

2030

CORCA DHUIBHNE
DINGLE PENINSULA

The Dingle Hub Approach to Climate Action at Local Level

Briefing Document

April 2023

Deirdre de Bhailís, Brendan Tuohy: Dingle Hub
Clare Watson, Aoife Deane: MaREI Centre



Introduction

Many different approaches can be used to engage and involve people in climate action at a local level. The approach taken by a particular group often depends on the interest and experience of the people who set it up and who lead the development of the work. It can also be determined by the requirements of funding bodies and the policy priorities at a point in time. The approach may largely focus on education and training; it may be driven by the principles of community development; or it may be campaign or project based. The approach of the Dingle Hub is predominantly project-driven (linked to funding streams that themselves are project based), with a particular emphasis on the broader development of local, sustainable, year-round and well-paid incomes on the Peninsula, embracing the themes of sustainability (climate), digitalisation and creativity within the local community.

The Dingle Hub has aimed to build a 'Living Laboratory' on the Peninsula and it has been accredited as a 'Living Laboratory' by the European Network of Living Labs¹.

The Hub has also been developing a concept of 'Scaling Deep'² (as opposed to 'Scaling Up') and is keen to expand on this concept in future years.

Background

Critical to the understanding of the approach being adopted to climate action by the Dingle Hub is to appreciate that it was established in 2016 with a specific mission: 'to build a creative, livable, sustainable and inclusive community, fostering a vibrant ecosystem of stakeholders to facilitate the creation and maintenance of well-paid, year-round incomes on the Dingle Peninsula.'

The reason a group of people came together to address this issue was the belief that, if something was not done to build a suitable ecosystem to support income creation on the Dingle Peninsula, people (particularly young people) would continue to leave the area after school and not return. The entry point for a suitable intervention was seen as the creation of a 'Digital Hub' (a physical space offering high-speed broadband, shared workspaces and community and business-related services) and the various pillars on which the Hub would operate included Sustainability (and Transition to Low Carbon), Digitalisation and Creativity.

This approach subsequently resonated with the funding mechanisms coming on stream from Government relating to sustainability (Transition to Low Carbon), Digital Transformation, Creative Industries and remote working.

The Dingle Hub is funded by a mixture of public funds (through various schemes and competitive calls) and from the users of the Hub services. The funding bodies set clear requirements for the use of the funds and specific time-based targets and outcomes for the funding provided. The Hub is an organisation that can manage the public (and other) funds provided to it in a manner that complies with good corporate governance and public service funding requirements, and delivers the required measurable impacts for the money provided.

¹ <https://enoll.org/network/living-labs/?country=ireland>

² 'Scaling Deep', as defined by Dingle Hub, is a process of regional development fusing enterprise, infrastructure and community development, whereby the State (in its various forms), a breadth of enterprise types (from micro domestic enterprises to HPSUs to large corporates) and the communities in which they are embedded, pursue enduring growth and sustainable transition in an approach that is "rooted-in" the assets of place.

The Hub has been very successful in working with its main funder, Enterprise Ireland, which in 2022 contributed approximately 76% of the overall Exchequer core funding (and 49% of overall Hub core income³) to somewhat broaden its brief to include such issues as Sustainability and Climate Change, but this is very much dependent on the achievement of tangible results and impact on climate emissions, energy transition and local, sustainable, low carbon income creation.

Administrative and Governance Structure

The Dingle Hub ('Mol Teic' is the official registered company, limited by guarantee) is a not-for-profit company with Directors and Members and some full-time and part-time staff, supported by many volunteers. There are also staff who are employed in respect of projects and, while they are integral to the work of the Hub, their work is linked fully to the funded projects.

Like in any organisation, particularly a company limited by guarantee (CLG), the Directors and Members are not (and cannot, by law, be) paid by the company. They fulfil their statutory and fiduciary responsibilities as Directors and Members and the governance role is one of increasing importance and complexity, particularly as the funds increase and there is a greater degree of public funding (from the Irish Exchequer and EU Commission), and, with that, commensurate accountability for the efficient and effective expenditure of those funds.

A core Hub team is in place to deliver operations, administration, finance and communication functions across main Hub and project activities. This team is led by a Workspace Manager who reports directly to the General Manager. The General Manager reports to the Mol Teic Board.

Objectives, workplans, outputs and outcomes for individual projects are determined by the funding agreements in place and the General Manager works with project staff to ensure delivery of these.

The Hub Board receives advice from a Youth Advisory Committee which has eleven members.

[For more detail, please see Appendix: Dingle Hub Organogram]

³ The balance is made up of Connected Hubs support, project contribution to overheads, service and consultancy income and rental income. For more see: <https://dinglehub.com/about-us/financial-model/>



Photo by Mossy Donegan

The Role of the Hub

The Hub can be seen as:

- an initiator and enabler of activities that support the sustainable development of the Dingle Peninsula.
- a body that has a track record of delivery of projects and initiatives (on time and within budget).
- a facilitator of local partners in addressing issues, challenges and ideas that can improve the quality of life on the Peninsula.
- a 'convener' of networks of interest on the Peninsula (providing a location for groups to meet and introducing groups and people to others who may assist them or with whom they have a common interest).
- a 'resource', by helping groups/partners to access funding either directly or by collaborating on suitable projects, and by supporting these networks.
- 'a trusted intermediary' for public bodies and other funders who may be interested in working with local communities but require some form of 'trusted' body that has good governance procedures in place as regard finances, accountability and transparency.



Photo by Mossy Donagan

Project Driven Approach

If the Hub is to continue in its current form, it has to be responsive to the requirements of funders and that requires a strong focus on delivery of projects and initiatives in a resource-efficient and timely manner, with a high level of governance and accountability. This inevitably leads to a clear time-bound, project-driven approach.

This approach involves communities working through projects and is at variance with a pure community development-led approach, which tends to be a much slower process that requires significant resources over a long period, with ongoing discussions, community identified actions, ownership and engagement and is not easily amenable to a time-bound, project-driven approach.

The Hub Initiates Projects

Depending on the initiative, the Hub and/or the local community could be partnering with multiple bodies or companies. The Hub seeks to bring these partners together and to enable a viable project or initiative that can be funded and resourced and then, in time, be evaluated against the targets for impact (outputs and outcomes).

Some specific initiatives and projects start as an idea in the Hub and they would not have happened without its involvement. For instance, the Tourism and Hospitality Sustainable Energy Community (SEC) was established following discussions with Fáilte Ireland, Kerry County Council, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Dingle Peninsula Tourism Alliance and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), based on the success of the West Kerry Dairy Farmers SEC (also supported by the Hub). It took time to get the funding and staff resources in place, mainly due to the fact that it was innovative in approach, and it had to fit in with existing funding schemes and public procurement processes. The Hub is very keen that the leadership of the initiative comes from within the sector and the Hub then acts in a supportive role. However, it was made clear by the funding bodies that they would only support the initiative if the Hub took responsibility for good governance and accountability (for public funds).

The idea for the Sustainable Mobility Pathfinder Project came about from the work done by the Hub with Local Link Kerry and the National Transport Authority in getting a new bus service for West Kerry (as a pilot for rural transport). Selection of the routes involved deep engagement across the Peninsula and this included NEWKD, local area groups and Dingle Peninsula Tourism Alliance. The service has already been a huge success (over 36,000 passenger trips in 2022 and a significant increase in the 2023 monthly numbers against the 2022 numbers) and two new electric buses began operating on the Dingle Peninsula from mid-2023.

Again, in this regard, finding a suitable funding mechanism to enable the project to get going and, in particular, to support active and deep community engagement, proved very challenging, as the funding schemes are not designed to accommodate such community engagement, despite the fact that everybody involved accepts that community engagement is essential to the success of any project.

Similarly, the Hub brought partners together to initiate projects such as the Community Energy Mentor Course (with Kerry Education and Training Board), the Anaerobic Digestion Feasibility Study and the Farm Ambassador Pilot. Again, finding suitable funding mechanisms to enable these projects to develop and to support active and deep community engagement was very challenging.

The Hub Supports Existing Projects

The Hub also provides expertise and support to assist other groups on the Peninsula to expand and develop their work. For example, the Maharees Conservation Association (MCA) and the Hub worked together to develop proposals for the short-term and long-term conservation of the Maharees ('Project 2070'). The Hub used its network to link with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Office of Public Works, Marine Institute, Geological Survey of Ireland and Kerry County Council and, in 2022, a very successful set of effective interventions were made in the area. At the request of the Hub, Kerry Education and Training Board also ran a very successful set of training courses for the local community in respect of biodiversity, etc. In early 2023, the Hub also assisted the MCA in writing an application to the Creative Climate Action Fund.

The Hub also supports the West Kerry Dairy Farmers SEC, the EU Ploutos project and (in 2022) the Creative Climate Action project by providing support staff and ensuring that the various conditions and reporting mechanisms are complied with, and by providing resources to develop communication materials, hosting meetings, and building a national profile.

Guiding Principles for the Hub Approach

Capacity Building

Capacity and capability development is not just about developing sufficient skills to respond to the identified (or 'felt') needs but it is also about building a greater and deeper awareness of the strategic issues that will be impactful in the future and the knowledge and skills that will be required to successfully address these issues (the 'strategic needs'). This includes the development of capacity and capability for delivering greater innovation (as is evidenced, for example, by the various projects involving the farmers), in the belief that this will assist in developing capacity and capability in the local community for sustainable development.

There is clear evidence of capacity being built across several areas, as follows:

- within the Hub itself, where the capabilities of the staff have increased significantly (as evidenced by the list of achievements and the skills required to deliver these). There is wider recognition of this capability as other bodies (nationally and internationally) now seek the advice and expertise of the staff in the Hub.
- within the networks that have been formed and supported by the Hub.
- within the various projects and those involved in those projects, as individuals and groups broaden and deepen their knowledge and skills, through working together on climate related projects and initiatives.

Community Engagement

The word 'Community' has multiple meanings, including:

- 'Location-based communities' defined by a geographic location (e.g., Dingle town, Dingle Peninsula, Maharees, Annascaul)
- 'Communities of practice' or 'sectoral interest communities' (e.g., Dingle Peninsula Tourism Alliance, West Kerry Dairy Farmers, hospitality sector in county Kerry, retail sector in the South-West)
- 'Communities of local-active (non-profit) groups' (e.g., people who share common interests, such as, GAA, rugby, traditional music, Tidy Towns)
- 'Communities of Specific Interests' (e.g., Féile na Bealtaine, Literary Festival)
- 'Statutory-based communities' (e.g., Public Participation Network (PPN), Local Authority, Local Municipal District)
- 'Minority communities' (e.g., Travellers, ethnic/religious minorities)

People can be members of multiple 'communities' and many people engage with the Hub through different 'communities'. The Hub operates an 'open-door' approach and is welcoming of any local groups that may wish to engage with it or for which it can provide advice or support. However, with the limited resources available, there are clearly constraints on the Hub so it may not always be possible to support what might be seen as a good initiative.

Supporting Empowerment

Community empowerment allows community members to expand their networks and meet new people, including those within the relevant public bodies. An empowered community can influence the social and economic aspects in which it lives. Furthermore, when working with others for a common goal, individuals develop a sense of worth and, as they collectively demonstrate their ability to successfully deliver projects and initiatives, they get emboldened and they build greater trust and confidence in themselves and in their ability to deliver and seek solutions, thereby further empowering themselves.

As part of its *modus operandi*, the Dingle Hub seeks to continually empower local sectors, groups and individuals through its programmes, projects, and initiatives, including its commitment to lifelong and lifewide learning (i.e. learning, either formal, non-formal or informal, that takes place across the full range of life activities (personal, social or professional) and at any stage of life)⁴ ; its commitment to supporting and encouraging ‘communities’ in developing and successfully implementing projects and initiatives; its openness to any individual or community to approach it with suggestions or ideas; and its willingness to introduce policy-makers to the local communities/sectors on the Dingle Peninsula so that they can have direct access to these policy-makers.

The Dingle Hub has made detailed submissions to many of the important public consultations that have taken place, and these have been informed by the experiences and views of the local people. Such submissions include:

- Kerry County Council Draft Development Plan
- Kerry County Council Local Area Draft Development Plan
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region
- National Smart Specialisation Strategy
- Impact 2030: Ireland’s Research and Innovation Strategy

The Hub has also initiated contact with and made detailed submissions to Government Departments and others on issues of relevance to the Hub (e.g. the National Bioenergy Strategy). Ensuring that informed views from the Hub are submitted to the various public consultations are important inputs to the policy-making process and they help to provide views from those who engage with the Hub.

Reflective Learning

Over the past five years the Dingle Hub has been working with MaREI, UCC in a reflective learning process. This involved intensive, collaborative reflection and deliberation, and helped to inform future decisions and action, and ultimately make the work more effective. The reflective learning culminated in the co-creation of learning briefs which highlight the benefits, challenges and lessons learnt, and also make recommendations. The overall aim was to capture the learnings in a format that is accessible and useful to the participants involved and to other communities, researchers and policy makers.

MaREI also brought a participatory impact planning and evaluation approach which enabled a more holistic impact planning and evaluation process, which informed tracking, monitoring, and impact assessment.

⁴ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-glossary/glossary/aprendizagem-em-todos-os-dominios-da-vida>

Social Inclusion

It is evident that the Hub has been proactive and effective in engaging with the community, be it thematic or geographic, right across the Dingle peninsula. However, it does not focus directly on social inclusion. With the limited resources available and the constraints put on the use of these resources by the funding bodies (along with the specific time-bound targets and measurable impacts that are required to be complied with), the Hub is not a community development organisation (although it collaborates with NEWKD and other bodies that work in that area) and it is simply not funded to primarily undertake community development. That is a brief given to other bodies and the Hub is very happy to collaborate with them and support them, where practicable.

As demonstrated in this brief, the approach taken by the Dingle Hub responds to the current requirements of funders and is largely time-bound and project-driven. To date, it has resulted in a number of very successful projects and initiatives across the peninsula and has clearly built capacity within the local community. However, it is important to acknowledge that a single approach is unlikely to be able to address the enormity of the climate challenge at local level. Therefore, many different approaches are required across all communities if we are to have real impact.



www.dinglehub.com

www.dinglepeninsula2030.com

Appendix: Dingle Hub – Organogram

