

2030

**CORCA DHUIBHNE
DINGLE PENINSULA**

Challenges and Proposed Solutions

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CHALLENGE

DEFINING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Defining the 'local community' or 'communities' is challenging, as the term can have different meanings:

- 'Location-based communities' defined by a geographic location (e.g., Dingle, Dingle Town, Dingle Peninsula, Maharees, Annascaul, etc.)
- '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, etc.)
- 'Communities of local-active (non-profit) groups' (e.g., people who share common interests, such as, GAA, rugby, traditional music, Tidy Towns etc.)
- 'Communities of specific interests', such as Féile na Bealtaine, Literary Festival, etc.
- 'Statutory-based communities' – e.g., Public Participation Network (PPN), Local Authority, Local Municipal Area, etc.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

One of the early tasks for a new group is to define with whom and for whom it is working. What is your definition of the community? How does the 'community' describe itself?

We suggest that new groups take time for collective discussion, agree and define who are the key local leaders and influencers, and identify the specific groups that should be approached for inclusion or consultation.

CHALLENGE

INCORPORATING ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

'Community development' is aimed at empowering local communities and requires a long-term, sustained, highly resourced process, whereas 'community engagement' may often be seen as being more about engaging with the community because we want them to do something for us or we want to do something with or for them. It may not necessarily foster inclusive participation or address underlying capacity needs. As a collaboration, we found it challenging to incorporate both approaches in our collective activities as the requirements and timelines were not similar.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

We concluded that a successful low carbon transition at local level requires people with different skills and expertise working together in communities. These skills include community engagement, community development and technical specialists (with relevant expertise in energy transition). It is important to find an effective mechanism through which they can work collaboratively rather than competitively.

Now that our collaboration is itself transitioning, the Dingle Hub is continuing with its project-based approach, bringing people together and making space for the necessary conversations which will lead to collaborative action, while NEWKD is expanding the role sustainability plays in its community development programmes.

When new initiatives are planned in a local area, it is important to ensure that the existing communities are enriched by the process and that they receive additional resources. It is also important to continually review our connections and communications with the local community and to listen to feedback.

CHALLENGE

DEVELOPING A MORE INCLUSIVE STRUCTURE

There were mixed views within the collaboration about whom to involve within the Corca Dhuibhne/ Dingle Peninsula 2030 governance and decision-making structure at the outset. One view was that we should invite key members of the local community to get involved and seek representation from relevant local organisations and networks on the Coordinating Committee. The alternate view was that this was too unwieldy, it hampered quick decision making and would put too much pressure on already busy local community representatives and would not allow for delivery of the outputs in the timeline for which the funding applied.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Our advice would be to start small, work with those who will work with you and those who are passionate about relevant issues (e.g., sustainable agriculture, sustainable mobility, sustainable tourism). Try to get it right with this core group, build a solid foundation and then expand into the wider community. It is important to communicate widely and to let people know what is happening, so that they can be encouraged to get involved when the time is right.

Building on our collaborative work and, in order to facilitate broader community involvement in the sustainable transition on the peninsula, in the autumn of 2022, NEWKD established a Community Forum on Climate Action

CHALLENGE

COMMUNICATING WITH, AND RAISING AWARENESS OF, THE TRANSITION AND OUR WORK WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY, AT THE BEGINNING OF THE INITIATIVE

Partly because ESB Networks had a clear timeline for launching their Dingle Project, our collaboration hit the ground running, without much preparatory planning. We therefore did not start with a very clear plan for communicating our vision, our message, our changing story, and those with whom we wanted to communicate. However, this did evolve organically over time.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

In an ideal world, we would have loved to have begun with a clearer, unified message, so that partners could have communicated the journey, milestones and messages to the community in different ways, ensuring greater awareness and buy-in across the peninsula from the outset. If possible, new groups or collaborations should strive for this. However, we realise it may be difficult because they will also need to start from where they are at and to respond to the circumstances, interests and driving forces which kicked them into action in the first place.

CHALLENGE

BUILDING ON THE WORK OF THE ESB NETWORKS (ESBN) DINGLE PROJECT

We were exceptionally fortunate in that ESBN appointed a very effective Community Engagement Manager to work on their Dingle Project. With a commitment to the collaboration, her employers and suppliers, and then to the individuals on the peninsula with whom she worked, she developed these contacts into a community. She also made strong links into and with the wider community. However, when the ESBN Dingle Project ended in 2021, there was no follow-on plan or resources to continue working with and involving the trial participants and Ambassadors.

Thankfully, funding has recently been secured for a follow-on project but there has been a long delay (16 months) between this and the end of the ESBN project.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

We fully understand that ESBN saw this as an opportunity to run a pilot in a rural location; they did not have any plans for follow-on involvement; and they do not have plans to do similar pilots elsewhere. The Dingle Peninsula was very lucky to get this initial investment and we do not want to discourage other agencies from doing similar pilots for fear they will not be able to extricate themselves from the community afterwards.

However, we do think that our collaboration should have given more thought to legacy planning well in advance of the end of the ESBN project. In that way we may have been able to put a follow-on plan in place and possibly arrange funding for the gap between the showcasing of the project and the outcome of funding applications. But this would all be dependent on the availability of funding, which is beyond the control of the Dingle Hub.

We would suggest that such legacy planning be a key part of the initial planning process when an outside agency offers to run a pilot project within a local community and some arrangements for possible follow-on funding from other bodies are made.

CHALLENGE

SUPPORTING THE UPGRADING OF HOMES ON THE PENINSULA

There are two challenges:

- Finding experts locally who will provide independent advice and support to householders to help them decide what upgrades will work for their home.
- Finding enough suitably skilled and trained people to carry out the physical work.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

In response to the first challenge, we suggest that the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), as the public body with the relevant funding and remit, should establish a service similar to that provided by the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) for householders wishing to upgrade their houses.

Steps are being taken to address the second challenge nationally, by increasing the number of apprenticeships. However, this is a huge, long-term issue and will take time to remedy.

CHALLENGE

SUPPORTING THE SHIFT TO SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

Encouraging a modal shift away from the car to walking, cycling and public transport, is very challenging. We need to move towards 'sustainable accessibility', whereby alternatives to the private car are available, convenient, comfortable and socially acceptable. Public transport should not be seen as a 'poor person's option' (there is a perception that if you cannot afford a car, then you use a bus). It should be seen as a preferential option for everyone.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

It is important to build upon the successes to date.

The TFI Local Link (Route 277) bus service, that operates west of Dingle (which now has two electric buses) was a very visible change that was well accepted by the local community and the passenger numbers show the extent of its approval (more than 35,000 passengers in 2022, up from 5,000 in 2020).

Dingle Hub has partnered with the Department of Transport to run a Sustainable Mobility Pathfinder project over the next three years on the peninsula. The focus will be on three core areas:

- **Public Transport:** Increase services to better suit citizens who already enjoy the benefit of the new Local Link bus services. Leverage technology (e.g., solar PV) to power community notice boards at bus shelters and online access to real-time information.
- **Electric/Low Carbon vehicles:** Public buses to go electric and charging points to be installed for private buses and cars. Promote use of e-bikes, e-scooters and leverage success of ESN Dingle Project to highlight advantages of EV. Develop local transport market for biogas.
- **Personal Mobility:** Infrastructural improvements and initiatives to encourage more active travel (cycling, walking) and car-pooling and car-sharing.

As part of this project, local champions will be encouraged to visibly use the services as part of a marketing drive to encourage others to change their driving habits.

CHALLENGE

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF REDUCTION IN ENERGY USE AND GREENHOUSE GASES

Measuring the impact (in terms of overall greenhouse gas emissions' reductions) of a multi-faceted community-based climate action initiative such as Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030 is an expensive, complicated, demanding and long-term task, which we have been unable to carry out to date. One of the key problems is that there is no standard methodology and different methodologies throw up different figures.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

We need a national framework and methodology for standardising measurements, approved by the Dept. of the Environment, Climate and Communications, which outlines what needs to be measured, how it is measured locally and how it can then be fed into the overall national numbers. The local authorities could have a key role in this.

Projects with decarbonisation targets should also include resources or expertise to measure and assess reductions in energy use and/or emissions.

CHALLENGE

THE RESOURCES AND TIME REQUIRED TO MAINTAIN A WEBSITE AND DIGITAL MEDIA PRESENCE

Setting up, developing and maintaining a website has to be a key part of any group's communications strategy. While we were able to cover the costs of developing the site through an SFI Discover grant, we underestimated and did not plan for the time, effort and money required to update and maintain it.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

When applying for activity funding, groups should include all website costs. Groups and particularly collaborations should (in its legacy planning) also consider and decide what will happen to the website after the initiative or project ends.

In our case, information on Dingle Peninsula 2030 can still be accessed via the www.dinglepeninsula2030.com address. However, in mid-2023, the website will become static and a repository of historical material only. Additionally, the main aspects of the various projects will be included on the Dingle Hub website, providing a high level, "shop window" overview.

CHALLENGE

THE TOP-DOWN NATURE AND COUNTY WIDE FOCUS OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

There was (and continues to be) a huge reticence, by all levels of government, to afford a sense of agency (empowerment) to local communities and to community organisations operating in these communities. Many local authorities operate a very centralised management style that does not encourage agency (empowerment) by local communities. This form of centralisation of power is detrimental to the development of local communities and, in a European context, is almost unique.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Government and the local authorities need to see the local community organisations as important (indeed, essential) partners in delivering on the low carbon, sustainable transition at a sub-county level (e.g., Dingle Peninsula). They need to provide suitable supports, in a timely and ongoing manner, for the local community organisations to provide the necessary sub-county structure, possibly building on some of the existing initiatives, such as the Digital/Connected Hubs. This allows for flexibility, agility, and the ability to successfully negotiate this transition. Local authorities should be championing this on the ground and calling on central government to also support it.

We recognise that climate action is a new brief for local authorities, therefore it is really important that this is properly resourced, right down to the community and local level, not just the whole county.

CHALLENGE

ENGAGING WITH LARGER LOCAL COMPANIES

Engaging with, and eliciting tangible support from, larger companies in the area has had limited success. We found that smaller companies were more interested in getting involved.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

With the Environment, Society and Governance (ESG) agenda now on companies' radars, there is a concrete driver for communities and larger companies to work for their mutual benefit. Communities should understand these ESG requirements and position themselves to offer solutions when engaging with these companies.

CHALLENGE

ENGAGING WITH NATIONAL POLICY MAKERS

Over the years, we have had good engagement with Ministers, Department officials, State Bodies (e.g., Údarás na Gaeltachta, Enterprise Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland, SEAI, Fáilte Ireland, National Transport Authority, Creative Ireland, Teagasc et al), convincing many of them to travel to Dingle to meet people and see the issues and developments on the ground. We recognise that this was made possible through our specific contacts who opened so many doors for us. We are now at a point where the initiatives on the Dingle Peninsula are recognised and so can continue to work on building those relationships. But not every community will be that fortunate.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Mechanisms need to be found to enable real and meaningful engagement between policy makers and communities. One suggestion is that key civil servants and department officials (generally based in Dublin) be encouraged by their Departments to actively seek to visit, engage with, and learn from community-based projects around the country, rather than waiting to be persuaded.

CHALLENGE

ENGAGING WITH PUBLIC BODIES

While engagement with some of the public bodies has been very good, most of the recommendations we have published in our Learning Briefs have not yet been acted upon.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

This is perhaps a reflection on the policy system because change takes time and articulating the issues usually comes well before action. However, we respectfully suggest that, if Government really wants to engage communities in climate action, implementation of recommendations such as ours (and others from around the country) needs to be acted upon.

CHALLENGE

DISCONNECT BETWEEN NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND LOCAL CAPACITY AND RESOURCES

There is a disconnect between the national aspirations and what can be delivered locally, with little real consideration of the capacity and capability to deliver locally and no plan to support it properly. Policies and targets are set nationally with very little apparent knowledge of how this will pan out locally.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Realistic levels of multi-annual core funding need to be made available for community-based organisations and groups (particularly those with a proven track record) to support Government in addressing the energy and climate change transition and also long-term community development.

CHALLENGE

TOP-DOWN ENGAGEMENT RATHER THAN CO-CREATION

While terms such as co-creation, co-production, collaboration and community engagement are widely used now in policy circles, the input and feedback mechanisms used nationally are more about some people at national level going out to tell communities what is proposed and then engaging in discussions. It is not really engaging with, and involving, the communities in the process as co-creators or partners, which is essential if the national policy aims are to be delivered both nationally and locally.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

A sub county structure (possibly building on such structures as the Connected Hubs) needs to be put in place to support communities and organisations at a very local level and to help provide a sense of agency (empowerment) to the local communities. This is particularly important if the Government's aspirations for energy and climate change transition are to be achieved.

CHALLENGE

THERE ARE MANY FUNDING CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY-BASED CLIMATE ACTION GROUPS

- The systems operated by the funding bodies are not run in an efficient manner or with due consideration to the nature of the local groups.
- Funding bodies have unrealistic expectations that communities can simply complete detailed applications and turn them around in a very short time (often during holiday periods).

- The short deadlines frequently imposed on community groups are not matched by the grant awarding bodies, who often take many months to announce the awards.
- People (currently in our case the equivalent of 1.5 full-time staff) are required to manage the multiple funding streams to comply with the governance requirements, so this alone drives a need for more resources.
- Funding uncertainty, competitive calls, short term (largely part-time) contracts and the inability to provide adequate employment benefits creates precarious positions and does not support the retention of multi-skilled staff and the building of high performing teams. The positions are almost 'vocational' in that people have to be able to 'afford' to take them up.

Local community groups applying for grants may have to commit to spending or borrowing money to compile the applications and/or to match some of the national grant aid and, if the community group is unsuccessful, it can have significant negative impact in that community, leading to demoralisation and opting out of future community participation. Additionally, there are always cash flow issues for groups waiting inordinately long times for approval of funding applications. Then, if successful, they are asked to deliver quickly on what has been included in the applications, even though many months may have passed and originally assigned staff may have had to take up other work.

To some extent, we have become a victim of our own apparent success. While winning national awards (Overall Winner .IE Digital Town Award 2021, Pride of Place Climate Action 2021, SEAI Inspirational Energy Community 2022, SFI Engaged Research 2022) and gaining recognition is very welcome, it brings with it expectations of how much more we will deliver in the future. It has led to more work, but not, as yet, to much more core funding.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

There should be a Code of Practice for funding community groups by State and Public Bodies, Government Departments (and other awarding bodies) that sets out a set of expectations for how such funding schemes are organised and guarantees on timelines for announcements, etc. It should also include the following specific provisions:

- If an application from a community group meets certain minimum standards, all costs associated with its compilation will be reimbursed, even if it is unsuccessful in the overall application. (This is not unusual in public tendering as it encourages more tenderers to apply, as they realise that their costs will be met by the awarding body).
- A requirement for prompt payment of invoices by State bodies, like what applies for small businesses whereby invoices are required to be paid within 15 days.
- Community Engaged Research will be funded.

Consistency around the classification of non-profit community groups (for receiving 100% funding) should be introduced across all funding bodies so that the local community group is not expected to fund, for example, 20% of the cost of the project while also providing voluntary inputs of peoples' time. Any local input should be seen as the value of volunteers' time.

While there are currently a number of different funding streams available, the fragmented model is absolutely merciless, driven by multiple deadlines. There is a need for a cross-departmental/ cross-agency funding (involving for example, DRCD, DECC, Dept of Transport, Enterprise Ireland) where communities operating at a sub-county level can draw down core funding to ensure that their organisations are viable in the long-term and able to deliver on their potential.

Nevertheless, the Creative Ireland Climate Action Fund must be commended. Whilst the application process was rigorous and demanding, the support and guidance from Creative Ireland staff was consistent throughout the project. Drawdown of funds and final reporting was straightforward and not unduly onerous.

Similarly, our experience with the SFI Discover Fund has been largely positive. They were willing to provide 100% funding and to fund upfront, and they have been very flexible with any proposed changes due to the nature of the project. This enabled activity that otherwise would not have happened. It also helped build long term relationships between MaREI and the Dingle Hub.

CHALLENGE

ENGAGED RESEARCH HAS A NUMBER OF CHALLENGES

- Engaged research requires a flexible and responsive approach that evolves along with an active project, which can conflict with a conventional project planning approach.
- Engaged research with communities requires that funding bodies offer core funding for both the academic institution and the community group, to cover staff costs.
- The lack of sufficient funding for community development and community engagement in the early stages slowed the development of the partnership, delayed the engaged research and impeded access to, and engagement with, the wider community.
- It can be difficult to prepare collaboration agreements that allow funding to go to partners within the community in a timely manner and it can be difficult to resource community partners in engaged research projects (i.e. reimbursing people for their time or expenses), due to the absence of appropriate mechanisms in the research funding ecosystem.
- When co-producing outputs, time and commitment is required to overcome differences in approach, language and needs between researchers and partners, and to reach consensus. Building mutual respect and trust is a core part of the process at the early stages. Similarly, the expectations of volunteers and non-profit bodies by the State actors are unrealistic and mostly far beyond what can be delivered, particularly considering the support mechanisms for the local community groups.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Those involved in collaborative engaged research projects need to push for a flexible and responsive approach to project planning, both in the proposal writing stage and within their organisations and in discussion with funders during project implementation.

Different disciplines, skillsets and supports are important in an engaged research team. Roles dedicated to engagement in academia are required to support and facilitate multi-stakeholder collaborations and the engaged research process. The same applies to engagement and development capacity within the local community. This must be considered at the proposal and project planning stage.

Engaged research with communities requires that funding bodies offer core funding for both the academic institution and the community group, to cover staff costs.

Co-production with communities is still relatively new for universities and requires new, more flexible, administrative and financial structures and timelines.

2030

CORCA DHUIBHNE DINGLE PENINSULA

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