



RO1 National report on the state of the art on innovative models of community enterprise development - Ireland

Technological University of the Shannon
Department of Applied Science (TUS Midwest)
Nenagh Rd., Thurles, Co. Tipperary.
Dr. Shane O'Sullivan, Dr. Bridget Kirwan
Shane.osullivan@tus.ie
Bridget.kirwan@lit.ie

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Introduction:

The ComEnt project, a 24-month transnational project funded by ERASMUS+, seeks to develop an innovative accredited educational programme on community enterprise development and provide higher education educators and students with appropriate teaching and learning resources. The ComEnt project consortium consists of the following:

- Technological University of the Shannon: Mid-lands Mid-West (Ireland – lead partner)
- Communities Creating Jobs (Ireland)
- ACEEU GmbH (Germany)
- Archivio della Memoria (Italy)
- Burgas Free University (Bulgaria)
- Fundatia Alaturi de Voi Romania (Romania)
- FHV – Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences (Austria)

The fostering of community-led and community owned enterprises promotes civic engagement. The knowledge, skillsets and competencies acquired through this initiative will enable university graduates and social innovators to empower marginalised groups and disadvantaged locations. This provides the capacity to create wealth and promote social inclusion, particularly for those who have been less successful in engaging with the dominant neo-liberal and capitalist market system. An enterprising community is not simply concerned with capitalism but seeks to build a viable and sustainable social, economic and cultural ecosystem. Enterprising communities involve an integrated mix of social, private and state enterprise, each adding value to the other. According to Cooke (2018), there are sufficient resources (live and dormant) owned by statutory agencies; community and voluntary sector; and private sector which could be utilised productively to create and sustain community-owned social enterprises.

The ComEnt project defines a community enterprise as an organisation owned and managed by the community, whose mission and vision are centred on serving individuals from a defined geographical area (predominantly disadvantaged locations) and / or communities of interest (predominantly marginalised groups in society). This makes community enterprises a distinct group within the wider social enterprise sector, not only trading for social purposes but reinvesting any profits in ways that provide benefits to a particular community.

Therefore, the specific promotion of community sponsored entrepreneurship within higher education courses is innovative. It is critically important for higher education institutions, in partnership with the community and voluntary sector, to undertake research on the topic of community enterprise. Furthermore, it is equally important to educate students and relevant stakeholders on the ways in which community owned enterprises can facilitate community-led local development.

Context:

To date, in Ireland, there has been little distinction between the terms ‘community enterprise’ and ‘social enterprise’. The focus of policy and research has largely been on social enterprise with community enterprise if considered at all, being seen as a sub-set of social enterprise.

When the term Community Enterprise is used (such as in the National Association of Community Enterprise Centres and the Community Enterprise Association Ireland), it tends to refer to systems, structures and facilities which support micro-enterprises of all kinds at a community level and not to the non-profit, social purpose focus of social enterprises.

This review, therefore, focuses on community enterprises in the recognition that community enterprises are seen as a sub-set of social enterprises in the Irish context.

*Social enterprises are **businesses that work primarily to improve the lives of people**. Their core objective is to achieve a social, societal, or environmental impact. (Gov.ie)*

Currently the principal policy document in Ireland relating to social enterprise is the National Social Enterprise Policy, 2019-2022 (Department Rural and Community Development DRCD) which describes social enterprises in the following way.

'A Social Enterprise is an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders. It pursues its objectives by trading on an ongoing basis through the provision of goods and/or services, and by reinvesting surpluses into achieving social objectives. It is governed in a fully accountable and transparent manner. P. 5.'

This definition is consistent with most definitions internationally and in Regulation 2021/1057 the European Parliament characterises the social enterprise as its goal achieving 'measurable, positive social impacts, which may include environmental impacts, as its primary social objective rather than the generation of profit for other purposes, and which provides services or goods that generate a social return or employs methods of production of goods or services that embody social objectives;... Regulation (EU), 2021/1057, p. 36. In addition this regulation identifies three key characteristics of social enterprises

1. a trading component in its resourcing,
2. a social purpose and
3. a particular approach to governance which sees social enterprises as being managed in 'an entrepreneurial, participatory, accountable and transparent manner, in particular by involving workers, customers and stakeholders on whom its business activities have an impact; (Regulation (EU), 2021/1057, p. 36)

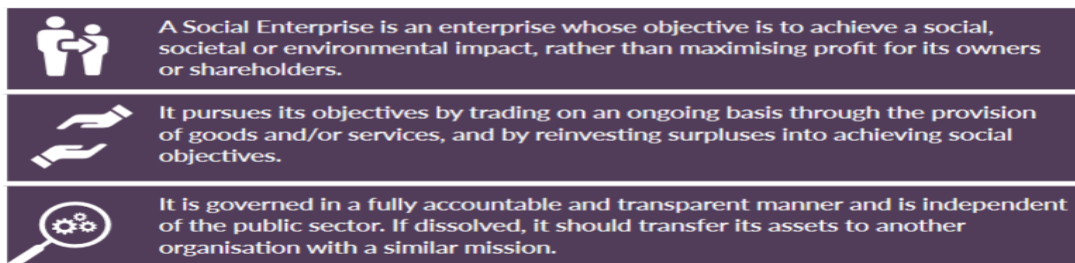


Figure 1: Source National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-22

In 2011 a report titled *Social Enterprise In Ireland Sectoral Opportunities And Policy Issues* published by Forfás in 2011, (Forfás was the national policy advisory board for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation in Ireland) it was mooted that

Social enterprise is a small but growing part of the enterprise base and ecosystem that has potential to bring further job gains and deliver economic potential. There is both a demonstrated need, and a market for, social enterprise in Ireland. With the appropriate enabling and promotional effort, there appears to be scope for increasing jobs in the sector. (P.2.)

The policy notes that, while the term social enterprise is new in Ireland, a social enterprise approach has been used in the delivery of many services for a long period of time. It states that – *there is a rich tradition in Ireland of community and voluntary bodies supporting communities by providing services where the private sector or State sector does not deliver such services directly.*

It notes the wide range of issues addressed by social enterprises as follows –

1. <i><u>Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs)</u>, which support disadvantaged people to prepare for, and participate in, the labour market</i>
2. <i><u>Enterprise Development</u> social enterprises which support the creation of other enterprises (e.g. through the provision of office space and facilities),</i>
3. <i><u>'Deficient Demand'</u> social enterprises which seek to meet a demand for goods and services within a community where there is insufficient demand for the operation of a regular market due to inherent economic and social disadvantage or low density of population,</i>
4. <i><u>Environmental social enterprises</u> which focus on environmental sustainability,</i>
5. <i><u>Social enterprises contracted with the public sector</u> to deliver public services in disadvantaged areas and communities</i>

In 2011 it made a series of recommendations for the development of Social Enterprise sector in the following areas.

1. Policy Development for the Social Enterprise Sector
2. Capacity Building in the Sector
3. Procurement
4. Funding and Finance
5. Developing Leaders and Harnessing Community Support
6. Governance

It is interesting to note that this recitation of the types of social enterprise includes those which provide service within a community and those which contract with the state to provide such services.

The policy has three objectives –

Objective 1 – Building Awareness of Social Enterprise

1. *Work closely with social enterprise stakeholders to develop an Awareness Strategy to raise the profile of social enterprise in Ireland.*
2. *Work with stakeholders to identify, profile and disseminate best practice examples of social enterprises and increase public understanding of their contribution to society and the economy.*
3. *Hold an annual Social Enterprise Conference for all stakeholders to provide networking opportunities, disseminate information, share best practice, and inform policy implementation and future policy development.*
4. *Support social enterprise initiation and start-ups through targeted programmes and initiatives.*
5. *Explore the scope for further inclusion of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship modules in the education and training system at all levels, and for promoting social enterprise as a viable model for entrepreneurs and social innovators.*
6. *Work with education and research bodies to further support the development of social enterprise.*

Objective 2: – Growing and Strengthening Social Enterprise

1. *Compile and make available information on the various business supports available to social enterprises, along with details of the providers of those supports.*
2. *Identify any gaps which may exist in business supports available to social enterprises and work to address those gaps.*
3. *Provide improved access to advice and supports to assist social enterprises and social entrepreneurs - including through standard Local Enterprise Office services where appropriate - to develop their business proposals.*
4. *Provide tailored training for social enterprises in areas such as business planning, mentoring, leadership, governance, capacity building, financial planning and digital innovation to help them to improve their business potential as well as leadership and governance skills.*
5. *Identify and catalogue the various funding schemes available to social enterprises at national and EU levels, and ensure that this information, and details of how to access the schemes, is widely available to social enterprises.*
6. *Identify any gaps which may exist in terms of financial supports to social enterprises, including at start-up phase, and work to address those gaps.*
7. *Explore the potential for new innovative funding schemes (repayable and nonrepayable) for social enterprises, including enabling access to the EU Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) guarantee scheme for loan funding.*
8. *Analyse and consider the potential for leveraging additional private sector investment to support the financing of social enterprises, including through philanthropy and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.*
9. *Explore the scope for improving alignment of funding schemes across Government Departments, where appropriate, to support the objectives of social enterprises, whilst avoiding any displacement of existing supports for Community and Voluntary organisations.*
10. *Support capacity-building for social enterprises in relation to procurement processes through workshops and training.*
11. *Work with stakeholders to identify how to improve opportunities for social enterprises in the business-to-business supply-chain and in public procurement.*
12. *Through the Social Considerations Advisory Group, help policy makers to better understand how procurement can be used to facilitate the advancement of social policy objectives within appropriate and structured public procurement guidelines. Conduct*

further research and analysis on the operation of social enterprises within existing legal structures and assess the potential value of a distinct legal form for social enterprises.

Objective 3: Achieving Better Policy Alignment

- 1. Develop a better understanding of the interaction between social enterprises and relevant policy areas across Government to achieve closer alignment with social enterprises and the potential contribution they can make to delivering on a range of policy objectives.*
- 2. Ensure, through the Department of Rural and Community Development, that Ireland engages closely on social enterprise policy developments at international level so that Ireland can influence international social enterprise policy and, where possible, that social enterprises can benefit from international networks and supports.*
- 3. Continue to contribute to the work of the British Irish Council in relation to social enterprise, through the Department of Rural and Community Development.*
- 4. Improve data collection relating to the extent of social enterprise in Ireland and the areas in which social enterprises operate.*
- 5. Develop mechanisms to measure the social and economic impact of social enterprises across the full spectrum of social enterprise.*
- 6. Establish a National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group, chaired by the Department of Rural and Community Development, with representation from other relevant Government Departments, public bodies and social enterprise stakeholders.*
- 7. Publish annual updates on the implementation of this policy through the Department of Rural and Community Development, following consideration by the National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group.*

In a review of the implementation of the policy in 2020, progress was reported on all fronts. The review referred to actions taken, funding allocated and numbers of social enterprises assisted. The ambition of the policy might be questioned but, overall, the place of social enterprise within Irish society is probably more central than it has ever been.

Another policy document in Ireland regarding social enterprises is ‘**Working To Change**’, the Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy 2021 – 2023 (<https://www.workingtochange.ie>) relates to the employment of ex-prisoners in social enterprises. The definition of social enterprise given in that document is –

‘A Social Enterprise is an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders. It pursues its objectives by trading on an ongoing basis through the provision of goods and/or services, and by reinvesting surpluses into achieving social objectives. It is governed in a fully accountable and transparent manner.’ (p. 4.)

The statement of the purpose of this policy is as follows –

‘Working to Change’ is all about meaningful employment, about removing barriers to support individual change, creating fair and accessible routes to work for people with criminal records, while ensuring the safety of the entire community. It is in recognition of the positive impact that securing employment for people with convictions

plays in supporting desistance and creating safer communities that the DOJ is setting out its direction on supporting and maximising employment options for people with criminal convictions. (P. 12)

Supporting Social Enterprise

While the social enterprise ecosystem is not fully developed in Ireland, there are a number of support and representative organisations which provide support to the social enterprise sector and advocate on its behalf. Amongst these are the following –

<p>Networking, Training, Support Network</p>	<p>The Irish Social Enterprise Network which aims to: Give voice to social enterprises for the work that they do and the issues and challenges that they face</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increase awareness raising through promotion and education of the social enterprise sector and model as a means of addressing social needs and inequalities including the rehabilitation of communities across Ireland · Learn from best international practice to develop effective models of social enterprise in Ireland · Be the authoritative source of essential knowledge in Ireland for managing, developing and supporting social enterprise growth · Collaborate and partner with enterprise and local agencies to provide a fuller range of supports and services to their social enterprise clients, including good governance, financial sustainability and delivering and monitoring social impact. <p>Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland which focuses on representation, awareness, support and relationships</p> <p>Social Entrepreneurs Ireland which seeks to find people with solutions to social problems and support them on every step of their journey through its programmes, direct funding and its community of alumni, funders, and sector leaders.</p> <p>Social Impact Ireland which works in many ways to support the many different stages of social enterprises, supporting both the enterprise and the individual, allowing them to achieve the impact they desire, wherever they may be on their journey.</p> <p>The Wheel https://www.wheel.ie/policy-campaigns/socialenterprise</p> <p>Advocacy and support</p>
<p>Funding</p> <p>Funding</p> <p>Funding</p>	<p>Rethink Ireland which provides cash grants and business support to the social innovations who can make a real difference. Its task is to fuel these innovations with the knowledge and the advice they'll need to succeed on a nationally impactful scale. It is there to open doors and give social enterprises access to the networks and connections who can help them spread their ideas throughout Ireland. They nurture communities of like-minded organisations who come together to share thoughts and approaches.</p>

	Clann Credo, the Social Finance Foundation and Social Finance Ireland which provide finance to social enterprises
	In addition, support is provided by the Local Development Companies which exist in every county and by Area Partnerships which operate in many cities.
	Social Innovation Fund Ireland provide support to social entrepreneurs and innovators through funding and other measures such as advice, mentoring, training and networking opportunities.
	Social Enterprise Step Up Fund 2023-24 is a €700,000 two-year Fund created by Rethink Ireland in partnership with Tomar Trust and the Department of Rural and Community Development via the Dormant Accounts Fund.

In 2011 *Social Enterprise In Ireland Sectoral Opportunities And Policy Issues* published by Forfás it made a series of recommendations for the development of Social Enterprise sector in the following areas.

1. Policy Development for the Social Enterprise Sector
2. Capacity Building in the Sector
3. Procurement
4. Funding and Finance
5. Developing Leaders and Harnessing Community Support
6. Governance

[OECD Preliminary Report.](#)

Recently, the OECD has carried out an in-depth review of OECD: SME and Entrepreneurship Outlook 2021. The preliminary findings of this study were presented to a conference in 2022.

This presentation listed strengths and weaknesses under a number of different headings as follows.

[Institutional and legal frameworks for social enterprises](#)

<i>Strengths</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An institutional framework built to strongly promote social enterprises across sectors and levels of government • Strong alignment with other national policies • A broad spectrum of legal forms that social enterprises can adopt • Availability of fiscal benefits for social enterprise, although not exclusively
<i>Weaknesses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persisting confusion around the legal identity of social enterprises and related fiscal benefits • Limited clarity about social enterprises and their governance systems • Institutional ambiguity around policy support for social enterprises (To this can be added confusion and lack of clarity regarding not-for-profit social enterprises and charities and their relative roles and suitability for support).

[Access to finance and funding](#)

<i>Strengths</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A set of policy measures and initiatives to strengthen social enterprises • Public or public-backed funding available for social enterprises e.g. CSP, DAF, SICAP, SIFI • Social lenders are active in Ireland e.g. Clann Credo, Community Finance Ireland, Microfinance Ireland, Social Finance Foundation
<i>Weaknesses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex identity and lack of tailored funding for social enterprises • Available funding for social enterprises is rarely investment capital • Fragmented public funding for costs containment and short-term liquidity issues • Mainstream banking system is absent for or invisible to social enterprises

Access to markets

<i>Strengths</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of access to markets issue in the National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022 • Transposition of the EU Directive on Public Procurement into Irish Law in 2016 • Public procurement is advancing towards greater sustainability • Philanthropy policy to improve access to market
<i>Weaknesses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited use of socially responsible public procurement • Inability to define and assess social value • Grant-based financing process is still prevailing • Lack of skills, knowledge, and training in public procurement

Social impact measurement and data provision

<i>Strengths</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy momentum to increase uptake of social impact measurement for social enterprises • Increasing efforts by social economy actors to advance social impact measurement
<i>Weaknesses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited data provision on social enterprises • Lack of in-house capacity and resources for social impact measurement • Limited public incentives for social enterprises to incorporate social impact measurement

Skills and business development

<i>Strengths</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active national and local agencies and support network organisations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of specialised and sectorial support organisations and networks as well as other ecosystem enablers
<i>Weaknesses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The starvation-cycle and the need of thoughtful and visionary leaders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragmented capacity building and human capital enhancement programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortages in training offers and most needed skills in the social enterprise field
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers to financial sustainability of social enterprises

The same report made a number of recommendations as follows:

Differentiating contracts and reserve quotas for social enterprises

- Improving social enterprises' know-how on tendering processes
- Co-creating a framework for measuring and reporting on social impact
- Supporting the development of a national database on social enterprises
- Acknowledging and fully recognising social enterprises' specific needs for business development
- Leveraging social enterprises' potential and strengths through targeted support mechanisms

This OECD report obviously draws on a wide range of data sources and is as good a summary of the situation regarding social enterprise – and therefore community enterprise – in Ireland.

Research Design

The objective of RO1 for this project is

“National and summary reports on the state of the art on innovative models of community enterprise”, the project has set itself the following objective: To analyse innovative processes and patterns pertaining to models of community enterprise in the selected partner countries and at a European level. To identify and reflect on best practice examples of successful community enterprise and determine their critical success factors. (RO1),

The literature review informed the design of the research methodology and the research design strategy was agreed among the partners at the meeting in Thurles in April 2022.

It was determined that a Case study format was the most appropriate approach as it is ‘A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (Woodside 2017) Yin (2003), in his influential book *Case study research: Design and methods*, suggested that case study research is an appropriate strategy for "how" and "why" questions.

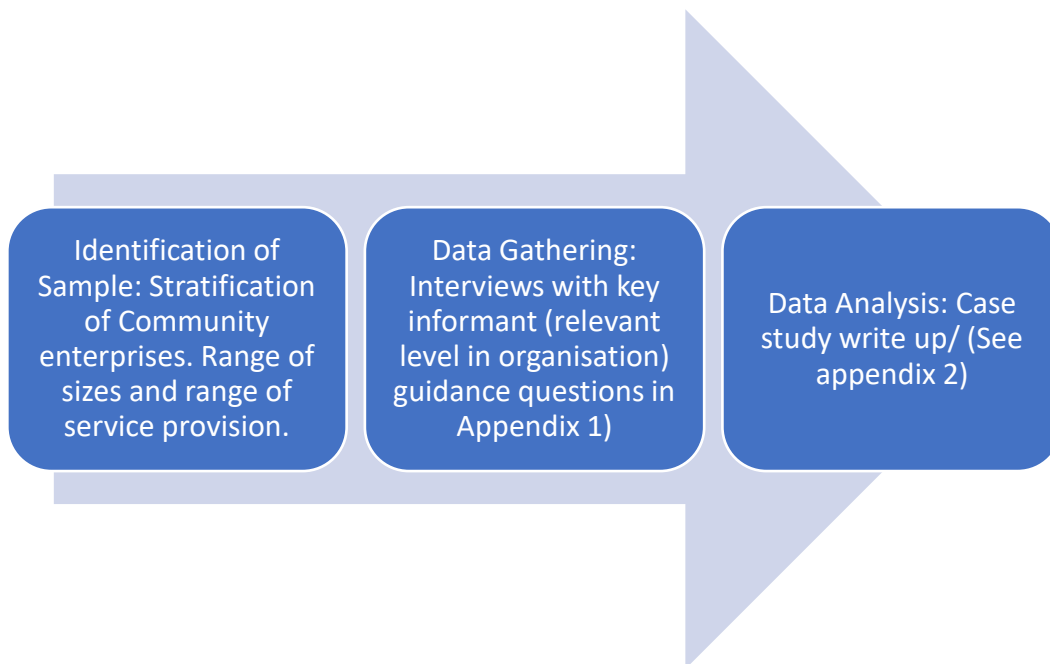


Figure 2: Research Design

Sampling Strategy:

To support the research it was agreed that a stratified sampling approach would be taken to identify a range of community enterprises using: scale, provision of services and duration in existences. The key informant identified to participate in the interviews in each organisation would be taken from the following stakeholder grouping in each organisation will include (a) the Chief Executive /Principal/ Managing Director (paper signer), (b) the financial manager, (c) a

separate employee, (d) the chair of the governors/other member of the board, (e) a stakeholder/beneficiary.

Data Collection:

It was agreed that a semi-structured interview approach would be adopted and that these would be conducted face to face with each person and the areas of focus for the interviews would be:

- (i) **Information about the organisation**
- (ii) **The reasons for starting the community enterprise**
- (iii) **The way in which the community owned enterprise operates**
- (iv) **The way in which the organisation manages its finances**
- (v) **The leadership & management approaches in the organisation & its future directions**
- (vi) **And finally ..any other issues that need to be considered**

(See appendix 1 for a full list of support questions)

Research Ethics:

All participants in the process were issued with and invitation to participate, a letter of consent and the research questions in advance. Ethical approval was obtained from LIT (TUS) Research Ethics Committee ensuring best practice in the research process.

Community Enterprise in Practice

In Ireland the concept of community enterprise is interlaced with the concept of Social Enterprise. The tradition of co-operatives in Ireland is a long standing one and the concept of communities working together traces back to the traditions of Horace Plunkett. However because of the changing economic context in Ireland and current full employment as well as the changing nature of 'community' this has resulted in a changed context.

The discussion on policy above and below does however point to a relatively strong network of policy and funding support Community Enterprise Association Ireland – CEAI represents the Community Enterprise centers in Ireland. These Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development and Charities

Factors which promote Community Owned Enterprise

We provide, principally through our agencies, a range of tailored supports for enterprise of all sizes in Ireland. Supports include **access to finance, management development, mentoring supports, business development programmes, market supports and trade promotion.**

Barriers

Policy Considerations

The key considerations from a policy perspective are as follows –

Social enterprise is much more firmly embedded in overall social and economic policy frameworks in Ireland than was the case heretofore

Social enterprise has been an aspect of Irish life for many years though not identified as such

A wide range of roles for social enterprise is recognised including providing public services on behalf of the state

Lack of clarity about the nature and governance of social enterprises and their relationship to charities still exists

There is no corporate form which has been designed specifically for social enterprises though this matter is under review at present

The relationship between social entrepreneurs and social enterprises is not clear and the mechanisms through which social entrepreneurs can remain engaged in the enterprises they establish is confused

The specific training for those who manage and direct social enterprises is patchy and poorly established

The sustainability of social enterprises is still uncertain and the capacity of many such enterprises to tender for public sector contracts is compromised by procurement rules which are often imposed such as turnover limits, levels of insurance, demonstrated experience

Community enterprise is nowhere identified as a specific form of social enterprise with its own characteristics and needs

Education and Training Requirements

It is helpful to consider the education and training requirements through the different phases of development of the Community Enterprise.

Set up Phase:

At this stage the participants are usually clear about what the service/product that they want to provide is but are less clear on the structures that are most suitable for the organisation as well as the general legal requirements for setting up a Community Enterprise.

At this stage clarification about the delivery of the service/product is also required, which can include costing, marketing etc.

Training requirements are:

Community Enterprise: The characteristics and principles of a community enterprise.

Legal structures for organisations, including governance requirements.

Business planning and operations: turning the idea to reality, the who, what, where, when and how of the business.

Vision, Mission and Goals: Establishing the vision mission and goals

Human Resource Planning: Working with volunteers and/ or staff.

Delivery: At this stage of the enterprise training could be delivered in a blended format so that participants could benefit from each others experiences as well as participating on-line for the more technical elements of the programme so that they might save on travel. Visits to similar enterprises and engagement with other social enterprises would be invaluable at this stage.

Early Operation:

This phase is when the reality of running the operation becomes clearer. There is a requirement for practical solutions: Location, website, delivery, customer care etc. and support as the particular challenges emerge for the enterprise.

Training requirements are:

Technology for business: website, databases, computer services etc.

Strategic planning: Moving from start up to sustainability

Financial management and governance systems 2: At phase 1 the participants will have been introduced to the concepts but additional issues arise as the enterprise is created.

Delivery: This phase is best supported through a mentoring/coaching method. There may be inputs on a phased basis but the support required is the provision of timely guidance and advice for the participants

Mature Phase:

At this stage of the process, the enterprise has been established and is managing its various processes and customers. The challenges faced at this stage relate to ensuring the long term viability of the enterprise and ensuring that the inheritance is ensured.

Training requirements:

Revisit the Strategic plan and direction: The strategic plan will only remain valid for 3-4 years and when the enterprise reaches this stage then a revisit and recalibration is required. The process will also be different because there are likely to be more stakeholders involved in the process.

Legal and Governance: Ensuring the legal and governance of the organisation is fit for the long term purpose of the organisation.

Inheritance planning: the challenge of replacing the 'founders' of the organisation and ensuring that there is no loss of organisational knowledge in this process.

The delivery of this phase of training is outside the remit of this project but is an essential element in ensuring the long term viability of the organisation. Remaining linked to the Local

Conclusion and Recommendations (1-2 pages)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Data Collection

1. ComEnt Semi-structured Interview Schedule

A. Notes:

It is intended that an informed semi-structured conversation takes place between a project partner and a key player in a community enterprise in the context of their home location.

Please see the example of a 'Letter of Introduction' about the project and an example of a 'form of consent'. Alter/amend to insert your appropriate details and obtain a signed form of consent from each interviewee.

The key players in each organisation will include (a) the Chief Executive /Principal/ Managing Director (paper signer), (b) the financial manager, (c) a separate employee, (d) the chair of the governors/other member of the board, (e) a stakeholder/beneficiary.

Please ensure to send the interview schedule in advance of the meeting, thereby enabling the correct person to be interviewed from the community enterprise.

Do not interview a minor/child, or a vulnerable person so as to avoid matters of research ethics

It is not intended that you use the following comprehensive list of questions/prompts as a spoken questionnaire that is delivered by the project partner to the interviewee and there is no need to cover each and every question indicated on the schedule below. Treat the schedule as your guide to conducting the conversation.

Main Topics:

The main topics to be addressed in each conversation are

- (vii) Information about the organisation**
- (viii) The reasons for starting the community enterprise**
- (ix) The way in which the community owned enterprise operates**
- (x) The way in which the organisation manages its finances**
- (xi) The leadership& management approaches in the organisation & its future directions**
- (xii) And finally ..any other issues that need to be considered**

The following schedule of suggested questions/prompts are for each partner to use in the context of each organisation they involve in the project and in the context of each person /role holder that is being interviewed.

Typically the interview should be recorded and last for around 45 minutes

About the organisation

Suggested questions/conversation prompts are:

A: Organisation Details

- Name of the Organisation
- Size of Organisation (Number of employed staff, number of volunteers and number of social clients)
- Sector of operation (e.g. retail; hospitality)
- Where do you operate? (location)
- Does your organisation have a mission or vision statement? (attach a copy if one exists)
- What are the aims and purpose of the Organisation?
- Who are the target groups of the organisation? (clients / social clients)
- What are the principle goods / services provided by the Community Enterprise?
- What are the main markets for the goods and/or services offered by the organisation?
- Do you consider selling your goods and/or services beyond your immediate location, say to the entire region, or the country or internationally?
- Has the organisation remained consistent or has it moved away from its original purpose? Why?

B: Reasons for starting the Community Enterprise

- **Suggested questions/conversation prompts are**
- When did you start the Community Enterprise?
- Why did you start the Community Enterprise?
- Do you consider that your Organisation is an 'enterprising' organisation? (could you provide some examples of enterprise activity?)
- In what ways has the local community/surrounding communities have benefitted from the creation of the enterprise? If so, how would you define these benefits; socio-economic, self-sustainability etc.
- What level of involvement had the local community in the development of the enterprise?
- Do you believe that this enterprise has helped communities to overcome specific challenges? Could you give some examples please?
- Were the local community/surrounding communities welcoming of the enterprise?
- Have you ever come across community members that were opposed to the enterprise?
- How do you measure the impact of your enterprise locally and regionally? (Can you provide examples of the features/factors that you use?)
- How do you see the enterprise developing into the future?

- Before, during or after your enterprise came into being, was there any research conducted regarding the development or further development of the enterprise? If so what/who?

C: How does the social enterprise operate

Suggested questions/conversation prompts are

Decision Making

- Can you describe the decision-making process within your organisation?
- Do you sometimes consider that it can be difficult to balance the competing social / community aims of the Enterprise and the commercial aims of the Enterprise? (could you give me a for instance to illustrate your point)

Organisational Structure

- What is the Organisational structure (please attach a diagram if one exists)
- Do you have an operational plan? Who contributes to this? Who writes the plan? Who uses the plan? How often is it reviewed?
- Does the organisation want to expand grow to deliver new services and goods or to provide services to an expanded geographic area ...do expansion strategies such as this provide tension between the Board and the organisations leadership

The role of Stakeholders

- Stakeholders are all those groups or individuals who have an interest or association with the community enterprise. It can include: target groups; local government; community groups; suppliers; etc.
- Who are the stakeholder groups involved in the Community Enterprise (you may wish to include a stakeholder map, for example social and economic stakeholders (social stakeholders are classed as those groups that can affect or be affected by the achievement of the organizations social objectives and economic stakeholders are those that have an impact on the aims of the business performance)
- How do you communicate with the different stakeholder groups? (could you give me some examples)
- Do you feel that tensions exist between different groups of stakeholders (prompts: in terms of resource allocation, enterprise activity, diversification, extending the geographical boundaries of the Community Enterprise).

Capacity Building

- In terms of capacity building we mean:-
*“The process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to: **perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives; and***

understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner”

- Sources: UNDP (1997); UNDP (1998); UNESCO (2005).
- What steps have you taken to build capacity into the organisation, in terms of sustainability? (e.g. employee training, volunteer support, stakeholder involvement, participative governance procedures, democratic leadership, being enterprising, organisational structure)
- What training requirements (knowledge; skills; and competencies) does your organisation require into the future in order to sustain the enterprise?
- In what ways do you involve the community in capacity building? (financing of community infrastructure; community training)
- Do you have any succession planning initiatives in place?

D: Financial Management

Suggested questions/conversation prompts are

How does the Organisation Manage its Finances: Financial Management

- How was the initial start-up financed? (For example grant funding, donations, loans, crowd funding or self-financed)
- How did the organisation manage to become financially sustainable, and, where appropriate, grow the Enterprise?
- How is the Enterprise looking to generate its income and support and maintain future operations and growth?
- Who looks after the day-to-day financial management of the Enterprise?
- How is it managed?

In terms of the Enterprise today:-

- Approximately what percentage of funding is derived from enterprise activity?
- Approximately what percentage of funding is derived from grant aid donations/philanthropy?

Do you think that these average percentages will change in the future? Why?

Any other sources of funding?

Profit and Assets

In terms of surpluses/profits and assets approximately what percentage have been reinvested in the Community Enterprise? (average annual figure, average figure for the duration of the enterprise any future plans?).

What is the process of distributing or allocating any surpluses/profits and assets of the organisation?

E: Legal Framework and Organisational Structure

What is the legal form/title of the Organisation? e.g. community enterprise, social firms; social enterprise; Company Limited by Guarantee; Designated Activities Company; Co-operative

Has this legal form changed as the Organisation has developed?

Does this legal structure enable community participation?

F: Governance

Do you have a Board of Governors in place? (if not please question how governance work).

How many members are on are on the board of Governors?

How were the Governors selected?

What stakeholder groups are represented on the board?

How often do the board of Governors meet?

Do you consider the governance process of the Organisation to be participative? (any examples)

G: Leadership and Management & Future Development

Definitions

(a) "Management is a set of processes that keep an organisation functioning. They make it work today – they make it achieve its set targets. The processes are about planning, budgeting, resourcing, clarifying jobs, measuring performance, and problem-solving when results did not go to plan."

(b) Leadership is very different. "It is about aligning people to the vision, that means buy-in and influencing people through effective communication, motivation and inspiration." (Kotter)

Suggested questions/conversation prompts are

Can you give some examples of how you provide leadership to the organisation?

How would you describe your style of organisational leadership?

H: And finally

How do you measure the impact of your organisation within the local community and / or regionally? (can you provide examples of the features/factors that you use ?

Are there any other factors that you think are important to a community enterprise remaining sustainable and looking to develop in the future that have not been considered so far in our conversation ?

What lessons have been learned.

2. Consent Forms and Information Sheets

PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

This research forms part of an EU - ERASMUS+ funded study led by **Insert Organisation** in **Insert County**. **Insert Name** is the member of staff of **Insert Organisation** who is conducting the work. You are being invited to take part in this study. Before you agree to do so, it is important that you understand the purpose and nature of the research and what if you agree, your participation will involve. Please read the following information carefully, and do ask if anything is not clear, or if you want more information. Contact details are given at the end of this information sheet.

Insert Organisation Name has received funding through the ERASMUS+ programme (via Higher Education Authority in Ireland) to undertake a series of case studies on community owned enterprises / community focused enterprises. The lead partner is Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest in Ireland.

The research methodology for this phase of the project uses a semi-structured interview with relevant actors in the community enterprise sector. The interviews will be recorded to produce a hard copy record. The recordings and hard copy records will remain strictly confidential and will not be shared with any other party. Your role and the data about the organisation will be identifiable in the final project report and other dissemination publications related to the project. All records will be securely destroyed after the research is completed and audited by the relevant funding body.

Any personal data gathered as part of this research will be treated in accordance with TUS' Data Protection Policy available at www.lit.ie/InformationCompliance/Dataprotection. Details of how to exercise your rights under Data Protection Law are also available here. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do agree to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you agree to take part, you may still withdraw within 14 days of the semi-structured interview, without giving a reason, by contacting **Insert Email** or shane.osullivan@tus.ie. If that happens, any information or data you have given will not be used in the study and will be securely destroyed.

Thank you for reading this information sheet. If you agree to take part, the researchers indicated above will ask you to sign a consent form and then make arrangements to conduct the interview. You will be given a copy of the consent form to keep.

If anything is not clear, or if you want more information, please contact shane.osullivan@tus.ie

If you wish to complain about any aspect of how you have been approached or treated in respect of this project, please contact: Mr Padraic O'Reilly, Development Unit, LIT Tipperary, Nenagh Road, Thurles, Co. Tipperary (Padraic.oreilly@tus.ie).

Regards

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Name

.....

Please tick the box(es) to confirm each statement

I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet dated _____ for the above study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I consent to the interview being recorded

I understand that the data collected from me during the study may be used by the researcher for this project

I consent to any quotations arising from the interview being used in the final project report and any other publications arising from the work.

I consent for photographs / images to be used for the final project report and any other publications arising from the work. I will have final approval prior to publication.

I agree to take part in the above study



Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Appendix 2: Case Studies

Case Study 1: Ballymacarbry Hostel & Community Centre

Section A: Organisational Details

Name: **Ballymacarbry Hostel & Community Centre**

Location: Curtiswood, Ballymacarbry, Co. Waterford: E91 T6X8

Aims and purpose of Organisation:

Number of Staff: 3 Fulltime. 6 Part-time.

Number of Volunteers (if applicable) 15

Number of Clients (if applicable / available):

Economic Sector / Activity: Providing a Setting for Community Activity and Accommodation

Principle goods / services provided by the Community Enterprise - Montessori School, Sports Hall/AstroTurf Courts, Meeting Rooms, Theatre, Dining/Catering Facilities, Yoga Classes and Accommodation.

Website: if available <https://www.ballymacarbry.com/>

Facebook: if available

Twitter: if available <https://twitter.com/ballymacarbry>

Instagram: if available

1. Reasons for Establishing the Community Enterprise

In 2004 there was an old Hall in Ballymacarbry which was used by the Community for carrying out various activities. It was in a state of bad repair and the cost of renovating it showed that it would be very expensive. A group from the Community debated whether it would be cheaper to build a new one. They send out a questionnaire to the Community to try and get an idea of what the Community wanted, either a revamp of the existing hall or a complete new building. Based on the result of this research a five-person committee was set up to bring the wishes of the Community to fruition. Everything that was looked for from the questionnaire has been delivered, with the exception of a swimming pool, in the past eighteen years

Community Enterprise Operations

1. Decision making & Operational Structures:

The five-member steering committee meet every Monday night since 2004 with the exception of Bank Holidays. These members decide on the small day to day issues that arise, like if a boiler needs replacing or a room needs painting. In all other matters, for example, if they were going to introduce the Pre-School are decided at public meetings attended by the Community. These Public meetings have played a huge part in the development of the Centre. The Committee believes that if it is really a community centre then the Community have to be at the centre of every big decision.

The full-time member of staff prepares the lodgements, sends out the invoices, collects up the money and any other general office administration. If an issue arises in this area the staff member brings it to the attention of the Steering Committee at their Monday Night meeting.

1. Role of Stakeholders:

The main stakeholder from its origin was Waterford Leader Partnership because they put in the terms and conditions around the funding and on what it could be spent on.

The other main stakeholders are Waterford County Council and the [Sports Capital Programme](#). The Bank who provided them with their loan would have also been one but no longer as the Centre is now debt free. They have had very good relationships with the above and The Committee put this down to the fact that they had carried out a lot of research before making any decisions plus the fact that they had enormous support from the Community. They were able to get in money, were able to honour the match funding and were able to honour their bank repayments.

1. Financial

Management

Maraid who is the staff member who works in the office, under the stewardship of the committee, takes a record of income, the bookings, the incoming money and provides these records to the Committee on a Monday night. Danny who is a member of the Committee has been the treasurer since the very beginning. He gathers the day-to-day Income and expenditures and forwards them on to their Accountant. The returns of the accountant are then provided to the Community and after analysis and agreement they are filed with Revenue. The overall expenditure is €1.7 million and the Community rose half of this amount. The remainder was match funded by the different agencies mentioned above. It has no debt now and wholly owned by the Community.

1. Legal

Framework

The Community Centre and Accommodation is a Company limited by guarantee. They choose this framework at the beginning due to the size of their project and its inherent risks. This protects the Community members from personal responsibility if the project had failed

Final Thoughts

1. Involve the community all the time. Keep the community and people involved all the way from start to where we are now.
2. Have a small committee. Now maybe you can have sub committees afterwards but a small committee, a small likeminded driving committee is key.
3. Be really careful with the scarce funds that you have and try to make the optimum use out of them.
4. Confidentiality is very important. Whoever in the Community donated money to the Treasurer, then only they and the treasurer knew about it.
5. Don't do solo runs, involve the Committee and the Community with deciding on what course of action was best.
6. When carrying out work on the Centre, try and employ some local contractor, it builds goodwill.

Case Study 2: Granard Motte Project

Organisational Details

Name: **Granard Motte Community Enterprises Ltd**

Location: Dublin St. Granard Co. Longford.

Aims and purpose of Organisation: To create a viable Tourism Product based around the theme of the Norman Motte which overlooks the town.

Number of Staff: 2 fulltime: 1 CE worker part time 1 TUS worker part time.

Number of Volunteers (if applicable)

Number of Clients (if applicable / available):

Economic Sector / Activity: Tourism

Principle goods / services provided by the Community Enterprise: Tourist Attraction and Restaurant

Website: if available <http://granardmotte.ie/>

Facebook: if available <https://www.facebook.com/GMCEclg/>

Twitter: if available <https://twitter.com/knightsconquest?lang=en>

Instagram: if available <https://www.instagram.com/knightsconquests/?hl=en>

- **Reasons for Establishing the Community Enterprise**

A Public Realm Report commissioned by Longford County Council in 2011 identified Granard as a town facing significant and increasing challenges, falling population, stagnant economic development, the closure of some businesses and its banks, lack of investment, and general disadvantage. The economic decline following the "Economic Bust" in 2008 exacerbated this decline and caused great concern for many Granard citizens.

A group of concerned citizens came together and decided to "do something". Public meetings were held, open discussion and consultation occurred over a period of months. and a new group emerged... Granard Motte Community Enterprise CLG . A company with charitable status was formed with 14 committed Directors.

The Report recommended that Granard needed to reinvent itself. So, the group in consultation with Longford County Council and Failte Ireland decided to venture into the Tourism industry, with an emphasis on training and education. The focus of this social enterprise is to develop a sustainable business based on the Norman Motte which overlooks the town.

Community Enterprise Operations

- **Decision making:**

As this is a Social Enterprise consultation with the Community is critical. Public meetings are held regularly and the Annual General meeting is open to all members of the Public. The Audited accounts are published Annually.

The Board of Directors meet on a fortnightly basis and all issues discussed, proposed and passed by the Board if a majority is achieved. The Board has hired a Manager for its Business and has delegated the day-to-day tasks to her. She presents a Report to the Board monthly. The Board have also formed sub committees to explore particular areas e.g., finance, Park Development, Restaurant.....these subcommittees have responsibility to keep Directors informed at each BOD meeting.

To summarize, this is a democratic organization, its aims are clearly stated, its structures are contained in its Memorandum of Association, its directors are Community people, it consults with all stakeholders and is strong in its Governance.

- **Operational Structures:**

The structures are as follows

1 The Board of Directors. A properly constructed active board operating under the Articles of Management are in overall charge. They operate in consultation with all stakeholders, the Community, Longford County Council and Failte Ireland.

The day to day running of the business is delegated to the Manager who is employed under funding from Pobal CSP scheme. She is aided by another full-time employee, also funded by Pobal.

Particular functions are carried out by sub committees that are set up from time to time.

- **Role of Stakeholders:**

The Community has a major role to play in this venture. They committed themselves to supporting this venture financially and have bought €100 tickets each year for the last 10 years. This money has been used to buy the 15-acre property and 2 onsite buildings. They are consulted via public meetings, online reports and in the Longford Leader newspaper.

Longford County Council have become our partners in this venture. Their advice and practical know-how are invaluable. They have also accessed further funding for this venture and are working with us to complete the project.

Failte Ireland are the experts in the field of tourism and they have offered training workshops, advice, appointed tourism experts, invitations to tourism events and support to our staff and Board.

Pobal are a huge support to the day to day running of our business as they pay staff wages. They, in the form of Bernard Bolger, are a huge source of advice and support to the Board in its corporate and social functions.

- **Financial Management**

The Board has two dedicated Directors appointed to manage and oversee the finances. The Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer. They are part of the financial subcommittee. This subcommittee has co-opted an Accountant to work with them and the Manager is on the subcommittee too.

The Manager looks after the day-to-day finances, money from ticket sales, which are both over the counter and online, and each week the co-opted accountant oversees the running costs.

The Treasurer manages the €100 draw each year and keeps records.

Each month a Financial Report is given to the Board.

The accounts are audited annually and submitted to the Charities Regulator and CSP in a timely fashion.

Pobal also requires 2 Financial reports annually.

- **Legal Framework and Organisational Structure**

The Board operates under the legal framework of the Articles of Management. It has also entered into arrangements with Longford County Council (LCC) and Community Services Programme (CSP) as required for funding purposes.

- **Leadership Structures**

The commitment of the Board of Directors is exceptional. Each brings a talent that over the years, has led different aspects of the project. Leadership is distributed across the Board. However, the people management skills of our Chairman, Fr Simon Cadam has brought this group from strength to strength. He is a hugely respected figure in the community and the Board responds to this. He has led the group with encouragement and praise. He is hugely motivational and keeps the vision alive for us all.

The Secretary communicates with the Board, its partners and liaises with the Manager.

- **Final Thoughts**

The Directors would all agree that this has involved more of their time and energy than they originally anticipated.

1. Working with partners is much slower than anticipated.
2. BOD (Board of Directors) meetings take longer than anticipated.
3. New skills are acquired daily.
4. It takes a whole town to support a project of this magnitude.
5. There are many highs along the way (and some lows).
6. Setting up a new business is challenging.
7. Becoming a Community Leader is rewarding.
8. Big Community Events are essential to mobilise the Community.

Advice: Plan your project meticulously, involve stakeholders, and then go for it. Do not change!

Case Study 3: Sunflower Recycling

Section A: Organisational Details

Name: Sunflower Recycling

Location: Shamrock Terrace, North Strand, Dublin 1. DO1 DX67

Aims and purpose of Organisation: To collect and recycle waste material which is affordable, cost-effective and convenient for its customers

Number of Staff: 57

Number of Volunteers (if applicable)

Number of Clients (if applicable / available):

Economic Sector / Activity: Waste Recycling and Collection Service

Principle goods / services provided by the Community Enterprise: Provision of waste collection and recycling

Website: if available <http://www.sunflowerrecycling.ie/home>

Facebook: if available <https://www.facebook.com/sunflowerrecyclingireland>

Twitter: if available <https://twitter.com/sunflow4u?lang=en>

Instagram: if available

- **Reasons for Establishing the Community Enterprise**

Bernie Walsh, founding member of Sunflower Recycling, along with another person from their community began to look at setting up a Community Recycling service. They both had taken part in a community leadership course in Maynooth College. As part of their programme they were asked to write up something that would work within their community. They looked at their community which is located in the Northeast inner city of Dublin and found that there were many projects dealing with Women, Youths, Educational disadvantage but mostly around children and youth. They wanted to do something that looked at the high unemployment levels also. Bernie had worked in Holland and in Denmark and realised that she had done recycling from her home when she lived there. It was this experience that motivated the two founders to create a Recycling Service. They felt that such a Service would be very valuable both for their community, for the environment and also create much needed employment in a very disadvantaged neighbourhood. Their main goal is to work with long term unemployed people in the North Inner City of Dublin.

Community Enterprise Operations

- **Decision Making**

Sunflower Recycling has a Board of Management. They hold a twice yearly, half day session around the Business and their Business development. It is at these meetings that the Board would determine issues like introducing new programmes and new strategies for the following six months.

When new developments are suggested by staff or Bernie, the Board will discuss these at the meeting. They then determine if more research needs to be carried out to look at the merits of the suggestion. When this is completed, they reach a consensus and decide to run with it or not.

Once a decision is made to make changes, Bernie brings this to the team and afterwards the process of implementation occurs.



- **Operational Structures**

Other than the two planning sessions mentioned above, the Board meets once a month to concentrate on the day to day running of the business.

There are also two other meetings held monthly.

Management meets on a monthly basis and then both Management and the Staff also meet.

Bernie finds that a lot of relevant information about the running of the Business is gathered at these meetings.

She states:

“You've drivers and helpers going out, they're dealing with customers and they know the problem with customers because if a customer is having a problem, the driver is able come back and say, do you know we collect your man on a Tuesday and it's not really making much sense, because he's not really full till Wednesday?”

The Board creates their operational plan at their meeting but the relevant information is provided to them from the Staff.

The plan then is fed to the Manager who informs the Staff at their meeting. The Staff will then have the opportunity to give their thoughts on the plan. As Bernie puts it:

“And the staff will have input and they might say, well that's not going to work because of A, B, C and D. Or they could do it for a week or two and then come back and say you know what, this is ridiculous, it's not happening, then that immediately has to be fed back and changed because at the end of the day, they're the ones out doing that work, they are our eyes and ears on the ground.”

She compares the operation of the Business to how a Family Business is run. Communication flow, both from the Board to the Staff and vice versa, is rated highly. The development of the Business is based on consensus with everyone's input respected. It is very democratic in how they go about their decision-making process.



- **Role of Stakeholders**

Their main statutory stakeholders are the Department of Social Protection (DSP), Dublin City Council (DCC), Dublin North East Inner City ([NEIC](#)) and the [Community Services Programme](#) from Pubal. These are the organisations that provide funding and

also the required licences for carrying out their business. They receive support from the DSP in the running of the Community Employment Schemes which employs 42 members of staff. NEIC supports them with specific funding and they obtain their licences from DCC. DCC also provides them with the site where they operate from and at a reduced rate than Market prices.

The other stakeholders they work closely with are the businesses they collect waste from.

Sunflower creates their future planning strategy from the relationships they have built with their various stakeholders - the amount of funding they have agreed on, trends in their customer's trading patterns and other opportunities which may present themselves as a result of the long history in providing their service. An example of these relationships is The Green Ribbon Project. It commenced following a recommendation set out in the Mulvey Report, "[Creating a Brighter Future](#)". The aim is to develop initiatives with resident associations and community organisations to take an active role in owning and maintaining improved areas in cooperation with Dublin City Council.

They recently won a tender from [Repak](#) to provide plastic bottle collection amenities. They work in a very competitive space with large Multinational players but still managed to win this tender as a result of their long working relationship with DCC and because they are a Community Enterprise providing a service within their community and usually these events happen as a result of an open conversation with their main stakeholders.

- **Financial Management**

The business of waste disposal is firstly a very expensive type of business to run. Primarily as a result of Sunflower starting a Community Enterprise, they were fortunate to get their start-up money from the EU in the form of Integra and also Youth-Start funding. This allowed them to build up their capacity without having to worry about the profit because they actually had EU money to support the existing money. They would have been one of the first organisations to use FAS money to match-fund with EU money. As the years progressed their business grew which necessitated them to keep very strict financial management practices. Their Inflow of funding and operating costs are big so they have one dedicated member of staff who looks after the day to day running of the business. They bring these reports to the Board for approval which are then

forwarded to their Auditors for filing. Funding accounts for roughly 60% of their business with the remainder coming from their operations.

- **Legal Framework and Organisational Structure**

They are a Limited Company with a co-operative structure. Their Board changes every twelve months and acts in a cooperative way. At the time that this company was set up, they would have found it very hard to get Government money as a cooperative and to deal with the Banks so they became a Limited Company with the ethos of a Co-Operative.



- **Final Thoughts**

“Well, I do think a lot of it is about relationships you build up with statutory bodies. And I personally, and maybe I'm just getting that little bit too old, or maybe I've become a bit cynical. I think those relationships aren't what they used to be. I think there's been a sea change within a government. After partnerships went, there's been a change, community development isn't the sexy thing they used to think it was and I find those relationships harder to maintain. So, for me, it's almost like personal politics, I make personal relationships.



And then you rely on those people to tell you when things are coming, when things are happening because it has become quite difficult. There's a mistrust that has happened in the last few years. I'm not just talking about us. I'm talking about the community sector

as a whole. And you see it all the time when you go to meetings with the statutory bodies, there's this thing of talking down to people, like who are you and what would you know?

And I think, that to me, that would be the first thing, that you build your relationships and you build the capacity, the capacity of your team to maintain relationships. The people are your success. It's not about money in the bank. If it was about money in the bank I would have gone off and started a business on my own and made shillings and be in the Bahamas on my holidays. But it's not! It's about the community.”

Case Study 4: Siul Eile (Walking Together)

ComEnt Case Study Siul Eile.

Section A: Organisational Details

Name: Siul Eile

Location: Clogheen, Co. Tipperary, Ireland

Number of Staff: 1

Number of Volunteers: The organisation depends on a team of volunteers who act as guides and supports for each of the walks.

Number of Clients: Economic Sector / Activity: Activity Based organisation

Principle goods / services provided by the Community Enterprise: Community based Activity groups.

Website: [Siul Eile – Walking with Friends](#)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1512003175477364>

Twitter: Siul Eile@EileSuil

Instagram: siuleile123

Aims and purpose of Organisation:

The organisation is an activity based initiative located in Clogheen, Co. Tipperary. It was founded by Liam Fleming who remains as the owner and sole director of the organisation.

Probably the way that I think about it, it is best described as a movement ... What we're trying to do is, is develop a sustainable walking culture in all these communities we go into. Liam Fleming, Founder Siul Eile



The initial purpose of the organisation was to highlight and show off the wonderful scenic area around Clogheen which has suffered from isolation and depopulation in recent years.

The second focus was to encourage activity and walking in the area to help developing fitness levels and also to build a sense of community between Clogheen and it's the local communities in its area.

The reason for setting up this initiative was to ensure that people were aware of the value of the amenities

in their own area and to build a walking 'movement' in the local area.

The very first initiative in 2016 was a series of walks called 'Couch to Mountaintop' (a 12 week programme with 4 different walks each week) where ordinary members of the community came out and began walking together and over a period of weeks built up their fitness level to be able to climb a mountain their area. During this first step 160 people participated and it was evident that there was a demand for an initiative like this.

After this first initiative it became apparent that in a world where people are all 'rushing and racing' there is no time to look around and explore your own area. The initiative introduced people to walks and places in their own area that were to be appreciated and people were amazed at the walks that they found, and the feedback identified that participants were very impressed with the social side of things, they had a chance to meet up with their neighbours for an hour or an hour and a half each week and this reduced levels of isolation for everyone who participated.

The second stage of the development of the organisation was to broaden this initiative out to other communities in County Tipperary and other communities have now set up their own walking groups. Each of these new community based groups is affiliated to Siul Eile and get the benefit of their knowledge and experience in running and managing the walking groups safely. Each group has its own set of local volunteers who manage the group and arrange the once/twice weekly activity in their own local area. The groups are covered by the insurance provided by Siul Eile and participants are all registered on Siul Eiles platform.

The participants in the groups vary according to the needs in each area, some are in the age cohort 55 upwards and others in younger cohorts. The focus in some is 'social walking' and others is 'fitness' walking.

All groups are run along the same principles and connecting with others is a key priority in each area.

..health and wellbeing would have been very strong in my belief system and so you know I would have seen that it is something that.. while there are other activities available to people walking is something that everyone can do and you can carry it on to the end of your days. So it is something that is sustainable and that was a big factor in it. Liam Fleming

Section B: Reasons for Establishing the Community Enterprise

'So with this programme people were amazed at the walks that they found and the feedback that I got was that people were very impressed with the social side of things, they had a chance to meet up with their neighbours for an hour or an hour and a half. Most of our walks were of that length. They found that they reconnected with their neighbours and reconnected with their neighbours and with their local communities. ' Liam Fleming

This initial venture has now expanded into many other communities throughout Tipperary and in each community there are volunteer leaders who plan the walking routes and facilitate the group using leaders to ensure the safety of the group members. It acts as a way for people to become active and also to connect with others in their own community, building social solidarity.

Section C: Community Enterprise Operations

The initial concept for the project was very organic and the first activity grew into the current enterprise as a result of two factors:

1. Towards the end of the first programme Liam was invited to participate in a Social Enterprise Incubator programme (BNest <https://www.ilovelimerick.ie/bnest-workshop/>) in the University of Limerick. This programme has now been incorporated into the work of Social Impact Ireland (<https://socialimpactireland.ie/>)
2. The second important factor was that Tipperary Sports Partnership employed Liam as a walking tutor which enabled him to allocate his time to reaching out to communities and supporting the set-up of the groups in the different communities.

This facilitated the growth of the project and put it onto a more secure footing. It facilitated the creation of the website, enabled the creation of the network throughout Tipperary and helped develop the infrastructure (on-line booking and registration system) to take it to the next phase.

Siul Eile is a social enterprise helping communities come together to form walking programs and challenges using the under-utilised local environment in their own community and to develop a sustainable walking culture in their community.

We build walking programs using quiet country roads, forest paths, tracks and trails.

It is designed for local communities to live quality healthy lives, socialise together and to combat rural isolation. (see <https://siuleile.com/about/>)



Decision Making: This community enterprise is still at the ‘incubator’ stage and during this period the organisation is being run by one person, employed full time and supported by a range of volunteers who make the activities possible. During this phase ownership and the decision making remains with the founder. The reason for this is that the idea as concept was new and untested and he felt that at the early stages confining decision making to one person to keep it simple would be an asset. For Liam one of his challenges with the ownership issue was vesting ownership in the community. Because there are so many communities involved, how would ownership be shared among these diverse communities.

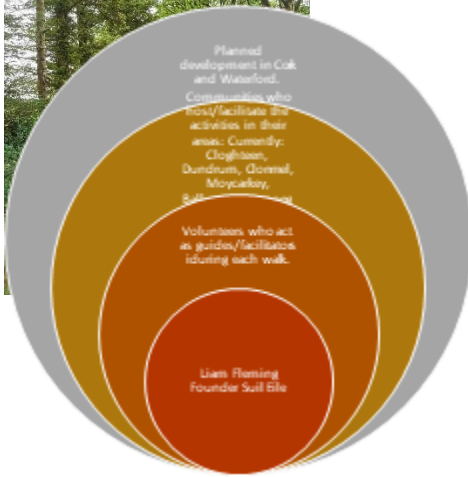
This question is part of the agenda for consideration during the next stage of development of the project. On a daily operational level the operations of each of the groups based in each community the volunteers in each community decide how to run their own group, they will also take responsibility for organising the groups and take responsibility for the management of the group in their own area.



Operational Structure: The website and the online booking system has been created through the contacts developed in the bNeST programme, the contact and all communication in the system is through the founder. Liam is conscious now that his central role has strengths and weaknesses. The strength is the organic nature of its operations and the flexibility that this approach gives but the weaknesses leave the organisation vulnerable in that the responsibility for

driving the organisation is the responsibility of just one person.

Stakeholders: The stakeholders can better be referred to as participants. The stakeholders are the members of communities who participate in the walking programmes. The stakeholders also include the communities and community groups where the groups are located.



Generally I would leave the **operation of the group to decide for themselves** as to what way they want to run their own walks, whether it will be social or fitness based and in an ideal world you would have both but we want to develop existing groups to be able to cater for other types of walks. Liam Fleming

Section D: Financial Management

At this point in its life, the organisation is viable only because of the employment of the founder by the Sports Partnership company. This has created the space to allow the resourcing of the development of the organisation. The on-line presence and the booking systems and the guidance for the structure of the organisation has been made possible through the supports which

flowed from the involvement of the founder in the BNest Programme and through various grants available to such organisations.

The main sources of funding apart from the employment provision are:

1. Avondhu Way (a national way marked trail where **Siul Eile** guided walks over a number of days and the participants pay €25-35 for this. There can be up to 60 people on these programmes.
2. Dara (Social Enterprise) Grant System

Some grants as well and these are the three strands and that is what keeps it financially sustainable

Section E: Legal Framework

It is set up as a DAC, (Designated Activity Company) <https://rethinkireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Social-Enterprise-Legal-Form-Guide.pdf>. The DAC has advantages for a set up community enterprise like this as it requires that the organisation identify specifically its area of work. In this case the Constitution also has a clause which requires that the company, if sold, would have to go to another social enterprise to maintain its status.

This legal status allows you to legally register the organization and to have its tax affairs and so on. The advantage has also been that as a sole trader you wouldn't qualify as a Social enterprise so this structure allowed the idea to be developed and to get it up and running.

I have not come across another DAC in the social enterprise space. It was what I was advised to do from the BNEST social enterprise incubator programme. It allows me to have full control, you do not need to have a board in this type of structure. Liam Fleming

At the moment the organisation has one employee and has been set up as a DAC, designated activity company. The responsibility for the organisation rests solely with him

and now requires more resources (people) to develop the movement further and to grow into other counties, where there is a demand coming from.

The role of the founder has been significant in bringing the organisation to its current position and has been very successful in growing the organisation. To be able to respond to the demand from other communities in other Counties additional human resources will be required. There is also the need to broaden the responsibility for decision making to ensure the longevity of the organisation.

Section G: Final Thoughts

Are there any other factors that you think are important to a community enterprise remaining sustainable and looking to develop in the future that have not been considered so far in our conversation ?

This is a unique approach to the issues of health and healthy lifestyles in communities and has had, and continues to have significant benefits for participants in building a sense of community and tackling issues of isolation. It has grown and expanded since its foundation and this indicates a demand for this type of approach in Ireland at this time.

What lessons have been learned.

This is a really innovative enterprise, the idea of naming it as a 'movement' establishes it philosophically in community development from the ground upwards. The initial seed that was sown has found solid roots as it has developed. It is a 'movement' which has found resonance with people through the integration of the 'activity' base with 'connection' as people reconnect with others in their own communities.

It has been made possible through the vision of one person and through his ability to engage others in the project in a very quiet and unassuming way. The skills required to work in this way in a community are invaluable and are often a scarce resource. Through their own experiences of the benefits of the engagement and activity the volunteers have become advocates for the project themselves. The strength of the project is in the number of volunteers and in the organic nature of its development. But the work it is anchored by the work of the founder.

The growth of the enterprise to date has been exceptional but the development of the idea further (into other counties) will not be feasible without an allocation of further resources especially the human resources required to go out to communities and help them to set up in the first place.

The strength of the organisation because of its 'organic' nature will also be a challenge for it as it grows and determining the appropriate structures and systems are put in place to ensure that it remains true to its roots will need careful consideration.

The role of the BnEST programme and its subsequent support has been instrumental in supporting the project through its set up phase. The role of Social Impact Ireland in continuing the link and the support for the project is also important.

The organisation has grown to the current level with one person driving it. In my community I have seen the add on benefits of the Suil Eile group through the additional activities and events that the group also engages in eg. Training courses, social events etc. There is a considerable community built from this work.

Measuring impact is also critical and I understand that research is being undertaken to measure the benefits from this project and this is something to look forward to.

Case Study 5 : Loughmore Tea Rooms ‘The Cottage’

Section A: Organisational Details

Name: Loughmore Community Cooperative Society Limited (trades as The Cottage)

Location: Loughmore, Co. Tipperary, Ireland

Number of Staff: 8

Number of Volunteers: 20

Number of Clients:

Principle goods / services provided by the Community Enterprise: Community shop and tearooms

Facebook: [The Cottage Loughmore | Tipperary | Facebook](#)

Twitter: @thecottagemore

Instagram: [The Cottage Loughmore \(@thecottageloughmore\) • Instagram photos and videos](#)

Section B: Reasons for Establishing the Community Enterprise Section C: Community Enterprise Operations

The Cottage is a community owned shop and tearooms located in Loughmore, a small rural community in Co. Tipperary Ireland. This initiative was established in 2012 in order to combat rural isolation. In recent decades, the village of Loughmore had witnessed the closure of numerous businesses and social services. Prior to the opening of the Cottage, there only remained the local Catholic church, primary school; and public house (opened only in evenings) within the village. Local residents had no other option but to travel to the towns of Thurles or Templemore in order to avail of retail and hospitality services. Apart from providing these economic activities, this community owned social enterprise offers a wide range of formal and informal social activities to the local community. Prominent examples include: a group of ladies coming in every Tuesday morning just to chat; a knitting club which meets once a week; and engagement with the local school / youth club around the growing of herbs / vegetables and local sustainability issues. The mission of this organisation is to provide a meeting place for the local community to engage in an array of activities, thereby alleviating rural isolation whilst also providing soft skills development.

This community enterprise has a strong ethos of supporting local craft and artisan producers. For example: ‘All our food is produced here within five miles. Our confectionary is baked by local girls; we’ve nine on our books at the moment. All our crafts are from within the locality’. The procurement of local goods / services by the Cottage is providing a stimulus to the local economy. Initially, the Cottage was reliant on volunteers, but this was not sustainable and now, this community enterprise has 8 paid staff whilst maintaining a number of volunteers. The Cottage could be considered a work integrated social enterprise as it has provided work placements to Transition Year (gap year) post primary school students; and individuals with a disability.

Decision Making

The Cottage has established robust and distinct decision-making practices and processes which are in adherence with the co-operative movement. All shareholders in the co-operative are invited to attend and participate in the Annual General Meeting (AGM). According to ICOS (2023), co-operatives are 'democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote)'. Loughmore Community Co-operative Society hosts an Annual General Meeting (AGM), whereby all shareholders are afforded an opportunity to appoint / re-appoint directors; and provided with a review of operations for previous trading year; financial report; and future strategic priorities.

Section F: Leadership Structures

A committee, consisting of 6 members meets each month to discuss the daily operations of the co-operative. 'We discuss the way things are going, and if we have problems, how can they be solved or if there are successes, to share those successes. We always keep a very tight rein on things, financially and even organizationally, we, just keep a tight rein on everything'. It is important for the co-operative to have a committed core group who will make decisions for the benefit of the shareholders (in this instance, the benefit of the community in Loughmore).

The day-to-day management of the co-operative is facilitated by a manager. This person was also one of the co-founders of the co-operative and had the vision to establish a community owned tea rooms and shop within the village. " I manage the place, which is great because I love the freedom in doing it. I also manage the staff and manage the daily running of the place. So, I kind of watch over everything, it's not that I do everything, but I watch over it."

The co-operative ensures at least 4 individuals are on the premises each day (10am – 4pm). The number of staff or volunteers can be increased during busier periods. This flexibility in acquiring additional staff is essential for a business situated in a rural village, where there can be variability in footfall across the year. Each individual (either staff or volunteer) has specific roles which have to be fulfilled - " Everybody has their own responsibilities, you have the chef, you have somebody on the washup, you have somebody on coffees, you have two on the floor out here at any time. You know, we just have to keep the flow of service going".

Loughmore Community Co-operative has an operational plan which outlines key procedures with respect to health and safety; hygiene and cleaning regimes; customer service; human resources; financial management; governance; and food safety. All staff and volunteers are provided with the necessary training. According to Mary, 'all our guidelines are followed, everything is followed, and we have our policies and procedures, and everybody is trained'.

Section F: Leadership Structures

Stakeholders

The Cottage has numerous stakeholders which includes customers, staff, suppliers, and local community groups. The residents of Loughmore are viewed as a key stakeholder group. The co-operative was initially established in order to combat rural isolation. Therefore, the co-operative is very conscious of organising activities for local residents and caters for all age groups.

Section D: Financial Management

Section E: Legal Framework

Section G: Final Thoughts

Case Study 6 (Shane Missing)

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