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Ireland's rural wasteland: a legacy of deep recession

In Ireland, deep recession has left behind hundreds of empty, unsold houses.

By Don Duncan, Contributor | FEBRUARY 19, 2010



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BALLYMAHON, IRELAND — • *A local, slice-of-life story from a Monitor correspondent.*

Ireland's fall from financial grace is one of the most dramatic in the Western world. The flashy cars and jet-setting lifestyles that came with the country's unprecedented economic growth between 1995-2007 – known as the Celtic Tiger period – are now all rapidly disappearing.

But away from the bigger cities, in the rural villages of Ireland, such as my home village of Ballymahon in the country's midlands, the roar of the Celtic Tiger brought about only one major change – houses, and lots of them.

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Real estate construction was a major facet of Ireland's economic miracle. At one point, the construction sector employed some 15 percent of the Irish workforce. Easy credit and over-speculation by housing developers led to years of unbridled development, especially in traditionally underpopulated areas, which benefited from tax-exemption schemes for development.

The result was a dramatic change to the physical space and nomenclature of the village where I grew up. Ballymahon's hinterland areas have names, anglicized from Gaelic, that connect the name to the place – Terlicken (place of flat stones), [Gurteen](#) (the small tillage field), Lissaniskey (water fort), Shrule (small river), Drinan (blackthorn bush), and so on.

As the years passed and the development scramble heated up, new names such as Auburn Village, Moyvale, [Thomand Hall](#), and Hill Crescent, jostled in with the old. But now these brand-new suburban-style housing developments with a terra cotta aesthetic sit meaninglessly in the rural landscape.



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In Ballymahon, as in many other similar villages dotted across rural Ireland, the lasting legacy of Ireland's deep [recession](#) is hundreds of empty, unsold houses; a hijacked organization of space; and a visually polluted rural vista.

"You can't put a price on these houses now," says [Jenny White](#), a Ballymahon-based real estate agent tasked with the job of selling off the estimated 40 percent of units that remain empty and unsold around the village. "Nobody is going to buy a house here now, so technically [they're] not worth anything."

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