

Neglected Economic Opportunities: What Place for Hunting in Rural Ireland?

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Abstract

This paper examines the configuration of the place of hunting within the context of Ireland's shifting rural policy. It does this in three main ways. Firstly, it examines the merits of recent economic claims made by the pro-hunting lobby. This is done through a national questionnaire-based survey of the organisers and participants of the various hunting activities in the Republic of Ireland. The results show that hunting activities contribute almost €220 million to the Irish economy annually, of which 83 percent is spent within rural regions.

The second part of this paper is concerned with examining the largely overlooked nature of hunting activities within current rural policy. More specifically, it investigates the attitudes of rural policy decision-makers regarding the neglected role of hunting activities within rural policy. The interviews expose a number of issues which hinder closer interactions between hunting and Irish rural development policy. The results focus on the wider political and controversial nature of hunting as well as issues relating to land access.

The final part of this paper considers the wider political and controversial nature of hunting in an Irish context. The paper in this regard focuses on a number of recent attempts by the Green Party to regulate or prohibit particular hunting activities in Ireland. Such debates centre on issues relating to politics and power with consideration given to the complex connections between hunting, ethics, and rurality in Ireland.

Ireland's Shifting Rural Policy

Although at the edge of Western Europe, Ireland has many similarities with other European countries because of its heavy dependency on agriculture and small-scale farming. Rural development has been on the Irish public policy agenda since the late 1970s. Prior to that, the concern in rural policy was almost exclusively with agriculture. The paradigm shift in rural policy has been as a result of a combination of factors. Firstly, there has been a decline in both the number of farms and agricultural employment. As a result, many farms have become non-viable and dependant on direct payments. Secondly, there has been an increasing trend towards urbanisation with urban areas attracting the majority of new investment and finally, there has been a growing concern for the protection of the rural environment (Dunne, 2006).

The basis of current rural development policy in Ireland originates from Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform and changes as a result of wider agricultural market trends. The main objectives of current rural development policy aim to complement reform in the agricultural market sector and to encourage alternative sources of income in rural areas, while supporting agri-environment measures. The CAP is now the most integrated of the community-wide policies implemented by the European Union (EU). It seeks to ensure that agriculture can be maintained over the long term at the heart of a living countryside. Ireland's Rural Development Plan (2007-2013) drawn up in line with the EU's rural development framework and in consultation with stakeholders, sets out the overall rural development priorities and the means to address them. The programme addresses three key priorities - improving the competitiveness of agriculture, the environment, and the wider rural economy (Rural Ireland, 2007).

New Opportunities for Recreation

In recent years, rural space has been increasingly brought within the consumption sphere as conservation or recreation space (Cox *et al.*, 1996). Leisure and recreation management are widely recognised as important elements in peoples' lives, and are receiving increasing academic attention and respectability (e.g. Mercer, 1980; Chubb and Chubb, 1981; Patmore, 1983; Van Lier and Taylor, 1993; Lynch and Veal, 1996). They are vital social issues (e.g. see Owen, 1984) and rewarding forms of human experience, constituting a major aspect of economic development and government responsibility (Kraus, 1984). At present, there are several debates concerning the potential role of recreation and leisure activities in rural areas throughout Ireland and Europe (Torkildsen, 2005; Roberts and Hall, 2001; Hanley *et al.*, 2003).

As a result of current EU rural development regulation, a key component (Axis 3) of Ireland's Rural Development Plan (2007-2013) is built around measures linked to diversifying the rural economy and in particular, the promotion of non-agricultural activities. For example, it provides a minimum of 10 percent of its funding for non-agricultural resource initiatives. This allows for increased measures to support various recreation activities, thus providing a potential source of funding for initiatives and objectives based on countryside recreation. Significant progress is also envisaged in developing the wider rural economy over the period of the programme, particularly in the areas of rural and agri-tourism.

In 2004, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht (Irish Speaking) Affairs published a National Countryside Recreation Strategy (CRS) to maximise the benefits of rural recreation in Ireland. The strategy encourages rural recreation activities to deliver social, economic, and health benefits whilst protecting the countryside, its environment and wildlife habitats. Among the possibilities, this paper argues that one possible recreation option for consideration would seem to be a greater recognition of hunting activities as a means of stimulating the rural economy. Within current Irish rural development policy however, hunting and game shooting activities occupy an interesting position as they are rarely mentioned on the leading issues of agriculture, environmental protection, and recreation. Numerous rural policy documents such as the Rural Development Strategy (2007-2013), the White Paper on Rural Development and the National Countryside Recreation Strategy fail to even mention the role of hunting activities in relation to current rural policy objectives. In this context, this paper examines the economic role of hunting activities in the Republic of Ireland.

Hunting Activities in the Republic of Ireland

For the purpose of this paper, the term hunting refers to a range of disciplines generally classified as game shooting and hunting with hounds. Hunting in Ireland is regulated by the Wildlife Act, 1976 and the Wildlife Amendment Act, 2000 under the control and regulation of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Their activities will be described in greater detail at a later stage in the paper.

The Economics of Hunting

There is a well-established body of knowledge outlining the economic value of hunting and shooting activities throughout Europe and the UK (e.g. Cobham Resource Consultants, 1997; Mackenzie and Associates, 1984; Manley *et al.*, 1999; Produce Studies Research, 1997; Winter, 1993). Two studies have previously examined the economic role of hunting activities in Ireland (Burke *et al.*, 1992; Corbally *et al.*, 1998). These studies however, are rather dated and rely exclusively on economic information from the organisers of the activities¹.

Corbally *et al.*, (1998) investigated the economic significance of hunting activities for 1996 and estimated that the 200,000 participants involved contributed at least €86 million to the then rural economy. The estimates in this study however, can be criticised for a number of reasons. Firstly, the data on which this work was based was largely secondary and most of it was rather dated. There was also evidence of double counting in a number of aspects relating to the relationship between the organisers and participants of the various hunting activities.

¹ Participation in hunting is to a large extent made possible by the organisers (hunts and gun clubs) who organise, manage, and in some cases, finance the facilities required. More specifically, the term organiser relates to a person or group of people who arrange sporting events on a formal or semi-formal basis.

Methodology

There are many criteria by which the various economic impacts of hunting activities can be assessed. This project mainly employed quantitative methods of research and analysis to examine the economic impacts of hunting activities in Ireland. Questionnaire surveys were designed specifically to examine the monetary flows of those who participate in the activities to assess their direct economic impacts. The method used to estimate the principal monetary benefits from hunting involved analysing the various expenditures by the participants involved (Giles, 1978; Sountwick, 1994; Grado *et al.*, 2001; Wallace *et al.*, 1991). This approach required a determination of participants' total expenditure on hunting fees, clothing, hunting equipment, transport, and other associated costs.

Preliminary steps of the methodology involved collating background information for a national questionnaire-based survey of the participants of hunting and game shooting activities. The questionnaire surveys were devised following consultation with a range of other recreation studies (e.g. PACEC, 2000) and were preceded by a pilot exercise. National geographic coverage was achieved and special care was taken to survey representative samples of the sports' participants. All hunt clubs were also surveyed to establish the number of hunting with hound's participants in Ireland. The generated data was evaluated using a combination of Microsoft Excel and the statistical analysis software SPSS to manage, sort, and analyse the quantitative evidence in order to reach useful conclusions from the data.

The final part of this project explores the national political discourses surrounding hunting activities in Ireland. The approach in this regard consists of a qualitative investigation into the attitudes of a sample of rural policy decision-makers from various government and non-government organisations through the use of semi-structured interviews. It also draws on recent conflicts between the government and the hunting lobby to highlight the theme of power and governance in relation to the regulation of hunting in Ireland. This investigation provides a medium whereby the prominent issues and values held by such actors are highlighted to provide some context into the changing attitudes of government in relation to hunting activities in recent years.

Results

The results of this paper are divided into three main parts. Section 1 examines the expenditure of the participants of hunting with hounds. Section 2 examines the expenditure of the participants involved in game shooting and section 3 examines the place of hunting within rural policy.

Section 1 - Hunting with Hounds in Ireland

For the purpose of this study, the term hunting with hounds includes the activities of fox hunting, mounted harrier hunting, beagling, foot harrier hunting, mink hunting, and the Ward Union stag hunt (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Hunting with Hounds in the Republic of Ireland

Activity	Number of Hunts
Fox hunting	36
Mounted harrier hunting	44
Ward Union hunt	1
Foot harrier hunting	70
Beagle hunting	17
Mink hunting	3

Fox Hunting

Fox hunting is a form of hunting for foxes using a pack of scent hounds. In the majority of cases the pack is followed by riders on horses. Fox hounds (of the fox hound or harrier breed) are specifically bred and trained for the purpose of fox hunting. In the course of a hunt, hounds are directed towards areas of cover deemed likely to contain foxes. If the hounds manage to pick up the scent of a fox, they will follow it by the most direct route possible. The hunt continues until the fox evades the hounds or is overtaken and killed by the hounds. At present, there are thirty-six active fox hunts in the Republic of Ireland. Each hunt is registered with the Irish Masters of Foxhounds Association (IMFHA) which represents the sport of fox hunting in Ireland.

Mounted Hunting with Harrier Hounds

Mounted harrier hunting is the hunting of foxes and to a lesser extent hares whilst mounted on horseback with a pack of harrier hounds. Harrier hunting takes its name from the type of hound used. The activity is governed by the Irish Masters of Harriers Association (IMHA) which currently represents fifty-one hunts, seven of which are based in Northern Ireland. A small number of packs also drag hunt. Drag hunting is a type of hunting where an artificial scent has been laid (dragged) over a terrain before the hunt. The scent, usually a combination of aniseed oils, is then chased by the hounds for any distance up to several miles to a designated finish line.

Foot Hunting with Harrier Hounds

The majority of hunting with hounds in Ireland is carried out on foot. The Irish Foot Harriers Association (IFHA) has the largest membership with over one-hundred packs of hounds in Ireland (including Northern Ireland). At present, there are seventy foot harrier hunts in the Republic of Ireland. The vast majority of these are in the south west of Ireland, with nearly fifty packs registered in County Cork alone. Many hunt clubs are based in cities and towns and consequently restrict their hunting days to the weekends. The hunting season runs from August to March.

Beagling

Beagling involves the hunting of hares on foot with a pack of beagle hounds. It extends throughout the winter months, usually one or two days a week and as many as twenty-five beagles would be brought out on a days hunting (Hobson, 1987). In Ireland, beagling is controlled by the Irish Masters of Beagles Association (IMBA) and currently represents eighteen registered packs in Ireland, three of which are in

Northern Ireland. The association has two main objectives; firstly, to foster and promote beagling and secondly, to encourage the breeding of the pure bred hunt beagle in Ireland.

Mink Hunting

Mink hunting is a relatively recent activity in Ireland, as the mink itself is a recent addition to the Irish fauna. Originally, mink were farmed in Ireland for fur, but many escaped when the fur trade declined in the 1970s and since then, they have established as a successful species throughout the Irish countryside. The activity has replaced otter hunting now that the otter is a protected species. Mink hunting in Ireland is controlled by the Mink Hounds Association (MHA). At present, there are only three registered packs, all of which are in Munster and they all hunt on foot. Unlike all the other hunting activities they hunt in the summer, from May until September.

Ward Union stag hunt

The Ward Union stag hunt is the only hunt in the Republic of Ireland hunting deer and has a long history dating from the nineteenth century. The hunting area comprises of north County Dublin together with the lands of south and east County Meath. Hunting takes place two days a week during the season from November to March each year. The Ward Union maintain about one hundred Irish red deer. They only hunt stags, which are not killed, but are recaptured and returned to the herd after a period of rest and monitoring.

Expenditure by Participants involved in Hunting with Hounds

Table 1.2 outlines the number of participants directly involved with the various hunt clubs in the Republic of Ireland. Of the 169 hunts clubs surveyed, 132 (78 percent) returned the questionnaire. The total participant membership is grossed-up taking into account for hunts which did not return the questionnaire. It should be emphasised that it was assumed that the hunts which did not respond were similar in their membership structure to the hunts that did respond. The results indicated that the mounted hunts - the Ward Union hunt, the fox hunts and the mounted harrier hunts - had the largest membership structure. The foot and beagle hunts had a smaller membership structure in comparison.

Table 1.2 Direct Participation in Hunting – Average Membership per Hunt

	Male	Female	Total	Total (grossed-up)
Fox hunts	62	40	102	3,672
Mounted harrier hunts	32	17	49	2,156
Ward Union hunt	181	65	246	246
Foot (inc. mink) hunts	20	6	26	1,924
Beagle hunts	18	8	26	390
Total	-	-	-	8,388

Surveying Hunt Followers

In total, 800 questionnaires were distributed to hunting participants during 2007. Gaining access to lists of hunting participants was problematic and every attempt was made to ensure that national geographic coverage was achieved and special care was taken to survey representative samples of the sports' participants. Questionnaires were also distributed at various hunting meetings during 2007 to increase the response rate. In total, 195 questionnaires were returned with satisfactory samples from each hunting activity (see Table 1.3). Mounted followers were surveyed separately to the foot followers. The questionnaires also differed slightly in relation to the various expenditure categories. The main reason for this is because there are different expenditure patterns between the mounted and foot hunting followers.

Table 1.3 Participant response rate

	Questionnaires Sent	Questionnaires Returned	%
Mounted Followers	550	125	23%
Foot Followers	250	70	28%

Expenditure by Participants involved in Mounted Hunting with Hounds

The breakdown of expenditure on goods and services by the participants involved in mounted hunting with hounds can be seen in Table 1.4. The survey in this regard incorporated members of the fox hunts, the mounted harrier hunts, and the Ward Union hunt. The expenditure relating to stabling and livery fees for maintaining horses for hunting was the largest expenditure category by the followers of the mounted hunts in Ireland. Such expenditure consisted of horse food, stabling fees, as well as veterinary expenses. The second largest expenditure category was from hunt-related social and recreational activities. Such expenditure included events such as social outings and hunt balls. Payments to hunts in the form of cap fees and subscriptions were also a significant expenditure category. Cap fees are paid to the hunt before a days hunting to contribute to the running of the hunt.

Table 1.4 Average expenditure from participants involved in mounted hunting

Expenditure Breakdown	Percent	Expenditure
Payments to hunts	14%	€848
Hunt-related social activities	17%	€1,034
Travel (on hunting trips)	10%	€628
Stabling/livery fees	25%	€1,443
Vets Costs	7%	€445
Tack & riding equipment	9%	€572
Horse transport	6%	€346
Farriers	9%	€545
Other	3%	€170
Total	100%	€6,031

Expenditure by Participants involved in Foot Hunting

Table 1.5 describes the expenditure relating to the foot hunting followers in Ireland. The survey in this regard incorporated members of the foot harrier hunts, the beagle hunts, and the mink hunts. The largest category was expenditure on hunt-related social and recreational activities. This was followed by expenditure relating to travel on hunting trips. Payments to hunts in the form of subscriptions and caps fees were also a significant expenditure category.

Table 1.5 Breakdown of expenditure from participants involved in foot hunting

Expenditure Breakdown	Percent	Expenditure
Payments to hunts	18%	€239
Hunt-related social activities	32%	€419
Travel (on hunting trips)	21%	€284
Clothing	10%	€134
Other	19%	€257
Total	100%	€1,333

Total Expenditure by Participants involved in Hunting with Hounds in Ireland

Table 1.6 presents the information in grossed-up format to allow for non-response from the participants that did not complete questionnaires. However, caution should be exercised as it was assumed that the participants who were not surveyed were similar in their expenditure characteristics to the hunting followers which were surveyed in the study.

Table 1.6 Grossed-up Expenditure by the Participants involved in Hunting

	Expenditure
Foot Hunting Followers	€3,084,562
Mounted Followers	€36,632,294
Total	€39,716,856

Total annual hunting with hounds participant expenditure amounted to €39.7 million in 2007 (Table 2.5). Mounted hunting followers accounted for 92 percent of this figure, with foot hunting followers making up the remaining 8 percent.

Section 2 - Game Shooting in Ireland

For the purpose of this study, game shooting in Ireland is divided into two main categories; game-bird shooting and deer shooting. Game-bird shooting in Ireland is mainly organised through the structure of the National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC). The NARGC is the principal recognised shooting body in Ireland. It represents the interests of the Regional Game Councils (RGC) which are organised on a county basis and gun clubs which are organised at local level. Currently, the organisation has 27,000 members spread throughout 840 gun clubs. The majority of gun clubs in Ireland operate as rough shoots where hunters walk up to game flushed by

dogs. The clubs obtain permission from local landowners to shoot an area and in the majority of circumstances they do not pay for shooting rights. Much of the shooting is carried out on an informal basis and includes the hunting of game species and vermin under Section 24 of the Wildlife Act, 1976 and 2000².

The second type of shooting considered in this study is deer shooting. At present, there are 2,500 participants licensed to shoot deer. Deer shooting is regulated by the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) under Section 29(1) of the Wildlife Act, 1976 and 2000. There are also a small number of deer shooting organisations such as the Irish Deer Society (IDS) and the Wild Deer Association of Ireland (WDAI) which represent the interests of deer shooters.

Results – Game Shooting in Ireland

Questionnaires were sent to the participants of game-bird shooting and deer shooting ($n = 1,550$). Game-bird shooting participants were sampled through the NARGC's RGC structure and distributed at gun club level to members. Deer shooting participants were sampled through their respective deer shooting organisations. Questionnaires were distributed on numerous occasions during 2007 to increase the response rate. Of the 1,840 questionnaires distributed, 446 (24 percent) questionnaires were returned of which 380 were from game-bird shooting participants and 115 were from deer shooting participants.

The average breakdown of expenditure on goods and services by the participants involved in game-bird shooting can be seen in Table 2.1. The expenditure relating to guns and equipment was the largest expenditure category. This expenditure consisted of ammunition, sporting guns, and gun repairs. The second largest category was from expenditure relating to gun dogs. Such expenditure included food and veterinary charges.

Table 2.1 Average Expenditure from Participants involved in Game-bird Shooting

Expenditure Breakdown	Percent	Expenditure
Guns & Equipment	29	€578
Licences	6	€120
Special Clothing	8	€144
Expenditure on Gun Dogs	22	€406
Expenditure on shooting trips	8	€155
Vehicle Expenditure	12	€215
Social Expenditure	7	€142
Purchase of Shooting Days	6	€124
Other	2	€33
Total	100%	1,917

² Vermin is a term given to animals or birds which are considered by some people to be pests or nuisances. They are usually not protected by any season and include species such as pigeon, mink, fox, grey crow, magpie, rat, grey squirrel, etc.

Table 2.2 Average Expenditure from Participants involved in Deer Shooting

Expenditure Breakdown	Percent	Expenditure
Gun & Equipment	25	€1,148
Licences	2	€101
Insurance	2	€77
Travel and expenditure	12	€563
Travel on special stalking trips	11	€550
Carcass fees	2	€82
Trophy mounting	6	€262
Purchase of special clothing	9	€412
Social Expenditure	3	€158
Expenditure on Gun Dogs	6	€289
Vehicle Expenditure	16	€740
Purchase of stalking days	1	€44
Other expenditure	5	€221
Total	100%	€4,649

The breakdown of expenditure on goods and services by the participants involved in deer shooting can be seen in Table 2.2. The purchase of cartridges, ammunition, sporting rifles, and gun repairs represented the highest expenditure category with an average of €1,148 being spent per person in 2007. Expenditure relating to vehicles was the second highest category.

Total Expenditure by Participants involved in Game Shooting in Ireland

Table 2.3 presents the information in grossed-up format to allow for non-response from the participants that did not complete questionnaires. However, extreme caution should be exercised as it was assumed that the participants who were not surveyed were similar in their expenditure characteristics to the participants who were surveyed.

Table 2.3 Grossed-up Expenditure by the Participants involved in Shooting

	Expenditure
Game-bird Shooting	€65,434,089
Deer Shooting	€15,341,700
Total	€80,775,789

Total annual game shooting expenditure amounted to €80,775,789 million in 2007 (Table 2.3). Rough shooting accounted for 81 percent of this figure with deer shooting (19 percent) making up the remainder.

Breakdown of Hunting and Game Shooting Expenditure by Region

As the vast majority of hunting and game shooting is carried out in rural areas, a key focus of this research set out to determine the economic significance of hunting activities to the rural economy. The participants surveyed were asked to estimate what percentage of their expenditure was made in a city/large town, in a country town, or in rural areas (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Breakdown of Expenditure by Region

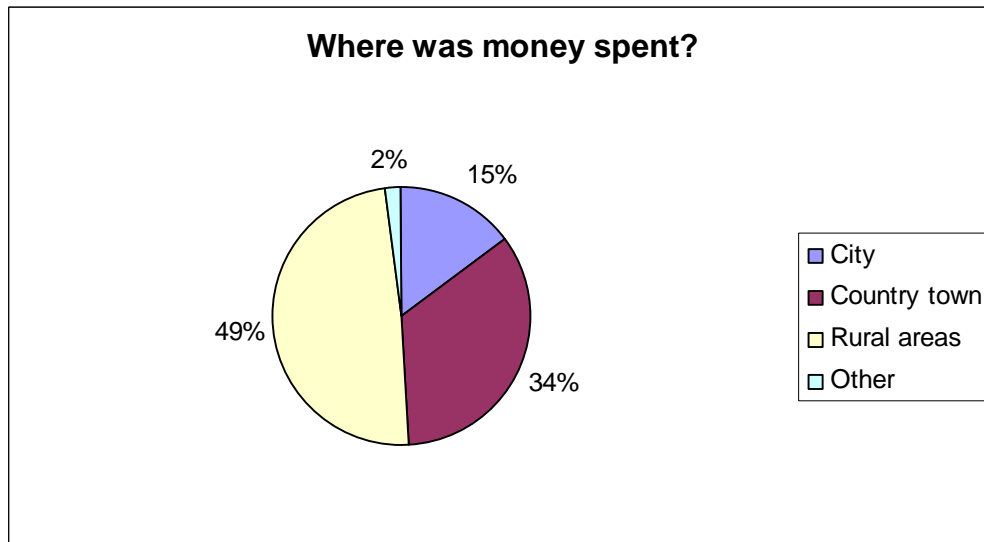


Figure 3.1 illustrates that 83 percent of the money was spent within rural regions (rural areas 49 percent and country towns 34 percent). The remaining 15 percent was spent in large towns/cities with a further 2 percent being spent outside of Ireland either through mail order or travel abroad.

The Political Debates Surrounding Hunting

The final part of the paper considers the wider political and controversial nature of hunting within rural policy and politics. Since 2007, hunting activities in Ireland have come under increasing pressure mainly as a result of the introduction of the Green Party into government. They are the only political party in Ireland to have a specific animal welfare policy which incorporates a dedicated hunting (blood sports) section. Their animal welfare policy states that when in government, they aim to introduce legislation to end blood sports in Ireland. The Party also state that they will campaign through the European Parliament for legislation, which will make it an offence to organise or participate in any illegal blood sport in Europe.

There was an even bigger concern for the pro-hunting lobby when the leader of the Green Party, John Gormley was appointed Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government with the responsibility of regulating hunting in Ireland. To date, Minister Gormley has attempted to restrict hunting and shooting activities in a number of ways since his introduction into government. Three examples are illustrated.

1) Ward Union Hunt

The first attempt by the Minister to restrict hunting was by granting a constrained licence to the Ward Union hunt which essentially prohibited the hunt from hunting deer. He attached a condition to the hunt which stated that the stag had to be recaptured by the hunt before the hounds could be released. This, in effect, expelled the hunt from hunting deer within the law. The Ward Union hunt responded by bringing the case to the High Court. The hunt club argued that the Minister's powers under the Wildlife Act of 1976 and 2000 did not permit him to apply this condition. They stated that the licence either allows them to hunt deer with hounds, or not at all. The hunt argued that the conditions which the Minister had attached were more to do with animal welfare than conservation and had gone too far. "He was trying to ban hunting by stealth, the hunt club claimed" (Irish Independent, 3.3.08). In the High Court, the Ward Union was granted an injunction preventing Minister Gormley from continuing to impose restrictions to the Ward Union's licence. He was also requested to pay the legal costs of €400,000.

2) Control of Dogs Act 1986

In January 2008, Minister Gormley attempted to introduce legislation under the Control of Dogs Act, 1986 to licence hunt kennels in Ireland. It was argued that each hunt would have to pay in the region of €5,000 for a licence which would have a devastating impact on all hunts. Pro-hunting lobbyists stated that the decision to include hunts within this Act was an attempt by Minister Gormley to incur unnecessary costs on hunts in Ireland. The hunting lobby challenged the attempts by the Minister and were successful in obtaining an exemption from the Act.

However, in September 2008, Minister Gormley attempted to re-introduce legislation to licence hunt kennels for all hunts in the Republic of Ireland. The regulations seen had no exemption made for dogs belonging to kennels attached to hunt clubs (Collins, 2008). The pro-hunting lobby immediately contacted Fianna Fail Government TDs asking them to account for the changes and have since been successful in receiving their exemption for another season.

3) Beagle Hunt Licence

In February 2008, the beagle hunts were refused a licence to extend their hunting season into the month of March. The extension had been granted to the beagle hunts for the previous ten years. Minister Gormley did not give any reason for not granting the licence. According to the pro-hunting lobby:

"The Minister for the Environment, John Gormley dropped another bombshell on the hunting fraternity in the last few days of February by refusing a licence to the Masters of Beagles Association to hunt into March. They had applied for that licence four months ago, but were refused just four days before the new licence would have come into effect". (HAI, 2008).

Hunting within Rural Policy

Aside from the Green Party's attempts to restrict hunting in Ireland, this paper argues that there are a number of broader issues which prohibit the inclusion of hunting from rural policy objectives. Interviews with rural policy decision-makers focused on other matters in addition to the controversial nature of hunting. For example, when asked about the inclusion of hunting within rural policy, the interviewees focused on concerns such as access to land, the insurance of hunters, and irresponsible hunting practices. They stated that hunting activities were capable of causing problems in relation to disrupting livestock. They were also concerned about the responsibility of hunters in damaging farm property. *"Some of the followers of hunting are known to cause problems whilst hunting, like breaking fences and frightening livestock"* (Dublin, 010). Interestingly however, the interviewees did agree that hunting was an activity which was completely excluded from current rural policy objectives. *"It simply does not appear on the rural policy agenda"* (Sligo, 011). Representatives from the Department of Agriculture similarly stated that *"hunting activities have never appeared for discussion regarding their economic impacts within rural policy"* (Dublin, 013).

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the economic role of hunting activities in the Republic of Ireland. The results indicate that the direct expenditure on hunting and game shooting activities contributed €120.5 million to the Irish economy in 2007, of which 83 percent was spent in rural regions. This figure however, can be regarded as being conservative because indirect expenditure or multiplier effects of participants' expenditures have not yet been incorporated into this analysis.

Input-output analysis considers inter-industry relations in an economy, depicting how the output of one industry goes to another industry, where it serves as an input, and thereby illustrates the flow of money through an economy. An input-output model would provide a measure of monetary value to the Irish economy which would outline the wider secondary and employment benefits from hunting in Ireland. If such modelling was to be applied to the expenditure by the participants involved in hunting, the original figure would be substantially increased.

The results of this research can be used to promote rural development, legislative, and financial support for natural resource-related recreation activities in Ireland. Policy-makers should recognise the wider economic impacts of hunting activities when considering future rural development plans. Piddington (1981) states that there is great potential for developing hunting activities as complementary activities to farming. For example, they require the land which is often considered too poor for typical farming practices. However, it appears that these activities are largely underplayed because of the immense conflict of interest which surrounds the issue. Nevertheless, current debates on diversification and multifunctional land use in Ireland, and similar activities globally, may benefit from considering the economic contribution of hunting activities.

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