



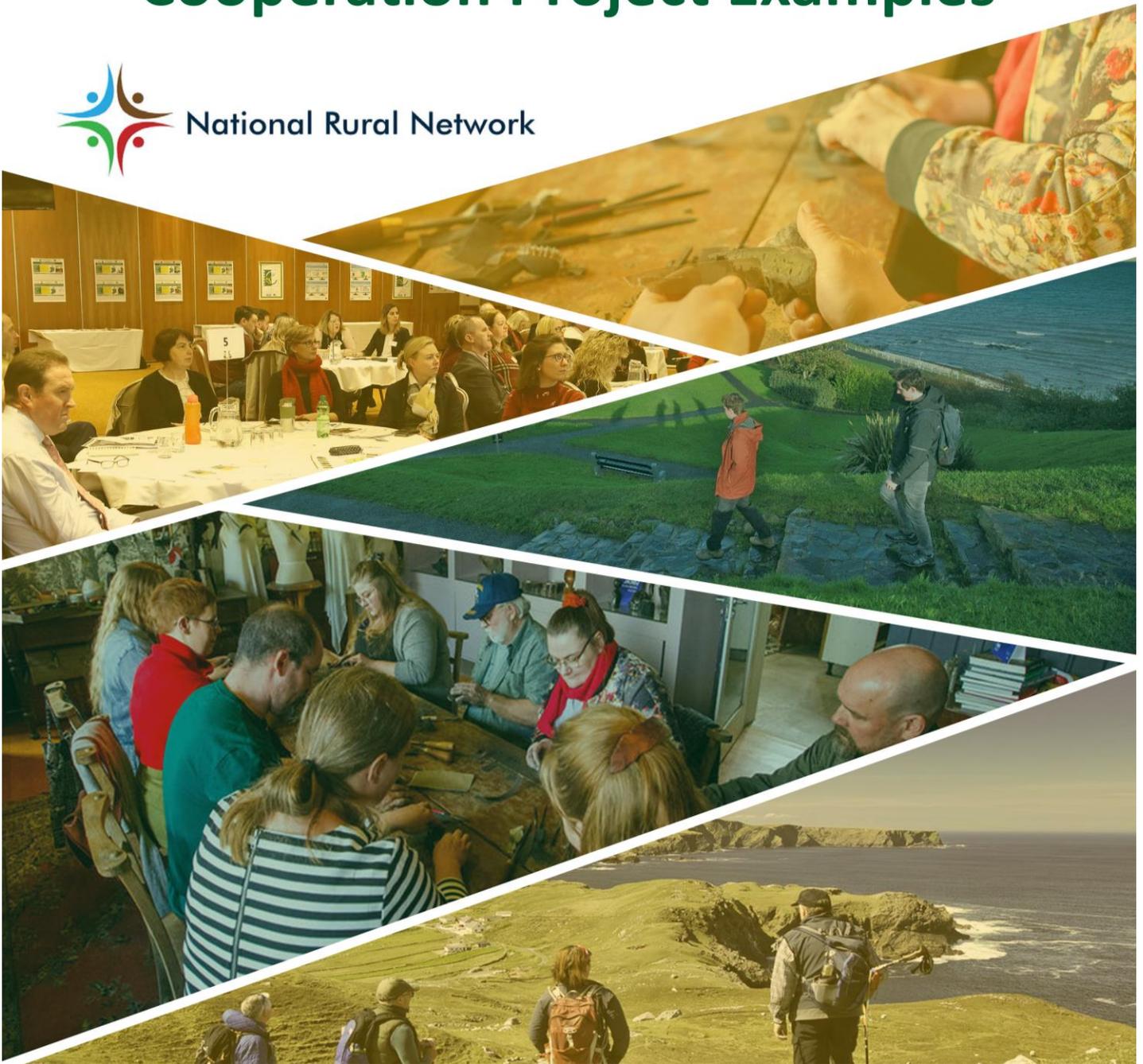
An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development



LEADER Programme 2014-2020 (Extended to 2022) Cooperation Project Examples



National Rural Network





**LEADER 2014-2020
(EXTENDED TO 2022)**

LEADER

Community-Led Local Development



Prepared by the National Rural Network (NRN) team at Irish Rural Link and the University of Galway on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM).

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The LEADER Approach

The LEADER Concept

The LEADER programme, established by the European Commission in 1991, is based on the ‘bottom-up’ approach. A European Commission report entitled ‘The LEADER Approach – A basic guide’, represents the rationale behind LEADER in the following manner: ‘the main concept behind the LEADER initiative is that, given the diversity of European rural areas, development strategies are more effective and efficient if decided and implemented at local level by local actors, accompanied by clear and transparent procedures, the support of the relevant public administrations and the necessary technical assistance for the transfer of good practice’.



7 Key Principles of LEADER

The LEADER approach is based on 7 key principles—all of which must collaborate and positively interact for it to be successful. Indeed, it is important to consider these 7 principles as a toolkit, rather than as separate entities, that can work together to safeguard and build a brighter future for rural communities.



LEADER 2014-2020 Themes

The LEADER Programme 2014-2020 targets funding towards key areas in need of support. Projects are supported in three thematic areas (1. Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation, 2. Social Inclusion & 3. Rural Environment). These three themes are broad enough to enable funding of a diversity of community-led projects both from private enterprise and community groups.



Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Implementing Partners (IPs)

Decisions on LEADER funding applications are made at a local level by a network of 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs). They approve applications that align with the objectives of their Local Development Strategy, which is developed in consultation with the local communities. Local Development Companies in each area are responsible for the day to day management and co-ordination of the LEADER Programme, either as Implementing Partners (IPs) in a wider LAG or by acting as the LAG itself. Applications for LEADER funding are made to these Local Development Companies. Project Officers within these companies are the first port of call when thinking about applying for LEADER funding.

LAGs may operate a ‘rolling call’ for LEADER funding applications and accept applications on an ongoing basis. Targeted calls allow LAGs to concentrate funding in specific strategic areas of need or opportunity.

Depending on the nature of the project and the applicant type, different rates of funding aid apply. For example, analysis and development projects from a private business can be funded up to 75% of the total project costs while for community applicants it is up to 90%.





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LEADER Cooperation Explained

The LEADER Cooperation Scheme is designed to encourage rural areas to work together on joint projects with mutual benefits for each participating area. The general aim of LEADER Cooperation is to help local actors improve the potential of their areas.

LEADER Cooperation involves networking but on a different, more dynamic level. There are many benefits, such as:

- Widening local views in order to improve local strategies.
- Accessing information and new ideas.
- Opportunities to learn from other regions or countries.
- Stimulating and supporting innovation.
- Acquiring skills and means to improve project delivery.

Cooperation is a partnership between Local Action Groups (LAGs) but the partnership can also involve non-LEADER groups. Cooperation projects between LEADER LAGs and non-LEADER groups, for example, may also be eligible where the proposed project is led and coordinated by the LEADER LAG, and whereby the non-LEADER group is implementing a local strategy.

Partners are obligated to have a direct relevance to the project theme and may have an advisory or a practical role in project management and delivery. It is pivotal that partners add value to the overall project and its eventual outcomes.

Different types of LEADER Cooperation exist:

- Inter-territorial Cooperation - between two or more LAGs within a Member State.
- Transnational Cooperation - between two or more LAGs from different Member States.

Find out more:

- Check out the [European Network for Rural Development's LEADER Cooperation web-based resource](#).

This booklet, produced by the National Rural Network (NRN), showcases 4 cooperation projects supported under the LEADER Programme 2014-2020 (extended to 2022).





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International Appalachian Trail (IAT) Ulster Ireland

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International Appalachian Trail (IAT) Ulster Ireland



Summary

Launched in 2013, the International Appalachian Trail (IAT) Ulster Ireland is a 279-mile / 449-kilometre coast-to-coast cross-border walking trail. Beginning at Slieve League in Co. Donegal, the trail traverses four counties and finishes at the port of Larne in Co. Antrim. Along the route, walkers can experience breath-taking scenery, historic landmarks, diverse culture and heritage sites.

In 2016, led by Donegal Local Development CLG in the Republic of Ireland, and Derry and Strabane Rural Partnership in Northern Ireland, six Local Action Groups (LAGs) came together to determine whether there would be sufficient interest in taking the IAT forward as a cooperation project and to assess its potential economic and community benefit to each of the areas involved. Based on the findings of an Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) scoping study, they decided to proceed. Funding received under the Rural Development Programme has had a transformational impact.

Project name: International Appalachian Trail (IAT) Ulster Ireland

Date: March 2020 – September 2022

Project initiated by:

- Donegal Local Development CLG
(Lead partner in Republic of Ireland)
- Derry and Strabane Rural Partnership
(Lead partner in Northern Ireland)
- Causeway Coast and Glens LAG
- Fermanagh and Omagh LAG
- Mid-Ulster Rural Development Partnership
- Mid and East Antrim LAG

Further information:

[Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#)

Among the benefits has been the establishment of an international standard high quality walking experience; increased uniformity across the route with regard to trail infrastructure, branding and marketing; and the creation of a strong working relationship between the partner LAGs involved.



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Context

The Ulster Ireland chapter of the IAT was formally launched in August 2013, four years after Donegal Local Development CLG had begun advocating for, and promoting the idea of bringing the route to Ireland in 2009. This is one of an expanding number of chapters which comprise the IAT family and which include among others Maine in the US, Quebec in Canada, Iceland, England, Scotland, Wales, The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, France, Spain and Morocco. The remnants of what is known as the Caledonian – Appalachian Oregon is at the core of the IAT narrative and provides a focus for member chapters to celebrate a shared heritage. All chapters also share a common mission which is to establish a network of walking trails that extend beyond borders to all geographic regions. In addition to connecting people and places, the goal is to promote natural and cultural heritage, health and fitness, environmental stewardship, fellowship and understanding, cross-border cooperation, and rural economic development through eco and geo tourism.

The IAT Ulster Ireland chapter comprises local authorities, public sector bodies, charities and voluntary sector organisations in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The common denominator for each of the group members is an interest in walking. The trail starts at the iconic Slieve League and passes through the Bluestack Mountains in Co. Donegal before crossing the border into Northern Ireland. Here the route picks up the Ulster Way where it takes in the landscapes of Tyrone and the Sperrins, passes onto the Giant’s Causeway and the north Antrim coastline before traversing the Glens of Antrim and finishing at the port of Larne.



The route of the IAT - Source: IAT Ulster Ireland

In 2016, led by Donegal Local Development CLG in the Republic of Ireland, and Derry and Strabane Rural Partnership in Northern Ireland, six partner LAGs came together to determine whether there would be sufficient interest in taking the IAT forward as a cooperation project. Following an initial scoping study, which examined the merit and potential of a full-scale capital cooperation project that would be mutually beneficial to each of the LAG areas, a decision was taken to proceed. LEADER funding was sought to develop and improve the physical infrastructure along the IAT with a significant investment directed towards marketing the route.

This project was part funded under Priority 6 (LEADER) of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the European Union. The total funding secured in Northern Ireland Council areas is £1,306,000. Participant Councils – Derry City & Strabane District Council, Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, Mid Ulster District Council, Causeway Coast & Glens





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Borough Council and Mid & East Antrim Borough Council contributed £340,000 of the total project costs as well as significant support to wider project delivery. The remaining £966,000 is secured through the NI Rural Development Programme.

In the Republic of Ireland, the project is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), delivered by Donegal Local Development CLG, on behalf of Donegal Local Community Development Committee in partnership with Donegal County Council through grant aid received under The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development in Ireland 2014–2020. The total funding secured in Co. Donegal of €214,735.83 includes a LEADER grant of €161,051.87 and additional match funding from Donegal County Council and the Rural Recreation Programme.



Causeway Coast, Co. Antrim - Source: IAT Ulster Ireland

“We started working to get the IAT to Ireland in 2009 and launched the route on the ground in 2013. I am delighted that we now have the funding to enhance the user experience on our section of this incredibly diverse international trail.” *Inga Bock, RRO, Donegal Local Development CLG*

“The project aims to connect Donegal to the Derry City and Strabane District as well as other Local Action Groups (LAGs) throughout Northern Ireland by improving a trail that will have both local and international appeal. This will help stimulate local economies by creating additional tourist amenities. It will also add value to the continuous work being carried out under the Rural Recreational Programme and the Walks Scheme in Donegal.” *Frank Kelly, Formerly of Donegal Local Development CLG*



Slieve League, Co. Donegal - Source: IAT Ulster Ireland

Objectives

- Deliver a cross-border and cross LAG cooperation project to enhance the Ulster Ireland section of the IAT and provide a quality and consistent walking experience across the entire route;
- Enhance the visitor experience along the IAT through the installation of new interpretive panels and trail furniture,





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and the refurbishment and upgrade of visitor car parks/amenity sites;

- Increase the profile, identity and brand awareness of the IAT – locally, nationally and in the U.S, through a comprehensive programme of marketing;
- Increase the economic value of the IAT route to the local and national tourism sector;
- Achieve uniformity in terms of branding and marketing across the route;
- Promote natural and cultural heritage;
- Promote health and well-being through walking.

Derry and Strabane Rural Partnership Strategy, the animation and maximisation of opportunities from the IAT began to emerge as a realistic and feasible project.

Following this, a number of meetings were held between Derry and Strabane Rural Partnership and a range of stakeholders in Co. Donegal, aimed at developing a realistic, achievable, and mutually beneficial project, in the area of tourism and recreation, with a specific link to the IAT.

* * *

Beginning in April 2016, Derry and Strabane Rural Partnership hosted monthly networking meetings to progress discussions on the IAT with officers and board members from the partner LAGs through which the route traverses. These meetings enabled the group to discuss the potential of the project to bring economic and community benefit to each of the Council areas. The partner LAGs agreed to part-fund a scoping study into the feasibility and viability of the project.

During the initial Rural Development Programme project scoping phase, Derry and Strabane Rural Partnership was nominated lead partner in Northern Ireland for the IAT Ulster Ireland Cooperation by partner LAGs. Among the activities undertaken by them included:

- managing a best practice visit to Scotland;
- procuring the delivery of a project scoping study;
- procuring the delivery of a design / branding toolkit;
- procuring the delivery of a programme of marketing activity; and
- procuring the delivery of the design and artwork of interpretive panels.

Activity undertaken by Derry and Strabane Rural Partnership was in close consultation with partner

Activities

Donegal Local Development CLG began advocating for, and promoting the idea of bringing the Ulster Ireland chapter of the IAT route to Ireland back in 2009. When the route was formally launched in August 2013, they set about approaching LAG partners in Northern Ireland about the potential of establishing a LEADER Cooperation cross-border project to enhance the route.

At this time in Northern Ireland, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) considered Cooperation Actions to be a priority activity for the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme, with a particular emphasis on cross-border projects, and on the development of opportunities afforded by unique landscape or natural resources crossing the boundaries of two or more LAG areas. Following a consultation period which considered potential projects to be included in the





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LAGs, Councils and an IAT Steering Group via meetings and workshops.

* * *

The formal need for the project, works and investment was demonstrated initially within a detailed scoping study undertaken by Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) between May and September 2017. This included detailed analysis of the current status of the wider IAT Ulster Ireland route, focusing on the individual sections within each of the Council areas. This report provided a number of recommendations for enhancement of the trail.

Each of the partner LAGs reviewed the development needs and capital works requirements for their respective areas as identified within the ORNI study, and in partnership with Councils and Donegal Local Development CLG, prioritised key actions for delivery. Each partner then submitted an application for funding to the Rural Development Programme Cooperation Scheme, as well as submitting a budget - sharing costs for a wider programme of marketing activity.

In May 2018, Park Hood Landscape Architects were commissioned via a competitive tender process to deliver a design / branding toolkit for all wayfinding / marking and interpretive signage along the full route to ensure a consistency of approach in the procurement and installation of trail infrastructure.



Interpretive signage on the IAT - Source: IAT Ulster Ireland

ORNI was also commissioned to deliver a programme of local, national and international (U.S) marketing activity. A temporary marketing officer was appointed to facilitate communication between ORNI and the six partner LAGs. In addition, two marketing project working groups were set up incorporating staff from ORNI, partner LAGs, partner Councils, and the temporary marketing officer. LAGs and Councils made available local knowledge on their section of the trail so that local places of interest could be highlighted on trail literature.



The IAT Ulster Ireland website was launched at the end of 2021 - Source: IAT Ulster Ireland

“The project provided a unique opportunity to engage in a strategic joint marketing initiative with each of the partner LAGs to develop the IAT brand.”
Eamon Gallogly, Mid-Ulster Rural Development Partnership

Results

The establishment of this cooperation between the six partner LAGs involved has resulted in the development of an international standard high quality walking experience connecting four counties and six district Council areas north and south of the border. Physical enhancements made to the IAT Ulster Ireland supported by LEADER funding such as new way marking, trail re-routing, additional trail infrastructure and furniture, branded signage, art and sculptures,





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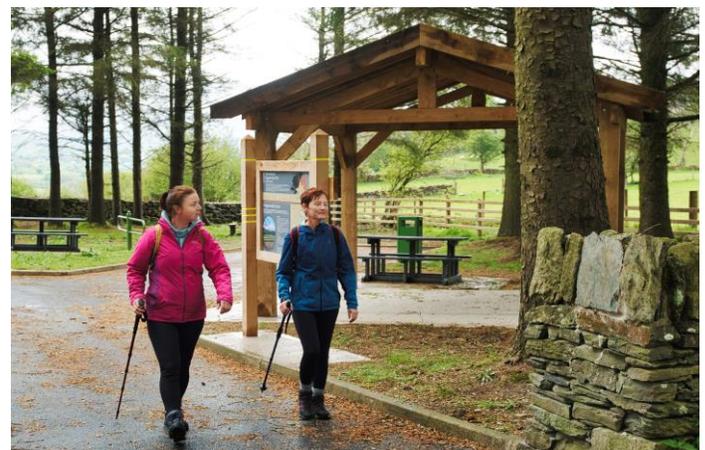
path developments and amenity improvements along the route have not only served to improve walker safety and navigation on the trail but have also helped to showcase the region’s culture, history and heritage.

“The significant financial support received by the International Appalachian Trail Ulster Ireland from the Rural Development Programme has had a transformational impact on what was an embryonic initiative, launched formally in 2013. The end product is a high quality long distance walking trail, framed within stunning landscapes, enriched by increasing the profile of local culture, history and heritage and supported by critical infrastructure and visitor services. The International Appalachian Trail Ulster Ireland now constitutes an international standard visitor walking experience which fits with Tourism NI’s Embrace A Giant Spirit. It will drive growth within the region’s tourism sector by increasing visitor footfall while contributing to connecting people and places, promoting natural and cultural heritage, health and fitness, environmental stewardship, fellowship and understanding, and cross-border cooperation.” Philip McShane, Rural Tourism Officer, Derry City & Strabane District Council



The IAT Ulster Ireland framed within stunning landscapes - Source: IAT Ulster Ireland

The IAT has capitalised on, and connected trails already in place along the route such as the Bluestack Way and the Ulster Way and links up existing infrastructure within the vicinity of the IAT.



A new shelter at Barnes, Co. Tyrone - Source: IAT Ulster Ireland





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“This project aims to make trails that already existed even better.” *Coleen McBrien, Fermanagh and Omagh LAG*

The uniformity in terms of branding rolled out across the IAT has increased public awareness and recognition of the route for walkers and visitors alike.



“Causeway Coast and Glens Local Action Group (LAG) in partnership with LAG groups from other council areas have worked together to develop and promote this renowned walking trail. Their efforts have resulted in significant improvements including updated information panels and improved facilities which will enhance the experience of our visitors who come here to enjoy our outdoor spaces and breathtaking scenery... I have no doubt it will encourage more walkers and outdoor enthusiasts to explore our part of this fantastic trail which enjoys global recognition.” *Councillor Richard Holmes, Mayor, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council*

In late 2021, LEADER funding supported the creation and launch of the IAT Ulster Ireland website. The website is a ‘one-stop shop’ for anybody interested in walking the trail. It provides up-to-date information on the IAT and features a number of short and longer walks. A range of images can be accessed in the gallery section of the website.



The new IAT Ulster Ireland website and capital work development were celebrated at a national launch event in Co. Tyrone in late-2021 – Source: IAT Ulster Ireland

Branding and design of signage is consistent throughout the IAT - Source: IAT Ulster Ireland

The provision and delivery of key tools from the outset of the cooperation project will ensure the future sustainability, development and growth of the initiative. There is clarity around the design and branding throughout the IAT, as well as the marketing





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programme moving forward, while findings from the initial ORNI scoping study have identified additional medium to long term objectives that can be worked towards by the partner LAGs, Councils, and the Ulster Ireland chapter of the IAT.

“An added benefit is that ORNI, as part of their work on the IAT, have asked for spin off routes near to the IAT, in neighbouring areas... This will bring walkers on the IAT into nearby towns and villages, thereby increasing footfall and benefitting the local economy and potentially accommodation providers.” Stephen Catherwood, Mid and East Antrim LAG

Finally, work undertaken by the various partner LAGs involved in this cooperation over the last number of years has led to the consolidation of the IAT Ulster Ireland partnership at a strategic level. Moreover, at an operational level, there has been substantial growth in the number of new entrants, facilitators and champions to the initiative.



Newly installed ‘Recycled Seat’ along the Owenea River near Ardara, Co. Donegal – Source: IAT Ulster Ireland

Lessons

Importance of pre-development funding

Pre-development funding enabled partner LAGs to carry out a comprehensive scoping study of the

entire route of the IAT which incorporated the physical trail, signage and interpretation, visitor experience and marketing including brand recognition and economic benefit. This exercise formed the basis of subsequent funding applications for physical infrastructure and marketing support, which were supported under the Rural Development Programme.

Scope for more collective collaboration

Each of the six partner LAGs tendered for the delivery of capital improvement works in their own respective areas separately and at different times. Although there was ongoing communication between partners to ensure a consistency of approach, it was suggested that a dedicated capital working group between those involved in the cooperation could have enabled smoother delivery and provided focused and agreed solutions to any issues arising. In addition, a more overarching strategic approach in relation to procurement generally would have been helpful, as opposed to each Council procuring themselves.

Knowledge exchange

The cooperation project provided participating partner LAGs, most of whom had not worked together previously, with the opportunity to meet regularly, and to share learnings, documents, templates and other information with each other with regard to procurement and a range of other issues.

“The cooperation project and working with other Councils built and increased relationships. It was insightful to learn about the IAT not only in Ulster-Ireland, but also in other areas of the world.” Stephen Catherwood, Mid and East Antrim LAG

“The opportunity to be involved in such a unique project was an exciting prospect.” Eamon Gallogly, Mid-Ulster Rural Development Partnership





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“The other LAGs were happy for us to work at our own pace and provided us with the flexibility we needed once they knew the commitment was there.”

Coleen McBrien, Fermanagh and Omagh LAG

Working alongside landowners

One of the initial steps in each of the LAG areas involved mapping the route of the IAT. Consultation and collaboration with landowners was a fundamental part of this.

“Funding new trails under LEADER is quite challenging, as most trails will need to access private land. Early and ongoing engagement with landowners is vital to ensure permission and goodwill are achieved throughout the lifetime of a trail project. We are very grateful to be working with so many proactive landowners on the IAT.”

Inga Bock, RRO, Donegal Local Development CLG

Funding

In the Republic of Ireland (Donegal):

Total project budget (i)+(ii)+(iii) =	€214,735.83
+ (i) Rural Development Programme support (a)+(b)	€161,051.87
+ (a) EAFRD (EU) contribution	€101,140.57
+ (b) National / Regional contribution	€59,911.30
+ (ii) Private match funding	€10,736.79
+ (iii) Other public funding	€42,947.17

In Northern Ireland Council areas:

Total project budget (i)+(ii)+(iii) =	£1,306,000
+ (i) Rural Development Programme support (a)+(b)	£966,000
+ (a) EAFRD (EU) contribution	£608,580
+ (b) National / Regional contribution	£357,420
+ (ii) Private match funding	-
+ (iii) Other public funding	£340,000

More information can be found on the International Appalachian Trail Ulster Ireland [website](#).





Innocrafts Irish Finnish Craft Cooperation



Innocrafts Irish Finnish Craft Cooperation

Summary

Offaly Local Development Company (OLDC) and Westmeath Community Development (WCD) collaborated to develop an enterprise craft-training programme and creative skills exchange in partnership with Finnish LEADER companies, Rieska and Keskipiste. Launched in 2019 and funded through the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (extended to 2022), the Innocrafts Irish Finnish Craft Cooperation (Innocrafts Cooperation) project provided craftmakers in both countries with an exciting and valuable opportunity to share and develop new techniques and skills.

Through the organisation of various craft training programmes, events and workshops, the Innocrafts Cooperation has supported and enhanced the skills and confidence of more than 30 craftmakers in Offaly and Westmeath; provided opportunities to collaborate with and learn from creative sectors in Finland; assisted greatly with the preservation of traditional heritage skills; and strengthened the working relationship between LAGs and craftmakers in both countries.

Project name: Innocrafts Irish Finnish Craft Cooperation

Date: September 2019 – September 2022

Project initiated by:

Ireland

- Offaly Local Development Company
- Westmeath Community Development

Finland

- Rieska LEADER
- Keskipiste LEADER

Further information:

[Innocrafts Cooperation Project Website](#) | [Craftlink](#)

[Directory of Offaly and Westmeath Craftmakers](#) | [The Art & Craft of Gifting](#)



Irish and Finnish craftmakers participating in the Innocrafts Cooperation project – Source: Jeff Harvey Photography





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Context

OLDC and WCD have a long-standing relationship with LEADER companies in Finland, which as a country is renowned worldwide for its expertise in craft and design. For this project, the Irish LAGs involved identified an opportunity to build on this existing relationship via a LEADER Cooperation project, which would benefit craftmakers in both countries.

Prior research carried out by OLDC and WCD supported by AD Training & Consulting had shown a strong interest from buyers in purchasing quality locally-made crafts, and from craftmakers in developing and growing within their professions. This included hobbyists aspiring to set up a business, part-time craftmakers transitioning to full-time, and professional craftmakers seeking to develop or expand their business further.

By providing necessary supports to craftmakers, OLDC and WCD hoped this collaboration with LEADER companies in Finland would help sustain and enhance the existing Irish craft business base and interest generally in crafts. The organic cross-fertilisation of knowledge and expertise between craftmakers from different disciplines and backgrounds would provide a novel opportunity for learning for all craftmakers.

The project set out to develop and implement a strategically designed professional training and development programme for the creative sector, with LEADER support, to enable enterprises to fully realise their talents both creatively and commercially.

Objectives

- Deliver bespoke training programmes in textile design, business development programmes, and additional

workshops, seminars and mentoring to craftmakers in Ireland and Finland.

- Identify new and innovative methods of marketing and promoting the work of craftmakers.
- Enhance the Innocrafts Cooperation project website to allow craftmakers from Ireland and Finland to easily connect, communicate and share resources with each other.
- Record and document the key events from the Innocrafts project by creating a portfolio of photography and audio-visual material to be used in the production of a booklet and for marketing purposes.

Activities

At the outset of this project, a research field trip to Finland was organised to gauge the interest of Finnish craftmakers in participating in a bespoke craft-training programme in Ireland. This trip involved meetings with Rieska and Keskipiste LEADER companies and discussions on requirements for the creative sectors in Ireland and Finland.

“We identified many common interests and areas for development. The consensus was that by building a bespoke project based on exploring traditional Irish and Finnish crafts, we would be able to discover and measure how the sharing of skills and heritage can impact on creative inspiration and sustainable economies in the craft sector.” Aileen Duffy, AD Training & Consulting

WCD was the project lead coordinating company with Ballinahown Community Development responsible for





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administrative support. The project was presented and approved by Offaly LCDC and Westmeath LCDC in Ireland as well as Rieska and Keskipiste LEADER companies in Finland. It was approved initially until September 2020, however as a result of Covid-19 restrictions, an extension to September 2022 was granted.

OLDC and WCD worked in partnership in the development, promotion and delivery of this cooperation project. A number of key objectives were identified resulting in the following activities.

- A masterclass was hosted by Eddie Shanahan (business and product development specialist for the fashion, craft and retail sectors), and various other guest speakers, who offered critical advice to participating craftmakers on engaging and converting audiences, capitalising on the value of heritage techniques and inspiration in product development.
- A product development programme was subsequently delivered by Eddie Shanahan who provided insight into market trends, retailing and new product development. A 'Reviving Retail' event was organised which provided craftmakers with an opportunity to interact with retailers from across the country in bespoke training sessions and incorporated the launch of the 'Art of Craft and Gifting' directory, showcasing a range of inspirational craftmakers from Offaly and Westmeath.

- An online 'Meet the Maker' series was organised in November 2021 which facilitated conversations with Eddie Shanahan and craftmakers. This together with the production of fantastic 'Behind the Scenes' videos provided an opportunity to promote Offaly and Westmeath craftmakers.



- Due to Covid-19 restrictions, Offaly and Westmeath craftmakers were not able to travel to Finland in late-2021. Instead, Finnish partners provided craftmakers in Ireland with an opportunity to exhibit their creations in Finland at their Christmas Market and TAITO Craft Shop. Product evaluation and mentoring were also carried out with an expert Finnish craft mentor. This mentoring support was reciprocated to six Finnish craftmakers who sent their products to Ireland.

"During the project, a close innovative group of artisans formed who networked with each other and with Irish artisans. The artisans saw the virtual possibility of communication, they received valuable guidance on design, marketing,



sales, packaging and presentation for both the Finnish and Irish markets. The artisans also learned from each other about new techniques and materials. In addition, they gained skills in planning and implementation of various workshops face to face and digitally. All of these actions have a significant impact on the earning potential of artisans.” *Tuula Puoskari, Finnish craft mentor, TAITO Central Ostrobothnian Crafts Organisation*



Finnish craftmakers at Cathal Barber’s Goldsmith Studio & Retail Shop in Birr, Co. Offaly – Source: Jeff Harvey Photography

- 10 Finnish craftmakers came to Ireland in April 2022 to participate in a skills exchange with Offaly and Westmeath craftmakers. This was a collaboration with Design & Crafts Council Ireland, Offaly Local Enterprise Office, and Westmeath Local Enterprise Office who together hosted FUSE Product Development Clinics. FUSE Clinics were essential for craft and design enterprises with aspirations of developing their product range and brand identity. This provided an opportunity to attend presentations and take part in 1-to-1 clinics with a panel of expert mentors in a range of areas such as product development, production and manufacturing, brand identity, fashion and textiles.

- Five craftmakers from Offaly and Westmeath visited Finland in May 2022. They were given an opportunity to participate in workshops, deliver workshops and visit the studios of other craftmakers during the visit. This provided craftmakers with a space to acquire new skills and learn sustainable business practices in Finland.

Results

The Innocrafts Cooperation project has directly supported more than 30 craftmakers in the counties of Offaly and Westmeath.

- Provided participants with training and development continuity support required to bring their businesses from inception phase through to strong, customer-driven businesses that can market and sell locally, nationally and internationally.
- Enhanced the skills and confidence of programme participants, enabling them to develop and grow their businesses.



Learning wood carving at Celtic Roots Studio in Ballinahown, Co. Westmeath – Source: Jeff Harvey Photography



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- Provided opportunities for participants to collaborate with and learn from creative sectors in other regions and countries.

recordings of craft classes that have already taken place.



Irish and Finnish craftmakers sharing ideas and developing new skills – Source: Jeff Harvey Photography

- Assisted greatly with the preservation of traditional heritage skills. Knowledge and expertise were exchanged during the programme and recorded for posterity.
- Increased the engagement of the wider community in all regions with the creative sectors.
- Strengthened the working relationship between LAGs and craftmakers in Ireland and Finland.
- The craftlink.eu project website was enhanced, enabling craftmakers in Ireland and Finland to communicate and share resources with each other. It provides information on upcoming events and activities and showcases text, audio and video

Lessons

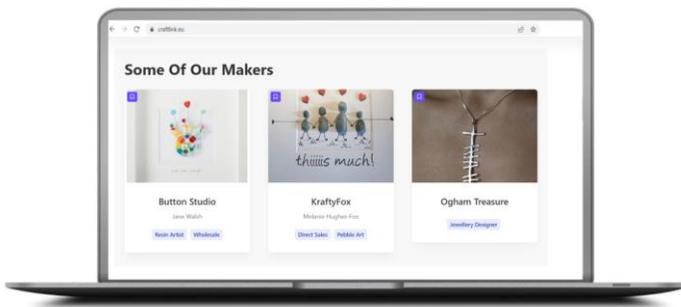
Online course delivery

The Innocrafts Cooperation project was developed and approved prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. As classroom-based training was not possible, the programme transitioned to online course delivery. The training had a specific focus on supporting existing craftmakers to remain in business.

“The level of demand for online training superseded our expectations. With the revenue streams of a number of craftmakers gone due to retail closures, this training was an invaluable lifeline for staying in business. The training enabled participants to upskill, ensuring they could reach their customers via other retail platforms such as social media. Another benefit of the online training was that it connected craftmakers with expert trainers from throughout the country. This method of delivery had less of a drain on time and resources for both craftmaker and trainer.” *Roisin Lennon, Offaly Local Development Company*

As craft businesses were catapulted into an online existence very quickly, it became apparent that not all of them were equipped with the skills to trade or promote themselves online.

“Weekly Zoom networking calls with participants allowed us to keep abreast of the changing needs of business owners in an environment that was extremely difficult. This constant engagement meant we could pivot, adapt and provide support and solutions timely and efficiently.” *Caitriona Duggan, Offaly Local Development Company*





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Building on existing relationships

OLDC and WCD have a proven track record developing and delivering bespoke training programmes to the creative sector. Fortunately, for this project, they were able to capitalise on a strong existing relationship with Rieska and Keskipiste LEADER companies in Finland. From the outset, partners had a very clear understanding of the needs within the creative sector and the possibilities of the learnings that could be achieved.

Be adaptable

As the project developed, it became apparent that some of the Covid-19 restrictions in Finland were different to those in Ireland which allowed OLDC and WCD to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities. For example, together they selected creative works from 6 craftmakers in Ireland to be exhibited and sold at Christmas markets and shops in Finland when retail outlets were closed here. They learned that they needed to continuously search for opportunities during the pandemic for both Irish and Finnish craftmakers.

Programme design

The design, development and implementation of a bespoke programme such as this requires innovation and a creative thinking process. Early engagement with the expected audience is crucial, they say, as is sourcing the highest quality trainers who can deliver training specific to the creative sector.

“We believe that having a strategic focused approach assisted greatly in the success of this programme. Knowing our audience and identifying our target market early in the development stages was key. We supported emerging businesses, start-ups and established businesses during the programme and each of them have spoken of the benefits.” *Bernie Leavy, Westmeath Community Development*

Importance of networking and collaboration

10 Finnish designers were hosted in Ireland in April 2022. During discussions and networking, it became clear that the level of business support and networking is very different in Finland, in fact designers only became aware of each other's creative endeavours on this particular trip. This was a surprising revelation and has encouraged Finnish craftmakers to re-examine the networking opportunities available to them in their own country.

“We have learnt a lot from our Finnish partners and understand the true value of the collaborative opportunities of this programme. Aligning training schedules and networking opportunities was sometimes challenging due to the restrictions we faced but a flexible approach and utilising all the resources and online opportunities available to us meant we were in a position to deliver a successful programme despite the challenges we faced.” *Roisin Lennon, Offaly Local Development Company*

Funding

Total project budget (i)+(ii)+(iii) =	€79,812.90
+ (i) Rural Development Programme support (a)+(b)	€79,812.90
+ (a) EAFRD (EU) contribution	€50,122.50
+ (b) National / Regional contribution	€29,690.40
+ (ii) Private / Own funds	-
+ (iii) Other funding sources	-

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Innovating Communities Project

LEADER
Community-Led Local Development



Innovating Communities Project

Summary

Innovating Communities is a LEADER Cooperation project in Ireland that aims to strengthen resilience, local development and community-led action in each of the six participating LAG areas across Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth, by training community groups, businesses and individuals in Design Thinking - a creative problem solving process. The free training and mentoring in Design Thinking is delivered through a series of free facilitated courses formed around a local challenge. Design Thinking is a 5 stage problem solving process: at Stage 1 you learn how to EMPATHISE with the people affected, at Stage 2 you DEFINE the challenge, at Stage 3 you will be supported to develop IDEAS, at stage 4 you will TEST these ideas and then finally, at stage 5, you will MATERIALISE the solutions.

The Innovating Communities project is a training programme that energises and mobilises a rural population such that they become more open to new ideas and ways of working. It invites local people to submit their local needs in the form of challenges in a 'Challenge Bank' (which is an online interactive tool for rural residents to highlight their own priorities, interests and ideas that could be advanced through rural development projects), on the project website at

Project name: Innovating Communities

Date: 20th October 2020 – Present

Project initiated by:

- Monaghan Integrated Development CLG
- Louth LEADER Partnership CLG
- Leitrim Integrated Development Company CLG
- Donegal Local Development CLG
- Breffni Integrated CLG - T/a Cavan County Local Development
- County Sligo LEADER Partnership CLG

Further information:

[Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Video](#)

www.innovating.ie/ideas. From there, people can view the challenge, agree, 'like' it and perhaps get involved in addressing it. If a challenge is securing enough interest, it will be turned into a free facilitated capacity building Design Thinking training course to help the group work through the challenge and reach a solution.





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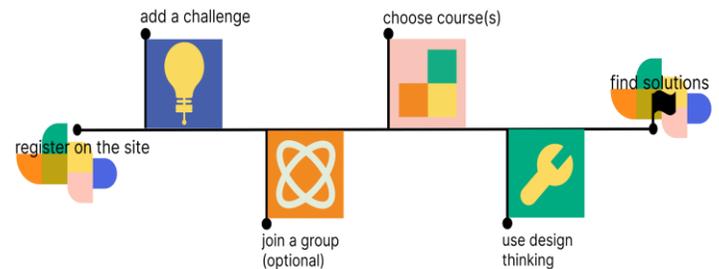
Context

In December 2018, representatives from participating Implementing Partners conducted a study trip to Steyr, Austria, to meet with practitioners of a LEADER multi-region project called 'Nature of Innovation', who had previously applied the Design Thinking problem solving process in a similar context. This trip enabled the group to see first-hand how this creative problem solving process was being applied through a LEADER project in Austria, whilst also paving the way for further links to be established with Andreas Kupfer, the Austrian project lead, and his colleague Hubert Preisinger. Both of these individuals have since provided significant helpful feedback and information which has helped shape the format and structure of the Innovating Communities Cooperation project in the border region in Ireland.

This project was initiated in the context of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, which in different ways highlighted and accelerated the need for innovation at a local level, to identify and respond to various new and unique opportunities and challenges faced by our communities on a daily basis. Having not previously worked together as a collective on a project of this nature, the participating LEADER Implementing Partners came together, primarily due to their geographical proximity along the EU border with Northern Ireland. The cooperation project involving the six LEADER Implementing Partners achieved the required scale and geographic coverage to enable partners to successfully pilot the use of the design thinking problem solving process, with each partner bringing their unique experience and knowledge of the needs and opportunities for their respective area.

"The project has worked well by encouraging participants to meet others, facilitating networking and the formation of creative ideas. It offers opportunities to learn new skills of Design Thinking

which incorporates design, analysis and solution-based tasks and enables collaborative work leading to the development of informal conversations and ideas for local context and areas." Collette McEntee, Innovating Communities Network Admin Coordinator



Objectives

- To identify the most pressing local issues, inspire rural innovation and build social capital in each of the six LAG areas participating in the cooperation project through the provision of training to community groups, businesses and individuals.**

Activities

The Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (extended to 2022) has funded, and continues to fund, training courses alongside other ad hoc events as part of the Innovating Communities project such as 'Challenge Generation' sessions which provide an opportunity for members of the training team to brainstorm and tease out a potential course topic which responds to an identified local challenge.

To date, across the 6 LAG areas:

- There have been 965 active project participants; and





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- A total of 4,580 hours of training has been undertaken.



Blended Design Thinking learning session in Louth LEADER Ardee Office for the 'Friends of Ardee Bog' - Source: Innovating Communities



Innovating Communities user-centred research in Rossmore, Co. Monaghan - Source: Innovating Communities



A group of people undertaking a trial walk in Co. Donegal to discuss the potential development of a sustainable 'Recreation Corridor' between Ballybofey-Stranorlar and Donegal Town to provide a boost for tourism and the environment, and stimulate small businesses and communities along the way - Source: Innovating Communities



Innovating Communities town hall event in Ballymote, Co. Sligo which addressed the need for a representative and inclusive community council to be established - Source: Innovating Communities

Other courses that have been completed / are currently running include:

- 'Attracting People to Live and Work in County Monaghan' which addresses the idea of rural attractiveness.





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- ‘Upgrading Energy Efficiency Measures with Save Our Homeless Dundalk’ which worked with third-level students to upgrade energy efficiency methods to an existing building for the charity organisation Save Our Homeless Dundalk.
- ‘Tackling Climate Change’ is a secondary school-level course with young people examining how to make a local sustainable impact in combatting a global issue.

have the potential of being advanced through rural development projects.

- Innovating Communities has led to the integration of ideas and individuals of all ages, from various backgrounds, groups and businesses, including new members of the community who may not have otherwise been part of a formal group.

Results

- In total, 965 people have either already completed or are currently participating in an Innovating Communities training course. The free training and mentoring offered continues to empower local people and groups to work together and overcome challenges facing their areas, putting them at the heart of the solution.

“We have come up with some better solutions - better thought out and more appropriate than we would have without the course. We have built good relationships with other people on the course which will be a longer term benefit.” *Innovating Communities Project participant*

“This session really opened up the discussion and opinions of all the group. It was very helpful to see all the different perspectives that I wasn’t aware of.” *Innovating Communities Project participant*

“From my perspective, it’s been wonderful to witness the various Louth groups grow their ideas into tangible solutions or strategic plans which move them towards achieving their goals on their various challenges. Design thinking skills have helped participants to solidify ideas into tangible concrete actions, plans and solutions. It enables groups of like-minded people with a vision to network, reach out to their user groups, receive feedback and refine their solution. Post course, I am delighted to see many of them continuing to implement their plans.” *Derbhille Clarke, coordinator and co-trainer for Louth Innovating Communities Project*

“I have benefitted from the collaborative approach and the depth of knowledge of the other participants.” *Innovating Communities Project participant*

- The interactive Challenge Bank tool hosted on the Innovative Communities website continues to offer rural stakeholders a straightforward means of suggesting local issues affecting them which

- Delivering the training predominantly online initially enabled people to participate who may have been prevented from doing so due to factors such as their location, health or ability.
- The cooperation project has provided a truly unique opportunity for the six partners involved to learn from experiences in each of the other LAG areas.





Lessons

Target audience

Already-formed community groups facing a specific challenge were found to be ideal candidates for this project as opposed to one person with an idea, as it can be difficult to get a group of interested participants to come together and commit to the training for the duration required. The training is particularly suitable for community groups who wish to come up with a strategic plan of action to tackle specific challenges facing their area.

Importance of ‘person centred design’ approach

The training uses a ‘person centred design’ approach to identify topics important to an area and the training support helps people explore ideas and the best possible sustainable solutions. The project has found this to be a very efficient and democratic means of solving the most pressing issues, rather than the LEADER partner relying on potentially out of date desk research or census data. Innovating Communities is a ‘Social Innovation’ approach, and this method is best employed for responding to specific challenges which require responses as opposed to more general development initiatives.

Training programme delivery

‘Icecream Architecture’, the designated contracted training team, has vast experience in delivering similar training programmes over the years. As part of programme delivery, each LEADER Implementing Partner recruited and trained between 5 and 7 local volunteer co-trainers to facilitate the training, alongside one of the designated contracted trainers. The project found the local volunteer co-trainers to be very important in bridging any knowledge gaps between the challenge and participants, and the trainer and process itself.

Monitoring and evaluation

Once a training course has been completed, a follow-up with participants would be particularly beneficial to assess how they have progressed and how many changes they have implemented over a period of time.

Funding

Total project budget (i)+(ii)+(iii)	€1,085,455.22
=	
+ (i) Rural Development Programme support (a)+(b)	€1,045,335.38
+ (a) EAFRD (EU) contribution	€656,470.62
+ (b) National / Regional contribution	€388,864.76
+ (ii) Private / Own funds	€40,119.84
+ (iii) Other funding sources	-

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**LEADER 2014-2020
(EXTENDED TO 2022)**

Women Active in Society

LEADER
Community-Led Local Development



Women Active in Society

Summary

Initiated by North, East and West Kerry Development Company (NEWKD) in Ireland and funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (extended to 2022), the Women Active in Society LEADER transnational cooperation project set out to support female leaders across the region to grow and develop their businesses while meeting like-minded entrepreneurs, farmers and producers.

Participants were given the opportunity to meet, share and learn from the experiences of their peers in Ireland and Poland under the leadership of the project's content experts from the Entrepreneurs Academy, who provided support on their journey of growth for both themselves and their business. A key component to the programme was the creation of a small, trusted group of like-minded women across sectors for collaboration and within three cohorts: female entrepreneurs, female farmers and female makers (i.e. artists, creators and poets).

As part of this programme, representatives from each of these cohorts were brought together for training specific to their sector, which involved spending 4 days together in Ireland and an additional 4 days in Poland. This, in turn, provided an ideal opportunity for

Project name: Women Active in Society

Date: June 2021 – April 2022

Project initiated by:

Ireland

- North, East and West Kerry Development Company (NEWKD)

Poland

- Tract Piastów

Further information:

[Project Documentary](#)

[Project Brochure](#)

Website for project participants to promote their businesses | womenkerrypoznai.e

participants to learn from, and exchange ideas with their counterparts. These women are now equipped to utilise what they have learned from each other throughout the programme as they continue to grow their businesses across North, East and West Kerry, and rural Poznan.



women
active in society
Transnational Development Programme





National Rural Network

**LEADER 2014-2020
(EXTENDED TO 2022)**

Context

The inspiration behind this LEADER supported transnational cooperation project came initially from Magda Jankowska, Board Member with the Tract Piastów Local Action Group (LAG) in Poland, who contacted NEWKD about the prospect of partnering for this project. Having previously spent some time living in Killarney, Magda was actually holidaying in this part of Co. Kerry when she decided to reach out to NEWKD.

“We wanted to do something for our women, to bring them together, to exchange women’s wisdom, and to show how different things work in different countries.” Magda Jankowska, Board Member, Tract Piastów

NEWKD had worked previously with women on an individual level but had not engaged as of yet to a great extent with groups of women so they were delighted and inspired to participate in this project to help and support women both in Ireland and Poland.

Objectives

- To connect like-minded female entrepreneurs, farmers and makers in Ireland and Poland.
- To provide support, help and guidance to female participants of the programme to help them grow and develop their businesses.

Activities

The Entrepreneurs Academy (EA) was selected as a partner on the project to design and deliver the Women Active in Society programme. With extensive

experience working with female entrepreneurs, the EA saw this as a great opportunity to support women in transforming their lives and their businesses.



The programme launched with a series of virtual and in-person workshops allowing participants to meet each other, learn from content experts from the EA, and begin to expand their mindset.

- 3-day virtual workshop in June 2021 hosted by Noel Davidson and Margaret Hctor (EA)

Topics included: what does ‘Women Active in Society’ look like in Kerry, finding inner motivation and networking.

- 1-day virtual workshop in August 2021 hosted by Noel Davidson and Joan Baker (EA)

Topics included: growing in self-confidence and building resilience.

- 3-day in-person workshop in September 2021 facilitated by Nancy Ward and Margaret Hctor (EA)

Topics included: marketing on a shoestring, sales techniques and tips, and how to maximise and grow your network.

* * *

Between September and November 2021, 6 separate 4-day trips were organised to Ireland and Poland. This provided a fantastic and novel opportunity for networking.





National Rural Network

**LEADER 2014-2020
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13-16 September - Poznan entrepreneurs visit Kerry;
20-25 September - Poznan makers visit Kerry;
4-7 October - Kerry entrepreneurs visit Poznan;
11-14 October - Kerry makers visit Poznan;
18-21 October - Polish farmers visit Kerry; and
8-11 November - Kerry farmers visit Poland.

Participants took part in a variety of tailored workshops and demonstrations in both countries across a range of themes; engaged in cultural and historical experiences; attended social events; and had the opportunity to visit local sites of interest.



Networking and social event in Czerwonak, near Poznan – Source: Women Active in Society

“One of the exciting aspects of the programme was getting to go on-site and visit other participants’ businesses. In doing so, they were able to tell their story, how they got started, their journey, the ups, the downs, the triumphs and the tragedies. All participants were able to learn and apply those lessons to their own businesses.” Nancy Ward, Head of Programme Development, The Entrepreneurs Academy



Visit to an organic farm in Ballybunnion, North Kerry – Source: Women Active in Society



Participants taking part in a cushion making workshop in the village of Kliny, near Poznan – Source: Women Active in Society

* * *

A number of additional workshops were run in late-2021 and early-2022 for programme participants.

- Discussion of Joint Project Website and Possibility of Indoor Market Initiative (December 2021)





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Nancy Ward (EA) hosted a virtual session to discuss how best to work together to create a website with the aim of promoting all participant businesses, and the potential for the development of a plan to initiate an indoor market.

- Market Research Workshop (January 2022)

Margaret Hoctor (EA) hosted a workshop to support participants in the essential work of market research as they further develop their business strategies.

- Social Media Workshop (February 2022)

Helen McNulty (EA) hosted a workshop to support participants in the development of their social media and marketing strategies.

- Showcase Event (April 2022)

Noel Davidson (EA) hosted a Showcase Event and Documentary Premiere. The shared learnings from the programme, networking opportunities and creating collaborations for the future were explored and discussed.

Results

Above all, the Women Active in Society Cooperation project has connected like-minded individuals in Ireland and Poland and has opened up a network to those involved. The combination of training via online and in-person workshops coupled with the hands-on experiences of visiting their counterparts in another country has equipped these women with new skills, exposed them to new ideas and perspectives, and has given them the confidence to pursue their own interests moving forward.

“As one of our first Transnational LEADER Projects, ‘Women Active in Society’ was a huge success. We as an LDC learned so much from the experience in terms of working with women under LEADER into the future. The women themselves got a huge amount from the project and have used that learning to enhance and improve their own businesses, and continue to meet as a network more than a year after the project visits. We are already having conversations with those women about how LEADER can support women in Farming, Local Production and Business under the next LEADER Programme.” *John Loughrey, RDP Officer, NEWKD*

An inspirational, informative and visual 40-minute [documentary](#) on the Women Active in Society programme has been produced and is a major outcome of the project. Daragh Murphy from ‘November Seven Films’ was present throughout the programme and captured many of its main activities and results. This documentary provides fantastic insight from the organisers and some of the participants involved.





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A [website](#) has also recently been developed for participants to promote their businesses following the completion of the programme.



Lessons

Timing of training

Rolling out training from the beginning of the programme via workshops was a fundamental aspect of this project. This enabled participants to enhance and grow their mindset from the outset in areas related to resilience, imposter syndrome and learning how to make difficult decisions.

Establishing connections

It was arranged that programme participants would stay in each other's homes when visiting the partner country. This was integral to the deeper level of bonding and sharing that was ultimately achieved. The intention was that participants would learn from each other throughout the programme and would continue to do so after completion.

Funding

Total project budget (i)+(ii)+(iii)	€199,415.00
=	
+ (i) Rural Development Programme support (a)+(b)	€199,415.00
+ (a) EAFRD (EU) contribution	€125,232.62
+ (b) National / Regional contribution	€74,182.38
+ (ii) Private / Own funds	-
+ (iii) Other funding sources	-

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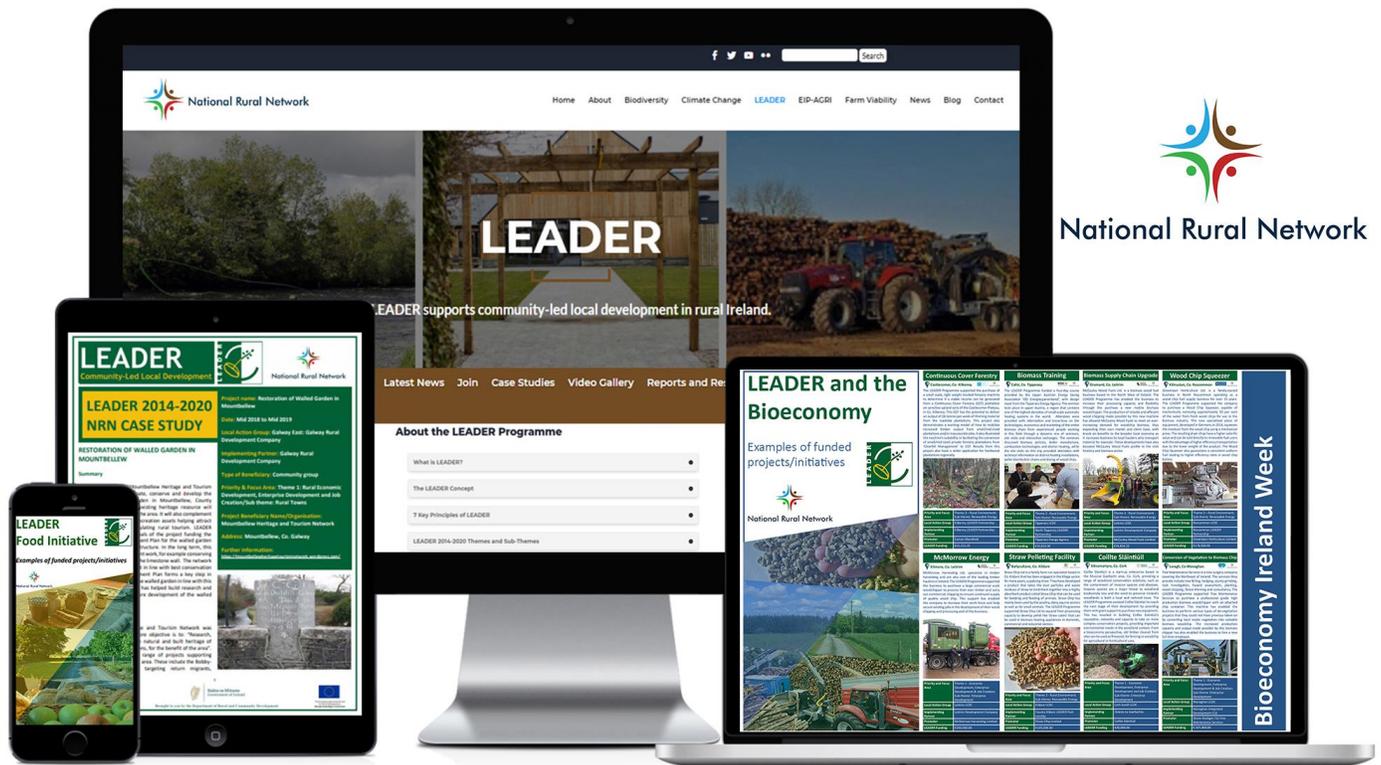


National Rural Network

LEADER 2014-2020
(EXTENDED TO 2022)

Multi-Method LEADER Programme Promotion and Dissemination Strategies

The NRN provides up-to-date information, case studies, seminars and conferences to maximise the beneficial outcomes of Ireland’s Rural Development Programme (RDP) for rural stakeholders on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).



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LEADER 2014-2020
(EXTENDED TO 2022)

Multi-Method LEADER Programme Promotion and Dissemination Strategies

NRN Local Action Groups (LAGs) & Implementing Partners (IPs) Interactive Map



Interested in learning more about accessing assistance under the LEADER Programme from those responsible for selecting and approving community-led local development projects in your county? An interactive map featuring all Irish LAGs and IPs can be found in the LEADER section of the NRN website:

<https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/>

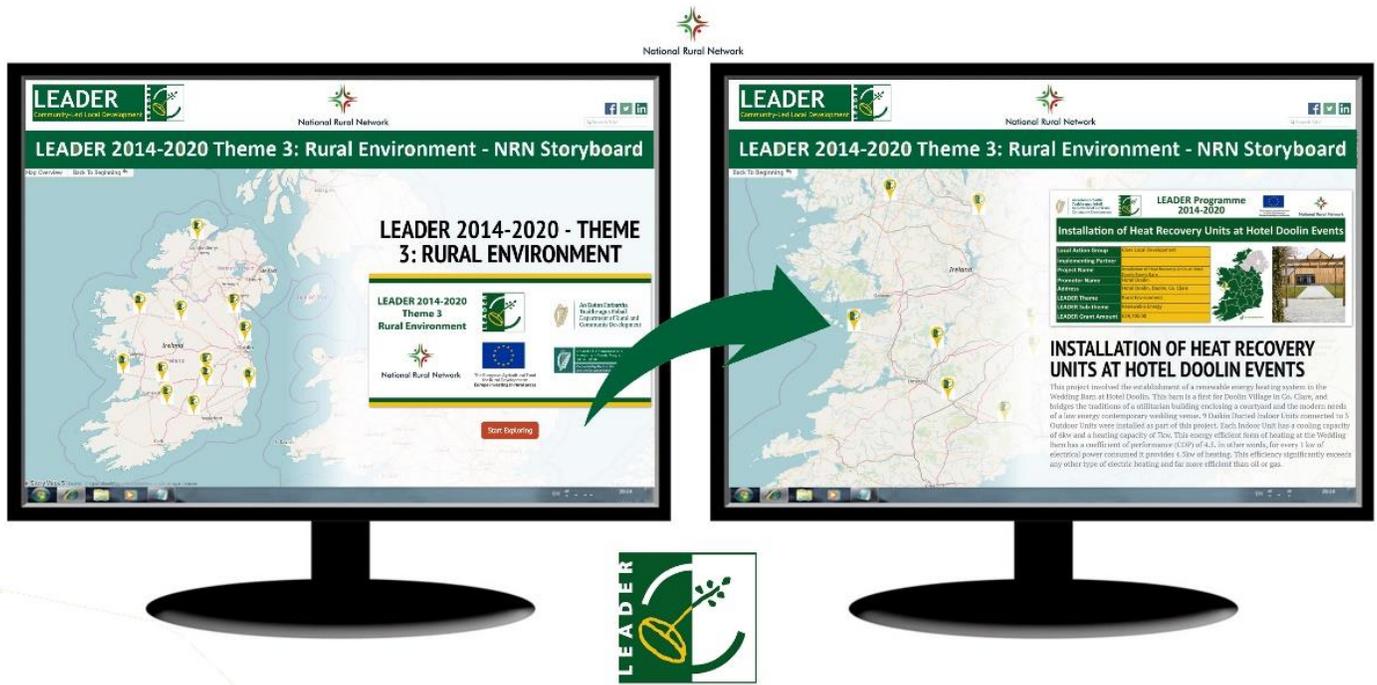




LEADER 2014-2020
(EXTENDED TO 2022)

Multi-Method LEADER Programme Promotion and Dissemination Strategies

NRN Interactive Storyboard Project Databases



An interactive storyboard database of over 100 projects funded under the three themes of the current LEADER Programme can be found on the NRN website. These project examples highlight the impact of the LEADER programme on rural Ireland, including its economic, social, cultural and environmental value:

<https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/leader/>





LEADER Programme 2014-2020 (Extended to 2022) Cooperation Project Examples



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas



Ireland's European Structural and
Investment Funds Programmes
2014-2020

Co-funded by the Irish Government
and the European Union



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