

2030

**CORCA DHUIBHNE
DINGLE PENINSULA**

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

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"We are not each on an individual journey to slash our footprint to zero. We are on a collective mission to shift the only true footprint that matters: that of society as a whole."

Grover, 2021



Key Policy Recommendations

- Better channels of communication need to be developed between government and policy-makers, public bodies, local authorities and communities on the ground, to allow for top-down and bottom-up inputs.
- It is important to find an effective mechanism through which people with community engagement, community development and technical skills can work collaboratively, in and with local communities.
- Collaborations need to be set up, nurtured, and supported through community based organisations.
- Time and resources are required to ensure that relationships develop, blockages are worked through and mutual understanding is reached.
- Seed funding for collaborations on sustainability projects involving multiple stakeholders, should be made more readily available via government departments, agencies and local authorities.
- Additional incentives, training and up-skilling courses are needed. As the education and training opportunities become available, a huge effort is required to encourage uptake.
- There is a need to provide training in community development and engagement skills, both for roles at the local level and for positions within public bodies, local authorities and corporations.
- Roles dedicated to engagement in academia are required to support and facilitate multi-stakeholder collaborations and the engaged research process.
- Research approaches must be flexible in their design in order to effectively collaborate with an active project.
- Engaged research can have a powerful impact on communities but we must find ways for communities to actively participate and to be resourced to do so.
- Research institutes and funders should place more value on the 'grey literature' outputs from engaged research.
- Evaluating the impacts of engaged research and the diffusion of sustainability is an important emerging area of research that requires more funding.
- Future public spending programmes (including in particular those aimed at local communities) should be proofed against the Climate Action Plan, with regular progress reviews.
- The areas of sustainability and climate action need to be embedded in all funding mechanisms so they become common objectives of all activity.
- A more collective approach across a number of funders would be very useful.
- Funding needs to be made available to public bodies to engage and empower local communities to work together on climate action.

Key Policy Recommendations

- There needs to be flexibility throughout the lifetime of a project to adapt and refine the approach. Sticking rigidly to plans written 6-12 months previously can lead to “box-ticking” actions which are not in anyone’s interest.
- Flexible funding structures are required to allow for pilot projects and for projects to expand over time.
- It is important to work with and fund what has already been established, i.e. there are over 400 **Connected Hubs**, 50 **Local Development Companies (LDCs)** and over 500 **Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs)** across the country. Core funding needs to be made available to local community-based organisations to provide a structured base from which to employ people, to coordinate, facilitate and enable effective climate action within their areas, to work with local authorities, and ultimately to empower local communities to make the changes that are required.
- In the case of the **Corca Dhuibhne Hub**, two of the pillars relate to Sustainability and Digitalisation and this has supported various initiatives in both areas, including **Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030**. It is suggested that this type of model has the potential for more widespread adoption across the country.

Corca Dhuibhne

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 and with an area of 583 sq km and extending 48 km into the Atlantic. It has a resident population of around 12,500, 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, Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030 is a multi-partner initiative on the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry. It involves the **Corca Dhuibhne 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.

ESB Networks is scheduled to conclude its **Dingle Project** at the end of 2021 while MaREI will continue to work on a number of specific activities. Work on the ground is developing and expanding through a number of themed projects across such areas as Energy, Agriculture, Marine, Sustainable Travel and Tourism. However, the structure and focus of any collaborative activity is constantly evolving.

Between 2018 and 2021 the Coordinating Group was comprised of 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 and Public Engagement Manager, MaREI; Clare Watson, Engaged Research Support Officer, MaREI; Evan Boyle, Post Doc Researcher, Sociology, MaREI; and Connor McGookin, Post Doc Researcher, Energy Engineering, MaREI.



Research Methods

In June 2021, the members of the Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030 Coordinating Group were asked to individually list the key lessons learnt from their involvement in the initiative over the past four years. In July 2021, these were collated and they provided the focus for three on-line discussions with the group (which also included Fergal Egan, ESB Network's Dingle Project Manager).

The main lessons and recommendations arising from these discussions were ranked by each participant in order of importance. The responses were collated and a final draft was agreed in September 2021.

LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

Start from Where People Are At

Lessons Learnt

- It is important to start from where people are at, not from where we want them to be, and to work with empathy so that we are open to seeing the challenge from other people's perspectives.

Recommendations for Practice

- Always avoid preaching, shaming, and telling people what to do.
- Garner community support by encouraging conversations, dialogue and debate, by sharing information, fostering awareness, and enabling active participation.
- Provide communities with something tangible (but relevant) to begin a successful engagement process. For example: home energy and transport trials; energy clinics; new public transport options; or a local electric vehicle (EV) initiative.
- Work with communities and their invaluable local knowledge and expertise, to agree priorities and co-create a road map.
- Help people to understand the 'bigger picture' - the context around what we are collectively doing, the limitations and constraints on the system, what we are trying to achieve together, and what this will mean for them.

Recommendation for Policy

- Help develop better channels of communication between government and policy-makers, public bodies, local authorities and communities on the ground, to allow for top-down and bottom-up inputs.

Develop Vibrant Communities

Lessons Learnt

- Sustainability needs to be dealt with in a holistic manner – one cannot expect to engage a diverse community if there is only a sustainability agenda in mind.
- Community development is aimed at empowering local communities and requires a long-term, sustained process, whereas community engagement may often be seen as being one-dimensional - we wish to engage with the community because we want them to do something for us. It may not necessarily foster inclusive participation or address underlying capacity needs.
- On-going support for community development may enable more meaningful interactions, engagement, capacity building and, ultimately, participation, 'co-authoring' and ownership.

Recommendations for Practice

- Build on what is already in place.
- Climate action should be seen as complementary to community development and vice versa.
- A successful low carbon transition at local level requires people with different skills and expertise working together in communities. These skills include community engagement, community development and technical specialists (with relevant expertise in energy transition) and they all need to work together.
- Energy system analysis needs to look beyond purely techno-economic assessments (for example, measuring the carbon emissions and the costs of same) to build an understanding of the societal context within which the energy transition will need to take place.

Recommendation for Policy

- It is important to find an effective mechanism through which people with community engagement, community development, and technical skills can work collaboratively in, and with, local communities.

Involving the Local Community in the ESB Networks Dingle Project

The ESB Networks Dingle Project developed a living trial environment on the peninsula to help understand how the electrification of heat and transport will impact the electricity network. The results of the trials will help inform the design of an electricity network to support a low carbon society. The project involved the appointment of 5 Project Ambassadors, 20 Solar PV Champions and 10 EV Ambassadors. It also included a full energy retrofit of 3 properties, and the deployment of renewable technologies in local homes, including 5 air source heat pumps, 25 solar PVs, 5 battery energy storage systems, 35 home energy monitoring devices, and 17 electric vehicles and home EV chargers.

Lessons Learnt

- The trials provided a very important catalyst for ‘getting things moving’ in the local community, starting conversations, and developing curiosity and interest around renewable energy technologies and the transition to a low carbon society.
- The trials kick-started the Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030 collaboration and they were a very important starting point. They quickly moved the initiative out of the talking phase into practical and demonstrable climate action.
- Having trusted members of the local community trialing the technologies and talking about their experiences may have helped to engage and encourage others to purchase and install technologies in their own homes (see Appendix 1).
- There was a knock-on benefit for local businesses, such as **Solar Beo**, a new solar panel provider, which carried out the initial installation work for the trials and subsequently expanded its business based on its successful track record of installing such products.

- The visibility of the photovoltaic (PV) panels and particularly the branded electric vehicles (EVs) meant that the EV trials were very visible and people could see some of the new technologies in action.
- Local Link Kerry also introduced new bus routes and two new buses to West Kerry, integrating with increased Bus Éireann services between Dingle and Tralee and this encouraged a significant increase in public transport usage on the Peninsula.
- When ESB Networks initially announced the Dingle Project, a local campaign group, Wired Atlantic Way, expressed their concerns about the use of smart meters. ESB Networks invited a number of key people from the campaign to meet and discuss these concerns with experts. This addressed some of the fears and the campaign did not impact on the trials.

Recommendations for Practice

- If coming into a community with a similar demonstration or trial project it is important to:
 - Clearly explain why you are doing the project and what you are trying to achieve
 - Provide the ‘bigger picture’ and what actions are required at local community level to achieve the Irish Government target of net zero emissions by 2050
 - Explain the home energy renovation process and how the new technologies work in language that people can understand whilst still being technically correct
 - Be available, have a local presence and provide a community engagement resource that people can easily access
 - Build trustworthy relationships and be honest and straight, even in difficult situations
 - Demonstrate commitment by walking the talk, doing what you have promised and going the extra mile, even if it requires effort
 - Communicate and collaborate with community initiatives and networks, and work together to achieve collective goals
 - Support the local economy, businesses and job/income creation through embracing the transition

Build Collaborations

Lessons Learnt

- Collective action is powerful - the whole is usually greater than the sum of its parts.
- Successful collaborations build teams and friendships. They foster trust, creativity, greater insight and understanding. Working together can be both fun and productive.
- However, collaborations do not happen on their own and they are not always easy.
- Co-production of solutions requires time, patience and an understanding of where partners are coming from, and the context in which they operate.

Recommendations for Practice

- Build on what is already being done and work with the people who are already active in this field locally.
- A bigger vision is required to avoid undertaking initiatives that are unconnected, and to ensure that the social, the cultural and the sustainable come together.
- Diverse partnerships are key. The combined experiences and expertise from different disciplines (technical and non-technical), with a common mission, stimulate better solutions and problem solving.
- Include a community development partner in the collaboration to ensure that engagement with the local community is inclusive, participative and empowering and that it helps to contribute to supporting broader societal capacity building.
- It is important, where possible, to document and reflect on the learnings (including benefits, barriers and challenges), in order to inform future practice and planning.

Recommendations for Policy

- Collaborations need to be set up, nurtured, and supported through community based organisations.
- Time and resources are required to ensure that relationships develop, blockages are worked through and mutual understanding is reached.
- Seed funding for collaborations on sustainability projects involving multiple stakeholders should be made more readily available via government departments, agencies and local authorities. Phased grants, where initial funding enables relationship development and proof of concept, are a good model. Allocation of dedicated staff time is required for relationship development and project management (including establishment of governance and communication structures) in agencies, academia, and communities.



Provide more Education, Training, Upskilling and Capacity Building

Lessons Learnt

- The transition to low carbon requires that people gain an understanding of what is required and that they build local capability and capacity to support their local community on the transition journey. This will also afford opportunities for building a capacity and capability for innovation, and creating new start-ups and sustainable, well-paid, fulfilling jobs (and/or incomes) in the local community that will be helpful beyond the transition.
- There are not enough skilled local tradespeople (builders, plumbers, electricians, technical assessors) to respond to the projected volumes of home energy upgrades and these skills will be required to affect the transition.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

- Additional incentives, training and up-skilling courses are needed. This requires that more people choose to study these subjects, take on apprenticeships and opt to work in these areas. As the education and training opportunities become available, a huge effort is required to encourage uptake.
- There is a need to provide training in community development and engagement skills, both for roles at the local level and for positions within public bodies, local authorities and corporations. This may require general awareness-raising among some public bodies and private companies (e.g. telecommunication, developers), accompanied by more specific, detailed community engagement skills training for particular people who are required to deal with communities on a more frequent basis. Where possible, local skill sets and personnel should be employed.

Engaged Research is Important

Lessons Learnt

- It is important to reflect and capture learnings from experimental initiatives, such as Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030, to identify 'unintended outcomes', to evaluate the process and to share the experiential knowledge. But it can be very difficult to make time for the work involved. However, it is possible through the **Engaged Research** process.
- An Engaged Research team can contribute expertise at various stages of the development of the initiative and then track, document and co-produce learnings. This has been of huge benefit both to Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030 and MaREI, particularly in terms of capacity building.
- On-going research may impact on policy. Transdisciplinary researchers are uniquely placed when they are involved both 'on the ground' in transition processes and building an understanding of people's concerns while also inputting at the upper policy levels.

Recommendations for Policy

- Research approaches must be flexible in their design in order to effectively collaborate with an active project. The established structures of academic research are not ideal for enabling this kind of work to take place yet the research outputs are important if there is to be institutional learning. Therefore, administrative, legal, financial and ethical processes in institutions may need to adapt in response to this need for flexibility.
- Engaged research can have a powerful impact on communities but we must find ways for communities to actively participate and to be resourced to do so.
- Research institutes and funders should place more value on the 'grey literature' outputs from engaged research (e.g. learning briefs, policy briefs, videos, infographics, guides, recommendations). These resources draw out experiential learnings and ensure that the research is accessible, useful and beneficial to stakeholders.
- Evaluating the impacts of engaged research and the diffusion of sustainability is an important emerging area of research that requires more funding.
- Roles dedicated to engagement in academia are required to support and facilitate multi-stakeholder collaborations and the engaged research process. In addition, community-based engagement roles can enable communities to become active citizens, while also addressing challenges such as climate change.

Resources are Required

- Volunteers have a key role to play and the volunteer element is invaluable. However, the issue of climate change is too important, strategic and urgent to be left solely to volunteers. We can no longer expect them to do all the work, or to scale up their activities to the level that is required, unless they are adequately supported and resourced.
- While some funding mechanisms exist, it is still very difficult to access core funding for community based climate action and in particular for community engagement and project management roles.
- There are so-called 'funding silos' whereby funding mechanisms all (understandably) have distinct goals and objectives but this may be limiting the impact they can have.



Recommendations for Practice

- Accessing resources, evaluating and reporting to funders demands its own resources – from proposal writing to final reporting, a very significant portion of time is required to manage projects. Communities need a core team in place to support this activity if they are to be in a position to leverage the many opportunities becoming available through the EU twin-track strategy of addressing digitalisation and climate change.
- In relation to funding, offering solutions is always key. This approach develops relationships and, in time, leads to obtaining support. It is suggested that potential funders should not be approached simply with a list of problems to be solved. Profile raising and demonstrating impact are very important parts of the process and are important tools for supporters within funding organisations to build the case for resourcing.
- Research institutes have a lot of expertise in accessing funding and may be able to help stakeholders to attain funding for projects and to facilitate community participation.

Recommendations for Policy

- Future public spending programmes (including, in particular, those aimed at local communities) should be proofed against the Climate Action Plan, with regular progress reviews.
- The areas of sustainability and climate action need to be embedded in all funding mechanisms so they become common objectives of all activity. Flexibility for communities to consolidate funds to achieve common objectives should be explored.
- Individuals on their own will not bring about the low carbon transition. The required changes will only happen with everyone on board. Funding needs to be made available to public bodies to engage and empower local communities to work together on climate action.
- Core funding should be provided to groups operating at sub-county level and, for example, could be channelled through the local Connected Hubs, Local Development Companies or Sustainable Energy Communities (see next section).
- Flexible funding structures are required to allow for pilot projects and for projects to expand over time. From our experience, the SFI Discover funding model works very well.
- A more collective approach across a number of national funders would be very useful (or at least more connectivity between them). It is recommended that the heads of the funding programmes meet annually to collectively plan for future Calls in the climate change and energy space, to discuss Call topics, Call timings, potential collaborative Calls, uniform templates and reporting, dissemination and evaluation. This would help with impact assessment at a national level and avoid duplication and overlap.
- For Calls involving community participation it would be useful to disseminate the information through national community organisations, such as The Wheel, the SEAI Sustainable Energy Community Network and the Public Participation Network, who have existing relationships with local communities.
- There is often a significant delay between proposal writing and project delivery and needs. Situations and timescales can change considerably in that time. An extreme example of this was the arrival of the Covid 19 pandemic which led to unexpected and pervasive changes. It is important we take the lessons learned around flexibility from this experience. Sticking rigidly to plans written 6-12 months previously can lead to “box ticking” actions which are not in anyone’s interest.

Create New Organisational Structures

Lessons Learnt

- Some communities may feel disconnected from local authorities and government. Many communities are eager to bring about positive change but there may be frustration when submissions to local plans are not responded to, or the communities consider that their needs and priorities are not being heard or taken seriously by the public authorities.
- The current local government structures do not adequately provide for the sub-county level, including the local community level, which will be critical for the low carbon transition as it will address local communities.
- The local authorities are being expected to do a lot and, while they can fund capital projects, they are limited in their ability to recruit sufficient additional permanent staff. Yet their existing staff do not necessarily have the time or the required competence and capabilities for addressing the climate change challenges.

Recommendations for Practice

- Mechanisms need to be developed to improve the channels of communication between local authorities and both area-based communities and communities of interest.

Recommendations for Practice

- It is important to work with and fund what has already been established, i.e. there are over 400 **Connected Hubs**, 50 **Local Development Companies (LDCs)** and over 500 **Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs)** across the country (the number will only increase). Core funding needs to be made available to local community based organisations to provide a structured base from which to employ people, to coordinate, facilitate and enable effective climate action within their areas, to work with local authorities, and ultimately to empower local communities to make the changes that are required (see Figure 1: The Role of the Central, Community-Based Organization in Mobilizing Effective Climate Action, for more details).
- In the case of the **Corca Dhuibhne Hub**, two of the pillars relate to Sustainability and Digitalisation and this has supported various initiatives in both areas, including **Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030**. It is suggested that this type of model has the potential for more widespread adoption across the country as it would allow for various Exchequer-funded investments in a cost-effective manner. This also means there is no need to develop a new parallel structure. The model we envisage is that a third of the money (core funding) would come from the Government, a third would come from various Exchequer or non-exchequer sources (including EU) and then a third, in the case of the Hub, would come from the revenue created by Hub users. For this model to succeed however, the initial core funding is essential.



Figure 1: The Role of the Central Community-based Organization in Mobilizing Effective Climate Action



Appendix 1

A data request submitted to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) in mid-2021 on Solar PV grants to date, along with known installations as part of the ESB Networks Dingle Project, provided the following figures.

	2018	2019	2020	Total
No. Installs	4	25	11	40
kW	8	55	36	98.4
kWh	7,709	52,902	34,208	94,818
CO2 saving	2,894	17,167	10,091	30,152

A significant portion of these installations can be attributed directly to the ESB Networks Dingle Project, which saw 25 households receiving Solar PV panels in 2019. It is no surprise then that the total Solar PV installed in the area between 2018-2020 is above what might be expected, at

W Installed / Capita	2018	2020
Ireland	2.7	1.1
Dingle Peninsula	7.9	2.8

just over twice the national average. However, looking at the per capita installations for the year 2020, occurring after the Dingle Project installations had taken place, it is interesting to see an above-average installation rate on the peninsula.

While it is too early in the transition process to verify the impact of Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030, a closer look at the Solar PV installations in the area may show an early indication of some technology diffusion. However, it is acknowledged that this does not definitively prove that Corca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula 2030 has had an impact, due to the following issues:

- The dataset is incomplete – houses built after 2011 or with a BER lower than C rated cannot access the grant and thus are not accounted for in the data provided by SEAI. In the case of the Dingle Peninsula, 15 installations were added to the grant number as it was known how many ESB Networks had installed. However, it would be very difficult to repeat this exercise for the national dataset.
- We did not speak to the eleven households – what motivated them to install Solar PV in 2020 has not been verified.
- A single year does not represent a trend – the increased activity seen in 2020 may not continue, this might just be a once-off spike rather than representing a long-term trend.
- External factors – factors such as household savings incurred due to COVID-19 restrictions may in part explain the spending in 2020.

The Dingle Peninsula 2030 co-ordinating group would like to acknowledge and thank all the people who have so generously given their time and support, both on the Dingle Peninsula and further afield.

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