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NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF BURRENBEO TRUST: PLACE-BASED LEARNING AND COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP 2008-2018

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IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

BACKGROUND

In October 2018, an Irish Research council funded employment based PhD study on the topic of *'Exploring Community Stewardship through Place-based Learning: evaluating impact and potential for knowledge transfer'* was commenced by Burrenbeo employee Áine Bird.

Place-based learning is learning about place, through place, for place. Stewardship implies caring for what we value; community stewardship represents a locally led, bottom up approach to the conservation of places and their communities.

The first phase of the study assesses the impact which Burrenbeo Trust programmes have had from a place-based learning and community stewardship perspective. This is achieved through archive creation and analysis of participant feedback received from 2008-2018 from place-based learning programmes delivered by Burrenbeo Trust coupled with analysis of data received through an online survey of past participants on Burrenbeo Trust programmes.

This report outlines the main findings from this phase of the research. The data and analysis obtained through creation of the feedback archive (1233 data entries) and online survey (99 responses) provides insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the various Burrenbeo Trust programmes under investigation and will also be used to inform the subsequent phases of the PhD study.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this research.

WHY IS PLACE-BASED LEARNING AND COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP IMPORTANT?

A number of the questions from the online survey and themes which emerged from the feedback analysis speak to this point.

- When asked who is most responsible for protecting local heritage and environment, over half (54%) of respondents gave high ranking to responsibility lying with the local community or each individual themselves. However, only 45% of respondents feel like they have a say in what happens in their local place and only 23% regularly participate in stewardship activities.
- There was strong agreement from participants that Place-based learning would encourage stewardship behaviours (96%) and that individual actions could bring about positive local change (93%) .
- The feedback analysis also pointed to people considering their role and ability to take action locally as a result of participation on place-based learning programmes.

Today made me think about the area and treating it better. It made me more conscious of how my action and other peoples actions affect the area we live in.

Áitbheo Secondary Participant, 2018

The argument could be made that people feel a responsibility to get involved in stewardship locally and feel that it would make a difference, however sufficient support structures do not always exist to facilitate this.

WHY ENGAGE WITH PLACE-BASED LEARNING?

While people's reasons for participation were diverse the most frequently selected reason reported through the survey was a desire **to learn**, this was followed by thinking it would be **enjoyable** and then by wanting to **take action**.

Results from feedback analysis showed that people engage because the programmes are **active, fun** and include **outdoor** and **social** elements.

Essentially, people want to learn outdoors in an enjoyable, social and active way.

There is a great balance between learning by doing and listening.

Áitbheo Training
Participant, 2016

It was enjoyable and educational. I enjoyed the activities and nothing ever felt awkward or forced.

Áitbheo Secondary
Participant, 2018

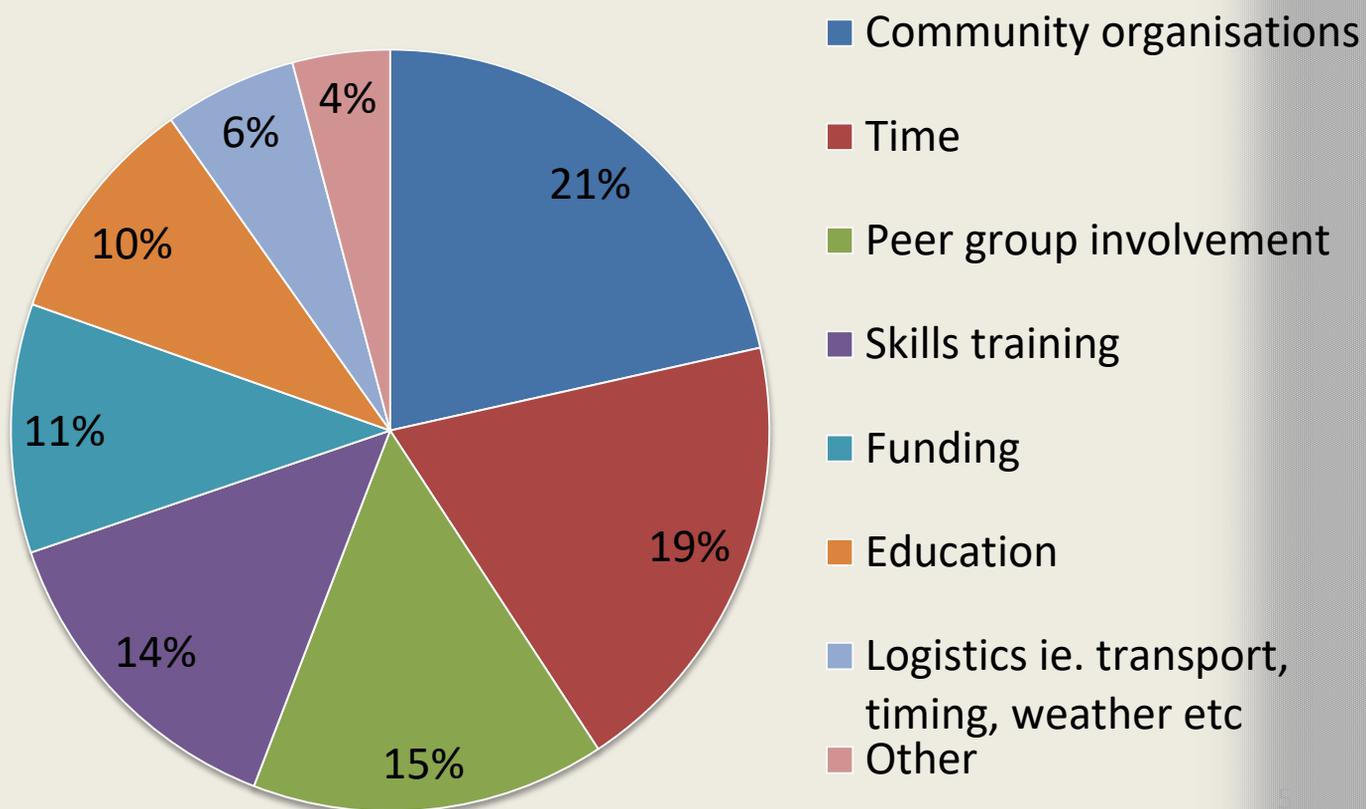
My favourite things about it was that we were having fun but learning at the same time. It was so much fun. There was nothing I did not like.

Áitbheo Primary Participant, 2017

CAN ENGAGEMENT BE INCREASED?

Survey participants were asked what might encourage them to take action on local heritage or environmental issues. The chart below shows the range and spread of responses to this question. It is interesting to note that the most popular response was presence of community organisations – indicating that organisations such as Burrenbeo Trust are vital for increasing engagement with community stewardship.

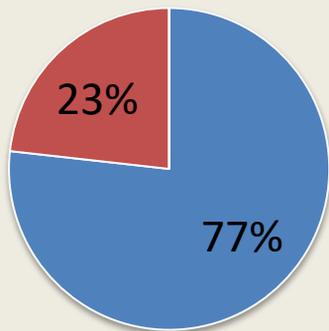
Also of note is how low Education is in this regard. This could indicate (as other research also suggests) that it is not lack of information/awareness that prevents people from taking action. It could be argued that addressing a combination of all of these factors would be most effective in increasing community stewardship.



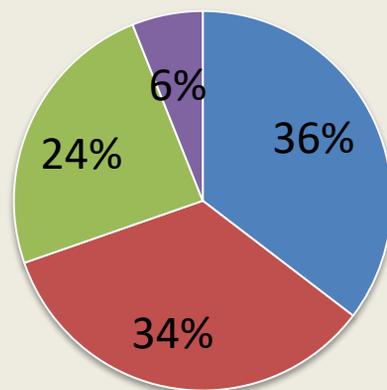
WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS?

Survey respondents indicated that participation had a **high impact** on their **attitude** to their local place and their **behaviour** in relation to local heritage, environment and community. However, impact on **involvement** in local initiatives was **less significant** – perhaps reflecting the fact that over 50% of respondents didn't feel like they have a say in what happens locally as previously mentioned. Analysis of comments from the survey also suggest the structures and programmes that exist in the Burren are not available to people in their home place.

Impact on your attitude to your local place



Impact on your involvement in local initiatives



■ High ■ Moderate ■ Low ■ None

The feedback analysis highlighted the potential for participants to feel enhanced connection to and engagement with their place through participation.

Now I realise how connected I am to my environment.
Áitbheo Primary Participant, 2018

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

This combined analysis of data from both the feedback archive and survey is useful in identifying the important elements in designing place-based learning programmes and enhancing their impact on community stewardship. The data reconfirms the success of the approach adopted by Burrenbeo Trust and provides evidence that the approach has had the desired impacts.

A number of points are worth highlighting;

- Nearly two thirds of survey respondents have participated in more than one programme and some spoke specifically about the value of an **interconnected suite of programmes** rather than just one programme.
- Respondents commented on how participation often **supported or strengthened existing views or feelings**. The question remains how to engage those that are not already predisposed to this type of programme?
- Responses indicate that participation on Burrenbeo Trust programmes resulted in **increasing awareness** and **appreciation** of local places, motivation to **take action** on local issues and enhanced feelings of **place-connection**.

In conclusion, participation in a suite of Place-based Learning programmes can impact people's attitudes and behaviour in relation to heritage and environment. However, it would appear that support (such as that provided by Burrenbeo Trust) is needed to facilitate people taking action on local issues.