to check in on them, explains the Chairman. Since March 13, 2020, the shed has been following advice from The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) regarding COVID-19 in relation to social distancing, hygiene, and respiratory etiquette during the various lockdowns. At present only two members of The Naas Community Men's Shed visit the premises to maintain the house with most work undertaken at a social distance outside for a short period each day. With the temporary closure of men's sheds across Ireland due to the global pandemic, some sheds have moved online to continue to connect with one another, finding new and innovative ways to interact. One such shed is the Naas Community Men's Shed and two WhatsApp groups have been set up; one where 52 of the 58 members are involved and a musical WhatsApp group for the band. A 'virtual men's shed' is held regularly where music sessions via WhatsApp or Zoom takes place. The members enjoy these. One of the band members set up a music YouTube channel also. As the chairman says, "they can see each other, listen to the songs and after the music, they'll have a cup of tea and chat with one another". The general banter and the sharing of videos, jokes and funny stories has been a

lifeline for most, but for other shedders message platforms or social media may be out of reach, due to technology or Internet issues. However, The Irish Men’s Sheds Association continues to operate normally providing support and advice to each Shed throughout Ireland and their shedders.



Image 2: “Bird Boxes” (Facebook 2021)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

(2.1) Introduction

This research is based on the topic of place exploration within the context of the discipline of sociology and examines the Naas Community Men's Shed in Co. Kildare and how it is understood, negotiated, and visualised by its members. The significant themes of place, identity, community, and gender emerged forming the foundation of an in-depth literature review. A comprehensive insight into a range of theories and case studies on each theme is provided. Space and place shape cultural, social, economic, and political life. Therefore, the fundamental theme of place is explored further as is the notion of third place – a place, aside from the first place of home and the second place of work, which is important for civil society, democracy, and civic engagement which assists in establishing a sense of place (Oldenburg 1989:264). Central to the analysis of place is place attachment. This concept is explored further in the context of how place attachment can be viewed as a marker of identity (Inglis 2009). Additionally, an analysis of technological interaction or what might be described as a “cyber third place” is undertaken considering the move to more internet-based communications resulting from the current global pandemic.

Review of the literature on the multi-layered concept of identity is also examined along with collective identity. Commentary is provided on these themes which provides an understanding also of the complexity of the interaction between identity and place. The study of community is conceptualised in terms of its use in ordinary people's everyday lives with the concept of boundaries explored too. Here too this theme is used to analyse the growth of the modern concept of virtual communities. The sociological construct of gender is a key theme examined in this literature review which incorporates the theory of masculinity. Finally, a review of material written on the Men's Shed Movement concludes the literature review chapter. A variety of research explores this active and growing international organisation which develops a deeper understanding of the contribution this movement makes to the study of sociology. This literature review provides

a framework which assists in structuring and interpreting the findings of this project to develop a sociological understanding of how the Men's Shed in Naas is negotiated and visualised by its members.

(2.2) Place

Gieryn (2000:467) argues that "place is not interchangeable with space". Place, a medium which mediates social life, is what space becomes when assembled with people, practices, objects, and representations. Social processes in terms of difference, power, inequality, and the collective action, which occur in these places, that come to be, makes them more than physical landscapes or backdrops against which life occurs. For Gieryn it is the material forms of the buildings, the streets, the monuments, and the open spaces that are designed, built, used, and protested at a certain geographical spot that makes place matter for social life (2000:464). Specifically, notable though is Gieryn's concern with other thinkers who describe the "transcendence of place" (Coleman 1993), the evolution of a "placelessness of place" (Relph 1976), cities "without a place" (Sorkin 1999), and how place becomes, with modernity, "phantasmagoric" (Gieryn 2000:463). Suburban neighbourhoods, retail outlets and motorways are replicated everywhere with a loss of reality and significance. Correspondingly, Gieryn points out that "social life moves" through many network nodes where the "points of power or convergence or translation are not anchored at any place necessarily" (2000:463). However, despite this narrative or maybe even because of the "jet, the 'net, and the fast-food outlet" there is a persistence of place as a constituent element of social life and historical change (Gieryn 2000). For Gieryn, "in the hands of different people", place is flexible and malleable over time contested by those who ascribe diverse meanings, values, interpretations, representations, and identifications (Gieryn 2000:467). Concerned about how the significance of place is measured and framed by an invisible "enduring tradition of robust sociological studies" Gieryn contests that the riches of place should be revealed and propelled forward by "place-sensitive sociology" (2000:464). This research projects endeavours to explore the

meanings which are invested by members of the Naas Community Men's Shed, how these meanings relate to place and how they are reflected into the identities of the participants

Massey (1995), social scientist and geographer posits that place is socially constructed and dynamic. She contends that places have multiple identities shifting and overlapping creating conflict and a richness which is inter-penetrated by connections to other social and economic worlds (Massey, 1994:153). Furthermore, like Gieryn (2000), Massey (1994), along with theorists such as Dreier et al. (2004) and Harvey (1990) "argue for the relevance of place" claiming there is renewed contemporary importance in its domain. As the Men's Shed Movement is a contemporary phenomenon, this research examines how place is understood and negotiated and what meanings are provided to the members through their participation. The Naas Community Men's Shed, a repurposed built structure in Naas provides a social outlet for 58 members ranging in age from 49 to 86 years. This research project offers a glimpse into the representations and subjective understandings of members of the Naas Community Men's Shed and formulates findings specific to this place at this point in time for these individuals.

For Hammad (2011) places are carved out, "experienced, remembered, understood, and imagined by the people who occupy them" (2011:556). Her specific case study of the divided Palestinian village of Bilin in the West Bank explores how place is experienced and interpreted by different generations. She proposes "generational perspectives" are imperative for attaining holistic and meaningful understandings of the complexities and subtleties of place which "impregnated with deeply rooted meanings" are derived from individuals' everyday socio-spatial practices and emotional attachments. Hammad argues further that incorporating an intergenerational lived experience approach provides a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the complexities and "shiftiness" of place experience (2011:565). With the age of the members of the Naas Community Men's Shed varying from 49 to 86 years an interesting element to this research is the opportunity

to gain an understanding of how different generations within the group understand and negotiate this variance.

Simonsen (1997) contends that attachment is crucial to place in the form of associational life, interactions, personal relations, and practices” (cited in Corcoran, 2002:50-51). This is evident in a case study in which urban allotment gardens in six European Countries were explored. Noori and Benson (2016:317) contend that personal taste is signified through the decoration of allotments. A process of “place-making” occurs for plot holders when they “inscribe their identity into the plots through creative engagement.”

Molotch, Fruedenburg and Paulsen (2000) suggest community projects not only integrate but harbour memory traces “transposing place into social structures” (cited in Corcoran 2002:51). The case study of the Men’s Shed in Naas explores the experiences of members, the meanings they invest and how those meanings relate to each other. Furthermore, this research project offers a glimpse into the members’ subjective understandings of their representative engagement and explores the creation of a place of active engagement and how that feeds into a sense of community.

Central to an analysis on place is the concept of place attachment. Researching place attachment broadly it is found that it can be defined in a variety of ways. Scannell and Gifford (2010) synthesize place attachment into a tripartite person-process-place organising framework. Within the three-dimensional model they attribute the person dimension of place attachment to individual or collective meaning, and they refer the psychological or process dimension to affective, cognitive, and behavioural components. The characteristics of spatiality, “specificity, and the prominence of social or physical elements” are emphasized in the place dimension (Scannell and Gifford 2010:1). A case study was undertaken by Mary P. Corcoran (2002) which explored the meaning of place attachment for those living within marginalised neighbourhoods in six European cities. The

research aimed to fully understand the meanings attached to place and community sentiment in the everyday lived experiences of city residents. It was found that a sense of attachment to place is “connected to the micro-communities of which residents form a part” and community sentiment resonates as symbolic “markers of identity” (2002:47). The case study of the Naas Community Men’s Shed explores the lived experience of its members, their relationship with the physical environment, and seeks to understand meanings they attribute to their participation in the project. Additionally, this case study will explore how the complex interplay of identity and place is understood within the Naas Community Men’s Shed.

(2.2.1) Third Place

In his influential book, *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg (1989) argues that third places, important for civil society, democracy, and civic engagement, establish feelings of a sense of place. People need a ‘third place’ to nourish sociability allowing a separation from the two environments of home and work. He contends private experiences, and a special period should be reserved for men to be in the company of other men (Oldenburg 1989:64). Furthermore, he argues that distinct characteristics within third places promote creativity and stimulation. Within a third-place individuals are brought into “close and personal contact” with a varied population, a “looseness and fluidity” of structure exists and novelty is inherent in a lack of rigidity (Oldenburg 1989:65). However, due to urban renewal and planning restrictions, as well as a general loss of interest in public facilities, Oldenburg (1989:264) argues casual places hosting easy and informal gatherings important for socially bonding are in decline. A central concern of this research is developing an understanding if the Men’s Shed in Naas provides a community bedrock for those who participate.

Golding (2015) in his chapter on “nailing down the Men’s Shed basics” reflects on the notion of third place while discussing a leaflet providing an account of what a Men’s Shed is and equally what it is not. The Men’s Shed in County Armagh provides a dedicated, friendly, and welcoming

meeting place where men can come together and undertake a variety of mutually agreed activities nevertheless it is not a formal training programme, nor a sports club, nor a health programme, or an information service (Golding 2015:11). Golding (2015) suggests that this list of “What a Men’s Shed Is Not” combined with the “novel suggestion that anything is possible” appeals to the idea of a Men’s Shed as a third place (aside from the first and second places of work and home respectively). He argues all Men’s Sheds seek to create this third place in the community for and with other men, particularly for men with much diminished first or second places (Golding 2015). This research project will seek to understand if the Naas Community Men’s Shed provides those who participate a third place and if indeed “anything is possible” in the social interaction of members.

When discussing third places clearly physical socialisation is brought to mind, but the Internet has propelled the types of interactions that Oldenburg (1989) speaks about in the communications that take place online. In cyberspace interaction is by way of video communication, social media platforms, and instant messaging and perhaps as Rheingold (1991) argues has become one of the informal public places where people have rebuilt aspects of community that are lost and conceptualised as a form of third place sharing many similar functions and characteristics (cited in Soukup 2006:422). However, Charles Soukup building on Oldenburg’s ‘great good places’ argues that computer-mediated communication as a virtual third place differs from traditional third places in one important respect (2006:426). The “realness” of technological interaction or “dependence upon simulation” changes the participant’s experience. In a sense, people are merely ‘pretending’ to be in a ‘real’ place while they sit at their computer screens, much like people pretend to be at a ‘real’ French café when dining in Disneyland. (Soukup 2006:426). In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO 2020) characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic, and this has resulted in the closure of many community projects. The Irish Men’s Shed Association issued formal guidance and urged “Men’s Sheds around Ireland to close and maintain connection through other

means” (IMSA 2020). The association has a strong web presence, with social media platforms curated by the organisation and individual sheds, providing information and updates to the public and members. Additionally, the use of video communication platforms is a method in use at present to facilitate membership engagement (IMSA 2020). My research also examines the implications of the pandemic on members and how their understanding and involvement in the Naas Community Men’s Shed has changed as a result of a move to a cyber third place.

(2.3) Identity

Identity, a complex social construct, is a multi-layered concept and needs to be understood “not as belonging within the individual person, but as produced between” persons and within social relations, the way one portrays oneself to the outside world and a subjective sense of knowing oneself (Lawler 2008:19). A dialectical concept of uniformity and distinction, identity at its most basic gives a sense of personal location, and a stable core to individuality (Lawler, 2008:2). According to Social Theorist, Herbert Mead (1934) “the self emerges out of interpretive work, influencing the practical conduct of social interaction” (cited in Dillon 2014:275). He suggests that to understand the emergence and development of the self that its “two dynamic aspects” be separated (Mead 1934: 173). Firstly, the ‘me’ who participates in the social world and then the ‘I’ which represents a subsequent reflection on the actions, perceptions, and understandings of the ‘me’ through the responses, reactions and attitudes expressed by others (cited in Lawler 2008:5). For Mead (1934), all facets of identity are linked, with both the “I” and “me” becoming forged through the social phenomenon of language, communication, and interaction. The self is always in the process of becoming as well as being (cited in Lawler 2008:6). This research examines to what extent membership of the Naas Community Men’s Shed contributes towards identity formation and how identity is understood within this space.

Mead’s dichotomous concept is further acknowledged by Goffman, and Hall. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) took a textured micro sociological approach to the study of everyday life providing

a theoretical framework examining techniques used by social actors to perform social roles in their presentation of self. He outlines his understanding of social identity in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and contends the shaping of the self could be understood by a dramaturgical approach (cited in Ritzer 2011:218). He perceived as did Mead (1934) that the self is constructed not as a possession of the actor but rather as the product of the dramatic interaction between actor and audience sharing aspects of identity and concealing others dependent on the stage being occupied (Goffman, 1959:252-253). Goffman (1963) proposes that people consciously and unconsciously perform to manage impressions and modify behaviours as social situations change. Elliot and Turner (2001) however, believes Goffman's theory is pessimistic presenting an amoral universe where a lack of truthfulness and sincerity exists in social interactions. Moreover, Gray (2002) suggests that Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor could, taken too far, result in a duplicity of identities. He argues that regulation and control in social interactions could suggest deception is at play. This research project aims to explore the performance of identity and to what extent Goffman's theory of dramaturgy contributes to identity formation in the Naas Community Men's Shed. Furthermore, does behaviour, as Elliot, Turner (2001) and Gray (2002) contend, become modified in the social interaction of participation in the Men's Shed in Naas.

Cultural theorist and sociologist, Stuart Hall (1996) provides a further commentary on identity and insightfully merges theoretical approaches arguing individuals construct their own reality, interacting in a society not consisting of forces beyond human control but shaped through agency attaching meaning to other's actions. He proposes that identity is a meeting place, a positioning rather than an essence or a true notion of a monolithic self (Hall 1996). He argues "identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us and are the result of a successful 'chaining' of the subject into the flow of discourse" (Hall 1996:5). Inglis (2009:12) believes identities are a form of cultural toolkit that people use to construct an image and understanding of themselves. Citing Durkheim (1976), he argues identity

with place involves interactive processes of social labelling and identification (Inglis 2009:3). In his empirical study of contemporary identities Inglis contends that for Irish people the dynamics of “identity with place is as significant as any other identity” (2009:6). This research seeks to explore if the dynamics of identity with place experienced by the men involved in the Naas Community Men’s Shed are as significant as any other identity.

A case study by Carragher and Golding (2015:152) “examined the impact of community-based men’s sheds on informal and nonformal learning by older men in Ireland” with the findings useful to understand identity. The shed environment influences men’s private lives and benefits their “personal relationships as well as their sense of self-identity” (Carragher and Golding 2015:162). Mens Sheds appeal to men as they provide a sense of purpose and meaning after retirement or when unemployed. For men identity can be constructed around paid work and this transition can be difficult. Meaningful learning environments for older men fill gaps in routine and in identity once occupied by employment (Carragher and Golding 2015:156).

Durkheim (1976) discussed the concept of a “collective identity” proposing bonds are created between individuals through shared morals and goals where focus is on the group identity as a whole (cited in Inglis 2009:3). He further argued that collective conscience acts as a moral force to construct a shared sense of identity. For Melucci (1995:50) the concept of collective identity is an interactive and shared sense of belonging produced by individuals (or groups) concerned with the orientation of action, opportunities, and constraints. He also conceptualises an intermediate stage, where individuals come to recognise their shared and communal orientations. As a process that is negotiated over time, collective identity has three elements which solidifies the collective: cognitive definition, active relationship, and emotional investments. Ahl, Hedegaard and Golding (2017:318) argue that informal community-based Men’s Sheds offer a place to go, something to do and a network shaping individual and collective identities focused on community contribution.

Based on the concept of self-organising with a “bottom-up” approach, Men’s Sheds provide members with a sense of ownership and empowerment reconstructing identity in a new environment. Brown, Golding, and Foley (2008:13) contend Sheds offer the opportunity for men to form a post-paid-work sense of identity, social support, self-esteem and a feeling of value and productivity. This research examines if the Naas Community Men’s Shed provides social support and a sense of value and productivity to its members.

Studies report that the social environment in community projects provides a sense of purpose and social identity leading to the development of positive relationships, a sense of belonging and community building (Giddens 1991). This research will explore if the Men’s Shed in Naas informs the identities of the men who participate and if the relationship between the physical environment, the community, and the activities within the programme provides a sense of identity. In addition, I will explore if there is an understanding of the complexity of the interaction between place and identity.

(2.4) Community

Debates about the term’s definition culminate in dichotomous theoretical perspectives resulting in contention. Thus, community becomes resistant to a satisfactory definition (Crow 2017:1; Cohen 1985:11). Nowell and Boyd (2010:510) argue that the McMillan sense of community theory provides “a needs-based rather than responsibility-based theory” built on primitive, human needs not appropriately considering valued-based behaviour. McMillan (2011:509) in his response contends their critique did not include a fair representation of the theoretical dimension referenced and the theory does conceptualise explicit relationships between elements articulated with several sub-elements reinforcing the complex interactions and formulas for how the ingredients of a community come together. Membership provides a barrier to who belongs and who does not, emotional safety and a sense of belonging. McMillan (2011:509-510) argues that influence and trust outlines a personal investment, community norms conform behaviour and consensual

validation maintains cohesiveness. Furthermore, he contends communities meet members' needs and provide a shared emotional connection with time becoming symbolized in rituals, common symbols and traditions with a bond emerging from shared history.

For Crow (2017) rather than seeking to define, contextualizing community in terms of its use in ordinary people's everyday lives and how various elements of these lives interconnect becoming part of a larger whole, assists in interpreting its meaning and providing a working definition. Members of a community share commonality binding them together distinguishing them from members of other groups. In this way community implies all at once similarity and difference (Cohen 1985:12). This creates a relational opposition of one community to another with this distinction or discrimination expressed through a perceived boundary encapsulating the "identify of the community" which is called into existence by social interaction (Cohen 1985:12). Like McMillan (2011) for Cohen (1985) though these boundaries or components of such are not explicitly obvious but exist in the minds of the beholders in so far as people attribute importance and meanings to community providing a symbolic aspect to their involvement. These symbolic lines relate to increasingly intimate areas of their lives characterized by shared identity and belonging. Correspondingly though boundaries perceived by some may be indiscernible to others, invisible to outsiders, change over time and sometimes blur (Cohen 1985:13). Benson's (2006) case study of the inner-city neighbourhood of Ringsend in Dublin where a process of "contemporary gentrification, a key feature of post-industrial growth and urban re-generation" is occurring, examines problematic boundaries. Birth distinguishes Ringsenders from non-Ringsenders but for some it implies the family must be residing in the area still. Marrying someone from the area does not bestow the title of Ringsender on an individual for generations as is evident when one woman living in the community of Ringsend for 40 years is still considered an outsider. However, on other occasions Benson was informed that someone who marries and moves into the

area is considered a Ringsender. This highlights that for this individual people relate and identify her as part of the community (Benson 2006:117-118).

Tönnies (1887) recognised community (*Gemeinschaft*) as natural or organic sentiments, traditions and common bonds rooted in family relationships and shared habitats but also extending to neighbourhood and friendships through co-operation towards a common goal which he described as a '*gemeinschaft of mind*' (cited in Giuffre 2013:20). But like others he argues with modernity comes society (*Gesellschaft*) associated with city life eradicating the traditional understanding of community (Tönnies 1963). As it is not always clearly precise what is meant by community how and in what ways can its loss be understood (Lee and Newby 2000:37). Contemporarily, Robert Putnam (2000) reviews and laments the sudden and substantial decline in civic organisations in the United States over the last century. He endeavours to explain his understanding of how the spirit of community has collapsed in '*Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*' (2000:69). He surveys the decline in social capital since the 1950s and mourns social engagement in his "whimsical yet discomfiting evidence of social disengagement in organised bowling leagues" (Putnam 2000:69). In *The Problem of Sociology* Lee and Newby (2000) posit a question as to whether there is a danger for nostalgia when the past is contrasted with the present; a rose-tinted view of the good old days yet they also argue the persistence of themes like Putnam's should not be written off as merely nostalgic (2000:37). The concept of loss of community endures throughout literature. Sociologists argue that the decline in community is attributed to the process of modernity characterised by increased privatisation, social isolation, globalisation, new technologies and an overall decline in social activities and collective action. Thus, modern sociology developed a keen interest in exploring the durability of community in modernity (Delanty, 2003). One of the rationales for this research is to examine the theme of community as it relates to the Naas Community Men's Shed and explore if the shed acts as a forum providing a sense of community.

Durkheim's (1893) conception of community was one of "collective activity existing both in large and small groups" (cited in Benson 2006:294) and for Durkheim this meant a specific type of community "in modernity where organic forms of solidarity are emerging and replacing the mechanical forms of the past" (Delanty 2003:37). Research does suggest a continued existence of community some of which exist in organic form. Ballinger, Talbot and Verrinder (2008) studied a community-based Men's Shed within a rural community of Victoria, Australia. Their research aimed to understand men's experiences of participating in such a program. The results of the case study found that the Shed was seen by the men as a vital and expanding place which provided an inclusive male friendly space. They recognised the intrinsic benefits including those which promoted their health and wellbeing and those which supported their engagement in activities they enjoyed and found meaningful giving a sense of purpose and community identity. Wilson and Cordier (2013) contend Men's Sheds have a distinct community development philosophy and are ideal locations to address social isolation. Participation suggests a sense of belonging and connection to the Men's Shed community. In researching the Naas Community Men's Shed I examine if a collective sense of identity exists and how this is represented within the membership of this community group.

Equally important is the analysis of the growth of online or computer-mediated communities. In reviewing an extended ethnographic study, *Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub: Masculinities and Relationships Online*, Lori Kendall (2002) provides an understanding in the context of globalisation and new communication technologies. Her case study analyses 'BlueSky' an online forum, initially, a kind of text-based virtual reality adventure game. However, over time its parameters evolved from its origin as a fantasy game to a 'virtual pub', a space of leisure where like in physical locations people congregate, announcements are made, and group identity is promoted, and a community develops which allows individuals to be involved in each other's lives forming interpersonal connections. This study helps us to understand that the internet is providing a virtual

community where relationships are formed, maintained, and revitalized (Soukup 2006:424). My research also examines the implications for members of computer-mediated social interaction as it relates to the pandemic and if their involvement and understanding of the Naas Community Men's Shed has changed and if so in what way.

(2.5) Gender

Thompson and Armato (2012) argue “gender, created, and maintained through complex societal arrangements and practices, is socially constructed”. The concept of gender refers to practices and activities aligning with the subjective assumptions of binary sex categories. In this way gender organises males and females according to their identity with the expectation that they respond to their roles and interact conforming to societal norms. The social, behavioural, and cultural attributes that are associated with being a man or a woman feeds into all spheres of social life with gendered expectations socially constructed and heteronormative ideas formed based upon traditional relationships. Treating people as gendered creates gendered structures. Connell (1987:78) argues that gender, a matter of human agency, constitutes “a system of beliefs and practices that refer to and create a sense of difference between men and women.” She further contends gender, fashioned by society, puts an order on social practice. These normative gender ideologies require to be distinguished from biological sex. The conduct of everyday life is organised through an arena defined by bodily structures and processes of human reproduction. In this way, gender is essentialised and organized in symbolic practices that may continue much longer than an individual life (Connell 1987). My research will examine how the members of the Naas community Men's Shed understand gender, if traditional gender roles are relevant and as a generation of an older demographic is there a rigid alignment to this social construct.

Masculinity, sometimes termed manhood or manliness is a socially constructed understanding of the attributes, behaviours, and roles associated with boys and men. For Connell (1995:29) masculinity, is “deeply enmeshed in the history of institutions and of economic structures.” Not

just an idea of personal identity but extended and merged in organised social relations throughout the world, normative masculinity becomes regulated. Connell (1995:73) conceptualises a structural framework of gender, distinguishing power and production relations, and emotional attachment which she portrays as cathexis. This Australian Sociologist argues this three-fold model aids in understanding masculinity. The axis of power mainly seen in contemporary Western gender order is subordination of women and dominance of men, a structure which the feminist movement designated as 'patriarchy'. Gender divisions of labour are seen in the form of apportionment of duties where attention is only paid to unequal wage rates. But the “dividends accruing” to men from the unequal shares of “social labour” and the gendered nature of capital requires consideration. A capitalist economy working through a “gender division of labour creates a gendered accumulation process.” The key issue of cathexis Connell argues is the political questions that are required to be asked to illustrate if the allocation of mental and emotional energy in practices and relationships are “consensual or coercive” (Connell, 1995:74). Expanding on the work of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) Connell uses the term “hegemonic masculinity” part of her gender order theory to refer to these patterns of practices which culturally exalt and sustain the legitimacy of the dominant position of men over women, but also other perceived “feminine” gender identities. However, Connell goes on to argue that the number of men “rigorously practicing” hegemonic forms may be quite small, but most men benefit from a “patriarchal dividend”, the general advantage men gain due to the overall subordination of women. This research will examine the meaning and significance given to the gender separation of men from women in the Naas Community Men’s Shed.

Monaghan and Robertson (2012) argue hegemonic masculinities represented by idealised male stereotypes involves male gender being practiced in social interactions signifying fixed beliefs. This is characterised by leading, dominating behaviours of “being strong”, hard, “unemotional, providing for one’s family and having limited involvement in household tasks” (cited in Mackenzie et al. 2017:1225). Foley argues some masculinities “do not fit a hegemonic stereotype”, such

groups as “working-class men, black men, men with disabilities, and homosexual men” (2014:31). Agreeing with Foley, Mackenzie et al. (2017:1228) argue many older and less formally educated men may also inhabit this subordinate position. For many men, particularly those who are disadvantaged, unemployed or who are older, this hegemonic measure can leave them marginalized, under resourced and impact negatively on their involvement in society and community. Because paid work is taken to be central to manhood, scholarly and popular discourse has characterized retirement as presenting a “crisis of masculinity” (Pietila, et al. 2017:306).

Jacqueline Daly-Bütz (2015:23) in her evaluation of the experiences of participants in a Men’s Shed in County Cork, reports that increased levels of male-unemployment resulting from the economic downturn which began in Ireland in 2008 has skewed men’s role as primary breadwinners and the further restructuring of traditional family types such as divorce and separation impacts negatively leading to social isolation. In addition, men have less experiences of socialising outside the home, except for socialising in the local bar or attending football matches or other such events, leaving them with less well-developed social networks in later life (Carragher 2017:351). Milligan et al. (2013;2015) analysed independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)’s School for Public Health Research (SPHR) through the Liverpool-Lancaster Collaboration (LiLaC). This research examined the effects of Men’s Sheds and other gendered interventions on men’s social wellbeing. The systematic review suggests that participating in traditionally male activities allows members permission to become more open with each other in discussions. It facilitates companionship and closeness leading to non-traditional practices of masculinity when there is implicit or explicit permission, and the setting is safe to do so (Milligan et al. 2013:14). Similarly, Golding (2015:370) suggests that sheds can be both a shelter and welcome relief “from negative and stereotypical views of gender, where men” can be empowered and encouraged to experience and express themselves, with other men, as men.”

Wyllie, Platt, Brownlie et al. (2012) argue that the changing social and economic landscape “has had a disproportionate effect on older adults. Nowhere is this more keenly felt than among the buffer generation of men caught between the silent, strong, austere masculinity of their forefathers and contemporary society—progressive, open, and individualistic” (cited in Carragher 2017:360). Much research has been undertaken, directed mainly at women, around gender equity. Research on Men’s Sheds provides understandings that “shed-based conversations” have an important role in helping older men with difficult life transitions and are an important site for future studies of masculinity in later life (Carragher and Golding 2015:152). This research will examine if the Naas Community Men’s Shed provides this important role for members during various life transitions.

In 2017 the Irish Research Council featured a post on their website from the then CEO of the Irish Men’s Shed Association, John Evoy on the council’s theme of the month, “A Balancing Act: Research and Gender” (The Irish Research Council 2017). In speaking about equality and social justice Evoy wrote that the systems which reproduce inequalities which face women, compared to men are still very much alive today. He goes on to say that he has often been challenged about the idea that the creation of Men’s Sheds was another mechanism providing advantage for men over women in society reinforcing gender stereotypes. But reflecting on the reason sheds were started in the Ireland in the first place Evoy argues men have a shorter life expectancy than women, 8 of 10 people who die by suicide are men, men are more likely to die from preventable causes such as heart attacks or strokes, they are more likely to experience addictions and participate in risk taking behaviour, and yet men are less likely to seek help or access services. When the Men’s Shed Movement became active in Ireland it was at the height of a recession where over 400,000 people were unemployed in Ireland and more than two thirds of them were men. Evoy argues he was clear that important work needed to be done. Furthermore, he argues many things are a balancing act, particularly when looked at from a gender perspective. He was struck by a point a speaker had

made at a Men's Shed Movement conference in Australia while the Men's Sheds could be reinforcing gender stereotypes, it is also "saving lives" (Irish Research Council 2017).

(2.6) Men's Shed Movement

A literature review on the Men's Shed movement is critical to this research study. Prompted by the growth in men's sheds in Ireland in a three-year period, Carragher and Golding in 2015 researched the impact of men's sheds on learning. They argue that men live their lives largely according to the traditional masculine values of breadwinner and provider and are socialised to be self-reliant. Furthermore, they contend that most social groups and organisations offering opportunities for people to be creative and to flourish are established largely by women for women (Carragher & Golding 2015:153). Further study by Carragher (2017) reports that membership of active retirement groups suggests female-dominance with activities provided of little interest to men. The development of the Men's Shed movement has been a "departure from this status quo" and has seen an increasing number of men coming together to participate in activities in a social space (Carragher 2017:354).

Firstly, a small historical summary of the Men's Shed movement's origins is appropriate. The first formal Shed for men in a community setting was established in rural Southern Australia in 1998 which was the beginning of a movement which by 2015 included up to 1,400 Men's Sheds in diverse countries on both sides of the world. Professor Barry Golding from Federation University Australia, is a patron of the Australian Men's Shed Association and a winner of the Ted Donnelly Award in 2013 for his "outstanding contribution to the Men's Shed Movement." Golding (2015) reports that with societies struggling to meet the needs and interests of men beyond the workplace, the Men's Shed movement mushroomed from the ground up to become a strongly networked international movement, not only in Australia, but now Ireland, the UK, New Zealand, and continental Europe. The inspiration for the earliest Men's Sheds in Ireland came from previous

Australian Men's sheds and its national association. From 2009 "early pioneering, innovative, remarkable and new and cutting edge" Irish Men's Sheds were developed with 450 Irish Men's Sheds currently active across the Republic (Golding 2015:264; IMSA 2020). The first Men's Shed to open in Ireland was the Tipperary Men's Shed in August 2009. The earliest Men's Sheds in Ireland were created through collaboration between service providers along with the support of family resource centres, state-funded organisations with local companies supporting development (Golding 2015:264-265). The Irish Men's Shed Association is supported by The Scheme to Support National Organisations and funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development (IMSA 2020).

As a researcher for and an advocate of Men's Sheds, Golding (2015:xi) contends that this important community movement provides for "many unmet needs" and contributes "positively to the lives of men, their families and communities." In his analysis of 22 years of this non-profit community and social organisation, culminating in his publication *The Men's Shed Movement* he proposes that a "remarkable and positive outcome is the value of agency: the choice and freedom to actively shape and create places which meet men's particular interests and needs" while at the same time providing "value to their local communities" (Golding 2015:1). He sub-titles his book "*The Company of Men*" a name proposed and adopted by one of the first groups set up in Victoria, Australia as he believes this shed and all those which have followed share "common underpinning characteristics" (Golding 2015:2). Firstly, the empowerment of men to self-manage, and secondly the recognition that in the company of other men, positive value is achieved by and for men and their community through their active participation in Men's Sheds. Describing Men's Sheds as a social movement Golding further posits that they comprise of large informal groups of men focusing on community involvement normally beyond the paid workforce. Although it is widely held that the Men's Shed movement was developed based on a concern for older men and their need for involvement in community-based programmes following retirement, there was a momentum in growth of the

movement in Ireland following the Global Financial Crisis providing an outlet for those not in paid work regardless of age (Golding 2015).

Many attempts have been made to define Men's Sheds but due to the varying locations, diversities, purposes, and outcomes, one simple universal and comprehensive definition cannot be refined. What should be included and what should be omitted is difficult to decide (Golding 2015). However, the Australian Men's Shed Association recognises a Men's Shed as "any community-based, non-profit, non-commercial organisation that is accessible to all men and whose primary activity is the provision of a safe and friendly environment where men are able to work on meaningful projects" (AMSA 2017). Additionally, this association which is funded by the Australian Government's Department of Health, "aims to improve the health and wellbeing of members and reduce the number of men who are at risk from preventable health issues that may emanate from isolation" (AMSA 2017). Furthermore, the association supporting the movement in Ireland similarly describes a Men's Shed as a "community-based non-commercial organisation open to all men, where the primary activity is the provision of a safe, and inclusive environment where men gather and/or work on meaningful projects at their own pace, in their own time and in the company of other members to learn, share skills, and make long-lasting friendships, where the primary objective is to advance the health and well-being of those participating" (IMSA 2020).

Although the narrative of these definitions mention 'health and wellbeing', there is evidence that both associations are reluctant to associate the Men's Shed movement as a health programme. While evaluating the experiences of the participants of a Men's Shed in County Cork, Jacqueline Daly-Bütz (2015) reports that John Evoy, ex-CEO of the IMSA explained that "if we called it a health centre men wouldn't come but the idea is to get men into a safe space" and talking. As a result, breaking "down barriers" can provide "health by stealth" (Daly-Bütz 2015:31). Furthermore, David Helmers, Executive Officer of the AMSA was quoted in an Australian

newswire feed as saying that the organisation “introduces health wellbeing strategies and checks in the background but please don’t tell the men” (Carter 2009). Talking to Brian O’Connell (2011), Evoy further points out that “talking about feelings is almost a by-product of having guys together shoulder-to-shoulder not face-to-face” while fixing a “broken lawnmower” (Irish Times). As conceived by the late Dick McGowan in Tongala, Victoria, in the very first men’s Shed in 1998 in Australia, a Men’s Shed is a “physical place and community organisation offering men, mostly older men beyond paid work – retired, unemployed, or with a disability – somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to” (Ahl, Hedegaard, and Golding 2017:317). The most common activity is wood- or metalworking, but can also involve whatever activities men decide upon, such as game playing, cooking, gardening, singing, or working with computers. Men’s Shed organisations typically also contribute to their local community by, for example, building playgrounds for children. Specifically, notable are the findings from the first ever Irish Men’s Shed survey entitled Men’s Sheds in Ireland: Learning through Community Contexts conducted by Carragher (2013) in which she concludes that Men’s Sheds cater for various categories of men. Her research further reports that, of the participants surveyed, 97% felt better about themselves and 91% indicated their wellbeing had improved because of their involvement in the Men’s Shed (Daly-Bütz 2015:23).

A case study exploring men’s perceptions of the need for Men’s Sheds was undertaken in 2018 at a time when there was a growing Men’s Sheds movement in Canada. The findings echoed and contributed to previous studies with the researchers highlighting the practical outcomes for such male-focused programmes. It was found that members experienced reduced isolation and benefited from the engagement in continual learning and the exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, the researchers suggest that the members preferred activities where they could form and develop friendships (Nurmi et al. 2018:809). This study also revealed that “although social support can be met in a variety of ways, access to community-based programmes is an important avenue that

supports building social connections for individuals with Men's Sheds having a positive impact on social engagement providing a sense of belonging" (Nurmi et al. 2018:795). This case study of the Men's Shed in Naas explores the ways in which men involved specifically experience and understand their participation.

(2.7) Conclusion of Literature

A review of the literature regarding the key themes, identified from the case study of the Men's Shed in Naas, was presented in this chapter. Through a sociological lens, a general overview of the themes of place, third place, identity, community, and gender, was provided. In addition, the literature has provided an understanding of the importance of the concepts of place attachment, a cyber third place, collective identity, boundaries, virtual communities, and masculinity. To conclude the chapter, an in-depth review of literature on the community-based organisation of the Men's Shed Movement, was presented. The material and literature highlighted the significance of these themes to this research and to the study of sociology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

(3.1) Research Question

For this research project, a study on ‘*How the Naas Community Men’s Shed is understood, negotiated, and visualised by its members*’ was conducted. The themes of place, third place, identity, community, and gender developed throughout the research and during data collection. The important additional theme of the Men’s Shed movement is also reviewed. Several sub-themes emerged during the research including place attachment, virtual communities, masculinity, and collective identity. The research question along with this combination of further sub questions aims to explore and interpret the meanings members attribute to their participation in the Men’s Shed in Naas:

- How is the Naas Community Men’s Shed understood as place?
- Does the Naas Community Men’s Shed act as a third place and in what way?
- How is identity understood and developed within this space?
- Does participation in the Naas Community Men’s Shed provide a sense of community?
- What meaning and significance is given to the gender separation of men from women in the Naas Community Men’s Shed?
- How was the loss of place experienced during the restrictions associated with COVID-19?

To best answer these questions and understand the experiences of the Naas Community Men’s Shed members a qualitative research approach was employed.

(3.2) The Qualitative Approach

Fieldwork and qualitative research bridge the gap between sociological theory and social processes adding to a body of knowledge guiding and informing future inquiry (Marvasti 2004). People socially construct their reality and interpretation of the social world. Encountering something new, social actors reconcile ideas and experiences, altering beliefs, adding to knowledge, becoming

active creators. The overarching social paradigm and constructivist ontological position posited in this explorative research required a qualificative approach. Based on a different epistemological foundation than that used in quantitative research, this approach recognises a world that assumes multiple constructed subjective truths (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell 2013) which are not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss and Corbin 1990:11). This approach allows researchers to recognise a world that is uncertain and variable and applying intuitive and holistic method results in findings that can be qualitative, idiographic, and unique. The qualitative approach I took in this study addresses questions and sub questions which benefit social research bringing to the surface issues and processes not identified at the outset as being significant” (Inglis 2009:8). Furthermore, it seeks to explore understandings of the social world from the perspective of those being studied (Bryman 2004: 393). Beginning with an analysis of literature, from which research questions were developed, the aim of the study was to gain an understanding of how members of the Naas Community Men’s Shed construct and develop subjective meanings from their participation. Within this qualitative approach data were gathered from a focused sample group. This allows for an understanding of their experiences and how the social world is interpreted and produced (Sandelowski 2001). Sociological and qualitative research is not used to predict the future but provide insights adding to a body of knowledge to develop further study (O’Leary 2011). The qualitative approach allows me to gain an insight into the subjective perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of members of the Naas Community Men’s Shed to understand how it is best represented, negotiated, and visualised. Qualitative research is a type of research which involves “the constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized, and represented’ (Gubrium and Holstein 1997:114). Some limitations to using a qualitative research method exists. One important disadvantage is that a smaller sample size raises issues of generalizability to the whole population of research as too many contextual variables can shape the findings (Rahman 2017). As Bryman argues “qualitative findings tend to be oriented to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the aspect of the social

world being studied” (2004:392) and study results cannot claim wider generalisation to other contexts or at least in only a limited way (Rahman 2017:105). However, a qualitative research approach can produce a thick and detailed description of participants’ feelings, opinions, and experiences; and interpret the meanings of their actions (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). In this case study the qualitative approach can provide an in-depth view of a specific community within the Men’s Shed in Naas allowing a rich analysis of how these members understand, negotiate, and visualise their participation and their own subjective perspective. A further disadvantage which may emerge while using a qualitative research method refers to my stance or potential bias in relation to the social context of this study. Section 3.5 ‘Issues of Positionality’ addresses this concern directly pointing out how I endeavour to mitigate such bias from impacting this research.

(3.2.1) The Case Study Approach

This qualitative research is based on a specific, detailed, and intensive case study of a single social setting providing an analysis of the complexity and particular nature of a phenomena or place; that of the Naas Community Men’s Shed (Bryman 2004:48). Case studies allow the collection and presentation of information in a way that provides more context. They are good for showing how something happens or works in a real-life situation (Kane and O’Reilly-De Brun 2001:215). As the attitudes, behaviours, and the environment all together, in a natural setting are examined in a case study, a better understanding of how things work is provided (May 2001). As Merriam contends the case study format examines “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (2002:178).

According to Bryman “one question on which a great deal of discussion has centred concerns the external validity or generalizability of case study research” (2004:51). As case studies are historically and socially specific and are also particular to a certain context they cannot be generalised to all areas. However, case studies allow the researcher a chance to explore key social

processes providing insights that survey techniques ignore. This does not mean however, that findings are merely limited to the social setting where research is conducted. It may well be that a case study of a locality or specific place or organisation provides evidence that many areas or groups are constructed and reconstructed the same. While what is being examined in the Naas Community Men's Shed may be mediated at a local level and the implications and findings may be context specific nevertheless this case study could be used in comparative analysis. Although there is a small sample size in this research and results of the study are limited in specificity to the context of the Naas Community Men's Shed, this study would not be precluded from examination in relation to other Men's Sheds or similar community based social projects in Ireland.

(3.2.2) Interviewing

The data to build the case study were collected through a series of in-depth interviews. Five one-hour semi-structured interviews with five Naas Community Men's Shed members allowed for the collection of data on specific, guided topics and produced answers which could be compared between different participants whilst also giving room for the conversation to flow and for the participant to freely express their thoughts (Guest et al. 2013:31). This semi-structured interview method different from structured interviews allows participants the freedom to discuss what is of interest to them providing a framework different from that which would be employed in an unstructured interview process. To establish rapport, I began all interviews in a conversational manner and then moved on to explore the specific themes I wished to discuss. I also allowed the research participants the opportunity to raise or discuss any other issues that came to mind.

It had been the intention that ten interviews would be conducted face-to-face at the Men's Shed in Naas, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic this was not possible as interviews could not be conducted adequately while adhering to proper social distancing measures. In the interest of the health of research participations and that of myself, in place of face-to-face interviews, Zoom, a

videotelephony and online chat service through a cloud-based peer-to-peer software platform, was utilised to conduct video interviews. This process was deemed best to answer my research question under the circumstances of a nationwide lockdown. However, as not all members are fully conversant with this technology, the number of interviews was limited. Nevertheless, the interviews facilitated the opportunity to gain an in-depth account of the research participants own experiences and perceptions surrounding the Naas Community Men's Shed. Acknowledging the subject's perspective allowed for deeper understandings and the exploratory dialogue provided qualitative data on a specific set of enquiries, which were open for improvisation. These were around the guided topics of place, third place, identity, community, and gender, which were analysed thematically (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). In addition, two other opportunities were presented to gain a deeper understanding of activities at the Naas Community Men's Shed. While interviewing the Chairman he invited me to an outdoor event in Naas for St. Patrick's Day where four members of the Naas Community Men's Shed, who have formed a music group, entertained residents of a nursing home. As this location was within a 5 km radius of my home I could attend with the advice and guidelines from The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) regarding social distancing, hygiene, and respiratory etiquette in relation to the coronavirus followed (Government of Ireland 2021). In addition, a short conversation was held with a representative of the Irish Men's Shed Association at the suggestion of one of the members. This is discussed further in the findings. Both opportunities provided further insight into my case study of the Men's Shed in Naas.

(3.2.3) Sources of Data

In order to uphold anonymity within the study each respondent was assigned a letter (Respondent A, B, etc.).

Respondent	Gender	Age	Occupation
A	Male	65+	Retired (commandant in the army)
B	Male	65	Retired (worked in financial services)
D	Male	66	Retired (business owner)
E	Male	73	Retired (Motor Mechanic)
F	Male	69	Retired (Facilities Management)

(3.2.4) Photographic Representation

While the visual has always had a place in sociology, its use and analysis have fluctuated over the discipline's history but of late sociologists have revived their interest in photographic representation (Marvasti 2004:66-67). With the rapid development of information technology paralleled by an increase in the use of visual forms of communications it has become an integral part of everyday life (Knoblauch et al. 2008:1). Nonetheless, the need to manage subjectivity applies equally to both visual and non-visual data (Holliday 2007). Photographs do not and cannot record 'the truth' (Pink 2001). Rather they are social constructions, partial views of the world, seen from a particular viewpoint. They express subject positions and convey visually specific experiences. When capturing images, researchers must consider the spatial dimension, angle, background and framing of the visual image. For this qualitative research study, visual images are used as illustration to add and develop the analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews.

The visual representations presented in this research were sourced from the Irish Men’s Shed Association (IMSA) website as well as the Naas Community Men’s Shed Facebook page. The first image sourced from IMSA is that of a group on shedders boat building in a Men’s Shed workshop. All other images were sourced with permission from the Naas Community Men’s Shed Facebook page except for the one photograph which I took myself of the gathering on March 16, 2021 at the Nursing Home in Naas to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day. The analysis of these visual data allows an understanding of the ways in which the Naas Community Men’s Shed is visualised as was set out to be investigated in my research question. Additionally, they assist in interpreting how the shedders understand and negotiate their participation. The visual images along with the established interview method provide a creative break as well as contributing to a new “way of seeing (Pink 2001:13).

(3.3) Analysis of Data

Figure 3.1: An outline of the steps taken in this qualitative research project

Initial readings surrounding the topic of inquiry (PLACE EXPLORATION)



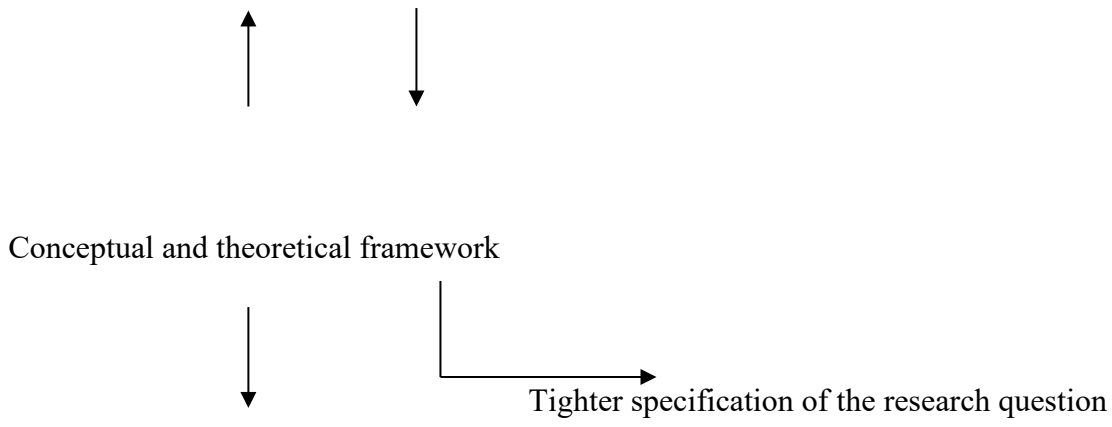
Developing an idea, research question, hypothesis. Formation of general research question and initial theoretical framework (this includes theories and literature surrounding the area of inquiry etc.)



Collection of relevant data – interviewing, photographic representation, literature review etc.



Interpretation of data / analysis of data



Write up findings/conclusions (Figure adapted from Bryman: 2004: 269)

Figure 3.1 presents an outline of the steps taken in this research project. Having worked in the recruitment industry for two decades I have been exposed to candidates whose roles were made redundant and those who retired early seeking part time work to fill their days. Specifically, during the economic recession in Ireland from 2008 to 2013 I interviewed men who told me of their involvement in various Men’s Sheds throughout Ireland. Additionally, an interest in this project was triggered when we brought our children’s old bicycles to a local Men’s Shed where they were repaired and restored for a children’s charity. This all impacted on the research question I wished to ask and influenced my decision to use the Naas Community Men’s Shed as a case study.

Firstly, reading and researching the topic of place exploration allowed for a research question to emerge. Sub-questions were formulated based on other key themes which developed an initial theoretical framework from which a literature review was completed. Research data for this study were collected in the form of semi-structured interviews and visual images which, used as illustration, added to, and developed the analysis of the data from the interviews. In addition to taking comprehensive notes during the interviews, the conversations were recorded and transcribed. While transcribing the interviews I was brought back to the experiences of the research

participants and their words provided evidence of the meanings the members attribute to their participation.

In a systematic and organised fashion, a descriptive and interpretative analysis of the data were undertaken by way of colour coding to identify significant findings. A key process of analysis is the establishment of classes of things, persons, events, and their properties with the researcher then attempting to establish linkages between these classes. This critical analysis of the data generated sociological concepts which linked to the theories and concepts discussed in the literature review chapter providing a deeper insight into the research question. This analysis frames the experience of the research participants and sets it in context (Ryan 2008:94). Once the data were coded, this then formed the basis and framework for writing up the findings. My findings chapter represents the themes that were discussed in these interviews: Place, Third Place, Community, Identity, Gender and the Men's Shed Movement. Highlighting the cyclical nature of research further themes emerged throughout the research process and during the interviews and these are incorporated into the findings chapter.

(3.4) Ethics

Ethics is concerned with attempting to formulate codes and principles of moral behaviour (May 2001) and ethical awareness is crucial "to protect the dignity and safety of research participants" Marvasti (2004:135). For O'Leary researchers are "responsible for shaping the character of knowledge" requiring that ethical and political attention be at the core of all research investigation (2011:32). Each individual researcher sets the highest standards of conduct in their investigations. Important ethical principles must be applied when conducting research. Fundamental is the practice of integrity, behaving honestly and ethically throughout. It is the responsibility of all researchers to ensure no emotional, physical, or psychological harm comes to respondents. Although the avoidance of physical harm is clear, in the case of maximizing the wellbeing of participants in the

context of the risk of unpleasant psychological emotions which may arise inadvertently, ethics always take precedent.

Sociological researchers in Ireland in their professional activities are guided by The Sociological Association of Ireland's (SAI) Ethical Guidelines. One of many important principles is that of anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality. Even though participants may not have a categorical guarantee of confidentiality, this is assumed and respect for individual's privacy, and anonymity is paramount. All researchers, their colleagues and others with access to participants' personal data are compelled to provide full confidentiality to individuals participating in the research process. Exceptions will have clear and prevailing reasons. At times it may be necessary to refrain from recording or using sensitive information. The delivery, storing or transferring of data from recording devices, laptops, personal computers, and networks must be undertaken following the local data protection authority's provisions. Removal of identifying information, use of alias names, and preventing data from being published, which would result in potential identification of participants, should all be undertaken with extreme care (Sociological Association of Ireland 2019).

Researchers at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM) are bound by the University's Policy Documents on Ethics in Research and conform with all legal and University codes of practice and policies. The informed consent clause within the policy clearly states that the research participant has a right to give informed consent. This is required even if the research is not directly related to the person or the material is not originating from the individual. As part of informed consent, the participants should be informed of the research objectives. Before research begins participants are clearly informed of their right to withdraw from the process at any time.

Ethics specific to this qualitative research was guided and informed by the ethical guidelines of the Sociological Association of Ireland (SAI) and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth

(NUIM). My research participants were informed of my research project and provided with a consent form outlining their involvement in my study before interviewing and inclusion in the project. This signed document ensured the interviewee understood that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to refuse to answer any questions and to withdraw at any time. As well as this the anonymity of my research participants was guaranteed. I ensured the confidentiality of my participant's data by storing it on my password protected laptop which I only have access to.

The research was carried out with professional competence, integrity, respect for human rights, diversity, equality, and social responsibility (NUIM 2015). I developed a relationship of trust, building a strong rapport with the research participants and acted in a friendly and respectful manner. Use of images from the Naas Community Men's Shed Facebook page, as well as from the Irish Men's Shed Association website and a photograph from the St. Patrick's Day event at the Nursing home in Naas were all used with express permission. In order to uphold anonymity within the study each respondent was assigned a letter (Respondent A, B, etc.). Additionally, when respondents spoke of others, I ensured their anonymity also by changing their names. I sought approval from my research supervisor before the project commenced.

(3.5) Issues of Positionality

A researcher carries with them a "history, a sense of themselves and the importance of their experiences" (May 2001:21) and the question of values can intrude at any number of points in the process of social research. These points include the choice of research area, the formulation of research questions, methodology, the formulation of research design and data collection techniques, the analysis and interpretation of data and the findings drawn from this analysis, (Bryman 2004:21-22). Living close to Naas, Co. Kildare and having some familiarity of the Men's Shed in addition to possibly accidentally having some acquaintance with some of the members it was important I was cognisant of my stance or positioning in relation to the social and political context of the study and

the participant group. For my investigation I endeavoured to remain objective ensuring I kept my interest, and pre-conceived ideologies detached and fully focused on the research project. My aim in this investigation was to hear directly from my research participants. My interest in how the Naas Community Men's Shed is understood, negotiated, and visualised by its members shaped the research process. As Gieryn (2000:465) posits, place is "inevitably contested" and Men's Sheds mean different things to different people. Bailey (2014:14) contends "good research requires reflexivity: critical thinking and writing about who we are and how the choices we make affect our results" and involves questioning one's own taken for granted assumptions. Recognising the impact, a researcher's background and experience has on research (O'Leary 2011), there is a strong requirement for reflexivity and self-reference in the process. For Russell & Kelly (2002) it is through "reflection researchers may become aware of what allows them to see, as well as what may inhibit their seeing" (Cited in Watt 2007:82). I endeavoured to conduct this research with an awareness of my interpretation of the world and the social, cultural, and political subjectively I brought to the process and used this information to mitigate any bias in the research.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

(4.1) Introduction

This research study set out to explore how the Naas Community Men's Shed is understood, negotiated, and visualised by its members. This chapter will draw out and discuss the literature examined in Chapter Two and highlight and incorporate the presentation of the findings. The data findings are analysed and represented thematically based on the themes discussed in the literature chapter. The research found that Members of the Naas Community Men's Shed understand, negotiate, and visualise their participation in a range of ways. The research found that the Shed resembles a third place where sociability is nourished, and distinct characteristics are found which promote creativity. Findings in the research emphasise the significance of an online community in facilitating and maintaining connection for shed members during Ireland's nationwide lockdown as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Furthermore, the research found community is important for the Naas Community Men's Shed members and a crucial element of their membership is the collective sense of community within the shed and the engagement in projects to contribute or "give back" to the community. Additionally, while exploring the implications of the pandemic, a key finding illustrates that for these men the loss of the physical location of the shed, a loss of place is significant.

(4.2) Place

Theorists propose that an evolution is occurring where place is becoming less relevant. Despite a worry for the transcendence of place, the placelessness of place and cities without a place Gieryn (2000:463) argues for its persistence as a constituent element of social life. He contends that place should be examined through a sensitive sociological lens (Gieryn 2000:464). Furthermore Massey (1994), Dreier et al. (2004) and Harvey (1990) discuss "the relevance of place" and speak of its contemporary importance. Like Gieryn and these other theorists this research reveals that the Naas Community Men's Shed is relevant as a place of interaction, learning and sometimes for just a

“cuppa” and an important constituent element of social life for the men who participated in this study. Not only has the Men’s Shed come into existence in recent post-modernity decades, but as a contemporary global movement is developing and growing at an exponential rate.

A key aspect of Gieryn’s understanding of place is that it is flexible and malleable over time and contested by those who ascribe diverse meanings, values, interpretations, representations, and identifications (Gieryn 2000:467). How the Naas Community Men’s Shed is represented and negotiated ascribes diverse representations of place for the members who participated in this research study. During the interviews with the members a multitude of subjective understandings and meanings of place were highlighted. In the time that the “shedders” who I spoke to have been members, two different premises housed the Naas Community Men’s Shed; one in the earlier years of 2014 to 2019 and the current location where the group has been accommodated for the last eighteen months. For Gieryn (2000:464) space becomes place when in material forms, they are built and used at certain geographical spots. From my analysis it is apparent that for interview participants both locations, as place, for the Naas Community Men’s Shed provide varied experiences and interpretations. The older location for one participant was convenient:

So then, in the last four or five years the fact that I was not active with the bar, I got involved with the, or I was asked to get involved with the Men's Shed, which was two doors from my house which was handy (Respondent A 2021).

However, two other members concurred with each other that this building and location was not ideal. Their experiences were quite different from Respondent A:

And then the first or second morning I went down they were – it was like going back to the 40’s I would say because it was the old shed. They boil the kettle, somebody made the tea, we wouldn't drink out of the cups because I know my wife would say you'd have to disinfect everything – laughing (Respondent C 2021).

Not somewhere you'd want to go on a dark night, or even on a wet night or a cold night, it was absolutely freezing up there. Laughing. Wind coming in from everywhere (Respondent B 2021).

However, for this member once the move had taken place for him togetherness became important. His comments emphasise a collective ethos using the pronoun ‘we’ in his description of the new premises. He expands on what the new place means for him and fellow shedders:

It's quite, quite a large size building, on about three quarters of an acre. And it has a house. We have reorganized the kitchen. We have an assembly room that will take 25 people. We have a small sitting room where we can have three or four people. We have a music room where we store all our musical equipment. We have computer room, we have a little office, we have toilets downstairs and upstairs. We have a lean-to at the front that accommodates about 25 shedders to sit around outdoors. We have a polytunnel then there just down from it in front of the lean-to and below that again then, we have the workshops which has three sections, and then we have a tennis court or walking soccer facility (Respondent A 2021).



Image 3: “Old to the New” (Facebook 2021)

It is clear that understandings of the Naas Community Men’s Shed as place vary from person to person. The three defining features of place – location, material form and meaningfulness, as Gieryn (2000:466) contends are bundled.

Massey (1995) posits that place is socially constructed, interpenetrates, and connects with other social worlds. This is illustrated when one member describes how from the social outlet of golf, he was introduced to the Naas Community Men’s Shed:

And how I came across the Men's Shed was that Respondent A and I played golf; I am in the same golf club as Respondent A. And he had said to me, he said, I'm in The Men's Shed. I'm Executive Chairman of the shed, would you like to come down and join us (Respondent C).

For this member place is dynamic with multiple identities shifting and overlapping.

Hammad (2011) argues in her case study of the divided Palestinian village of Bilin in the West Bank, that intergenerational lived experiences provide a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the complexities of place experience. For the members of the Naas Community Men's Shed who vary in age from 49 to 86 this research found that position in an individual's life course has an influence on their lived experience of place. For some members, the Naas Men's Shed provided them a very regular social outlet, as for example in the case of the oldest member interviewed, living alone as his wife died recently, who frequents the Shed six days a week:

Six days a week. Jesus, I love it. Even when she was sick, I used to go up. Lord of mercy on her. I used to take her to the hospital, and I'd drop her up about half nine and then come back to the shed. Then if she was on a short day, I'd go back up for her one or half one or two o'clock or it could be five or six that's the way it was like (Respondent D 2021).

But for another member who has a family and other responsibilities his experience of the Naas Men's Shed is quite different:

So, my involvement is not as much as you know, some of them, some of them are there every day. They would be there. I said to Respondent A, I feel very selfish. I said, I just do the music and he said but that's what it's about. That's what it's supposed to be about. Everybody gets what they want and what they need out of it (Respondent B 2021).

Furthermore, he speaks to intergenerational lived experiences when he describes the age gap between members and what that means for some:

We grew up in an era when women were an endangered species, like they were at the other side of the dancehall. Let me tell you, it was difficult for many of the men to walk that distance over to where the woman was, as it was for the woman to stand there waiting to be asked to dance. It worked both ways in that era, as well. So that has all changed. There would be some men who would have grown up in the era I grew up in. But there's a younger men's shed and an older one. Some of the men are older than me. Some are my age, some are in their early 60s, or maybe even in their later 50s. So, there could be a 25-year gap in some instances between the youngest and the oldest in the shed, and, maybe some are more comfortable just talking to men (Respondent B 2021).

Here these respondents demonstrate that a generational perspective is imperative for attaining holistic and meaningful understandings of the complex subtleties of place which derived from individuals' everyday socio-spatial practices and emotional attachments are impregnated with deeply rooted meanings (Hammad 2011).

As well as Gieryn (2000:464) arguing that place transcends to mediate social life when assembled with people, objects, and representations, Molotch, Fruedenburg and Paulsen (2000) contend that community projects harbour and integrate memory traces. For the members of the Naas Men's Shed much reminiscing was prevalent in my interviews as they recollect and relive the experiences as members of this group:

We kept turkeys up at the shed too for three years. Oh, the crack we had with the turkeys was incredible like. The people couldn't believe they could grow so fast. I kept telling them they'll grow fast. Putting on 2kgs every, we were weighing them every second week and they were putting on 2kgs and like these lads I'd call them townies, they wouldn't understand turkeys or anything (Laughing) (Respondent D 2021).

Yes, one thing I didn't say about the group is about my granddaughter and her experience with the Men's Shed is unique in the world because she knows every shedder by name. They all know her. And they ask about her, and she's grown from the age of two to eight as a shedder herself. She comes down with me. They ask about her every time I go down, and they still meet her and if she meets them on the street, she meets their wives, and they stop her and they say hello to her. It's been a wonderful story (Respondent A 2021).

These myriad of meanings and memories offer a glimpse of how important place is in the lives of these men who as members of the Naas Community Men's Shed transpose place into a social space and how crucial as Simonsen (1997) contends attachment is to place in the form of personal relations and practices. Equally crucial is that which Noori and Benson (2016) speak about in their case study on urban allotment gardens. Place-making occurs as identity is inscribed through creative engagement:

The house was lying derelict for a number of years. So, with the guys in the shed, we have one guy in there and he's extremely good with his hands as regards maintenance and things like that. So, he got in with the aid of ourselves, refurbished, a lot of the house, put new floors in, mended windows that were broken. And then then we all got in and started

painting it and got the carpets changed and got a polytunnel from the old shed to the new shed (Respondent D 2021).

For the members of the Naas Community Men's Shed a process of place-making emerges as members relocate from one premises to another.

Place attachment is central to an analysis of place. Scannell and Gifford (2010) posit that place attachment can be synthesised into a tripartite framework. Three dimensions; the person, the psychological behaviour and the physical location collectively contribute to a process where meaning is attributed to involvement within this place of attachment. In addition to place attachment there is a concern for an erosion of place, with some arguing that modernity brings about a loss of place. These concepts were investigated in light of restrictions resulting from the global pandemic. This research found that place is relevant. Social meanings have not evaporated from the Naas Community Men's Shed and the loss of the premises during the last year of lockdowns as this member explains is difficult:

It has been tragic; it has been awful difficult for the shed. we are still not back yet. There's a carpenter, and another guy and the two of them work, social distancing in a three-tier workshop. We only put our head in the door to see how they're doing (Respondent A 2021).

These sentiments provide evidence that Scannell and Gifford's (2010) third dimension of the physical location of place attachment is important.

(4.2.1) Third Place

The Naas Community Men's Shed resembles the types of social settings Oldenburg (1997) describes as third places. Close and personal contact with a varied population, a "looseness and fluidity" of structure all exists within this community group. It is a forum for sociability, interconnection with others, a place of learning and a hangout for that friendly chat when you might just be lonely. The benefit of such a third space for one member as described by another is invaluable:

There are a couple of people in the shed that you know that have lost their wives, for example, Respondent A might have told, you you know, for example Michael. He didn't come out of his house for nearly three years, and he came to the shed and now he's kind of assistant house manager and looks after the gardens and you know he's totally different than he was. He has the smartphone and is one of the best on WhatsApp, you know (Respondent E 2021).

These sentiments clearly reflect what Golding (2015) refers to when he argues that Men's Sheds seek to create a third place particularly for men with much diminished first or second places. Golding (2015:11) also suggests that the appeal of a Men's Shed as a third place is that "anything is possible." It is clear from this interview that the Naas Community Men's Shed provides many different activities and a variety of social interaction opportunities to suit those with varying interests:

Yeah, absolutely, we interact with all the festival committees. We take part in all the festivals. We put up, we put up. We put up a stand, and we would sell our bird boxes and insect hotels and show our eggs and the fruits that they would grow in the polytunnel. And then would play music. Twelve members are in a band. So, we play at all the festivals, we play for all the nursing homes (Respondent A 2021).



Image 4: Sunny Sunday: Naas Community Men's Shed Band at Naas Easter Parade 2019 (Facebook 2021)

This image represents the activities that are undertaken by the shedders outside the premises and within the community. What is interesting is that not all activities surrounding the group take place in the shed premises. The third place could be a festival where members participate or an outing to a tourist site.

Oldenburg (1997) speaks of a decline in socially bonding informal gatherings due to urban renewal and planning restrictions. Bonding is a key benefit of participation in the Naas Community Men's Shed:

You bond then by taking them away for the day. And they talk more, they are in a new environment. On the bus for two hours going down to Limerick. We went down to Ardnacrusha, and up to the Titanic Museum. We went down to the lovely gardens down there in Carlow and the sensory gardens in Athy, all those lovely places. We went on all those trips and this is a huge thing for us (Respondent A 2021).

Although Naas town has seen considerable urban renewal initiatives and some planning restrictions, this respondent reports the Executive Committee of the Naas Community Men's Shed has a strong working relationship with Kildare County Council. Both groups liaise regularly and are working towards sourcing a permanent location for the Men's Shed in Naas when the current arrangement ends.

We haven't met for a while, so we will go through, he'll tell us what's happening with the town plan, and we put submissions into the town plan, so we discuss those. And also, then he'll be trying to make sure that going forward the Men's Shed gets a permanent home. So, I know that the town council will look out for us that way going forward, so I've no worries about our future (Respondent A 2021).

Despite Oldenburg's (1997) concerns, I would argue that this research discovers a community bedrock in the Men's Shed in Naas.

Contemporarily, there is a need to speak of a "new" third place – that of the Internet where the types of communication Oldenburg (1989) discusses also takes place. As mentioned previously The Irish Men's Shed Association has a strong web presence, with social media platforms curated by the organisation and individual sheds, providing information and updates to the public and members. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic many community projects have closed or are strictly curtailed and The Irish Men's Shed Association issued formal guidance and urged "Men's Sheds around Ireland to close and maintain connection through other means" (IMSA 2020). Following these guidelines, the Naas Community Men's Shed has only two members visiting the premises

and maintaining the building, at a social distance outdoors for a short period each day. In the meantime, most communication is by way of Zoom meetings and activities, and correspondence is via a Naas Community Men's Shed WhatsApp group. As Respondent A reports this has been positive for most:

They run Zoom meetings on a whole load of things, like fitness. We have been talking to Dr. O'Neill too and loads of other things (Respondent A 2021).

And now we have our own WhatsApp. As a result, everyone can use it, some of them would eat the phone before rather than use it before these courses. Now they are all confident, yeah, send messages to talk and video, the fear is gone (Respondent A 2021).

But for another member his experience of the move to a cyber third place has been different:

Zoom I just watch it. Like you sent me the number and I just hook in. I was never into IT. Now it's a necessity. I don't do banking or anything, but I can tax my car on it. The banks keep asking me to go online, but I said no – I'm not – end of story. I'm not setting it up as you could press a wrong button. And my wife she was the same as me like, what do you call it. She didn't even know how to use WhatsApp like. We had to teach her how to work WhatsApp in hospital like (Respondent D 2021).

In line with Soukup's (2006) argument technological interactions change participants' experiences.

(4.3) Identity

The Naas Community Men's Shed is understood in a range of different ways and these understandings effect the many dimensions of identity found within its members. For Lawler (2008) identity does not belong only within an individual but is produced between persons where one portrays oneself to the outside world providing an opportunity for a subjective sense of knowing oneself. Within the Naas Community Men's Shed, identity formation is apparent as the members present themselves in everyday life shaping their identity through dramaturgical interaction (Goffman 1959). Goffman (1959:252-253) speaks of a conscious and unconscious performance of self, sharing some aspects of identity and concealing others dependent on the stage being occupied. This one gentleman speaks quite deliberately about what experiences he shares and, others which remain unspoken, with another member:

I actually rang him the other day to see how he's keeping. He's good crack. He'd have a varied life like myself, you know, in business. And as I say he, he was a millionaire twice

over. Yeah, lots of stories. And he would have similar problems with the banks as I did, and you know, you wouldn't share experiences. But you know, what he's talking about. You can listen to him and identify yourself with him (Respondent C 2021).

The modifying of behaviour which this member eludes to describes Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach to the presentation of self.

A case study by Carragher and Golding (2015) examining the impact of community-based men's sheds on learning, can be drawn upon to understand self-identity while analysing the experiences of another interview participant. For Carragher and Golding (2015) men's sheds provide a sense of purpose and meaning after retirement and a learning environment. This member admitted to not having had much experience with DIY:

I am just thinking of a funny instance. We have a garden seat out the back and it needed to be painted. But I said, I'll bring it down to the shed and repair it. So, with the help of the lads, I repaired it in the sense that you know, put new fixed fixtures on it and repaired some of the wood that was rotten and painted it and things like that. I enjoyed it. I had never done anything like it before. I was going to dump it to be honest. I gave it an under coat of paint. I would have dumped that some years ago and just bought a new one. So that has helped me in a sense. It was project, gets the hands dirty and get stuck in. (Respondent C 2021).

This case study reflects Carragher and Golding's (2015) findings, the Naas Community Men's Shed provides meaning and purpose and a learning environment for its members.

Inglis (2009) believes identities are a form of cultural toolkit which people use to construct an image and understanding of themselves. This member whose career was centred around mechanical engineering speaks about his lead position in the shed as he describes his interactions with another member whose experiences are more limited in that arena:

Oh, but we used to fight, give out and argue and then he was a bricklayer by trade, but couldn't drive a nail into a pound of butter he was that bad with his hands. Like he would be making things up there. We would be leaving after lunch and then you go into the workshop then you could end up in there for a half an hour or three quarters doing something for him, you couldn't say well I am going. He would ask will you do this for and that for me. Lord have mercy on him (Respondent D 2021).

This member's sense of identity is wrapped up in his technical expertise and his unspoken mentoring or coaching position within the shed. Although jovial in describing this instance his connection to a sense of pride was palpable. Through his involvement with the Naas Community Men's Shed meanings are generated for this member which in turn shape his identity. As Inglis (2009:3) argues citing Durkheim (1976) identity with place is an interactive process of social labelling and identification.

For Durkheim (1976) bonds are created between people who have shared morals and goals. For the Naas Community Men's Shed members there is a collective sense of camaraderie. One member at this particular stage in their life course eludes to the fact that they can share and understand each other's experiences:

So, what do I do I get out of it. But I get an appreciation I think of that there's an awful lot of different personalities, because you have time, maybe to be there and to see them and to listen to them, and maybe they're worried some of them and some of them that are very jovial, have their own worries and an appreciation of, I suppose, different strands to and different personalities and what people did all their working lives, and a whole variety of them because there is a big variety (Respondent B 2021).

In the Naas Men's Shed a sense of collective identity is produced in an interactive environment where a shared sense of belonging originates.

As Ahl, Hedegaard and Golding (2017:316) refer to in their study of *How the Men's Shed Idea Travelled to Scandinavia* "men come together in men's sheds not to be corrected or fixed, but to be able to express themselves to other men while not having the fear to be judged." Participation in the Naas Community Men's provides members with a form of post-paid-work sense of identity, social support, self-esteem, and a feeling of value and productivity.

(4.4) Community

For McMillan (2011) community meets members' needs and provides a shared emotional connection where interaction in the form of rituals and traditions emerge. For one Naas

Community Men's Shed member an emotional connection was shared at his wife's funeral. He describes the support he was given at a difficult period in his life:

She had 14 men walking beside me and her hearse the day of her funeral, she got a full guard of honour – crying. (Respondent C 2021).

It is clear that the support offered between members demonstrates that the shed provides shared emotional connections in a community setting.

Cohen (1985) argues members of a community share commonality binding them together. For one member who is the treasurer of the Naas Community Men's Shed his responsibility lies with the finances, governance, and identity of the community in the form of membership obligations, membership fees and an adherence to a written constitution:

I've read the Constitution, I accept, and I will abide by it. So then if anything crops up that you need to address that document is taken out and looked at and we say this is what we agreed to guys, can we follow this constitution (Respondent E 2021).

As Cohen (1985) contends these boundaries are held important. They provide meaning to community members and a symbolic aspect to their involvement. For the Naas Community Men's Shed members these symbols relate to an intimate area of their lives characterized by shared identity and a sense of belonging.

The traditional understanding of community was of concern to Tönnies (1963). He felt that an eradication was at play as modernity took shape in society. Additionally, in a contemporary perspective Putnam (2000) also lamented a sudden and substantial decline in civic organisation. This research set out to examine community as it relates to the Naas Community Men's Shed. My research highlights that in contradiction to both Tönnies (1963) and Putnam (2000) community is not being eradicated. The Naas Community Men's Shed provides a case study of a community where civic organisation is strong.

Durkheim (1893) described community as one of “collective activity” and suggested in modernity that organic forms of solidarity emerge which replace mechanical community forms of the past (cited in Benson 2006:294). Throughout the interviews an important element for each man was their involvement with the community both in a participatory way within the shed but more importantly in their “giving back” to the community. In describing the contribution, the Naas Men’s Shed provides to the community this participant emphasises the word “community” within the title of this shed. I had set out to research what I thought was the Naas Men’s Shed but very early into the process it was reiterated to me several times that this was not just the Naas Men’s Shed, but the Naas Community Men’s Shed:

All sheds contribute to their communities. We're known as the Naas Community Men's Shed. So, we work with, we actively interact with Naas Access which is a disability group. We provide them with a place for their meetings, I'm a member of the Access committee, disability, we interact with the Tidy Towns. So, when the Tidy Towns want something done, they have their store down in our shed or other equipment in our shed. Their car is in our shed. When they want a clean-up done or want something done, we will assist them (Respondent A 2021).

The members of the Naas Community Men’s Shed are attuned to their engagement with community projects. As one member describes the Men’s Shed in Naas is associated with many other community groups and the shed premises is used to host them regularly:

An awful lot of our visitors are from other community groups who come in to visit us, like Care of the Aged and Age Action Ireland and they drop in and we make them welcome to come in (Respondent A 2021).

Making a contribution to the local community in a practical and social manner is important. While interviewing my first interviewee I was told of an event in a local nursing home in Naas to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day which he kindly invited me to attend:

Yes, on Tuesday. St. Patrick's Day thing the day before. You are welcome to come down and listen. It's outside. 1230 on Tuesday. So, four or five of the band will go (Respondent A 2021).



*Image 5: St. Patrick's Day Celebrations: Naas Community Men's Shed Band
Nursing Home, Naas (2021)*

These events are held regularly, and it was fortunate that during the limited re-opening of society at Christmas 2020 a similar event was held for the residents of this same nursing home and was able to be held indoors.

A study of a community-based Men's Shed in a rural community of Victoria, Australia found that the shed gave a meaningful sense of purpose and community identity (Ballinger, Talbot and Verrinder (2008). Equally in the Naas Community Men's Shed it was found that the members gravitated towards the organization in order to integrate within their community. For one member he spent his working life commuting out of the area:

There's a small community out here. So, we're living in an estate now where everybody goes to work at half, six or seven in the morning. And they are not home until seven or so because, I mean, I did that for years (Respondent D 2021).

For this member during his working career, he found he was unable to integrate into the community. This case study finds that the participation and integration of members in the Naas Community Men's Shed provides a home and a means for community engagement.

McMillan (2011) believes membership of a community provides a barrier to who belongs and who does not. However, as described by this member no barrier exists for membership of this Men's Shed:

We have them from all walks of life from bankers to teachers, to guards to army officers and army NCO's, the building trade, mechanical trades, carpentry trade, teachers, nursing home residents, young fellow in a special needs home, so no barrier (Respondent A 2021).

In Kendall's (2002) ethnographic study, *Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub: Masculinities and Relationships Online*, she provides an understanding that the internet provides a virtual community where relationships are formed, maintained and revitalized (Soukup 2006:424). In the Naas Community Men's Shed a virtual Men's Shed has been established to provide a way for members to connect while there is limited access to the Men's Shed premises during Ireland's national lockdown. Although Soukup (2006:426) expresses a concern that "people are pretending to be in a 'real' place while they sit at their computer screens" this member describes online meetings which appear to provide sufficient computer-mediated communication:

And we've been on other Zooms. We were on a Zoom last week with a focus group are doing a study for Europe, so they asked the Shed would they take part. There was six of us on at the one time on Zoom, and the way they spoke to the presenter, about their, their own experiences, so intimate, so personal, but comfortable to do it. An absolute honesty. There is no hypocrisy. We have no time for that. Purely, everything is genuine, and people are prepared to tell you their most intimate details (Respondent A 2021).

Possibly considering that more than a year has elapsed since the pandemic was announced by WHO and lockdowns and computer-mediated communications have become the norm, members are now comfortable with this type of interaction. However, there is a eagerness for things to "return to normal" as one member illustrated in his closing remarks to me:

I am glad I joined, and I will do what I can and hopefully if we could get rid of COVID we could get back to doing a few things together again (Respondent E 2021).

Many members spoke of giving back and discussed the projects they have been involved with. They feel more involved in their community and enjoy the contributions and difference they can make to their local community.



Image 6: Supporting the International Community. Lorry fully loaded at the Naas Community Men's Shed departing for earthquake hit town, Petrinja, Croatia. (Facebook 2021)

The image above illustrates how members of the Naas Community Men's Shed also support the international community. Strong earthquakes hit two towns in Croatia in December 2020 causing major damage. Tonnes of supplies, including non-perishable foods and critical equipment for damaged homes were collected. Members of the Shed in conjunction with the Naas town team assisted in filling a 40-foot container bound for Petrinja, Croatia. This member in his final remarks to me was keen to emphasise the range of community efforts made by the members.

No. I think I have given you loads. But just to say there is a major amount of activity. People underestimate the range of activities that the shed is involved in in terms with interacting with the community and activities we do ourselves in the shed, and that's huge (Respondent A 2021).

This research identifies, although modernity may be characterised by some as a loss of community for these members of the Naas Community Men's Shed community social interaction and collective action remain.

(4.5) Gender

Gender and feminist theorists argue that social, behavioural, and cultural attributes that are associated with being a man, or a woman feeds into all spheres of social life with gendered expectations socially constructed and heteronormative ideas formed based upon traditional relationships. For Thompson and Armato (2012) gender is created and maintained through complex arrangements and practices organising males and females according to their identity with the expectation that they respond to their roles and interact conforming to societal norms. Furthermore, for Connell (1987) in this way, gender is essentialised and organized in symbolic practices. Cooking was and is still for some a practice which is often considered the work of females in the home and that was the case for one member whose wife recently died:

I've learned how to cook. Lord have mercy on her, but my mother used to look after me when I was at home and then my wife was the boss in the kitchen. No one cooked in her kitchen. We did a cookery course three or four years ago in the shed. It was very good. I'm fairly handy now. I cook shepherd's pie; I make 5 or 6 together and freeze them. Sure, it's as handy to do that than make one. I make fish pies as well, and soup. I've soup in the freezer (Respondent D 2021).

Although the shift for this member was somewhat forced upon him due to the death of his wife, his pride in taking on these new practices was evident, providing a new interest and crushes the gendered nature of this activity. Furthermore, consideration of the gender division and the apportionment of duties which Connell (1995:74) refers to as the “Western gender order of social labour” require analysis. For this shedder, a change in societal norms is seen, as since retirement, he has begun to assume practices and activities he would not have been involved with in the home while working, as his wife continues to work:

The other big thing that I've done is learnt to cook. So, I never cooked in my life before to be honest. And because of my wife, you know, breakfast was ready, dinner was ready when I come home. And I was never here for lunch. And Saturday and Sunday, I played golf. I just come in, leave the clubs down, open a bottle of wine, sit down, have a meal. So that has all changed now in the sense that since my wife is still working. It's just changed our perspective on things as well. Because before you know, okay, I'd wash the dishes and put them into the dishwasher or whatever. But I mean, I'd never prepare anything whereas now I would, you know, I'd have potatoes done or I'd have meat done. I'm actually doing the shopping as well, which is very unusual (Respondent D 2021).

The shifts seen in the social roles of these two members within the household positions them to broaden their responsibilities and partake in duties not normally aligned to their generation.

Carragher and Golding (2015) in a case study “examining the impact of community-based men’s sheds on learning by older men in Ireland” found that shed-based conversations have an important role in helping older men with difficult life transitions. This is evident in these findings where a member reports how important the support offered within the Naas Community Men’s Shed around health issues is:

It is surprising the number of different conversations that crop up. Something even medical – people don’t generally talk about you know. I had a scope last week or Jesus I had that a couple of months ago – it’s got much easier than it used to be and all those types of conversations. You’d know that someone might have an issue in the background that they are worried about and it all helps (Respondent D, 2021).

The stereotypical representation of hegemonic masculinities signified by behaviours of “being strong”, “hard” and “unemotional” does not fit all social groups (Foley 2014:31). Some who are unemployed, older, or disadvantaged do not meet this hegemonic measure which can impact negatively on their involvement in society. One respondent describes how another member who has experienced financial difficulties since his retirement was embarrassed as he could not contribute to the voluntary contribution that members make to lunch each week:

And then I saw him walking around the town one day, and he was like a lost soul. I went over to him. And I said to him, are you not coming down to the shed anymore. He says, you know, I’d have to put a fiver in, and I said, you don’t have to put a fiver into anything, just come down and have a chat. And have a smoke or. And he says I don’t smoke, and I don’t drink. I said just then come down and have a chat, so he did, eh came down about two days afterwards. And you don’t see him that much, but at least he knows he’s welcome (Respondent D 2021).

Paid work is often taken to be central to manhood and as Pietila et al. (2017:306) argue retirement can be characterised by “a crisis of masculinity.”

An analysis of independent research examining the effects of Men’s sheds on men’s social wellbeing suggests that participation in male activities allows members permission to be more open

in discussions with each other (Milligan et al. 2013;2015). This was evident with one member who welcomes the “all-male” environment which is provided for in the Naas Community Men’s Shed.

I will answer you that very straight – I have four daughters, so I am used to 5:1 in the house all my life so it’s lovely to have no women down there. (Respondent E 2021).

The findings in this case study contribute to the suggestion that Wyllie, Platt, Brownlie et al. (2012) make that a buffer generation of men exists who are caught between a previous generation of silent, strong, and austere males and contemporary, open, and individualist masculinity (cited in Carragher 2017:360). Analysing the data, it is found that “shed based conversations” do play an important role during difficult life transitions and as Carragher and Golding (2015) contend this analysis is important for future studies of masculinity in later life. Illustrating the significance of this support, this member conveys a solid example:

Yes, it is mainly a male-environment, but the emotional support, loyalty and looking after each other is massive. I spent an hour talking to one of our older Sheddors in Galway on the phone, who is not in a good way. He lost his dog, and his brother has gone into a nursing home. He doesn’t know what to do. So, I spent an hour, two nights ago talking to him and another shedder spent 45 minutes talking to him earlier in the day, and trying to guide him out of the situation that he’s in. So, we all know, everything, all the intimate details of each other. There’s nothing I don’t know about, about their medical conditions, their emotional conditions, their family. And we all know it, and nobody hides anything.

This case study identifies for the Naas Men’s Shed members a significantly important participatory male experience where emotional support in a non-judgmental environment is provided. John Evoy (1997) mentioned in his post on the Irish Research Council’s website that he was struck by a point a speaker had made at a Men’s Shed Movement conference in Australia that although Men’s Sheds could be reinforcing gender stereotypes, it is also saving lives.

Most social groups and organisations are established largely by women for women (Carragher and Golding 2015). A mixed methods study by Carragher in 2017, exploring the contributions Men’s Sheds make to the well-being of older men, reports that membership of active retirement groups is

female-dominated with activities of little interest to men. However, women in Naas do realise the importance of the Naas Community Men's Shed as is evidenced here:

Sometimes, daughters and wives hear about us. Bring up the husband because they say they're sitting by the fire all day. I want him to come up and he won't come up, would you come down and see him, and encourage him and we do and sometimes we've been successful and sometimes we haven't Its funny how women really value socialization, they do. They know how beneficial it is (Respondent A 2021).

Analysing the data presented from interviews with members of the Naas Community Men's Shed it was found that for some females realising the benefit of socialisation they encourage their fathers and husbands to get involved.

(4.6) Men's Shed Movement

Barry Golding (2015) in his analysis of 22 years of *The Men's Shed Movement* proposes that a valuable outcome is the value of agency and the choice and freedom men have within Men's Sheds to shape and create places which meet their interests and needs. Equally important is the "value to their local communities" (Golding 2015:2). As this member discusses it is not only community groups the Naas Community Men's Shed liaise with but with individuals in their homes:

There's huge initiatives in that we now have the public all the time asking us to do things. Like at the moment there's a woman who has a kitchen and she wants to arrange taking the kitchen out and putting it into the Shed. So, this is also interaction with the community who know about us now. We got about 7,000 followers, and they will contact us because they have our numbers (Respondent A 2021).

Online interaction through the Facebook page has been instrumental in informing the public of the activities within the Naas Community Men's Shed.

As mentioned previously The Naas Community Men's Shed is supported by The Irish Men's Shed Association (IMSA) IMSA, a registered charity was established in 2011, two years after the first Irish Men's Shed was set up in Tipperary in 2009. The association has received national recognition of its value to Irish Society with President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins a patron since 2013. Additionally, governmental, and European recognition of IMSA's contribution to Ireland was

reinforced by receipt of the European Citizen's Award in 2018. Most recently, the organisation was recognised by the Irish Government as a Sustainable Development Goals Champion for 2019/2020. The aim of the organisation is to assist any like-minded group of men in Ireland to set up, run and maintain a men's shed. To this end, they provide information, resources, and support to member sheds; listening and responding to members' concerns is a cornerstone of their ethos. A strong finding in this case study was the positive impact that the Naas Community Men's Shed has on members. As one shedder suggests more people should know about the benefits of Men's Sheds:

Send your report to government and send it to the Irish Men's Shed Association. If the state could see the value. There should be more advertising about the Men's Shed (Respondent A 2021).

It was suggested by the chairman of the Naas Community Men's Shed that I might also speak with a representative of the national body and he kindly introduced me to the National Volunteer Coordinator. A short 15-minute telephone conversation took place where she spoke of the roll-out of a Shed Support Volunteer Programme during her four years with the organisation. Previously she served on the IMSA board and was a shed support coordinator for the North East region of Ireland. The Shed Support Volunteer Programme was built around work previously undertaken by advocates connecting sheds with one another and with the IMSA. The aim of the programme is to ensure that strong connections continue and that:

every shedders' voice is heard at national level (IMSA Representative 2021).

Although within the narrative of definitions of Men's Sheds both in Australia and Ireland 'health and wellbeing' are mentioned, there is evidence that both associations are reluctant to associate the Men's Shed movement as a health programme. However, the National Volunteer Coordinator spoke of the Sheds for Life programme which is a health and wellbeing initiative spearheaded by the IMSA and supported by the Health Service Executive (HSE), Sláintecare Action Plan 2019 and other health organisations. Sheds for Life deliver health services to members in their natural habitat

– the individual men’s sheds. While evaluating the experiences of the participants of a Men’s Shed in County Cork, Jacqueline Daly-Bütz (2015) reports that John Evoy, ex-CEO of the IMSA explained that “if we called it a health centre man wouldn’t come but the idea is to get men into a safe space” and talking. I suggest in the six years which have passed since this report, it is no longer necessary to provide “health by stealth” to shedders as there is an appreciation of the holistic value provided by membership.

This case study of the Naas Community Men’s Shed points to the findings in a Canadian study undertaken in 2018 at a time when there was a growing Men’s Sheds movement in Canada. It was revealed that Men’s Sheds have a positive impact on social engagement and a sense of belonging. For this shedder in Naas this impact is also evident:

It means an outlet to do something, you are using your brain, you are not sitting around in the house doing nothing like. It’s a challenge for something to do and I’ve learnt to wood turn now. I was never able to use a woodturning lathe before. It’s an interest, it’s a nice hobby to have, particularly when you are on your own and I’ve made great friends (Respondent D 2021).

My findings echo and contribute this previous study. Members experience reduced isolation and benefit from engagement in continual learning, exchanging knowledge and forming new friendships. Access to the Naas Community Men’s Shed provides access to a programme which is an important avenue for supporting social connections.

(4.7) Conclusion

This chapter has revealed the significant findings that emerged throughout this study on the Naas Community Men’s Shed. The qualitative semi-structured interviews provided in-depth and insightful information for this research project. The respondents engaged openly and candidly

about their experiences and the meanings they attribute to their membership of the shed. Their honesty and engagement benefited the research process which assisted in analysing the data and subsequent findings. Members of The Naas Community Men's Shed understand, negotiate, and visualise their participation in a range of ways.

A significant finding is that the Shed resembles the types of social settings Oldenburg (1997) describes as third place where sociability is nourished and where the distinct characteristics within third places promote creativity. The findings in the study demonstrate how the Naas Community Men's Shed is a place where men can be creative, learn new skills and be nourished by the social interaction of a place which is not home or work. Within the Naas Community Men's Shed as Golding's (2015) suggests "anything is possible" was found to be true. Due to restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19 the process by which shedders interact has changed. Findings in this research emphasise the significance of the online community in facilitating and maintaining connection for shed members through online platforms over the last twelve months. However, while exploring the implications of the pandemic, a key finding illustrates that for these men the loss of the physical location of the shed, a loss of place is significant. Exploring the durability of community, which some sociologists argue is in decline, this research has found that community is relevant and important for the members of the Naas Community Men's Shed. A crucial element of their membership is the collective sense of community within the shed and the engagement in projects to contribute or "give back" to the community. The cultural toolkit that Inglis (2009) speaks of is evident within the Naas Community Men's Shed where members construct an image and understanding of their identity through the interactive processes of social labelling and identification. As Mead (1934) contends social conduct is influenced by how "the self" emerges from interpretive work. In the Naas Men's Shed a sense of collective identity is produced in an interactive environment where a shared sense of belonging originates. While analysing the global

Men's Shed Movement it was found that Men's Sheds have a positive impact on social engagement. This is clearly evident in the Naas Men's Shed where members experience reduced isolation and benefit from engagement in continual learning, exchanging knowledge and forming new friendships. Access to the Naas Community Men's Shed provides access to a programme which is an important avenue for supporting social connections. Analysing the data, it is found that "shed based conversations" play an important role in difficult life transitions. Changes in societal gender norms are seen in the Naas Community Men's Shed members as some have begun to assume practices and activities normally aligned to the subjective assumptions of binary sex categories. This analysis is important for future studies of masculinity in later life.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Gieryn (2000:482) contends there is probably nothing in sociology which has not been touched by place. Place-sensitive sociology is undertaken in a different key-a visual key as place matters for identity and community. Researchers gain a social understanding of lived experiences, people's perspectives and the meanings attributed to place through a sociological exploration of place. The goal of this research was to gain an understanding of how the Naas Community Men's Shed is understood, negotiated, and visualised by its members. This research project contributes to a body of knowledge on the sociological concept of place by gathering data which adds to the subjective understanding of how a location can be interpreted to inscribe meaning and identity. This case study provides an interpretation of how the Naas Community Men's Shed is understood as place, and how it acts as a third place. The analysis demonstrates how identity is understood and developed within this space substantiating that participation provides a sense of community. Additionally, there is a meaning and significance to the gender separation of men from women in the Naas Community Men's Shed.

Chapter 1 sets the project in context, explains my motivations for undertaking the research and demonstrates how the study relates to other work in the same field. Furthermore Chapter 1 includes a sub-section which 'sets the scene' providing an outline for the case study on the Naas Community Men's Shed. Following on, a Literature Review is undertaken in Chapter 2 where sociological understandings of the key themes of place, third place, identity, community, gender, and the social movement of Men's Sheds are reviewed. Several sub-themes emerged during the research including place attachment, virtual communities, masculinity, and collective identity. This chapter provides the sociological foundation from which a thematic data analysis is undertaken. The methodological approach to undertake this study is outlined in Chapter 3, as well as the research questions and sub-questions. Additionally, Chapter 3 provides an outline of

the steps data to analysis the data collected in this qualitative research project and an overview of research ethics and my positionality. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the case study of Naas Community Men's Shed and an interpretation and an analysis of these findings.

My aim in this investigation was to hear directly from my research participants. My interest in how the Naas Community Men's Shed is understood, negotiated, and visualised by its members shaped the research process. As Gieryn (2000:465) posits, place is "inevitably contested" and Men's Sheds mean different things to different people. To mitigate any bias in this research it was conducted with an awareness of my interpretation of the world and the social, cultural, and political subjectively I brought to the process.

This case study of the Naas Community Men's Shed provides a unique window to acknowledge that membership provides men with agency. The findings echo previous research evidence that Men's Sheds provide camaraderie, socialisation, and skill development (Wilson and Cordier 2013). As a researcher for and an advocate of Men's Sheds, Golding (2015) contends that the Men's Shed Movement provides for many unmet needs and contributes positively to the lives of men, their families, and communities. This is clearly evident in the Naas Community Men's Shed. It is a third place, the type of social setting which Oldenburg (1997) argues promotes sociability and creativity. Importantly, "anything is possible" as Golding (2015) argues. A key finding illustrates that for these men the loss of the physical location of the shed in the last year due to a pandemic is significant. A crucial element of their membership is the collective sense of community within the shed and the engagement in projects to contribute to the community. Members construct an image and understanding of their identity through the interactive processes of social labelling and identification. A collective sense of identity is produced in an interactive environment where a shared sense of belonging originates.

A significant finding which emerged while analysing the data, was that membership of the Naas Community Men's Shed plays an important role in difficult life transitions. Additionally, some members have begun to assume practices and activities normally aligned to the subjective assumptions of the male gender category.

While it was beyond the scope of this research, ongoing consideration of the ways in which work in the modern world is replaced by artificial intelligence might be addressed in the context of how the Men's Shed model could extend to younger groups of male workers addressing the needs of those who may be displaced by automation.

Bibliography

- Ahl, Helene, Joel Hedegaard, and Barry Golding. 2017. "How the Men's Shed Idea Travels to Scandinavia." *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 57(3):316-333.
- Bailey, Carol A. 2014. *A Guide to Qualitative Field Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA:Sage Publications Limited.
- Ballinger, Megan. L., Lyn A. Talbot, and Glenda K. Verrinder. 2009. "More than a place to do woodwork: a case study of a community-based Men's Shed". *Journal of Men's Health* 6(1) 20-27.
- Benson, Mary. 2006. *Changing Cityscapes and the Process of Contemporary Gentrification: An Examination of the Transformation of Ringsend within the Context of Post-Industrial Growth in Dublin*.
- Brown, Mike, Barry Golding, and Annette Foley. 2008. "Out the back: men's sheds and informal learning." *Fine Print* 31(2):12-15.
- Bryman, Alan. 2004. *Social Research Methods: 2nd Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carragher, Lucia. 2017. "Opportunities for Generativity in Later Life for Older Men." *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 57(3):351-365.
- Carragher, Lucia and Barry Golding. 2015. "Older men as learners: Irish Men's Sheds as an intervention." *Adult Education Quarterly* 65(2):152-168.
- Cohen, Anthony P. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. UK: Ellis Horwood Ltd.
- Coleman, James S. 1993 "The Rational Reconstruction of Society." *American Sociological Review* 58(1): 1-15.
- Corcoran, Mary P. 2002. "Place Attachment and Community Sentiment in Marginalised Neighbourhoods: A European Case Study." *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 11(1):47-67.
- Connell, Raewin. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, Raewin. 1995. *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Crow, Graham. 2017. "Defining key terms." In *What are Community Studies?* London: Bloomsbury Academic. 1-6.

- Daly-Bütz, Jacqueline. 2015. "An evaluation of the experiences of the participants of a Men's Shed in County Cork." *Cork: Community-Academic Research Links*, University College Cork. Retrieved February 10, 2021 (https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/research/car1/2015_Jacqueline_Daly_Butz.pdf/).
- Delanty, Gerard. 2003. *Community*. London: Routledge.
- Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonne S. Lincoln. 1998. *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Limited.
- Dillon Michelle. 2014. *Introduction to Sociology Theory*. 2nd ed. Chichester: England Wiley Blackwell.
- Dreier, James. 2004. "Meta-Ethics and The Problem of Creeping Minimalism". *Philosophical Perspectives*, 18: 23-44.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1976. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Elliott, Anthony, and Bryan S. Turner. 2001. *Profiles in Contemporary Social Theory*. London: Sage Publications Limited.
- Foley, Annette. 2014. "The Case for Some Men's Spaces." Pp. 63-76 in *Men Learning Through Life*, edited by Barry Golding, Rob Marks and Annette. Foley (Eds.) Leicester: NIACE.
- Noori, Susan and Mary Benson. 2016. 'Urban allotment gardens: a case for place-making.' Pp. 291-320 in *Urban Allotment Gardens in Europe*, edited by Simon Bell, Runrid Fox-Kamper, Nazila Keshavarz, Mary Benson, Silvio Caputo, Susan Noori and Annette Voight. Oxon: Routledge Earthscan.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gieryn, Thomas F. 2000. "A Space for Place in Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 463-96.
- Giuffre, Katherine. 2013. *Communities and Networks: Using Social Network Analysis to Rethink Urban and Community Studies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Golding, Barry. 2015. *The Men's Shed Movement: The Company of Men*. Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing.

- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Penguin.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Behaviour in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organisation of Gatherings*. Glencoe: Free Press.
- Government of Ireland, Department of Health. National Public Health Emergency Team. Retrieved March 19, 2021 (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/de1c30-national-public-healthemergency-team-nphet-for-COVID-19-governance-/>).
- Gray, Peter. 2002. *Psychology*. New York: Worth Publishers.
- Gubrium, Jaber F., and James A. Holstein. 1997. *The New Language of Qualitative Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Guest Greg, Emily E. Namey and Marilyn L. Mitchell. 2013. *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research*. London: Sage Publications Limited.
- Hall, Stuart. 1996 Who needs identity? in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage Publications Limited.
- Hammad, Suzanne. 2011. "Senses of Place in Flux: A Generational Approach." *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 31(9/10):555-568.
- Harvey, David. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Holliday, Adrian. 2007. *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications Limited.
- Inglis, Tom. 2009. "Local belonging, identities and sense of place in contemporary Ireland". Institute for British-Irish Studies Working Papers and Policy Papers: Politics and Identity Series; 4. University College Dublin: Institute for British-Irish Studies.
- Irish Men's Shed Association (IMSA). 2019a. Retrieved November 25, 2020 (<https://menssheds.ie/>).
- Irish Men's Shed Association (IMSA) 2019b. Retrieved April 10, 2021 (<https://menssheds.ie/sheds/naas-mens-shed/>).
- Kane Eileen, and O'Reilly-De Brun, Mary. 2001. *Doing your own research*. Rev. ed. London; New York: Marion Boyars.
- Kendall, Lori. 2002. *Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub: Masculinities and Relationships Online*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Knoblauch, Hubert, Alejandro Baer, Eric Laurier, Sabine Petschke and Bernt Schnettler. 2008. "Visual Analysis. New Developments in the Interpretative Analysis of Video and Photography." *Forum Qualitative Social Research* 9(3):14.
- Lawler, Stephen. 2008. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lee, David, and Howard Newby. 1995. *The Problem of Sociology: An Introduction to the Discipline*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Mackenzie Corey S., Kerstin Roger, Steve Robertson, John L. Oliffe, Mary Anne Nurmi, and James Urquhart. 2017. "Counter and Complicit Masculine Discourse Among Men's Shed Members." *American Journal of Men's Health*. 11(4):1224-1236.
- Marvasti, Amir B. 2004. *Qualitative Research in Sociology*. London: Sage Publications Limited.
- Massey, Doreen 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Massey, Doreen. 1995. *The Conceptualization of place*. In: Massey, Doreen and Jess, Pat. (eds), *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures and Globalization*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 45-85.
- May, Tim. 2001. *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*. 3rd ed. Philadelphia, PA, USA; Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- McMillan, David W. 2011. "Sense of Community, a Theory not a Value: A Response to Nowell and Boyd." *Journal of Community Psychology*. 39(5):507-519.
- Mead, George Herbert. 1934. *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Melucci, Alberto. 1995 'The Process of Collective Identity' in H. Johnston and B. Klandermans (eds) *Social Movements and Culture*. London: UCL Press.
- Merriam, Sharan. B. 2002. *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis*. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.
- Milligan, Christine, Chris Dowrick, Sheila Payne, Barbara Hanratty, Pamela Irwin, David Neary, and David Richardson. 2013. "Men's Sheds and Other Gendered Interventions for Older Men: Improving Health and Wellbeing through Social Activity: A Systematic Review and Scoping of the Evidence Base". Lancaster, England: Lancaster University Centre for Ageing Research.
- Milligan, Christine, David Neary, Sheila Payne, Barbara Hanratty, Pamela Irwin, and Chris Dowrick. 2015. Older Men and Social Activity: A Scoping Review of Men's Sheds and Other Gendered Interventions. *Ageing and Society* 36:895-923.

- Molotch, Harvey, William Friedenburg and Krista E. Paulsen. 2000. "History Repeats Itself, But How? City Character, Urban Tradition and the Accomplishment of Place." *American Sociological Review* 65:791-823.
- Monaghan, Lee. F., and Steve Robertson. 2012. "Embodied Heterosexual Masculinities, Part 1: Confluent Intimacies, Emotions and Health". *Sociology Compass* 6:134-150.
- Naas Community Men's Shed. 2021. Retrieved February 10, 2021 (<https://www.facebook.com/NaasCommunityMensShed/>).
- Noori, Susan and Mary Benson. 2016. 'Urban allotment gardens: a case for place-making.' Pp. 291-320 in *Urban Allotment Gardens in Europe*, edited by Simon Bell, Runrid Fox-Kamper, Nazila Keshavarz, Mary Benson, Silvio Caputo, Susan Noori and Annette Voight. Oxon: Routledge Earthscan.
- Nowell, Branda and Neil Boyd. 2010. "Viewing Community as Responsibility as well as Resource: Deconstructing the Theoretical Roots of Psychological Sense of Community." *Journal of Community Psychology*. 38(7):828–841.
- Nurmi, Mary Anne, Corey S. Mackenzie, Kerstin Roger, Kirsten Reynolds, and James Urquhart. 2018. "Older Men's Perceptions of the Need for and Access to Male-Focused Community Programmes such as Men's Sheds." *Ageing and Society* 38(4):794-816.
- O'Connell, Brian. 2011. "Talking Shoulder-to-Shoulder, not Face-to-Face". The Irish Times. Retrieved February 15, 2021 (<https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/talking-shoulder-to-shoulder-not-face-to-face-1.586417/>).
- Oldenburg, Ray. 1989. *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. New York: Marlowe.
- O'Leary, Zina. 2011. *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*. Rev. ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications Limited.
- Pietila, Ilkka, Toni Calasanti, Hanna Ojala and Neal King. 2020. "Is Retirement a Crisis for Men? Class and Adjustment to Retirement". *Men and Masculinities* 23(2) 306-325.
- Pink, Sarah. 2001. *Visual Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications Limited.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rahman, Shidur. 2017. "The Advantages and Disadvantages of using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language: Testing and Assessment Research: A Literature Review." *Journal of Education and Learning* 6(1):102.

- Ralph Edward. 1976. *The Placelessness of Place*. London: Pion
- Rheingold Howard. 1991. *Virtual Reality*. New York: Simon & Schuster
- Ritzer, George. 2011. *Sociological theory*. 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Russell, Glenda. M., and Nancy H. Kelly. 2002. "Research as Interacting Dialogic Processes: Implications for Reflexivity." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 3(3).
- Ryan, Anne B. 2006. *Methodology: Analysing Qualitative Data and Writing up your Findings*. In: *Researching and Writing your Thesis: A Guide for Postgraduate Students*. Mace: Maynooth Adult and Community Education.
- Sandelowski, Margarete. 2001. "Real Qualitative Researchers do Not Count: The use of Numbers in Qualitative Research." *Research in Nursing & Health* 24(3):230-240.
- Scannell, Leila and Robert Gifford. 2010. "Defining place attachment: A tripartite organizing framework." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 30 (1) 1-10.
- Simonsen, Kirsten Frisch. 1997. "Modernity, community or a diversity of ways of life: a discussion of urban everyday life." In *Cities in Transformation: Transformation in Cities*, edited by O. Kalltorp. London: Avebury: 162-183.
- Sorkin Michael. 1999. *Introduction: Traffic in Democracy*. In *Giving Ground: The Politics of Proximity*. New York: Verso.
- Soukup, Charles. 2006. "Computer-Mediated Communication as a Virtual Third Place: Building Oldenburg's Great Good Places on the World Wide Web". *New Media & Society* 8(3): 421-440.
- Strauss, Anselm and Corbin, Juliet. 1990. "Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria." *Qualitative Sociology* 13:3-21.
- Susen, Simon, and Bryan S. Turner. 2011. "Tradition and Innovation in Classical Sociology: Tenth Anniversary Report of JCS", *Journal of Classical Sociology* 11(1):5-13.
- Evoy John. 2017. "Balancing Gender and the Men's Sheds Movement." The Irish Research Council. Retrieved April 12, 2021 (<https://research.ie/what-we-do/loveirishresearch/blog/loveirishresearch-blog-john-evoy-on-balancing-gender-and-the-mens-sheds-movement/>).
- The Irish Times. 2013. "Recession may have done lasting damage." Retrieved November 28, 2020 (<https://www.irishtimes.com/business/work/recession-may-have-done-lasting-damage-to-women-in-workplace-1.2666258/>).

- Tönnies Ferdinand. 1963. *Community and Society*. New York: Harper and Row. (Trans. C. P. Loomis).
- Thompson, Martha E., and Michael Armato. 2012. *Investigating Gender: Developing a Feminist Sociological Imagination*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Watt, Diane. 2007. "On Becoming a Qualitative Researcher: The Value of Reflexivity". *The Qualitative Report*, 12(1):82-101.
- Weber Max (1978 [1922]) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Roth G and Wittich C. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Westmeath Examiner. 2013. "Martin says Men's Shed can Help Ease Pain of Recession." Retrieved November 25, 2020 (<https://www.westmeathexaminer.ie/2013/05/15/martin-says-mens-shed-can-help-ease-pain-of-recession/>).
- Wilson, Nathan J., and Reinie Cordier. 2013. "A Narrative Review of Men's Sheds Literature: Reducing Social Isolation and Promoting men's Health and Well-being". *Health & Social Care in the Community* 21(5):451-463.
- World Health Organisation. 2020. "Events as they Happen". Retrieved November 25, 2020 (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen/>).
- Wyllie, Clare, Stephen Platt, Julie Brownlie, Amy Chandler, Sheelah Connolly, Rhiannon Evans, Brendan Kennelly, Olivia Kirtley, Graham Moore, Rory O'Connor, and Jonathan Scourfield. 2012. "Men, Suicide and Society: Why Disadvantaged Men in Mid-Life Die by Suicide." Surrey; Samaritans Retrieved March 11, 2021 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271521903_Men_suicide_and_society_Why_disadvantaged_men_in_mid-life_die_by_suicide/).

Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

Participant Identification Number: Respondent A

How is the Naas Community Men's Shed understood, negotiated and visualised by its members?

Name of Researcher: Deirdre Moore

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated March 12, 2021 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to refuse to answer any questions and to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I understand that my name will not appear in the final project.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix B: Information Sheet

March 12, 2021

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my Research Project for my Special Topics BA Project at Maynooth University, NUIM. My research is designed to explore how the Naas Community Men's Shed is understood, negotiated, and visualised by its members. The themes covered will include place, third place, identity, community, gender, and the Men's Shed movement.

This interview may take up to one hour and with your permission I would like to tape record the conversation. A copy of the interview tape will be made available to you afterwards if you wish to hear it.

All of the interview information will be kept confidential. I will store the tapes/notes of our conversation safely. Your identity will be kept confidential, and I will use a code number/pseudonym to identify your interview data. Neither your name nor private information will appear in the final research project.

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to refuse to take part, and you may refuse to answer any questions or may stop at any time. You may also withdraw at any time up until the work is completed.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me at

Deirdre Moore

deirdre.moore.2019@mumail.ie

Appendix C: Transcript of Interview

Respondent A, March 12, 2021

Interviewer: Tell me a bit about yourself.

Respondent: I'm retired from the army, about 15 years. I was a commandant in the army, and also had a number of pub businesses which I got into while I was serving but after I left, we expanded the business by joining another group. So, we ended up with a hotel and two pubs, one in Newbridge and one in Naas, with a nightclub in the back of one of them. We operated then with them for about five or six years successfully, and then we broke up not in the best terms, it was over a few different things. So, we sold out to them, and then we, we developed our own business in Naas, a bar and restaurant and we have an off-license. Me and my brother sold our share to his son about a year ago. A bit unfortunate for them. That's been very tough for them. The banks have been okay to them and they're doing okay. We ran it very well and we had a lovely clientele and it's highly respected and that's made it, nice, you know. I worked in the bar for a few years and then I got a brain haemorrhage.

Interviewer: Oh dear!

Respondent: So, then I didn't go back to working behind the bar, but I was still involved in the business and then recovered. So then, in the last four or five years the fact that I was not active with the bar, I got involved with the, or I was asked to get involved with the Men's Shed, which opened up next to me, two doors from my house in the previous place. Pretty handy. So, they asked me to join so I did join and get on very well with them, and then they asked me to be Chairman two years ago. So, I became chairman, I've been chairman since and then we were very lucky. You might know him, a man called Joe Spark the builder through our links with the county council and Laurence Jones we were on to them and talked about a future premises because we knew we wouldn't last where we were because he was going to sell that. So, Joe came to us and offered us a house, the house on the Dublin Road, at the entrance of Kingsfurze. And he offered to us, free of rent that we would maintain it for a minimum of a year. And that's where we are now 18 months and he's told us we have another two years. The old place was on Rathasker Road beside Flemings bicycle shop.

Interviewer: How long is the Men's Shed in existence in Naas

Respondent: It's in existence since 2014. We have 58 members about 40 active and the last year has meant that, about 20 of them have been inactive haven't moved out of their house. They're nearly all elderly from 86 to our youngest is about 49. 90% of them are retired, a few of them are semi-retired and the rest one or two are actually working. Okay, we have we have them from all walks of life from bankers to teachers, to guards to army officers and army NCO's, the building trade, mechanical trades, carpentry trade, teachers, nursing home residents, young fellow in a special needs home, so no barrier.

Interviewer: Do people join as a result of being introduced or do they come knocking on the door or how does it come about

Respondent: Sometimes, daughters and wives hear about us. Bring up the husband because they say they're sitting by the fire all day. I want him to come up and he won't come up, would you come down and see him, and encourage him and we do and sometimes we've been successful and

sometimes we haven't. Its funny how women really value socialization, they do. They know how beneficial it is.

Interviewer: How long are you in the area?

Respondent: I've been in Naas since 1985, from the time I got married, I had twins, honeymoon twins. We lived in Dublin for a few months, and then we started looking for a house, and moved to Naas.

Interviewer: Where are you from originally?

Respondent: Mayo

Interviewer: Lovely part of the country

Respondent: Yes, great county - we are very special (shared laughter) weather is the only downside. There's a big difference between the weather in the West and the weather in the East. I am from Hollymount, between Ballinrobe and Claremorris right between the two of them. We had a farm; I am a farmer's son.

Interviewer: And you didn't want to go into farming?

Respondent: Definitely not. So tough. I have four brothers and three sisters, and one brother farmed the home farm for a while, but eventually he sold it and came into business with me. That's the brother that, whose son is now running the business.

Interviewer: Very good

Respondent: My father should never have been a farmer either. He wanted to get up into his good clothes in the evening, sit down, have his dinner. He wanted to do anything besides farming - football, politics, banking, mathematician, he was very clever. Went to Blackrock College in Dublin. My grandmother left my grandfather and took her daughters and left her sons with the grandfather, and as a result, then when my father came back from college from school in Dublin, finished, and he never went to university. That's just the way it was. He didn't, he didn't fulfil his full capacity. He should have been a banker or something.

Interviewer: He lost out on a lot then.

Respondent: I think though now we are a great country for education. We have done loads of courses in the Men's Shed.

Interviewer: Yes, please tell me more about those

Respondent: Well, we do courses with the KWETB – Kildare Wicklow Training Board – they are so good to us, and they run everything from basic courses, basic computer to level one, two, three four for anybody who wants to go on to a higher level, and some of us have and have become very computer savvy. And now we have our own WhatsApp. As a result, everyone can use it, some of them would eat the phone before rather than use it before these courses. Now they are all confident, yeah, send messages to talk and video, the fear is gone.

Interviewer: How has this helped during the pandemic?

Respondent: It has been absolutely vital. Yeah, it has been the saving of many of them.

Interviewer: Have any of the members been ill during the year?

Respondent: We lost one member to COVID. He went into hospital. He only had 40% heart function beforehand, and he had ongoing trouble, so he was in the hospital got COVID and never came out. A second guy we lost. I'm not sure if it was COVID but he had Alzheimer's while he was a member and then he had to go to a nursing home. He died in the nursing home, he would have been a young enough man in his 70s or so.

Interviewer: What is the current situation at the Men's Shed – is there anyone in there?

Respondent: It has been tragic; it has been awful difficult for the shed. we are still not back yet. There's a carpenter, and another guy and the two of them work, social distancing in a three-tier workshop. We only put our head in the door to see how they're doing. A few of us on the committee meet in an outdoor setting – we have a lean-to build onto the shed. It's outdoors, the porch is fully open facing south. So, we go down there, and have a cup of tea, social distancing and just keep the administration and everything up to date.

Interviewer: That's the best you can do. Can I ask you about what your first experience was of the Men's Shed? Did it fulfil what your expectations were or what did you know before you even joined?

Respondent: I knew nothing about the Men's Shed. I was a total dedicated golfer. Family, golfing, and the pub that was my social life and my social interaction, so I was very socially active with that. And then just these two guys came to the door in 2014 and asked would I come up to the shed. I didn't even know they were in it.

Interviewer: Was there many there at that point in time?

Respondent: There was only five of them. Five or six. So, I went up and they were starting to work on a hen house and a polytunnel and all that. Now I think of it though there might have been ten of them actually though at that stage, and they were doing great work. Very smart carpenters' tradesmen, so there were, I was impressed anyway. And I went up and I'd bring my granddaughter up. She was only two at the time. So, they got to know her then, as well, so she'd be up sitting on my knee and they'd be talking to her. So the big thing earlier was social interaction, the cup of tea, and then activities like growing vegetables and fruit. They got a grant from the Lions Club to build a hen house and a polytunnel, they did it all themselves. So they starting sewing and they had ten hens and so my granddaughter of course loved all that, then I got more and more interested, and then I used to use it, because the field at the back was empty, I used to use it as a driving range. So, I'd bring my golf clubs and hit the ball from inside in the garden out into the field. And then there were horses in the field, so we had great interaction, that way. So, then it started to grow and grow.

Interviewer: Can I ask you what age were you at that point?

Respondent: Let me think, I was 65 no 64

Interviewer: Young man

Respondent: Yeah, yeah and active and all that. And gave me a lot, far more, no no. I was gonna to say far more than I gave them. than I ever gave them but I would say the whole, my whole military experience of man management was a huge factor in becoming chairman and managing, which is a new organization so it's a new management technique. Managing 50 men and managing the meetings, the committees. Jesus! All the personalities, cranks, positives, and negatives, and quiet, and every kind of personality, and we only ever had one problem with one member. He was difficult to manage, he had medical conditions that ended up in with the Ombudsman. He awarded

against us that we would all have to do a first aid course to be able to manage him because he had a right to come to the shed. But didn't he die! He had a condition that he just wouldn't work as a team. He went into the Credit Union and just started asking them for money. Then he wanted us to do certain things. Yeah, he wasn't working through the committee. Yeah well I wasn't Chairman at the time, I was only a member at the time. Since then, we have 58 members, and we don't have any problem. Every one of them interact very well together. It's been a fantastic thing. The shed - nobody realizes yet how much goodness and, the contribution that the men's shed is making to older men and their potential to deliver an unbelievable service going forward.

Interviewer: What are the types of things that they contribute to the community?

Respondent: All sheds contribute to their communities. We're known as the Naas Community Men's Shed. So, we work with, we actively interact with Naas Access which is a disability group. We provide them with a place for their meetings, I'm a member of the Access committee, disability, we interact with the Tidy Towns. So, when the Tidy Towns want something done, they have their have their store down in our shed or other equipment in our shed. Their car is in our shed. When they want a clean-up done or want something done, we will assist them.

Interviewer: Fantastic

Respondent: Yeah, absolutely, we interact with all the festival committees. We take part in all the festivals. We put up, we put up. We put up a stand, and we would sell our bird boxes and insect hotels and show our eggs and the fruits that they would grow in the polytunnel. And then would play music. Twelve members are in a band. So, we play at all the festivals, we play for all the nursing homes. We are playing on Tuesday at Larchfield nursing home.

Interviewer: Fantastic

Respondent: Yes, on Tuesday. St. Patrick's Day thing the day before. You are welcome to come down and listen. It's outside. 1230 on Tuesday. So, four or five of the band will go. We have all the equipment we got through different grants from the county council.

Interviewer: Are you a musician yourself.

Respondent: No, I couldn't sing a note, or I cannot play a word, but I love it. I love listening to them. They are a fantastic band. They are fantastic. They have their own concert. They have every instrument, from drums to guitars to everything. We have several good singers. And they play music, the singers they play music on the WhatsApp. They record songs themselves and play them.

Interviewer: Excellent

Respondent: I put some of the songs up on the Facebook page. There are some great singers. There are rockers and there's ballad singers and country western singers and everything in it. We've had our own concert for two years in the Osprey Hotel. Our own band and we raised, each time we raise three thousand pounds for the Men's Shed. Funding is important for the Shed. We lost two major events this year. The Flag Day which is three thousand and we lost the concert which is three thousand. So, that's six thousand for our revenue stream this year because of COVID.

Interviewer: That must be difficult

Respondent: We've made up some of it. We were asked to make for a company in Dublin. We were asked to make a major insect hotel. A big one about a metre by a metre and we got 800 pounds for that.

Interviewer: What is an insect hotel?

Respondent: It's where insects can go into and hibernate for the winter. So, you might have two hundred holes, little holes that they can get into. Nothing else can get in only them – the size of them. We make small ones, and we sell them through our Facebook page. We have people coming down to the shed constantly looking to buy bird boxes or hotels. Insect hotels, bird feeders. We make them all the time and then I advertise them on the Facebook page.

Interviewer: Tell me more about what you do in the Men's Shed?

Respondent: I am the Chairman; we have a Treasurer – Respondent E. You will be talking with him. He keeps very tight accounts. We are a registered charity, we have a bank account, we produce, we produce, we keep our books, any grants we apply for we must produce everything for the council. Then we must produce receipts for what they give us the grant for. Like musical equipment, carpentry equipment, things like that. Computer equipment.

Interviewer: Tell me more about the community work?

Respondent: We're determined to give back to the community. Hugely into the local community. To the extent that I got a phone call this morning from Paul at nine o'clock, asking me to come down to the Garda station at half eleven. Hope we will be finished by then – laugh!!

Interviewer: We will indeed.

Respondent: Ok, to collect a cheque that the court has awarded us from the fines they're given people for committing offences. So that's the second time. It's a donation to the Men's Shed so I will pick it up this morning from sergeant Paul in the station. And that's a recognition by the community the contribution we're making. And I am also representing the Shed on the town team, which is a group, a group of different qualified people in terms of business, community groups, retail, and we advise the county council through Joseph who is the planner what we'd like to see happening in the town. From the community point of view, ourselves and access and tidy towns and others in the community and then you have other people in retail, other people in heritage. So, we are meeting now on Zoom next week.

Interviewer: You are busy.

Respondent: We haven't met for a while, so we will go through, he'll tell us what's happening with the town plan, and we put submissions into the town plan, so we discuss those. And also, then he'll be trying to make sure that going forward the Men's Shed gets a permanent home. So, I know that the town council will look out for us that way going forward, so I've no worries about our future.

Interviewer: So, you won't stay in that building where you are?

Respondent: We won't be able to be. There will be apartment blocks for there.

Interviewer: So, you might tell me about what is in the current Men's Shed building?

Respondent: It's quite, quite a large size building, on about three quarters of an acre. And it has a house. We have reorganized the kitchen. We have an assembly room that will take 25 people. We have a small sitting room where we can have three or four people. We have a music room where we store all our musical equipment. We have computer room, we have a little office, we have toilets downstairs and upstairs. We have a lean-to at the front that accommodates about 25 shedders to sit around outdoors. We have a polytunnel then there just down from it in front of the lean-to and

below that again then, we have the workshops which has three sections, and then we have a tennis court or walking soccer facility.

Interviewer: Wow, that's nice. How will that be replicated somewhere else?

Respondent: We have potentially two options going forward hopefully. One is with an organization who has, who has developed a place called the Bundle of Sticks which is across from Lidl. There's a company and builder. They bought that in conjunction with the council, and they have developed it and redeveloped it totally. There's 14 residents going into that. Ex-state cared people who need care going forward, but they are 18 years of age or more now. So, they're going to be the residents and they are going to be looked after by an agency under the HSE. These agencies out there look after these special houses and all that. So, they have come to us and said that would we consider taking the rest of the site and they would build a building for us. I presume that's the ultimate. There are 6 acres there. We don't want 6 acres but if we got 6 acres, we would recreate everything and then in addition we would develop a donkey sanctuary. We would have allotments and maybe a small pitch and putt maybe 5 or 6 holes.

Interviewer: How much time do you give to the Men's Shed?

Respondent: Laughs. I am at it all the time but in a kind of sociable way. I took a phone call last night from a fellow in Camphill Residential who wanted to talk to me. He comes down to visit us – he's a member. Camphill are a set of state cared institutions for mentally and physically impaired people. So, we play for them, once a month out in Dunshane, out at Two Mile House and we have coffee and we raise money for them and they bring their patients into us and they do little things they want to do, that they like doing and we entertain them and all that. So that relationship is there with Camphill for the last four or five years and it's a pity now as it's broken by COVID. He rings me.

Interviewer: It would have been nice for me to visit the Shed but unfortunately with COVID that wasn't possible. Do you keep in touch with the people outside the Shed? Are there other things you do, play golf or something?

Respondent: Four of the members are golfers. So, I play golf with them, not necessarily the same four ball or anything, but on and off with them so that's ongoing all the time and then there are others that are groups among themselves, carpenters, wood turner – they are in a wood turning guild. So, they compete in the All-Ireland woodturning competitions and they won two years ago. Naas / Carlow or Naas / Laois. They won the best entry, which was a replication of the weighing scales, down at the Canal in Naas. It was fabulous – recreated in wood and it had to work. So, it means that the wheel had to turn, and we've displayed that several times, at our own events or where we're invited to take part in community events. We put a stand at indoor events as well as outdoor display to show it. It's actually going into the library when the library opens, and it will be in the library forevermore. There are pictures of that up on Facebook. You can use them for your research too.

Interviewer: Were you looking for a men's only space? How do you feel about that?

Respondent: That's a good question, as they say on television, that's a good question. Laughs. It is not a Men only place. We entertain, and we welcome all the wives, all the families to come down to the shed, and they do, and an awful lot of our visitors are from other community groups who come in to visit us, like Care of the Aged, Age Action Ireland, Access and they drop in and we

make them welcome to come in. I wouldn't say every day there are one or two females but on a lot of days. The Tidy Towns is all run by females. We are constantly interacting with, with females.

Interviewer: Yeah, and I suppose my question wasn't coming from that perspective but what it was coming from the perspective of, is there a freedom there to talk. I hear of this shoulder to shoulder, which I've read about in the book you know that you're working together on it and as you know with your hands, and you're physically working but does it help with socialization, is there something different there that you feel is more on the emotional support side.

Respondent: Yes, it is mainly a male-environment, but the emotional support, loyalty and looking after each other is massive. I spent an hour talking to one of our Shedders in Galway on the phone, who is not in a good way. He lost his dog, and his brother has gone into a nursing home. He doesn't know what to do. So, I spent an hour, two nights ago talking to him and another shedder spent 45 minutes talking to him earlier in the day, and trying to guide him out of the situation that he's in. So, we all know, everything, all the intimate details of each other. There's nothing I don't know about, about their medical conditions, their emotional conditions, their family. And we all know it, and nobody hides anything.

Interviewer: That's great.

Respondent: And we've been on other Zooms. We were on a Zoom last week with a focus group doing a study for Europe, so they asked the Shed would they take part. There was six of us on at the one time on Zoom, and the way they spoke to the presenter, about their, their own experiences, so intimate, so personal, but comfortable to do it. An absolute honesty. There is no hypocrisy. We have no time for that. Purely, everything is genuine, and people are prepared to tell you their most intimate details.

Interviewer: Well, I would imagine only meeting you there for the first time this morning that you facilitate all of that with your lovely manner and I'd say your life skills and your experience allows people to open up.

Respondent: The army certainly helped me with that. I had 30 men at one stage and then 150. Every one of them had a life. I was overseas with them and everything. I served overseas in Lebanon with them so you're away from our families and so you had to treat them with respect and care for them, because you knew that the situations weren't easy, so it was a great experience. I can bring that; I bring the same experience.

Interviewer: You are so enthusiastic

Respondent: Yeah, I just want the country to take it on. Yeah, big time. There is no limit, you could have three sheds in Naas if you needed it, or three groups. Nobody, no man should be sitting at home. Not wanting to go out. As Kevin Downes said to me, when people come up to the door, he goes around the back, so the way he doesn't see them. That's the loneliness. I said, Kevin, you have to come back to Naas, you can't do this. He's coming back this week and we're going to start working on what to do with his house. He's crying down there he's crying and he's looking at the chair across where the dog was, and the dog is gone. You know it's a disaster.

Interviewer: Poor man

Respondent: I just said come back, come back Kevin to Naas. We will meet up and we will interact, we will sort these problems. Every problem is a massive problem. There are hundreds and thousands out there like this. When I think of down the country from where I came from myself

and the older men who don't go to the pub or cannot go to the pub anymore. Whatever it is, and their wives have passed on. God Almighty! It's mind boggling the problems that are there. Now, the big thing about the Shed, you're saving the state an awful lot of money. Now for the money through medical through the fact that they're well, mentally well, well. Mentally well and then physically well because we do the walking and we do all of these things as well we do the walking, we go on trips, we were doing, we're were going on trip day trips away and everything There's a whole range of activities we do, other than meeting at the Shed to talk. You bond then by taking them away for the day. And they talk more, they are in a new environment. On the bus for two hours going down to Limerick. We went down to Ardnacrusha, and up to the Titanic Museum. We went down to the lovely gardens down there in Carlow and the sensory gardens in Athy, all those lovely places. We went on all those trips and this is a huge thing for us going forward.

Interviewer: Hopefully, they will all start again soon. I have a rather long question - in sociology we have a concept called third place – it a place you can go that's not work or the home, where you can meet and talk to people – like bars, coffee shops, hairdressers, and also places like Men's Shed's. The argument is these are extremely important places in which people can discuss issues and develop understandings and maybe new ways of looking at things. Do you think the Shed represents this for you? Tell me a bit about this.

Respondent: It's my 2nd place – it's home from home. I would be sitting here at maybe half ten in the morning and I get a phone call, are you're coming down? Laughs! Are you coming down? I have the kettle on! (shared laughter). I'll bring the milk. Then you go down, and there's four or five there and you start talking.

Interviewer: I think we've had a really good conversation. I really appreciate the time; you know you've given me more to work with.

Respondent: Great to see you on Zoom. All the others are familiar with Zoom they're all competent with Zoom.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: Yes, one thing I didn't say about the group is about my granddaughter and her experience with the Men's Shed is unique in the world because she knows every shedder by name. They all know her. And they ask about her, and she's grown from the age of two to eight as a shedder herself. She comes down with me. They ask about her every time I go down, and they still meet her and if she meets them on the street, she meets their wives, and they stop her and they say hello to her. It's been a wonderful story.

Interviewer: That's fabulous.

Respondent: I love her. I am so delighted I got a second chance. I was working the pub at night and in the army during the day. I wasn't here at all during the day. I have twins; a boy and a girl, 36 now. I have two daughters here, and I have a future son in law, and a granddaughter, all living here, and I am so delighted. They've taken over the whole house. We have three offices going at the moment. Sometimes I have to go into the bedroom to get space.

Interviewer: Thank you so so much. You have given me lots of time. I really appreciate it.

Respondent: Drop down to Larchfield next week. Send your report to government and send it to the Irish Men's Shed Association. If the state could see the value. There should be more advertising about the Men's Shed. There's about 10,000 members at the moment nationwide.

Interviewer: How involved is the Association?

Respondent: Very good. They are excellent. They run Zoom meetings on a whole load of things, like fitness. We have been talking to Dr. O'Neill too and loads of other things.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you want to add?

Respondent: No. I think I have given you loads. But just to say there is a major amount of activity. People underestimate the range of activities that the shed is involved in terms of interacting with the community and activities we do ourselves in the shed, and that's huge. There's huge initiatives in that and we have the public all the time now asking us to do things. Like at the moment there's a woman who has a kitchen and she wants to arrange taking the kitchen out and putting it into the Shed. So, this interaction with the community who know about us now. We got about 7,000 followers, and they will contact us because they have our numbers and everything and they will say, I have this, I have this. Do you want this, can you make these, I can give you these? We've got some fantastic equipment from from people's houses. That interaction is there as well with the community.

Interviewer: And when you say 7,000 followers is that followers on Facebook?

Respondent: Yeah, yeah when I put something up on Facebook, you might get 7000 followers following a particular item to say that they've seen it.

Interviewer: Have you other social media pages? Instagram or anything else?

Respondent: No just a Facebook page, it's enough. I am doing two Zoom courses at the moment, one with KWETB and through the OPC (the Older Person's Council).

Interviewer: I am going to let you go now. You have been very helpful, thank you sincerely.

Respondent: No problem at all, take care of yourself.

Interviewer: Thank you. Have a nice weekend.