

New study examines community role of Ireland's rural pubs

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Researchers from the University of York are exploring the role village pubs play in local communities in Ireland and ways of halting their decline.

The one-year study, funded by the Vintners Federation of Ireland, will look at the importance of rural pubs as a place for the local community to meet and talk, and at their function as hubs for charitable, voluntary, leisure and business activities.

Led by Dr Ignazio Cabras of the York Management School, researchers will report on the level of socio-[economic activity](#) generated by pubs in

rural parishes, as well as their role in creating a sense of community.

The new study will benefit from expertise gained by Dr Cabras from six years of research into the role of village pubs in England.

More than 1,100 pubs have closed in Ireland in the past five years, with [rural communities](#) being worst affected. The Vintners Federation of Ireland says that a further 800 pubs are in serious financial trouble, putting 4,800 jobs at risk.

Dr Cabras, from the Operations Management Group at the York Management School, said: "In both Ireland and England, rural pubs are in serious decline. However, they often have a vital role to play in both the social and economic wellbeing of a rural community.

"From providing an outlet for the sale of [local produce](#), to a meeting place for a local sports club, to a focal point for a charitable activity, rural pubs are often at the heart of the rural community.

"Pubs are also important generators of part-time and casual employment. This is often more important in rural areas where work-opportunities for some categories of people, such as students and women with families, are frequently reduced."

The Vintners Federation of Ireland represents 4,200 publicans, with its members supporting over 54,000 jobs in Ireland. The Federation says 20 per cent of its members are at crisis point.

Padraig Cribben, Chief Executive of the Vintners Federation of Ireland, says the new study will help ascertain the socio-economic benefits pubs provide in rural areas of Ireland.

He said: "It is intended that this study will quantify the real benefits that

pubs bestow in [rural areas](#). Dr Cabras and his team have great experience and expertise in this area of research and we hope to have quantitative and qualitative data that will allow us to further demonstrate the importance of the pub in the local community."

While the number of village pubs in both Ireland and the UK is declining, the way the industry operates is very different.

Dr Cabras said: "Pub companies are the main players in the UK and own the majority of public houses, whereas in Ireland 90 per cent are independently owned. The majority of pubs are still family-run, one-bar operations, although the recession has forced many businesses to reduce their opening hours and staff. This situation may have caused the closure of many village and rural pubs which frequently experience less custom compared to those located in urban areas."

Researchers are hoping to present the results from the rural Irish pubs study and a separate 14-month study into rural pubs in England, funded by the British Academy, at the Beeronomics Conference 2013.

Held in September at the University of York, the four-day international conference will cover topics related to beer and brewing including economics, law, policy, marketing and consumption and innovation.

More information: Further information on the Beeronomics 2013 at www.beeronomics2013.org/

Provided by University of York

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