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NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

EXPLORING PLACE ONLINE WORKSHOPS FEEDBACK ANALYSIS

Completed by Áine Bird, June 2021

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IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
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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 (PBL) 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 assessed the impact which Burrenbeo Trust programmes have had from a place-based learning and community stewardship perspective. The results from this phase informed the development of a series of workshops aiming to facilitate community stewardship in communities throughout Ireland. These workshops were piloted online from February to April 2021 with a number of communities.

This report outlines the main findings from this phase of the research based on facilitator observations and participant surveys which were completed pre and post workshops.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this research.

WHAT DID THE WORKSHOPS INVOLVE?

Communities coming together to learn, experience and enhance local places

Building on the experience and work of Burrenbeo Trust, the collaborative workshops facilitated local communities looking to develop and deliver initiatives that encourage pride of place, connection and active local engagement to the benefit of communities and places. The process (and resulting initiatives) aimed to incorporate a whole place, whole community approach, be sociable, active and fun - reflecting findings from research on the successful elements of Burrenbeo Trust programming.

Participants worked with Burrenbeo Trust practitioner and researcher Áine Bird to develop, enhance and implement local place-based learning initiatives. Participant groups comprising geographic communities, communities of interest and communities of circumstance were identified. The programme was delivered 3 times; once to a community of circumstance, once to a geographic community and once to a combination of the three. Group size ranged from 4 to 8 participants. The sessions were delivered online via the Zoom platform. There were a total of 5 workshops sessions and each lasted for no more than 90 minutes.

Ongoing support was provided by Burrenbeo Trust during the process. Participants completed two short questionnaires (one pre and one post workshops) and each participant will be asked to complete one final questionnaire after a period of approximately six months (August 2021).

WHAT DID THE WORKSHOPS INVOLVE?



Session 1 Introduction & Audit

Explaining logistics, establishing expectations, outlining what PBL is, identifying individual aims, brief audit of existing local PBL activities and resources and outlining group objectives.



Session 2 Burrenbeo Trust's experience

Outline and discuss Burrenbeo's PBL experience (to include walks, talks, education programmes, conservation volunteering and community celebrations).



Session 3 How do we learn more?

Share the many available tools, ideas and skills for learning about local places including the built, natural and cultural heritage.



Session 4 What could we improve?

Identify areas of need and interest locally and the steps necessary to implement any changes, considering the local resources and how they could be utilised.



Session 5 How are we going to make it happen?

Committing to a definite PLACE action plan for the future.

PRE WORKSHOP RESPONSES

Questionnaire responses were analysed and themed where possible. The following responses reflect the most prominent themes to emerge. 21 responses were received.

What (if any) are your expectations from this programme?

- **Learn and share:** about local area, history, environment (and to document learning).
- **Community:** working together, building links/connections, creating sense of community.
- **Support:** get practical help, advice and guidance.
- **Action:** have a positive impact, find opportunities for action, develop skills for action.

How do you feel about your local place?

- Love, connection, appreciation, lucky to be from here.
- Proud, it's special.
- Strong community.
- Has a rich heritage.
- Need for more outdoor amenities/access and community engagement.

What changes (if any) would you like to see happening in your local place?

- Improved infrastructure – internet, transport, employment.
- Care for environment.
- Understanding from outside agencies.
- Greater community involvement and awareness.
- Documenting of history.
- More outdoor amenities.

What (if any) challenges do you see engaging local communities with their places, the environment and heritage?

- Covid.
 - Lack of interest/despondency.
 - Communication.
 - Time/too busy.
 - Fear – of change, being given responsibility.
 - Knowledge.
- (Only one respondent mentioned funding)

POST WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

Questionnaire responses were analysed and themed where possible. The following responses reflect the most prominent themes to emerge. 15 responses were received.

100% of participants felt **able to take action** locally, 93% felt they had the **knowledge needed to take action** after the workshops.

100% of participants reported **enjoying** the workshops, **learning** something and that they would **recommend**.

What they liked?

- Interaction.
- Now wanting to find out more.
- Having it personalised to each situation.
- Providing practical advice.
- Being interesting, relaxed and positive.
- Sharing honestly about experience.
- Provision of resources.
- Presented with an enabling attitude.

What they didn't like?

- Online delivery (but for some this was a positive).
- Differing opinions within their community.
- Being too busy to fully engage.

I thoroughly enjoyed all the workshops and the discussions and the experience. I would recommend anybody who has the chance to take part in the programme. I looked forward to all the workshops from week 1. Also it was very welcome during covid restrictions to be able to talk and meet people online. We had an excellent host and I think the programme was excellently delivered and a pleasure to take part in. Many thanks.

Excellently presented, enjoyable and thought provoking. Top class.

Sincere thanks for organising this programme it was excellent and truly sets out to enable a community to tackle community and climate change issues.

POST WORKSHOP RESPONSES

Questionnaire responses were analysed and themed where possible. The following responses reflect the most prominent themes to emerge.

Did this programme meet your expectations?

- Participants reported learning – increasing awareness, having new ideas, recognising the importance of communication and being more familiar with the resources available.
- Feeling empowered – now having structure and focus.
- Appreciated the opportunity for discussion and interaction.
- Many participants reported finding the workshops enjoyable.

Do you feel any differently about your local place having completed the programme?

- Having more appreciation, awareness, connection.
- Being inspired for the future, feeling more positive, and like they might be able to influence change.
- Thinking more about their area.
- Understanding more about community.
- *Lifted a veil from my eyes* - being more connected and grateful.

What might prevent you from putting your plans into action?

- Motivation.
- Information.
- Funding.
- Local support.
- Time.
- Covid.

The information I got from this course opened my eyes to the unreal history of the town and techniques / knowledge of nature we once had. Terrific course I can't thank you enough for letting me be apart of it.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS PLAN TO DO

The following are a selection of plans which participants intend to carry out locally having completed the Exploring Place workshops;

- I hope to do a family tree and be able to show the process to others so they can more easily do the same.
- I hope to do recordings of local residents, people who were reared in the locality but are not living in the area now and people who have moved into the locality.
- I have helped to organise small (covid safe) informal hiking/walking groups that meet at weekends and some weekdays. In the future I hope to help organize a small Arts/Heritage event. Again in the future I hope to bring back the set/céilí dancing evenings at our local bar and have began finding other volunteers (community musicians/dance facilitators) to help with this.
- To help drive the initiatives identified by the Tidy Towns group. To enhance the village by working with the County Council to improve the roads and footpaths and cycle lanes. To get planting trees and to try to make the place attractive for people to visit. Hopefully to organise a regular tea and talk session for the community and walks and talks during the summer.
- Local wetland survey.
- I intend to organise a 'festival' or a gathering similar to a 'pattern' day but for the whole community to come together and engage in activities and workshop type events. Hopefully be able to organise by end of summer.
- Research my own house.
- Documenting the fungi life in my area, contributing to the biodiversity website.
- Detailing more local walks and information on that.
- I hope to organize various speakers in the areas to highlight what farming community are contributing to environment and local area.
- There is a short right of way between two villages that has not been used for years, I hope to tidy it up and use it to link two walkways.



WHAT DOES IT TELL US?

Delivery of the Exploring Place workshops, along with analysis of the participant questionnaire data provides some useful insights for future delivery of similar programmes and for other initiatives focused on community engagement and building of stewardship behaviours.

- Structured interactive workshops which allow participants consider and discuss local issues and ideas were enjoyable, informative and constructive for participants.
- There is an interest in learning about local built, natural and cultural heritage generally. Workshops such as this can spark the interest and provide initial resources for participants to discover more.
- Practical, evidenced and honest advice and guidance are appreciated when communities or individuals are looking to get started.
- There is a diversity of structures through which participants can engage – as individuals, as existing community groups, as newly formed community groups or as a community of circumstance or interest from different geographic areas. Combining different groups and communities worked well in the online setting as they could learn from and engage with each other as well as their existing group.
- Groups are very motivated and enthusiastic following completion of a programme such as this – it will be interesting to see, if without ongoing structured engagement, they maintain the enthusiasm and carry out the planned activities. It is hoped that the 6 month surveys will address this.