

Social Change in Twentieth Century Ireland

Key Points

In this Question in the Junior Cert. Exam you are usually asked to write about some of ways in which peoples lives have changed over the past 80-90 years in Ireland. You may be asked to write under some of the following topics:

- Life in rural areas
- Life in the towns and cities
- Transport and Communication
- Role of women in society
- Changes in leisure and pastimes

In order to get high marks in this Question you need to write a well-organised essay and use plenty of factual information. You may also be asked to list some of the **sources** which you might use in studying the lives of people in Ireland and what you learn from these sources and whether or not you think they are **reliable**.

In a study of the **social changes** that have occurred in Ireland over the past 80 years you could mention some of the following as your sources of information.

- Old photograph collections such as the Lawrence Collection which consists of over 40,000 photos and which have been used in various books and also in a TV documentary by RTE called "Shadows of the Past" Other collections of photos are the Eason Collection and thousands of photos taken by a Jesuit priest in the 1920's and 1930's called the Fr. Browne Collection.
- Written sources such as **books, old newspapers, plays** etc. Some good examples are "Your dinners poured out" by a primary teacher called Paddy Crosbie who taught in Dublin city. Also good sources of information about city life are the plays of Sean O' Casey who was reared in the tenements of Dublin as well as his autobiography. For life in rural Ireland you could mention the book by Alice Taylor called "To school through the fields" which is all about a young girl growing up in Cork in the 1930's and 40's. Another really good example is a book called "Children of the Dead End" by Patrick MacGill which describes his life growing up in west Donegal in the early 1900's. e.g. describes the hiring fair at Strabane each May.

- Another valuable source of information are the many stories from our grandparents about life when they were growing up whether it was in the city or the countryside. This is called **oral history**.
- Other sources of information are visits to heritage centres and places such as the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Role of Women

Early 1900's

Women had very few rights
Often treated as second class citizens
Most women only went to primary school
Only a small % went to second or third level
Very few women had careers outside the home
Women expected to stay at home and rear children
Many women married young - large families common
Women trained to be nurses, teachers or joined civil service
Women not allowed to vote in general elections
Minority of women began to demand equality - called the Suffragettes
Finally got right to vote 1918
First woman elected MP was from Ireland - Countess Markievitz
In rural areas women had a very important role
Often sold eggs, did knitting, packed fish to make extra money
In cities women also worked in factories and as domestic servants
Women were often the sole wage earner in the family
Women nearly always paid less than men for the same work

Changes

Women's Rights Movement spread to Ireland in 1960's
Women began to demand greater equality
Free education arrived in 1960's
Girls had option to do science subjects for first time
Large number of women go on to 3rd level education from 1970's on
Women no longer have to give up their jobs in civil service when they marry
Women are entitled to equal pay as men
Employment Equality Agency set up 1977
Ensures there's no discrimination against women in work
Still very few women on Boards of Telecom, FAS, I.D.A., Banks, Civil service
More women entering politics for first time
First woman leader of an Irish political party in 1990's
First woman President in 1990, Mary Robinson, Mary MacAleese in 1997
Women also prominent in world of sport in 1990's

Urban Life

Early 1900's

Poorest people had very bad housing called tenements
Nearly 30% of Dublin population
One family often lived in a single room
Tenements were often dirty, noisy, unsafe and overcrowded
7-8 families often shared one outside toilet and cold-water tap
No heating, lighting or inside toilets
Nearly 25% of babies died from disease and poor diet
The worst disease was T.B. which killed adults and children
Majority of men were unskilled labourers
Many worked on the docks but only on a casual basis
Many women also worked as domestic servants or in factories like Jacob's in Dublin
Skilled workers and Guinness workers had better housing
Middle-class lived in the suburbs such as Rathmines
Trams were most common form of transport
Boundary of city of Dublin was North Circular Rd and South Circular Rd
Population around 250,000

Changes

Tenements have all been demolished
People moved into Corporation flats and to new estates such as Crumlin, Ballyfermot
Huge housing development of Ballymun in 1960's - copied UK and USA
Unions and social welfare system have improved the quality of people's lives
Suburbs of Dublin have grown rapidly eg. Tallaght - over 100,000 people
Large number of people moved to city from countryside since 1960's - new jobs
Still have problems in inner-city areas esp. unemployment
Also a growing problem of crime and drug abuse in many cities
Many large new shopping centres and cinemas built
1st shopping centre opened 1967 in Stillorgan
Urban renewal schemes very important in late 1980's eg. Temple Bar
Huge increase in number of apartments built
Boundary of Dublin city continues to expand
Problems are lack of amenities in some areas esp. for young
Also a growing problem of waste disposal as cities grow
Problem of transport congestion
Air pollution also problem in modern city

Rural Life

Early 1900's

Most people lived in countryside
Many people were poor
Many were seasonal migrants to Scotland or England
Many forced to emigrate to USA or UK
Lived in small, thatched 3-roomed cottages
Kitchen was main room - open hearth fire
Very little furniture - wooden tables, chairs and dresser
Lighting was either oil lamps or candles
Main fuel was turf or wood
Cooking done on open fire - iron pots and pans
No piped water supply - relied on pump or a well
More prosperous farmers lived in 2 storey houses with slate roofs
Work was done mainly by hand or with horses
Women played a very important role
Cooking, churning, ironing, looking after children and elderly relatives
Helped at harvest, gathered seaweed

Changes

More modern bungalows were built
Many houses built by local county councils
Nearly all houses had running water, bathrooms etc.
Electricity brought everywhere in 1950's
ESB set up to do this
More electrical equipment in houses and on farm
Life made somewhat easier for women
Very little work done by hand or by horse
Large scale use of machinery and tractors
Farming became more efficient
Large co-ops formed in rural areas
Aid from EU to rural areas very important in period after 1973
Also a decline in number of small farms
Major move from rural to urban areas
Rural depopulation and isolation a big issue in 1990's

Transport and Communications

Early 1900's

Walking the number 1 form of transport
Bicycles became popular for first time
Horse-drawn transport also widely used to transport goods and people
Wealthy had own carriages in rural and urban areas
Electric trams widely used in cities e.g. Dublin
Large network of railroads all over Ireland - most built in 1890's
Cheap means of travel all over Ireland
Many people went on day-trips to the sea
Very few people could afford holidays
Very few motor-cars.. 1st one imported into Ireland in 1899 by a Dublin doctor
1904 - 38 cars in Dublin
Only the very rich could afford cars - cost around £400
Break down was expensive to repair
Travel abroad : steamship the only option
Steamships left from Dublin, Cork, Belfast
Could cross Atlantic in 5-8 days
Most communication via telegram or by letter
Very few phones available

Changes

Cars began to be mass produced around 1910
Cars became more affordable e.g. Model T Ford 1908
More and more ordinary people could afford cars
Petrol stations opened for first time
Buses and lorries became common on roads
CIE set up in 1940's...buses and trains
Aer Lingus set up in 1930's
First trans-Atlantic flights to USA were by flying-boats in 1937
Airports built at Shannon, Dublin and Cork
Shannon Airport was first in world to have a duty-free zone
Many new smaller airports built in recent years
Huge increase in number of private cars in 1960's
Many new and improved roads built
Huge amount of money comes from EU funds
Problem of traffic congestion and air pollution in 1990's
Communications have improved dramatically
Phones became more common in 1960's
1990's - mobile phones, Internet, e-mail and satellite