

2030

CORCA DHUIBHNE DINGLE PENINSULA

The Value of Collaboration

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."
Helen Keller

"Ní neart go cur le chéile"

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- The collaboration ensured that the partners worked in and with the community and did not use it as a 'guinea pig' or a vehicle for a project. The multi-disciplinary approach and the merging of views, skills, experience and additional resources led to real progress, across a wide range of issues, in a very short timeline.
- For collaborations such as this, it is important for each agency and participant to understand that it is involved in a partnership and the collective effort is aimed at stimulating the potential of each player, both individually and collectively and, most importantly, is responsive to the needs of the local community. Dingle Peninsula 2030 showed that this can be achieved even in a multi-stakeholder initiative involving different (and often larger) organisations, where each organization has its own governance requirements. These may require particular processes to be followed (usually to ensure good corporate governance and financial governance), or they may not sanction specific actions, for their own organisational reasons outside of the particular project. While this can be frustrating and seems to be overly bureaucratic, it is the price to be paid for securing agreed collective actions by multiple stakeholders.
- The building of trusting and respectful relationships with partners who respect each other's input is key to a successful multi-agency collaboration. The regular group meetings, along with the openness to sharing ideas and learning from each other fostered a sense that the solutions were co-created and not owned by any one stakeholder.
- The engaged research approach in this collaboration informed the direction taken by different aspects of the overall initiative. By approaching research in this way and collaborating with the other organisations involved, the research outputs were scientifically rigorous, co-created and locally impactful. However, the time and resources required are extensive and were certainly underestimated at the outset.
- There are no clear funding sources for the community development aspects of climate action projects. Each of the four partner agencies invested heavily, both financially and in kind, in the work on the Dingle Peninsula. A key challenge was resourcing the significant, time-consuming and resource heavy logistical, coordination and engagement challenges to this kind of community-based work, which are not often fully appreciated by funding bodies. The current climate action funding mechanisms do not generally make provision for supporting community development activity and, in many cases, specifically exclude such support. If similar projects are to take place in future and if the critical role of local communities is to be acknowledged and encouraged, clear funding mechanisms need to be provided to resource some core staff on the ground with community development, engagement and project management skills, and to cover administrative costs. Resources also need to be made available for the co-ordination of such collaborations, for on-going evaluation, for the extra additional costs involved in engaged research, and for not-for-profit community groups engaging in research projects. Only then will the huge community resource, capacity, expertise and enthusiasm be tapped into and maximized to co-create acceptable, sustainable and viable solutions.

¹ This report was completed in February 2021 and records the experiences of the Dingle Peninsula 2030 multi-agency collaboration up to that time. Therefore, while the collaboration continues, this document is largely written in the past tense.

Located in the south west of Ireland, the Dingle Peninsula is defined by the territory to the west of a line connecting Blennerville to Castlemaine, covering an area of 583 sq km and extending 48 km into the Atlantic. It has a resident population of 12,764, with 2,500 living in Dingle Town (CSO, Census, 2016). Second (or holiday) homes account for c. 26% of all houses on the Peninsula and tourism accounts for c. 30% of the local economy.



Background

Established in early 2018, **Dingle Peninsula 2030** is a multi-partner initiative on the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry. It involves the **Dingle Creativity and Innovation Hub**, **ESB Networks**, North East & West Kerry Development (**NEWKD**) and **MaREI**, the **SFI Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine**. The premise of the initiative is based on the Quadruple Helix Model involving science, policy, industry and society. Partners actively collaborate with each other and with the local community, schools, business, transport and farming sectors to support and enable the broader societal changes required for the sustainable transition.

A co-ordinating group was subsequently set up comprising the following:

Deirdre de Bhailís, Manager, Dingle Hub,
Brendan Tuohy, Board Member, Dingle Hub,
Claire McElligott, Community Engagement Manager, ESB Networks Dingle Project,
Séamus O'Hara, Area Manager, NEWKD,
Aoife Deane, Communications & Public Engagement Manager, MaREI,
Dr. Clare Watson, Engaged Research Support Officer, MaREI,
Evan Boyle, Sociology PhD student, MaREI,
and **Connor McGookin**, Engineering PhD student, MaREI.



Research Methods

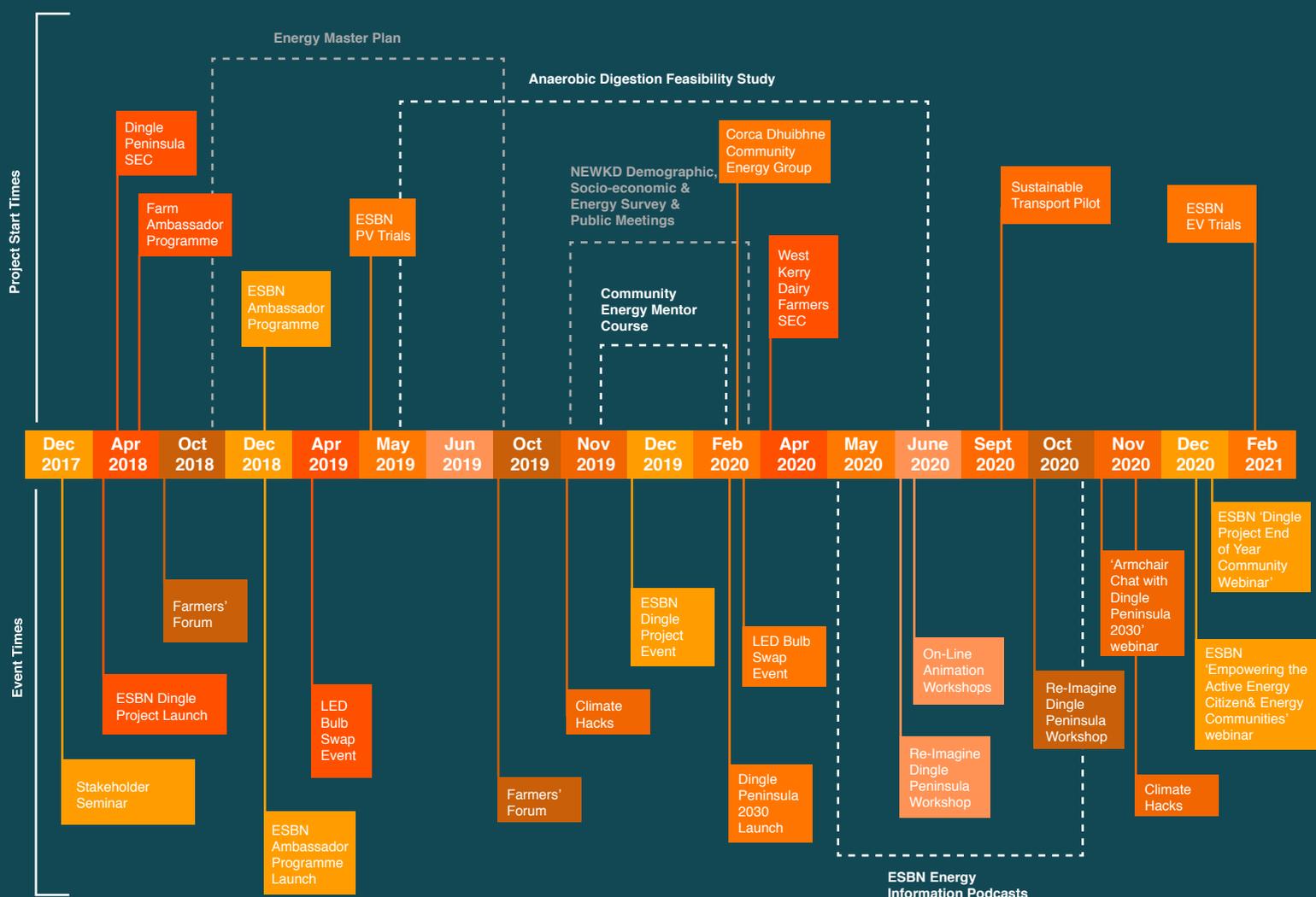
In July 2019, MaREI organized a workshop with the co-ordinating group to discuss the development of a Dingle Peninsula 2030 case study. At this, the significance of the unique collaboration between the four agencies was agreed and it was decided to reflect on the collaboration, to draw out its components, and to evaluate the process.

In early 2020, the co-ordinating group members each answered the following questions:

1. What do you personally bring to the Dingle Peninsula 2030 collaboration (skills, experience, information, networks)?
2. How have you practically contributed to the collaboration?
3. What does your organization bring to the table?
4. Can you describe the benefits of the collaborative process so far?
5. Can you describe any challenges that have emerged during the collaborative process so far?
6. Can you suggest how to overcome them?

In November 2020, each participant reviewed their responses and the collation of the responses was completed in January 2021.

Timeline of Projects and Events





Deirdre de Bhailís,
Dingle Hub

PERSONAL SKILLS & EXPERIENCE:

- A trusted member of the local community
- The ability to communicate with varied stakeholders, to engage the public, and to drive awareness raising initiatives
- Technical competence
- A network of contacts among the national engineering community

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION:

- Strengthened links within community through constant communication and interaction
- Organised events
- Obtained funding to enable activities
- Developed relationships with other stakeholders
- Drove Community Energy Mentor training programme
- Managed the development of the Energy Master Plan and the Anaerobic Digestion Feasibility Study
- Facilitated and enabled community involvement in projects
- Promoted the work of Dingle Peninsula 2030 locally and nationally



Brendan Tuohy,
Dingle Hub

PERSONAL SKILLS & EXPERIENCE:

- A facilitator, making introductions, facilitating engagement, building upon contacts in local and national Government and the public service
- A convenor, bringing people to Dingle to learn about what is happening and explore what may be possible
- A supporter, helping to break down barriers to engagement with senior people in the public service and private sector, and to develop a sense of agency and control in the local communities

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION:

- Helped to develop Dingle Hub as the platform for delivering the community engagement elements of the ESB Networks Dingle Project and Dingle Peninsula 2030
- Helped to create the original complimentary visions
- Helped source and support good people to deliver the objectives
- Helped to get financial and other support
- Helped to get visibility for projects at county and national level
- Facilitated the introduction of MaREI to Dingle Hub



Claire McElligott,
ESB Networks

PERSONAL SKILLS & EXPERIENCE:

- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Previous experience in business relationship management
- A team worker, willing to help out where possible
- Ability to manage difficult and confrontational situations and a decision maker
- Big picture thinker with strategic experience
- Access to a wide range of skills within a large corporate organization
- Access to funding that has broader benefits for Dingle Peninsula 2030

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION:

- Selected all trial participants to represent ESB Networks Dingle Project and Dingle Peninsula 2030
- Rolled out 3 retrofits, 2 air source heat pump, 25 solar PV and 17 EV trials across the peninsula
- Developed relationships with all trial participants, being transparent on project objectives, plans, status, challenges and solutions
- Promoted the project through national and international events and the media
- Engaged local media to enable information sharing by peers in the community
- Worked part time in Dingle Hub to establish a presence
- Participated in, and supported, multiple community events
- Helped build a supportive community network through social events
- Participated in a number of steering committees



Séamus O'Hara,
NEWKD

PERSONAL SKILLS & EXPERIENCE:

- Experience of working in community development and local networks
- A track record of inclusive, respectful engagement with the local community
- Organisational and communication skills
- Insights into project management
- A knowledge of, and commitment to, environmental issues
- A working knowledge of some community structures throughout the peninsula

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION:

- Demonstrated a commitment to the partnership approach and addressing projects goals
- Demonstrated goodwill and an openness to growing the relationships with individuals and respective organisations
- Provided time and resources
- Offered advice
- Provided personal contacts in the media
- Facilitated access to local sectors (e.g. farming), to environmental groups throughout the peninsula, and to local community and NEWKD community structures
- Organised some aspects of public events
- Initiated and co-ordinated a demographic, socio-economic and energy survey through out 8 parishes, with 15 public meetings, on the Dingle Peninsula



Clare Watson,
MaREI

PERSONAL SKILLS & EXPERIENCE:

- Experience of working with NGOs, community groups and environmental campaigns
- Experience of trying to live a low carbon sustainable life
- Experience of setting up, structuring and developing new organisations and networks
- An understanding of how campaigns work and the social dynamics at play
- An understanding of theories and research literature around community engagement, community energy and climate action

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION:

- Provided advice and support on community engagement issues and strategies
- Set up co-ordinating group and organised regular meetings to ensure good communication and collaboration between the four partner organisations
- Acted as a sounding board, helping to work out difficulties and tricky situations
- Provided advice on how to respond respectfully to opposition
- Provided contacts within community energy and environmental sectors
- Led the production of learning briefs on Dingle Peninsula 2030 initiatives



Aoife Deane,
MaREI

PERSONAL SKILLS & EXPERIENCE:

- Experience of planning and implementing public engagement and outreach activities
- Experience of evaluating and reporting on these activities
- An understanding of the role played by MaREI and the value of engaged research
- Insight into funding agencies like SFI and industry partners, and an awareness of funding opportunities

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION:

- Contributed to co-ordinating meetings
- Acted as a sounding board and provided on-going advice to the MaREI Dingle team
- Drafted funding application to SFI Discover 2020 and provided subsequent project management
- Provided input and feedback on content for outputs
- Contributed time and the expertise of the MaREI Communications and Public Engagement Team to develop outputs, promote events and provide seed funding
- Compiled input for reporting on Dingle Peninsula 2030



Evan Boyle,
MaREI

PERSONAL SKILLS & EXPERIENCE:

- Disciplinary skills from sociology relating to report writing, note taking, facilitation, interview skills, survey design and administration
- Knowledge of, and contacts in, UCC's Sociology Department
- Experience of bringing a transdisciplinary approach to research
- An openness to engaged research practice, building on the experience of previous more detached approaches, and engaged research skills acquired through University modules

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION:

- Conducted research on the role of the ESB Networks Ambassador Programme and EV trial, and the stakeholder collaborative process
- Carried out a participatory mapping exercise outlining goals of different community representatives
- Facilitated engagement with the local Tidy Towns group and the sharing of previous research experience
- Organised and facilitated meetings between a local agricultural energy initiative and the Department of Agriculture
- Assisted in organising events based in UCC and MaREI
- Acted as note taker for early meetings
- Assisted with local events



Connor McGookin,
MaREI

PERSONAL SKILLS & EXPERIENCE:

- Energy engineering and climate policy expertise
- Competence with calculations on energy and emissions
- Experience in running programmes for schools and families
- The ability to communicate climate change in an appropriate way

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION:

- Conducted detailed analysis of current energy demand on the Dingle Peninsula for EnergyMaster Plan
- Prepared Energy Master Plan document and summary slides
- Coordinated 'LED bulb swap' events with Dingle Hub
- Prepared material for 'Climate Hack' events in schools
- Collaborated with NEWKD and Breandán O'Keefe to deliver a series of community meetings in seven parishes

Figure 2: What each organisation brought to the collaboration

Dingle Hub

- Instrumental in starting the Dingle Peninsula 2030 initiative and getting support from the local community and beyond
- Pivotal convening and initiating roles
- The ability to build and maintain sustainable, transparent, trusting relationships with many people and organisations
- A focal point for the community to connect, develop ideas and engage with innovation
- People with diverse skillsets and expertise

ESB Networks

- Development of a living trial environment to help understand the impact on the electricity network of low carbon energy transition by citizens, to help inform the design of a network to support a low carbon society
- A full time Community Engagement Manager resource
- The development and maintenance of trustworthy relationships with the Dingle community and key stakeholders
- Trialled a range of new technologies on the electricity network to enhance its reliability for an ever more dependent energy society
- Shared its knowledge and project learnings, community-wide, nationally and internationally
- Investment in technology, in network upgrading and in research
- Awareness promotion of the project across Ireland
- Project management skills and influence

NEWKD

- A community development perspective
- Insights into working respectfully with communities
- Commitment to improving the standard of living and proven track record of bringing investment into the community
- Credibility within the community, farming, statutory, business, and public authority sectors
- Experience and goodwill of previous work and ongoing working relationship with communities
- Introductions and the opening of doors
- Existing network and structure of local communities to highlight and collaborate on issues
- Knowledge of LEADER and Sicap, SEAI programmes, and access to funding and resources
- Access to some EU programme supports

MaREI

- Engaged research and engagement expertise
- Dedicated resources committed to working with the local community
- Financial investment in engaged research team
- A link between research literature, knowledge and practical action
- Credibility of association with a research institute and university
- A link to academic excellence in energy and climate research
- Assistance with funding proposals and acting as funding partner in research calls
- Funding for outreach and engagement activities through Education and Public Engagement (EPE) grant
- Outreach materials and assistance at family days
- Access to a wider national and international audience, through links with key policy makers, organisations and established research network



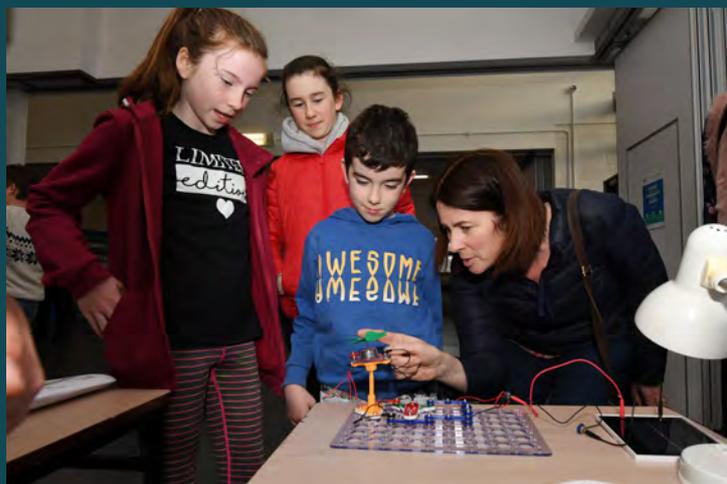
Development of Trusting and Respectful Relationships

The building of trusting and respectful relationships and the creation of a friendly group which had fun and was successful in enabling the diffusion of sustainability, winning funding through competitive processes and delivering various initiatives, is seen as being the most important aspect of the collaboration. As partners, we respected each other's inputs. This helped us to work together, make joint decisions, reflect on past events, plan ahead and then produce results. The good working relationship also assisted in defusing potential conflict and preventing ill-feeling or fallouts. It helped us to deal with the inevitable diverging opinions which arose - for instance, on whether to engage with and hold workshops in the community early on, or to develop some projects first and show 'quick wins' before engaging more widely. There was an on-going internal debate on how to structure the Dingle Peninsula 2030 initiative into the future and whether to, and how to, include other groups in the collaboration. Such debates were carried out in an amicable and respectful way where we worked together and listened to each other's opinions.



Dingle Peninsula 2030 Co-ordination Meetings

The holding of regular group meetings with representatives from each organisation facilitated the building of these trusting working relationships. There was an openness to sharing ideas and updates from each of the partners and a feeling that the solutions were co-created and not owned by any one stakeholder. The representative structure ensured that good channels of communication were developed. We consulted with, and informed each other, which meant that the local community was not confused or bombarded by mixed messaging or duplicate requests for their time or involvement. This allowed us to avoid duplication of effort - for example, ESB Networks worked with the Dingle Hub to organise one information session on Solar PVs rather than two separate ones. Good internal communication also ensured that the different deliverables required by each agency did not conflict with each other or cause problems in engaging with the community, and it allowed for ideas and suggested changes to be brought back to each organization for endorsement. This helped to keep the project grounded within individual organisations while, simultaneously, pushing the agreed common objectives that evolved over time. Most importantly, the collaboration ensured that we worked in and with the community, that we were a resource for the community, and we didn't use it as a 'guinea pig' or a vehicle for a project.





Increased Learning

We all learned from each other and the collective knowledge and understanding generated influenced the project direction. MaREI gained a better insight into societal dynamics in a rural community setting and how this influences and affects social acceptance and the diffusion of technology. MaREI researchers also used and shared their expertise within communities, leading to greater understanding of, for instance, energy use on the peninsula. ESB Networks came into the collaboration with limited experience in community engagement but, by employing a full-time community engagement manager on the Dingle Project, it demonstrated a clear commitment to building relationships within the community and developing internal expertise, with the support of the other partners.



The Power of Collective Action

The diverse group brought together many different kinds of expertise and a wide variety of networks from within, and involving, the local community, and in broader academic, technical, business, State agency and national policy circles. The multi-disciplinary approach and the merging of views, skills, experience and additional resources enabled more to be done. The Dingle Hub became a true hub for the initiative, providing a local base, local contacts and the co-ordination of events and projects, and it also ensured that connections were made to a broad range of stakeholders and policy makers. There was a gap in the Community and Enterprise Development landscape which posed a challenge for local area-based, community-engaged, economic and social development. The model pioneered by the Dingle Hub provided an ideal low-cost way of leveraging the efforts of other agencies in delivering effective change.

NEWKD provided a crucial link into the local community, local farmers and the network of community councils throughout the peninsula, as well as organising a series of local workshops.

The resources and technologies that ESB Networks brought to the Peninsula was a key hook to attracting interest from a large network of local people. Support from ESB Networks for local events and the use of local services and businesses was also integral to building the community network.

MaREI's remit and commitment to action learning, and back-up of technical expertise for the energy planning process and engagement with the schools and farmers (in relation to anaerobic digestion, in particular), gave invaluable credibility to all our work. The ability to navigate potentially difficult interactions and bring people with us was also guided by MaREI.





Engaged Research

Engaged research encompasses a broad range of rigorous research approaches and methodologies which are concerned with collaborative engagement with a range of non-academic stakeholders, be they public or professional service and product users, policy makers, civil society organisations and actors aiming to investigate, understand and improve societal challenges (such as climate action). Key elements of the engaged research process include listening, enhancing the deliberation with evidence and informed views, and respecting the expertise, knowledge and experience of the local community – which may not necessarily be based solely upon academic excellence.

Within MaREI there is a focus on advancing engaged research and participatory methodologies through the active involvement of non-academic stakeholders and the provision of evidence-based information which can inform policy and practice. As a collaborative partner in Dingle Peninsula 2030, a MaREI team was embedded within the area since the inception of the project, with researchers spending a lot of time on the Dingle Peninsula, attending meetings, contributing to decisions and activities, documenting events, developing local connections and getting to know the area. Building a solid foundation on the ground enabled the research team to actively engage with stakeholders from the outset and throughout the project lifecycle.

The engaged research approach informed the direction taken by different aspects of the overall project. By approaching research in this way and collaborating with the other organisations involved, the research outputs were both scientifically rigorous and locally impactful. Combining peer-reviewed articles and learning briefs, the approach balanced academic requirements with practical learnings.



Impact

The collaboration ensured that there was real progress, across a wide range of issues, in a very short timeline. The initiative acted as a small beacon of what could be possible. A feeling of connection with, integration in, and good will towards Dingle Peninsula 2030 was fostered on the peninsula and also amongst policy-makers and others. The collaboration developed in such a way that people wanted to be involved. This was beneficial when seeking to leverage support or expertise. Moreover, there was a commitment to doing things well and, even though there was much voluntary engagement, the work itself was to a very high professional standard.





Lack of Core Funding

Each of the four partner agencies invested heavily, both financially and in kind, in the work on the Dingle Peninsula. Finding a clear source of core funding for the community development aspects in particular was a fundamental challenge for this initiative from the beginning. A lot of time was spent chasing up leads and making funding applications, but some of the schemes specifically excluded funding for local participation, even though funding was provided for the public bodies involved. This is a shared problem also experienced by other climate action groups across the country. While the partners were able to commit resources to support established services (e.g. video production, technology installation, feasibility studies, engaged research etc.) there was no clear process, or agency through which to access money to pay for community development and engagement expertise.

The original funding for the Dingle Hub came through Exchequer-funded schemes that were aimed at job creation/entrepreneurship. The Hub decided to adopt an approach to job creation that was based upon three strengths of the local area, namely, Sustainability, Digitisation and Creative Industries. By leveraging this core funding, it was then possible to bring in some other funding through different initiatives, funded through Irish and EU schemes and some private sector support. It was proposed that this type of funding could be a model for the future, with core funding from the Exchequer (through some relevant scheme) leveraging other support from Irish and EU schemes, together with some private and philanthropic finance.

MaREI invested nearly €1 million in research funding for engaged research and technical research to support Dingle Peninsula 2030. In addition, MaREI funded a number of outreach projects through a MaREI Education and Public Engagement grant

ESB Networks committed €5 million to its three-year Dingle Project to fund a series of trials and the deployment of a range of new technologies to help inform the design of the smart, reliable, low-carbon electricity network of the future.

NEWKD was also able to bring additional funds onto the peninsula through its varied programmes. However, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2018-2022 (SICAP), funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and co-funded by the European Social Fund, did not include climate action in the national programme guidelines. It was hoped that this would change for the next funding period.

MaREI and the Dingle Hub were successful in helping to secure SFI Discover Funding in 2020, and again for the 2021-2022 period. The second round of funding allowed for the hiring of a Community Engagement Coordinator for the Dingle Peninsula 2030 initiative over a 2-year period, and also enabled MaREI to continue its engaged research and evaluation of the initiative. The 2021-22 Discover funding aimed to support the project partners to:

1. Strengthen legacy structures in Dingle Peninsula 2030 to ensure continued impact beyond the lifecycle of seed funding
2. Share learning nationally with other communities and stakeholders via multimedia outputs and networking events
3. Develop good practice toolkits on engaged research, co-creation processes, and innovative engagement methods in STEM



The Involvement of Large Institutions and Public Bodies

Different organisations have different ways of working, different goals, and different required outcomes. Therefore, naturally, a challenge can arise when these groups come together on a common initiative, particularly if there is no previous experience of collaborating in this way. Moreover, large organisations sometimes lack the mechanisms to work with community organisations and the project teams often spend time and effort discussing and justifying the benefits of working in partnership.

In this collaboration, two of the agencies initially came to the table with their own deliverables and timeframes. For instance, MaREI PhD researchers had worked out research plans, outlining specific timed activities (e.g. workshops). This schedule had to be shifted to accommodate developments on the ground as they emerged. ESB Networks had its own defined learning objectives from its project and while there was some alignment with the overall Dingle Peninsula 2030 objectives, it nevertheless had its own plan of activities relating to its own project.

The different sets of projects, different expectations and timelines for delivery may initially have led to some misunderstandings and concerns amongst partners. However, this changed through the collaborative community engagement process and, particularly, under the leadership of ESB Networks' community engagement manager.



Enlisting Support from Other Agencies and Public Bodies

Public bodies and other agencies, while broadly appreciating the importance of the issues and the goals of Dingle Peninsula 2030, may have had difficulties fitting the projects into suitable categories from which to deliver resources and funding. But when some agencies supported specific projects and events they were hugely helpful and added real value. However, because the initiative was novel and ground-breaking, it was not always easy to fit the broader goal of transitioning the Dingle Peninsula to a low carbon sustainable future into the schemes that were available to the various partners. This is always a hazard when engaging in innovative projects. The process of enlisting such support proved to be time and resource consuming, and would not have happened without the sustained commitment of the agencies involved to find ways of providing support, and a corresponding flexibility on the part of the Dingle Peninsula 2030 team to adjust their applications so as to address the concerns of the agencies.

Where possible, initial engagements with the public sector and other large organisations were made at senior level, to ensure buy-in at that level. This made it easier to get support down the line, and the engagement was then maintained with staff below senior level, while always keeping the senior people updated and (occasionally) engaged. Again, this was time and resource consuming but, ultimately, very rewarding when the projects delivered the results.





Engaged Research

The implications of what is involved in carrying out engaged research as part of a collaborative initiative was new and initially challenging for MaREI. The time and resources required were extensive and were certainly underestimated at the outset. Researchers felt under some pressure to engage with the community quite quickly. However, it became clear that this should not be rushed as it could have a negative impact on the overall development of the initiative in the local area.

There were tensions at times between the importance of being flexible and responding to the needs of the community on the one hand and the linear outline of research design with a clearly defined plan that was a requirement of UCC's ethical procedures. Managing time commitments and constraints in order to complete all the different necessary aspects of the engaged research work was also a challenge. Working in this manner required a considerable time commitment to Dingle Peninsula 2030, which was at odds with conventional academic responsibilities. This was particularly pertinent for early-stage researchers (e.g. PhD students) who need to produce a thesis, publish journal papers and take on tutoring positions, all of which are essential to building a career in academia.

There were also logistical issues, such as the bi-lingual requirement for written outputs, the physical distance between researchers and the Dingle Peninsula, and how much money was available to cover travel and accommodation expenses. Doctoral stipends were designed to cover the cost of dissemination at international conferences and did not cover travelling to meetings, organising workshops, etc.





The Covid 19 Pandemic

The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns throughout 2020 and into 2021 created unexpected challenges for Dingle Peninsula 2030 and its stakeholder organisations. The most immediate of these was the need to suddenly move on-line for meetings and engagement activities. While the immediacy of the change was initially a shock, we were very fortunate to have the finances and the back-up support of our agencies which enabled access to technical and on-line facilitation expertise as required. There is also no doubt that the rapid shift to on-line work created unexpected benefits.

During 2020, the following activities were successfully held on-line:

- Online animation workshops with young people on the low carbon transition (June 2020)
- ‘Re-Imagine Dingle Peninsula’ workshop and follow-up event, in association with Imagination of Things (28 June & 6 October 2020)
- Pobalcoil Chorca Dhuibhne Creative Tech Workshop, in association with Imagination of Things (13 November 2020)
- Virtual Climate Hacks in local schools (8-15 November 2020)
- ‘An Armchair Chat with Dingle Peninsula 2030’ webinar, in association with SEAI (11 November 2020)
- A series of energy Information sessions and podcasts with Radio Kerry (May-Oct 2020)
- Regular ESB Networks Dingle Project updates in The Kerryman and Kerry’s Eye (June 2020 & Oct 2020)
- ESB Networks ‘Empowering the Active Energy Citizen & Energy Communities’ webinar (9 December 2020)
- ESB Networks ‘Dingle Project End of Year Community Webinar’ (15 December 2020)

The on-line challenge undoubtedly offered advantages not previously considered, including the holding of, and attendance at, meetings and public events which would normally have required a lot of travelling and associated climate emissions and financial expense. However, the abrupt on-line shift was initially difficult for many in the local especially those who did not have the confidence, the skills, the technology and access to reliable broadband. Moreover, connecting with people virtually is very different to





in-person engagement, particularly if the participants don't already know each other, and it is much more challenging to form networks. Nevertheless, by the end of the year, many people in the community had embraced the technology and adjusted well to the changes. Furthermore, the holding of on-line events enabled us to reach audiences from further afield and to more easily capture data in real time, which proved to be advantageous. At a broad community level, fewer public events were held during this period, and less networking took place amongst communities. Looking to the future of our work, and how we will successfully engage locally, this presents us with both a challenge and an opportunity.

We were fortunate that a series of local meetings with community representatives to develop plans for a sustainable future had been held across the Peninsula prior to the initial Covid lockdown in March. However, the subsequent follow-up meetings could not take place. Similarly, we were unable to host any other in-person workshops, public meetings or events. The annual series of festivals/community events on the Dingle Peninsula, and our involvement in them (e.g. Feile na Bealtaine, Dingle Food Festival, Farmers' Forum) did not take place in 2020 which further reduced some of the momentum associated with our community engagement work.

Our level of interaction with the schools was impacted. The challenges of digitisation and Covid 19 within the education system were evidenced in particular by some of the difficulties schools encountered in trying to participate in the on-line Climate Hack, including scheduling computer room time and organising inter-pod groups.

One of the successes to date has been the willingness of national organisations and others to visit Dingle and see, at first-hand, what has been happening on the ground. In light of the Covid-19 restrictions, it was necessary to postpone planned visits by organisations, such as the boards of ESB and EirGrid, and not to initiate any others. It was hoped that these visits would re-commence in autumn 2021.

During 2020, work progressed on our Sustainable Transport Pilot, and the first phase began with new bus services operating on the Dingle Peninsula (due to migrate to electric buses in March 2021) and increased bus services between Dingle and Tralee. While there was great potential for a significant modal shift to sustainable transport on the Dingle Peninsula, introducing a move to public transport during Covid restrictions was particularly challenging, with the constraints on the number of passengers and the general constraints on people leaving their local area.

Fortunately, the Community Energy (CE) Mentor Course ended in early February 2020, and was not disrupted by the pandemic. However, plans for developing the role of the ten CE mentors within the local community had to be shelved. While this seemed like a negative impact, many of the mentors subsequently came together with renewed enthusiasm around the development of community energy in the area, at a time when policy and other supports for this had progressed significantly.

The ESB Networks Dingle Project had scheduled its Electric Vehicle Trial to commence in July 2020 but it was postponed for Covid related reasons. However, it began in February 2021, once Covid restrictions were lifted. As a result, the overall ESB Networks Dingle Project was extended to the end of 2021.

The hospitality sector on the Dingle Peninsula was severely impacted by Covid and they make up the majority of businesses that will be required to invest in energy efficiency upgrades in the coming years. At best, a full year of potential business upgrades was lost. At worst, the impacts will last for several years as businesses try to return to a position of being able to consider such investments.



Incredible Pace

The scope of the challenge to transition the Dingle Peninsula within a realistic time frame, coupled with the vision, scope, complexity and pace, meant that sometimes the rush to develop projects and respond to all the inherent demands this creates took precedence over reflection, agreeing collaborative procedures and forward planning. At times, it also caused a level of exhaustion and stress for those most centrally involved!



Evaluation

Communicating the outputs, outcomes and impact of the Dingle Peninsula 2030 initiative remained an ongoing challenge, as was evaluation of the work being carried out. However, in order to address this, and as part of a reflective evaluation exercise, MaREI worked with the team to collectively produce a series of learning briefs (of which this is one), to identify and distill learnings and recommendations.





Relationship Building

- It is important for each agency to understand that it is involved in a partnership where all players engage with openness and trust, and which stimulates the potential of each player, both individually and collectively, and, most importantly, can be responsive to the needs of the local community. But it also needs to be recognised that, when working as part of a large institutional organisation, there are processes to be followed (usually to ensure good corporate governance and financial governance).
- There needs to be clarity from the beginning if one agency is being expected to, or is offering to, fund any of the other agencies in the collaboration. The process of decision-making around how this happens should be clear and transparent, so that everyone understands the mechanisms involved and expectations can be managed.
- It is important to find ways of helping others (beyond those directly involved in the collaboration) to find solutions to their own challenges through working with the partners on addressing these challenges. It is also important to continue to engage with others, even when they do not appear to be in a position to engage. This may be simply by informing them of developments and plans, until they can identify a benefit and are in a position to engage fully.



Planning

- Academic ethical research processes need to have a clear understanding of the nuances of more engaged research approaches, or perhaps even a separate application process.
- Detailed planning at the outset is beneficial, particularly regarding expectations, engagement measures and evaluation, while still allowing for the flexibility and adaptive approach required in a collaborative project. For such planning to occur, project management must be adequately resourced.





Resources

- Clear mechanisms need to be provided to ensure that provision is made (and agreed in advance) for resourcing core staff on the ground with community development, engagement and project management skills, and for administrative costs (including Irish translation services, where necessary). Volunteers can only do so much and they need to be adequately supported. Resources also need to be available for the co-ordination of the overall collaboration, particularly as the initiative expands, and for on-going evaluation of the project from the outset. Research funding needs to take into account the additional expenses relating to engaged research and new mechanisms are required that can allocate funding for not-for-profit community groups which engage with research projects.
- The basic funding mechanism for the Dingle Hub has a strong focus on 'job creation' but here, the Dingle Hub Board agreed a strategy that categorised the potential for 'job creation' under three pillars: environmental sustainability, digital transformation and the creative industries. Based on the experience of the Dingle Hub, it may be possible to utilise a similar mechanism in other areas, by incorporating these ideas and initiatives and leveraging other funding. Discussions are on-going with funding bodies to broaden the criteria by which local community Digital Hubs might be resourced, allowing for funding to help build local capacity and capability and to support community engagement, engaged research and development of innovation at local level.
- Future active and engaged research approaches need to be resourced to allow for flexible deadlines, and to free up time for researchers to be fully committed to the methodology. The uncertainty and complexities, the requirements of a multi-disciplinary approach, and the extra resources involved in co-creating research should be built into the funding application model from the outset.

And finally, while the collaborative initiative has achieved a lot on the Dingle Peninsula, we would be the first to say that it is not enough. We are continually learning from our experience and from the experience of others around the country and abroad. We know that what we are doing is only the beginning of a long and exciting road.

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