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Theme 8**

**Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH)**



**Developing Europe's Rural Regions  
in the Era of Globalization**

An interpretative model for better anticipating and responding to  
Challenges for regional development in an evolving international context

**WP5**

**Synthesis and Contextualisation of Research and  
Development of an Interpretative Model**

**Deliverable 5.3**

**Case Study Report 'West Region of Ireland,  
with particular focus on County Roscommon'**



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# Chapter 1

## 1. Introduction and Context

### 1.1 Introduction

Developing Europe's Regions in the Era of Globalization (DERREG) is a Europe Union funded project dealing with the impact of globalization in Europe. Nine institutes in seven EU Member States focused on developing an interpretative model that will better anticipate and respond to challenges for regional development in an evolving international context. The following case study report will focus on the West of Ireland, paying particular attention to County Roscommon. The report will summarise specific findings from three work packages by presenting conclusions and recommendations relevant to the region and of potential interest to regional stakeholders. The three thematic work packages are:

- International mobility and migration of rural populations
- Environmental capital and sustainable rural development
- Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems

### 1.2 The Case Study Region – West of Ireland - County Roscommon

#### 1.2.1 Profile of Study Area: West of Ireland

The West Region comprises of three counties, Galway, Mayo and Roscommon plus the city of Galway. The region is a NUTS3 statistical region which occupies a peripheral location on the north-western edge of Europe (Figure 1.1). The three counties of the West Region also lie within the traditional province of Connacht. The population of the region in the 2006 Census was 414,277 which are 9.77% of the national population. The population density is 29 persons per sq. km, which is the lowest of any region in Ireland. The region is mainly rural in character, with only 30% of the population living in urban areas. The West Region is situated on the Western Seaboard, with the Atlantic Ocean forming the western boundary and the river Shannon forming the eastern boundary. Due to its rugged coastline, off shore islands, large numbers of quality beaches, its inland rivers, lakes, mountains and plains, to name but a few of the natural attractions, the region has an abundance of natural amenities which draw visitors from all over Ireland and elsewhere. The area is renowned for the warmth of its people, for the "craic" and for the continuation of traditions, particularly the Irish Language, which is widely used in the Gaeltacht areas of the region and also in Galway city. The West Region has two airports located at Knock and Galway with services to Dublin, the UK and mainland Europe. There is an excellent rail service on the Galway to Dublin and Mayo to Dublin routes and a motorway/dual carriageway was constructed and completed in 2010 (The Irish Regions Office, 2010).



**Figure: 1.1:** Regions of Ireland – (Source: The Irish Regions Office)

### 1.2.2 Profile of the Sub Region: County Roscommon

County Roscommon covers an area of 254,819 hectares (Figure 1.2). The population is 58,768 (CSO, 2006). Roscommon can be defined as a largely rural county without a major urban centre. The nearest city is Galway. The main town is Roscommon, with a population of just over 5,000 in 2006. The two next largest towns are Boyle (approx. 2,500), Castlerea (1,870) and Ballaghaderreen (1,700). Towns of this size do not have sufficient critical mass to generate high value-added economic activity or adequate employment opportunities for a potential workforce (Boyle and Feeney, 2001). Population growth in County Roscommon, at 13.2%, is well below the regional and national average (20.7% and 20.3% respectively). Population growth has been concentrated on the outskirts of the largest towns, and of Athlone Town (Co. Westmeath). Some electoral areas continue to experience population decline. The proportion of the population in the professional classes is 32.5% (the national average is 32.9%). The proportion in the lower-skilled professions is 17.9% (national average of 18.6%). County Roscommon falls under the NUTS II designation, and is part of the BMW Regional remit. Because of the poor nature of data availability at the county level, much of the discussion below on policy instruments relevant to the location relate to those set at either national or BMW Regional level.

# County Roscommon

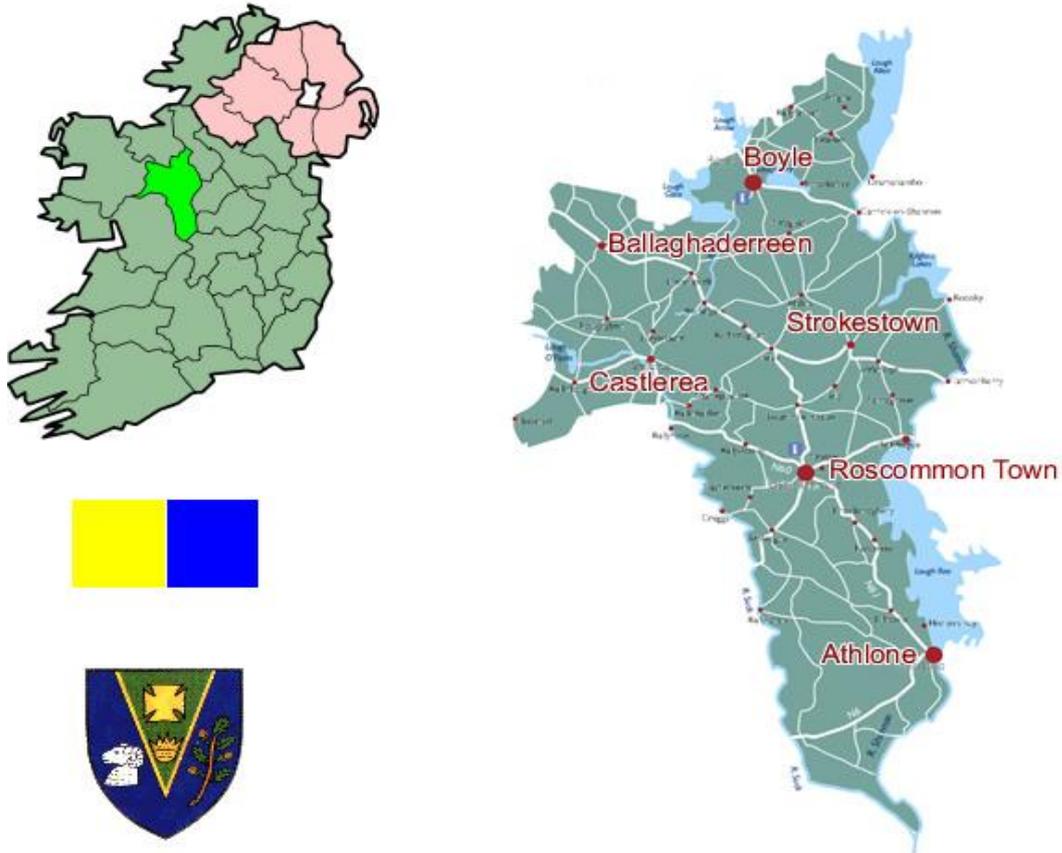


Figure 1.2: Map of County Roscommon

## **Chapter 2**

### **Work Package 2 International Mobility and Migration of Rural Populations**

#### **2. Introduction**

This section of the report introduces work package 2, its aims, objectives, methodology, key findings and some general conclusions. The research was implemented in five case study areas, Sweden, Germany, Slovenia, Ireland and Lithuania. The three types of migration investigated in WP2 were: Labour migration – migration related to the search for employment which carried out in Germany, Lithuania and Sweden; Migration associated with the purchase of second homes, implemented in Sweden, and Slovenia and cross-border commuting in Germany. The final area of research related to return migration carried out in Ireland and Lithuania. This final segment of the research was conducted in County Roscommon and responded to the goals of the project by probing issues concerning the re-insertion of return migrants into rural and assessing the potential contribution of return migrants to regional development drawing on skills and competences developed elsewhere.

#### **2.1 Return Migration as a Component of Globalization**

The phenomenon of return migration to rural areas represents an evolving field of research which must be contextualised within wider processes of societal change. Fundamental influences include the increased mobility of populations, the shrinking of distance with improved transport and communications systems, and the creation of new social networks that increasingly overcome geographical boundaries. Such developmental progression and societal change can often be embedded in the process of globalisation. Globalisation in a migration context can be conceptualised as a discourse that presents the existence of a smaller world which can be connected and travelled in less time and with increasing frequency. Steger (2003) has suggested that globalisation ‘involves the creation of new, and the multiplication of existing, social networks and activities that increasingly overcome traditional, political, economic, cultural and geographical boundaries’ (p.9). Woods (2011) proposes that globalization is a driver of change in rural areas encompassing a variety of contexts such as trade and economic production, tourism, migration, media representations and environmental regulations. This multiple characterisation of globalization corresponds with Steger’s (2003) definition of globalisation as ‘a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social (and economic) interdependency and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distance’ (p. 13). One societal process increasingly reflective of patterns of globalisation is that of return migration. A complex and multilayered process, it has been the focus of academic deliberation since the 1960s; however, it was not until the 1980s that more wide-ranging debates on the issue started to take place among the academic community (Kubat, 1984). These debates resulted in the development of an

extensive body of literature on the phenomenon of return migration, producing a range of theoretical approaches that attempted to better understand the significance of return migrants to origin countries (Cassarino, 2004).

## **2.2 Theorizing International Return Migration**

An extensive proportion of the theoretical and empirical literature on migration views the phenomenon as permanent. In contradicting this assumption Dustmann and Weiss (2007) argue that the majority of migrations are temporary rather than undeviating, and that the 'permanent' hypothesis is convenient as it facilitates analysis in many ways, such as immigrant behaviour and the impact of migration on residents' outcomes. Halfacree (2011) suggests that the permanent-temporary binary that ordered much of our understanding of migration is 'increasingly considered unhelpful' (p.5). Additionally, he advocates that because any migration is more often temporary in terms of the duration of a person's life, the very idea of permanent migration seems a 'product of an implicit assumption of normative sedentarist settlement' (ibid, p.5). Non-permanent migration or return migration therefore is commonplace but still a relatively new area of migration in the sense that does not have a standard meaning in national or international policy or law. For the purposes of the DERREG project research, a 'return migrant' is defined as one who has returned to his/her place of birth following a period of time in another country. Additional consideration is also given to internal migration, which is referred to as a change of residence within national boundaries, such as between states, provinces, cities, or municipalities. As a significant entity of international migration, return migration has been the focus of academic deliberation since the 1960s, even though it was not until the 1980s that extensive, thought-provoking debates among international scholars took place (Kubat, 1984). These debates resulted in the development of an extensive body of return migration literature, which produced various theoretical approaches that aimed to better understand the significance of return migrants to origin countries (Cassarino, 2004).

In all five theoretical approaches have been identified and utilised over the last number of years (ibid). The first, the neoclassical approach to international migration is based on the response of individuals to economic opportunities in other countries. In contrast to the neoclassical approach and its associated notion of failure, the new economics of labour migration (NELM) analyses return migration as the natural conclusion of a successful experience in a foreign country. Although the neoclassical theory and the NELM approach provide valuable insight into migration patterns, the success/failure paradigm fails to explain the decisions and strategies of return migrants. In addressing this Cassarino presents the structural approach to return migration which suggests that return migration is not only a 'personal issue, but a social and contextual one, affected by situational and structural factors' (ibid., p. 257). In analyzing the structural approach further however, Cassarino (2004) argues that it fails to emphasize consistent associations between sending and receiving countries. Transnationalism, on the other hand, endeavours to create a theoretical framework based on a solid connection between migrants' host and origin countries. Cassarino (2004, p. 265) criticises this transnationalists perspective which 'encapsulates (migrants) initiatives and projects in the home country in a fundamental set of mutual obligations, opportunities and expectations stemming from common ethnicity (i.e. diaspora) and kinship (i.e. the family, the household)'. Hunter (2010)

reiterates this claim, additionally suggesting that, the transnational literature is 'conceptually fuzzy'. By contrast, Hunter (ibid) argues that a flourishing approach in migration studies advocates a theory of society in which pre-ascribed membership in kinship and ethnic groups has no place. Social network theory, according to Cassarino (2004), the final theoretical approach contributes to a better understanding of return migration. Unlike transnationalism, social network theory views returnees as actors who draw together tangible and intangible resources to return to their country of origin. This is achieved by mobilising resources 'stemming from commonality of interests and availability at the level of social and economic cross-border networks' (ibid, p.265). In similar fashion to transnationalists, social network theorists analyse returnees as migrants who preserve persistent links with their host countries.

The research took all five theoretical frameworks into consideration and it became obvious that return migrants differ considerably in terms of the reasons or motivations for returning. As such, various aspects of all of the above outlined perspectives can be taken into consideration when analysing the data accumulated as part of the DERREG return migrant study. Of particular relevance, however, are theories of transnationalism and social network theory in that they allow the significance of social networking, human capital, transnational mobility and identities to be probed.

## **2.3 Methodology**

### **2.3.1 Characterisation of the Sample**

The interviewees chosen for this research were located in the West of Ireland. Nineteen interviews were carried out in total. Five male, six female and four couples were interviewed with all but three residing in County Roscommon. In relation to the four couples interviewed, six of the eight individuals were Irish return migrants, while two of the eight interviewees were English and came to live in Ireland with their partners. The interviews sought to ascertain why return migrant left the West of Ireland; their length of stay abroad; motivation for returning (retirement, problems of integration abroad, language problems, quality of life, economic status, and personal reasons) and their experiences as return migrants. Data was collected on return migrants from international destinations such as Britain (London), Canada, Holland, USA (Boston and New York) and Scotland. The time line for the research was returning to the West of Ireland from 1994-2009.

### **2.3.2 Selection of the Sample**

Qualitative (semi-structured) interviews were carried out with all the respondents residing in the County of Roscommon. The goal of the sampling process for this particular qualitative study was not that the sample was statistically representative of return migrants, but that the sample was representative in terms of content. The objective was to reach 'theoretical saturation', and as such, all relevant aspects of the research issue were included in the sample and addressed in the interviews. On completion of the interviews the research team had acquired all relevant information pertaining to return migrants experiences and motivations. The research methodology used a selection of cases by selective sampling - a sampling method linked to theoretical sampling. Selective sampling is a qualitative selection method based on predetermined criteria. For instance, in the case of return migrants, the individuals

selected for interviews returned to Ireland voluntarily without compulsion at their own cost. Interview partners were identified not by random selection but by a conscious selection of cases. Selective sampling was used to assure that all relevant aspects were included in the sample, particularly as the total number of interviews was small. The sample reflected the relevant variation of the underlying population with regard to the criteria (variables).

The criteria taken into consideration when choosing the required sample of interviewees included: candidates were of Irish origin; were professional or non-professional; both male and female candidates were selected in the sample (nine male and 10 female); both individuals and couples were selected and their duration of stay abroad was both long-term and short-term. All types of return migrants were included in the study; highly skilled migrants, skilled workers (e.g. craftsmen) as well as non-skilled workers. The level of education although important was not paramount, but what was required was current employment. What was also important was information regarding shift in work practices once return migrants were employed in the West of Ireland (County Roscommon). Family status played an important role in this subtask. Couples with children were interviewed as they may have had different motivations and perceptions about returning to Roscommon rather than single return migrants. Important also was the family connections in the country of origin and how this motivated migrants to return to their birth country.

For return migrants the length of time spent living and working in another country was important to the study. Depending on the period of stay in other countries we differentiated between a short-term stay (a period of a least 1 month but less than a year) and long-term stay (a period at least 12 months). It was important to regard return migrants who left the West of Ireland for a short-term and for a long-term. The initial step of the study was to carry out a pre-test to check the correctness and practicability of the guideline. This was achieved successfully and some questions were altered slightly as their clarity appeared problematic. Audio recordings of all interviews were made and were then transcribed in full. The transcripts were later used for quotations of distinctive statements which added to the quality of the research.

### **2.3.3 Return Migration and the Case Study Region of Roscommon**

The trend of return migration in Ireland was documented as long ago as the 1970s, but gathered pace in the 1990s with the Celtic Tiger boom. Between 1996 and 2006 return migrants made up between 23 and 50% of net inward migration flows to the Republic of Ireland (Ní Laoire, 2008 and Conlon, 2009). Similar to the national scenario international in-migrants to the West of Ireland generally fall into one of two groups. The first group is return migrants: individuals who had emigrated from Ireland returning home later in life, or decedents of emigrants returning to their 'home' country. Between 1991 and 1996, around 19.1 return migrants arrived in County Roscommon per 1,000 population, around 22.2 per thousand population in Mayo, and around 23.8 per thousand population in Galway (Central Statistics Office, 2006). Many return migrants come from the UK, with others from further afield, notably North America. In the year prior to the 2006 census, 12% of in-migrants to the West Region had previously lived in England and Wales, and 3.8% in the United States. British citizens comprise the largest group of foreign nationals resident in the West Region at 34.5% (45.2% in County Roscommon) (Central Statistics Office,

2002). Rural Ireland, therefore, embodies a history of emigration and return migration that can be drawn upon as an example for many countries currently witnessing migration patterns. Consequently, rural Ireland was an appropriate case study location. Following DERREG project guidelines the study focuses on the West of Ireland and in particular the county of Roscommon.

## **2.4 Key Findings**

### **2.4.1 Movement Patterns and Experiences of Return**

Thirteen of the nineteen return migrants interviewed for this research left Ireland in the 1980s as a result of a national recession. Emigration from Ireland was concentrated at two ends of the class/education/wealth spectrum and unskilled and skilled males and females were leaving Ireland in significant numbers. A quarter of all emigrants to England in the 1980s were labourers, but by 1990 almost 30% of college graduates were emigrating to source further employment, training and experience abroad, a situation reflected in the findings whereby all but one interviewee had completed secondary level education prior to emigration and nine of the seventeen completed a third level qualification to Diploma or Degree level prior to leaving Ireland. Individuals and couples interviewed primarily emigrated to the United Kingdom the United States, Europe and Canada where most were motivated not only by the economic recession of the time, but also by family and friends living abroad, higher incomes and better working conditions. Such findings suggest that both 'push and pull' factors were involved in emigrants leaving rural Ireland. Push factors referring to the economic circumstances of migrants while pull factors involved the need for young Irish emigrants to explore different cultures and experience new ways of living and working.

Despite the traditional tendency to consider migration as permanent (Dustmann and Weiss, 2007) many of the interviewees stated that they always intended to return to Ireland. It would appear from the interviews that nine out of the eleven individuals and one of the couples needed little or no stimulus to return to Ireland as they always intended to do so. In eight of the interviews, it was suggested that issues of return came to the fore once children were born. Such motivations for return are highlighted in a simple spatial model of return presented by Jones (2003) in which he suggests that the attractions of home and family often persuade emigrants to reconsider a permanent residency abroad. Such motivations for return are also strongly connected to the new economics of labour migration theory, which suggest a strong attachment to home, household and nostalgia. Similarly, transnationalism is strongly associated with family ties, as is a strong attachment to home crucial in the decision to return. Three other interviewees also returned home for family reasons; however their experiences were somewhat negative in that, in all three cases, a parent had become ill and interviewees felt compelled to return. One couple felt they were forced to return due to the family situation and appeared to resent it, even after ten years home. These families reported considerable adjustment problems, ranging from Ní Laoire's (2007) insider-outsider dualism to feelings of not belonging, loneliness and isolation. Return migrants are expected to feel a sense of belonging and homecoming, and according to Ní Laoire (2008, p. 40) issues of loneliness and adjustment are 'either not acknowledged or are unexpected'. Narratives of loneliness and poor adjustment

were evident within this research, in particular amongst families who were uncertain about their return or those who felt their return was forced upon them.

#### **2.4.2 Return to Rural Ireland**

All returnees, except one female, loved returning to rural Ireland and most felt it presented little or no barriers to their lifestyle. Even though most interviewees felt that rural areas present challenges in relation to rural transport, services and facilities they are still content to attempt to overcome such challenges rather than move to an urban setting. These results mirror key findings of Ní Laoire (2007) in that they are embedded in an idyllic construction of rural Ireland with notions of safety, community and family. Concept of peace and tranquillity dominated returnee's motivation to return as did their longing to return to friends and family. The dream of return for many migrants is powerful, but what appears as strong if not more so, is a longing to return to the rural region where they originated.

Nonetheless, there were several aspects of returning to rural Ireland that perturbed interviewees. A distinct lack of services, information regarding services and the level of professionalism within available services was a preoccupation with many interviewees (3 males, 4 females and 3 couples). In particular, the availability of rural transport was an issue, with many deeming it impossible to carry on any 'normal' existence in rural Ireland without owning one if not two cars. Although all interviewees were amazed at the transformation of Ireland during the 'Celtic Tiger' era they still felt the service industry lacked the professionalism they witnessed abroad. Some also expressed the opinion that Ireland's brief encounter with wealth and prosperity replaced feelings of community pride and localism with materialism and self-centredness. On the other hand, one man disliked the fact that people in his area changed very little. Having worked in an urban setting where instantaneous results were common place he found the 'laissez-faire' attitude in rural Ireland difficult to deal with. The availability of broadband was a problem for most returnees. Although most interviewees had broadband, several had considerable difficulty accessing it. In a social network theory context individuals who maintained contact with family and friends in their country of origin were aware and prepared for the difficulties that lay ahead in rural Ireland thereby making their transition somewhat easier. In fact similar to the transnational approach to return migration, social network theory views returnees as migrants who maintain strong linkages with their former residence whereby such contact can in turn provide valid information and resources for the returnee and where such linkages and networks become a resource for returnees as they attempt to source/secure employment in their native areas.

#### **2.4.3 Professional Experiences of Rural Return Migrants**

Two of the nineteen interviewees are currently unemployed, but prior to leaving Ireland, all but four interviewees were unemployed while all were employed once they settled abroad. Of the seventeen returnees currently employed in Ireland, eight are self-employed in areas such as photography, recording studio, mechanic, turf cutting, restaurant, farmer/plumber and painter. All interviewees felt that the experience, skills and abilities they obtained abroad were invaluable once they returned to Ireland. Self-employed individuals felt that their experiences abroad were central to establishing their own business once they returned. All interviewees suggested that working in different work environments while away provided them with an opportunity to experience different work cultures and practices, which

enhanced their employment opportunities once they returned. Most interviewees (14) were satisfied with their current employment situation except one female who was recently given redundancy notice. All self-employed individuals were anxious about their businesses due to the current recession and some (5) felt they might have a better chance at 'growing' their business if they resided in an urban area, albeit none were willing to trade the benefits of rural life for their businesses. All interviewees felt they gained skills and abilities abroad that assisted them in their current occupation. Eight of the nineteen interviewees obtained further education while abroad including; obtaining a Haulage Licence, Human Resources Degree, Photography Degree, Plumbing Degree, I.T. and Hotel and Catering qualifications. Others suggested that they gained substantial experience, strength of character and ability to deal with diverse populations and situations.

To this end a recognized advantage of mobility is the acquisition of forms of capital gained while abroad. Social network theorists view the returnee as a social actor who has values; projects and his/her own perception of the return environment. These ideas are developed over time because of accumulated information regarding situations and prospects in origin countries. The returnee mobilises resources prior to return and belongs to a cross-border network involving migrants and non-migrants. In addition to financial capital, social network theorists suggest that human capital in the form of skills acquired abroad as well as knowledge, experiences, acquaintances and values all contribute to the successful return of migrants (Cassarino, 2004). Dustmann and Weiss (2007) suggest that the source country can gain immensely from opportunities and experiences its citizens had to acquire abroad, resulting in a 'brain gain' for the source country rather than a 'brain drain'. Migrants returning to rural Roscommon brought with them financial, social, human and cultural capital, which in turn are enormously beneficial to the sustainability and long term development of small rural areas. Those who established small rural businesses reflect the migration-development debate (Black et al. 2003) which increasingly promotes the small business sector as an engine of growth for the economy as a whole and for rural areas in particular. Although a somewhat contentious matter (ibid), the small business sector is increasingly relevant within the Irish situation where the economic crisis of recent years continues. The entrepreneurial and innovative ability of some of the returnees within this particular study was clearly evident. What materializes however is a lack of assistance, financial support and business direction and guidance, particularly for those in rural areas. Seven individuals sought assistance from government agencies (LEADER in Roscommon, Roscommon County Enterprise, IDA and Roscommon Enterprise Board). One individual setting up a recording studio in Roscommon received monetary and 'start-up' business assistance, but the others failed to receive any form of assistance. Therefore, although individuals within this study were successful in developing and sustaining their businesses, new returnees in the current economic climate may not be as fortunate without considerable support and guidance.

## **2.5 Conclusion and Recommendations**

The research carried out for WP2 sought to add to the discussion on migration in rural areas through a specific focus on return migration. It has placed the interpretation of migration rather than the rural to the forefront, in this sense opening up the analysis to a range of other explanatory factors around return migration to the rural. A number of main issues have been identified:

- The first relates to the potential for return migration to be seen as a failed attempt by the individual to improve his or her status. This has not been borne out by the results of this research, suggesting therefore that dominant discourses associating return migration with some kind of ‘failure’, usually economic, may be overstated, particularly under more contemporary migration circumstances and conditions.
- A second issue relates to the idea of return migration as a disruptive phenomenon for rural place in terms of breaking up social connectivity. Again, this has not been evident in this research; rather, it reveals more about how migration binds places rather than separates them, in other words, migration as connective rather than disruptive.
- One distinct advantage of the returnee’s mobility practices was the acquisition of various forms of capital. Migrants returned to rural Ireland with financial, social, cultural and human capital making them both employable and capable of employing others within a self-employed capacity.
- Drawing on social network theory returnees showed an ability to network both in preparation for their return and once they returned. Such networks contributed to the successful reintegration of migrants, particularly within a rural setting. As such, the return migration process, particularly for rural areas resulted in a ‘brain gain’ situation rather than the original ‘brain drain’.
- The entrepreneurial and innovative ability of some of the returnees draws again on notions of social network theory, in addition to the theory of transnationalism, in that return only constituted the first step towards the completion of the migration project. Where the migration project displayed negative connotations however, was the lack of support and direction from local agencies. Local agencies failed to provide additional advice and support, particularly for innovative individuals who wanted to start their own business.
- Within the realm of this research most returnees were successful in their ventures without additional support however this may not be the case for future returnees, particularly in light of the ongoing economic downturn. As such, it is imperative that returnees are supported and guided, not only in the everyday process of return, but also if they show initiative to start a business that will eventually contribute to the sustainability of rural areas.
- Finally, what was also apparent within this research was the impact of the rural on the decisions being made by migrants. In the first instance, the particular conditions and lack of opportunities within rural areas was a determining factor in forcing emigration. In more recent times, the perception of the rural and its placing within the consciousness of the idyll has seen a notable return migrant experience. This is clearly evident in many of the discussions with those who took part in the research and in particular the perception of the rural as ‘safe’, as ‘close-knit’, as ‘community’, as ‘a good place to raise a family’, were frequently referred to by many of the respondents. It is therefore clear that the phenomenon of return migration to rural areas is a more complex entity than perhaps first realised.
- The new emphasis on mobilities and fluidities of rural life adds to this complexity presenting us with a more challenging understanding of what or whom the rural represents or what or who impacts on the changing nature of the rural. One of the key issues emerging from this research is the apparent correlations between employment and innovation, and human capital and social networks.

- It is evident from this research that return migrants are very much part of the diverse groups and myriad identities present in rural space and consequently are a group worthy of further investigation, particularly in the context of ongoing changes to rural populations and places under processes of globalisation.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Work Package 3**

#### **Environmental capital and sustainable rural development**

##### **3. Introduction**

This section of the report introduces work package 3, its aims, objectives, methodology, key findings and some general conclusions. Research within this work package explores how European regions reposition rural environmental resources in global discourses and networks, and the consequences for the exploitation of the ‘environmental capital’ of rural regions to promote eco-economy’ as a dimension of sustainable rural development. In doing so, the research carried out in the West of Ireland considered the repositioning of the forestry sector within the regional development sector under influence from the interaction of global, regional and local environmental discourses, including the relative positioning of productivist forestry, conservation, and opportunities for ‘eco-economy’ initiatives.

##### **3.1 The Global Repositioning of Forestry**

The West of Ireland is predominantly a rural region with considerable potential for the capitalization of environmental capital. Increasingly affected by globalization and external actors who have the capacity to exploit natural resources, the West of Ireland has the potential to reposition rural resources, such as forestry, in order to facilitate the building of an eco-economy. Globalisation has become a central characteristic of development in all regions. The delicate balance of demands and opportunities it presents is primarily significant for rural areas resulting in it becoming a central focus of EU policy. Although political dialogue principally focuses on the implications of global trade liberalisation for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the challenges facing individual rural communities have not been overlooked (Marsden, 2006). While there is little question about the declining importance of agriculture to rural areas – albeit in current times there is a great deal of emphasis on the role agriculture can play in reinvigorating national economies - what has clearly emerged are new demands being placed on rural spaces, economies and communities. In responding to this new global discourse, the exploitation of the environmental capital of rural regions as a dimension of sustainable rural development is increasingly promoted. One particular response, increasingly endorsed as a global option with a local and regional focus, is forestry. In particular, afforestation (the planting of new forests) is generally viewed as an almost ‘unmitigated good’ (Carroll et al., 2010, p. 35) with benefits including carbon sequestration, fibre production and the creation of habitats, in addition to the economic and social advancement of participating regions and

individual groups. Consequently, forestry policy is currently considered an integral part of future European Union policy on rural development (Elands and Wiersum, 2001; European Commission, 2003; European Commission, 2009). This emerging relationship between farming, forestry and rural development manifests itself in myriad ways from specific production functions to more diverse ecological, recreational and economic benefits.

### 3.2 Forestry in Ireland

In the first instance forestry in Ireland lacks historical presence. There is also 'evidence to indicate that where opportunities afforded by forestry development exist, these are very often overlooked or dismissed by farmers due to emotional attachment to the land and/or perceived ideas of failure' (McDonagh et al. 2010). Despite this, forestry is seen as an expanding and developing sector in the Irish rural economy, with 'an increasingly important role in rural development not only through the diversification of farm income but also through the provision of rurally based employment both of which contribute to rural stabilisation and viability' (Ryan 2011, p.121). Forests now cover approximately 10.7% (745,457 ha) of the land area (FOREST SERVICE 2010), up from < 7% (< 5,000 ha) in 1990. Still among the lowest forest cover in the EU (EUROSTAT 2009) Ireland's annual planting was 15,815 ha between 1986 and 1999 and 11,560 ha between 1997 and 2007 with a peak of 23,710 ha in 1995 and a trend generally downwards since (Malone 2008). Despite the current economic downturn the 2010 Budget allocated funding for 7,000ha of new planting in 2010 and the planting for 2007, 2008 and 2009 was broadly stabilised in that 6,947ha, 6,181ha and 6,648ha were planted in respective years (Forest Service 2009). While the strategic policy document 'Growing for the Future' (published in 1996) envisaged an increase in the area under forestry to 17% by 2035, a review by Peter Bacon & Associates in 2003 suggested a national planting target of 20,000 ha per year be maintained to primarily secure a sustainable commercial processing sector in Ireland but also to promote the importance of the non-timber value of wood for carbon sequestration, biodiversity, amenity and recreation. In the Foresight 2025 study, Fennessy (2005) also highlighted the importance of Irish forestry as a provider of public goods into the future, particularly in the areas of carbon sequestration, biodiversity, recreation and water quality. In her assessment of the situation and outlook for forestry 2010/2011, Ryan (2011) suggested however that 'in the absence of a busy timber harvesting sector, there will be less employment available in rural areas and at an individual forest owner level, there will be no income stream from farm forests to support local rural economies' (2011, p. 139).

In relation to forest cover approximately 745,457ha of land is under forestry in Ireland (10.7%). Of this, the total area of privately owned forest is 339,341 ha; the average size plantation is 8.2ha with approximately 15,000 forest owners and a total timber production (2008) of 2.4million m<sup>3</sup> (Private: 0.12 mill. m<sup>3</sup>) (Forest Service 2010). The output of Irish forestry and forest products sector is estimated by the Irish Forestry and Forest Products Association (IFFPA) at being €1.89billion or just less than one percent of GDP (IFFPA 2010 cited in Ryan 2011). The contribution to rural economies is further boosted by the €72m paid to farmers through forest premiums (Forest Service, 2010). Forestry thus reflects the single biggest land use change in Ireland over the past decade, with a critical mass of private forestry now developing. This trajectory is supported in no small measure by the changing nature of the policy environment that sees forestry support under CAP moving from an alternative use for

land taken out of agricultural production in the 1992 reforms to becoming a means of delivering EU environmental objectives which has parity with agriculture in all three axes of the EAFRD.

### **3.3 Methodology**

The central objective of this work package was to explore the extent to which diversification activities such as forestry form part of the broader rural development process. Keeping this in mind data collection was designed to obtain an overview of the forestry industry in the West of Ireland and the potential for exploitation of the industry that would have a positive impact on rural development. Specifically the methodology consisted of five main dimensions:

#### **3.3.1 The Collection of Statistical Data and Documentary Analysis**

Statistical data and documentary analysis was used to probe information embedded in different types of written sources, such as, the Border, Midland and Western Region Operational Programme 2000-2006 and 2007-2013. Analysis of these documents provided contextual understanding and accordingly was conducted at the beginning of the research activities. This served as a basis for directing the surveys and interviews.

#### **3.3.2: Media Analysis**

To understand how forestry is projected and/or the message about forestry that is being communicated, a review of the various media (the regional newspapers) was a useful tool. Regional newspapers play an important role in the discussion about environmental resources and their valorisation within the economy. By agenda setting they project global environmental discussions onto a regional scale, inform and sensitize the public and contribute to awareness-raising. Online archives of important regional newspapers were used to analyse the information flow to/from the forestry industry. In the first step of analysis conclusions about frequency distribution were drawn from the total amount of articles as well as from the amount of articles in each category. An in-depth-media-analysis was conducted to gain more detailed insights into regional discourses about specific environmental topics and the stakeholders involved. The basis for this investigation lay in the selection of articles collected, the selection criteria, number of considered articles, the length of considered articles and peculiarities regarding authors. This in-depth-media-analysis endeavoured to gain insight into regional discourse about forestry and its key stakeholders.

#### **3.3.3 Individual Interviews with Key Stakeholders**

To further engage with these questions a third group that was identified as an important contributor to the repositioning of forestry in the rural economy were key stakeholders. These stakeholders were drawn from enterprises and business associations, public authorities and state agencies, science and research institutes. In all, the central objective was to identify and analyse the positions of relevant key actors or their institutions and organisations with regard to forestry. Eleven stakeholders, mainly employed in a senior capacity with extensive experience in forestry within these various organisations, were interviewed with all interviews

recorded and transcribed following agreement. Further, based on the results of the statistical analysis, documentary evidence and interviews with key actors, 10 best/good practice examples were chosen within the BMW region. These examples of 'best/good practice' initiatives were deemed to be representative of successful forestry projects, initiatives, networks or policies/strategies which depicted positive effects on rural and regional development and were used to unpack this potential mismatch/complementarity between diversification and rural development.

While there are a variety of stakeholders involved in forestry in terms of producers, consumers and decision makers, this paper focuses on the latter group, namely the key stakeholders from enterprise and business associations, public authorities and State agencies and from the sciences and research institutes. In all, eleven groups were targeted – two Universities with expertise in forestry research and development; the Western Forestry Co-operative Society Ltd; Mid Western Forestry Services Ltd.; Sustainable Energy Ireland; Teagasc – Public authority/State agency but also research institute; Coillte Forest; COFORD - the National Council for Forest Research and Development; Muintir na Coillte; Forestry Service, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The eleven key actors interviewed were mainly employed in a senior capacity with extensive experience in the area of forestry. The focus of the interviews was to consider attitudes and aspirations of the stakeholders to the repositioning of the forestry sector within the regional development sector under influence from the interaction of global, regional and local environmental discourses, including the relative positioning of productivist forestry, conservation, and opportunities for 'eco-economy' initiatives.

### **3.4 Key Findings**

#### **3.4.1 Key Findings from the Documentary and Statistical Analysis**

Forestry in modern Ireland lacks historical presence. There is also 'evidence to indicate that where opportunities afforded by forestry development exist, these are very often overlooked or dismissed by farmers due to emotional attachment to the land and/or perceived ideas of failure' (McDonagh et al. 2010, p.4). Despite this, forestry is seen as an expanding and developing sector in the Irish rural economy, with 'an increasingly important role in rural development not only through the diversification of farm income but also through the provision of rurally based employment both of which contribute to rural stabilisation and viability' (Ryan, 2011, p.121). Forests now cover approximately 10.7% (745,457 ha) of the land area (Forest Service, 2010), up from < 7% (< 5,000 ha) in 1990. Still among the lowest forest cover in the EU (Eurostat, 2009) Ireland's annual planting was 15,815 ha between 1986 and 1999 and 11,560 ha between 1997 and 2007 with a peak of 23,710 ha in 1995 and a trend generally downwards since (Malone, 2008). Despite the current economic downturn the 2010 Budget allocated funding for 7,000ha of new planting in 2010 and the planting for 2007, 2008 and 2009 was broadly stabilised in that 6,947ha, 6,181ha and 6,648ha were planted in respective years (Forest Service, 2009). While the strategic policy document 'Growing for the Future' (published in 1996) envisaged an increase in the area under forestry to 17% by 2035, a review by Peter Bacon & Associates in 2003 suggested a national planting target of 20,000 ha per year be maintained to primarily secure a sustainable commercial processing sector in Ireland but also to promote the importance of the non-timber value of wood for carbon sequestration, biodiversity, amenity and recreation. In the Foresight 2025 study,

Fennessy (2005) also highlighted the importance of Irish forestry as a provider of public goods into the future, particularly in the areas of carbon sequestration, biodiversity, recreation and water quality.

### **3.4.2 Key Findings from Media Analysis**

The basis for the in-dept-media-analysis was 40 articles issued in a variety of newspapers (the Connacht Tribune, Western People, Sligo Champion, Sligo Weekender and the Roscommon Herald) in the West of Ireland from 2000 to 2008. Although a variety of articles were available only those that reflected opinions of relevant stakeholders were considered. The search for the articles was conducted on an electronic search engine using key search words such as environmental protection, nature protection, agriculture, forestry, climate change, energy, water contamination and tourism. The articles ranged in length from the shortest 135 words, to the longest 1150 words with a significant increase in numbers between 2000 and 2008 (from 4 to 113), and while many were written by journalists, such as, Dennis Manning and Catherine Regan, the majority appeared to be material that was obtained from groups and organisations promoting forestry as a viable alternative farming option. Against this background both the promotion of, and reluctance to, embrace forestry were themes that emerged quite strongly particularly in terms of questions around: Which key stakeholders were promoting forestry and what information were they imparting to landowners? How was forestry promoted as a potential wood energy resource? Was forestry promoted as a possible option to increase farm household income? How was forestry thought of in terms of an activity which offered potential as a secondary resource, particularly when its significance as an ecological, amenity, recreational and environmental reserve is taken in to account? How was forestry promoted in terms of rural development?

### **3.4.3 Key Findings of Qualitative Interviews**

Interviews carried out in relation to forestry explored the repositioning of the forestry sector within the regional development sector under influence from the interaction of global, regional and local environmental discourses, including the relative positioning of productivist forestry, conservation, and opportunities for 'eco-economy' initiatives. Eleven interviews were carried out with key actors from enterprises and business associations and sciences and research institutes. Strongly influenced by EU legislation and national policy those interviewed suggested that the general environmental situation in the West of Ireland has improved dramatically in the last decade, although the region still faces environmental challenges that require considerable attention. The use of the qualitative semi-structure interview approach provided valuable information on the way in which key stakeholders perceive forestry in rural Ireland and more importantly, the way such stakeholders view the potential of forestry in terms of future rural development. It is clear that there are many challenges, both cultural and economic, in bringing forestry into the mainstream of land use activity in rural Ireland.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has overall responsibility for forestry development in Ireland and for the most part the Irish State's direct involvement in forestry planting in Ireland reflects EU policy. Since the 1980's forestry development has been enhanced in the West of Ireland by state funded

schemes, which include annual premiums and grants. Many stakeholders commented that forestry is promoted by the State through the extension advisory division of Teagasc, without which there would be little or no forestry in many parts, particularly in the West of Ireland. State involvement (through funding) in forestry was also seen as hugely significant in terms of its role in renewable energy and as a potential carbon sink. Several stakeholders suggested that forestry conservation activities and planting could result in the reduction of carbon emissions; however, this is somewhat dampened by the fact that the Irish state does not have a specific policy in terms of controlling carbon emissions, and that using forests as sinks is not recognized by the Kyoto Agreement until after 2012. Current Irish forestry policy is set out in the Strategic Plan for the development of the forestry sector in Ireland at a macro level rather than a regional level. This was criticized and regarded as outdated and failing to take into consideration issues relating to carbon emissions and renewable energy. The objectives of the 1996 Strategic Plan were largely associated with the production of timber for construction and not for renewable energy. Nonetheless, many interviewees suggested that State support for forestry into the future may very well depend on its role in reducing carbon emissions.

One further interesting development in terms of the State's role was the lack of acknowledgement of the multifunctional use of forestry with the State not following through on grants for amenity forestry. Huge potential in the area of forestry for recreation and tourism is not exploited and could be an 'untapped' area of rural development potential. The concept of forestry and forestry development has raised many debates and contentions in rural Ireland. Whatever the perception or attitude, it would appear that despite the multifunctional role that forestry now provides its increased economic potential and its central role in rural development policy, there is still a cautionary approach when it comes to farmers willing to plant their land. Stakeholders suggested that a lack of confidence, tradition and culture among farmers were the main barriers to afforestation in Ireland (particularly in the west of the country). Farmers fear the permanency of forestry and are reluctant to 'tie-up' land in forestry development for an extensive period of time even though farming in many rural parts (particularly the west region) is not financially viable. Most stakeholders commented that farmers would consider forestry development if the financial incentives were adequate and if confidence in the premiums was maintained. Stakeholders also suggested that the current economic crisis in Ireland had a major impact on farmers dependent on part-time employment and that this may bring about a change in attitude to forestry. Land structure in the West region was also considered a barrier to afforestation as small plots of land prevent a reasonable area of land being available for planting.

Wood energy was also endorsed and although forestry premiums was the greatest incentive to planting, interviewees believed that going on market value there was huge potential for forestry in terms of a renewable energy resource. While Ireland has an excellent growing climate and suitable soil to encourage forestry in terms of economic potential, some interviewees had reservations regarding the economic potential of forestry in the west region as previous planting was carried out on unsuitable land. They felt these sites would not produce a profitable crop and consequently some stakeholders suggested that farmers needed to be encouraged to plant on good land rather than marginal land and thereby develop a stronger, more economically viable crop. It was further suggested that farmers needed to be made aware of the potential value of forestry planting and the fact that forestry may have better returns, albeit over

the longer term. Most stakeholders suggested that improved awareness would materialise if farmers gained an income from thinning and in turn if local markets were readily available. Training for farmers' in forestry development was also suggested; albeit, Teagasc does offer extensive training with little apparent effect among the farming community. Stability in the State's support was also suggested as a means of overcoming barriers to afforestation.

#### **3.4.4 Identification and Characterization of Good Practice Examples**

Eight best practice models were identified with a variety of strengths and potential such as; the Irish Afforestation Programme and Grant Scheme and Green Belt Ltd. One key best practice identified was the County Clare Wood Energy Project which typifies many of the aims and objectives of the WP3 research. This project presents a clear holistic example of the repositioning of a rural resource (forestry) and how it provides opportunities for eco-economy based regional development. The project was initiated in 2005 with funding from the Forest Service and Teagasc with a clear agenda to support the establishment of a commercially viable wood energy sector in the county of Clare, based on wood chip from local farm forest thinnings. The project aimed to develop the demand for wood energy and establish a local wood chip supply chain from farm forests and to-date the project has been very successful.

#### **3.5 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The use of the qualitative semi-structure interview approach provided valuable information on the way in which key stakeholders perceive of forestry in rural Ireland and more importantly, the way such stakeholders view the potential of forestry in terms of future rural development. The following conclusions can be drawn from the research:

- It is clear that there are many challenges, both cultural and economic, in bringing forestry in to the mainstream of land use activity in rural Ireland. Forests as a land use have moved rapidly from the traditional industrial timber production model to providing roles in creating ecological and amenity arenas as well as employment. However, what is clear from this research is that forestry can (and does) play a significant role in the economy of rural areas such as the West of Ireland.
- In recent years there has been an increasing emphasis on the positioning of forestry as an alternative energy industry; its potential for carbon sequestration and the provision of multifunctional aspects of forestry such as forestry recreation. This is clearly acknowledged as being an important focus in terms of the discussion with the key stakeholders and encouragingly, these key forestry stakeholders showed great confidence in the role that forestry, environmentally and economically, can contribute to rural sustainability.
- As with all positive steps there is often a cautionary note, In this case the positivity is tempered somewhat by the fact that despite generous grants and premiums, afforestation was stagnant and, in some areas, in decline. Cognisant of this position, stakeholders reiterated the need for policy change and the continuation of consistent financial support for afforestation throughout Ireland and particularly the Western region.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Work Package 4**

#### **Capacity building, governance and knowledge systems**

##### **4. Introduction**

This section of the report discusses the significance of knowledge and capacity-building as essential elements that underpin wider policies and strategies for rural sustainability in the case study region. As part of this, it considers the importance of governance arrangements to facilitate ‘the capacity to act’<sup>1</sup> at the regional and local level, particularly in answering the increasing challenges of globalizing forces upon the rural. First, an overview of identified public strategies to support learning, innovation and capacity building in a rural and regional development context are outlined in terms of their relevance to the study region. This is followed by a review of the selected grassroots initiatives in terms of support of joint learning and innovation, particularly the operational quality of support arrangements based under the main criteria of initiation, expertise and facilitation, and finance.

##### **4.1 Data and Information Collection**

This consisted of an in-depth review of the relevant learning and innovation support strategies including policies and organisational/institutional supports. Other data collection included interviews and focus group meetings with key actors representing the grassroots initiatives and public organisations. This was based on an initial inventory of 10 grassroots initiatives receiving public support for various forms of innovation and capacity-building across a range of development activities. Four of these were subsequently reviewed in greater detail via secondary data sources, in-depth interviews and focus groups with key actors.

##### **4.2 Overview of Learning and Innovation Support Strategies**

###### **4.2.1. Regional-level Programmes and Supports**

This focused mainly on the activities of publicly-funded institutions and agencies/organisations that are relevant for supporting regional and rural knowledge and learning in the West region and the Roscommon study area. It also involved a review of the main policies and funding strategies to support innovation and capacity-building at the regional and local level. From a regional and rural perspective, the number of publicly-funded organisations might be regarded as extensive and adequate to support the range of knowledge-related needs of the region. However, it was also apparent that there were a number of barriers to maximising on the value of the services and resources provided, or that could have potentially been provided by these organisations.

The main regional-level organisations identified as part of formal governance structures and delivery of development programmes operating in the case study area included the Western Development Commission, the Border Midland and West Regional Assembly, and the West Regional Authority. All three organisations are

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<sup>1</sup> D5.3, Wellbrock and Roep, p.11

defined as advisory rather than decision-making bodies. The West Regional Authority comprises a network of local authorities, represented by city and county councillors. It makes recommendations to national government on regional development and planning strategies but is not a decision-making body in its own right and it does not have any direct role in development interventions. The WDC is concerned with policy analysis and development, the promotion of regional initiatives and the operation of the WDC Investment Fund (€28 m, provided via the government's National Development Plan - NDP) to support small and medium-sized enterprises and social enterprises in the region through the provision of risk capital, equity and loans on a commercial basis. The BMW's stated remit is to advise government on regional dimensions of the NDP, monitor EU Programmes and manage Regional Development Operational Programmes for the region. Their success in devising individual programmes for the region, although modest in terms of the funding available to them (decided by central government and supported via EU funding), is attributed to understanding stakeholder needs and responding to these in a flexible way. One example is the Innovation Voucher Scheme, which allows successful applicants to spend funding on those specific supports they identify as priorities to develop their business projects. One key sector in terms of its rural development potential that has been facilitated is that of small scale food producers. There is a strong brokerage element, i.e. helping individual producers to identify and make links with relevant organisations and individuals. This is cited as a vital component in the success of the scheme, which is now mainstreamed by Enterprise Ireland. In other cases, however (and not confined to the BMW), regardless of their success, programmes fail to move beyond a pilot stage. Weak regional governance structures and the implications for policy formulation and achievement of development and competitiveness goals have been highlighted by the BMW Assembly through a range of submissions to central government. It has managed to exert its otherwise constrained position to develop a strong working relationship with other local and regional organisations in terms of sharing information, and increasing efficiencies in devising and delivering a range of pilot programmes.

The higher education sector (including NUI Galway, the Institutes of Technology in Galway, Sligo and Letterkenny, and St. Angela's College, Sligo) are also identified as a key player in development within the region and in terms of building successful interfaces with grassroots initiatives. The most obvious and frequent connection is made via enterprise development, both in terms of training graduates who will remain in the region, and in providing supports to innovation and the knowledge economy. In a regional and rural development context, this sector is also exposed to the disadvantages of rurality and peripherality. Current funding for third level research, which is distributed on a competitive basis at national level, does not differentiate between the regions. Numerous examples of successful collaborative projects promoting knowledge exchange, capacity building and innovation exist between the third level institutes, the BMW Regional Assembly and the WDC.

#### **4.2.2. Rural and Regional Development Policy**

This section discusses briefly the status of rural and regional development policy in the context of Ireland's overall development priorities for the reference period 2007-2013. It notes the relatively fragmented approach to rural-relevant policy in terms of formulation and governance at national level. Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP - €5.778bn = EU€2.339bn + IR€3.439bn) is separate

from but at the same time forms part of the country's overarching National Development Plan for 2007-2013 (NDP). The emphasis in Ireland's RDP is on Axis 2 (Environment and countryside) with over 80% of the funds going towards agri-environmental and related schemes. The remainder is split between Axis 1 (Competitiveness of farming and forestry) and Axis 3 (Quality of life and rural economic diversification). Axis 4 deals with the LEADER Approach. Farmers and land/agriculture-related concerns form the primary focus. Wider rural and regional specific policy priorities within the NDP are mainly identified under one of its five key investment priorities, specifically Enterprise, Science and Innovation. This priority contains seven programmes. One of these, the Agriculture and Food Programme, represents by far the major proportion of funding allocated to development measures focused on rural areas. It incorporates measures under Axes 1 and 2 of the EAFRD. The NDP's Rural Social & Economic Development Programme reflects measures under Axis 3 and 4. It comprises 4 subprogrammes that are delivered at a more local level; these are: LEADER/Rural Economy; Rural Social Scheme; Western Investment Fund; CLÁR (Table 2). In relative terms the amounts available to this subprogramme are modest.

**Figure 3: National Development Plan – focus on rural and regional development policy**

<b>National Development Plan 2007-2013 total</b>	<b>€184 bn</b>
<b>Programmes under Enterprise, Science and Innovation Priority</b>	
Science, Technology and Innovation	6,112
Enterprise Development	3,323
Tourism Development	800
Agriculture and Food	8,028
Rural Social and Economic Development	844
Gaeltacht and Islands Development	457
Marine and Coastal Communities	442
<b>Total for Enterprise, Science and Innovation Priority</b>	<b>20,006 bn</b>

Source: NDP 2007-2013.

The LEADER programme in the case study area is delivered by Roscommon Integrated Develop Company Ltd. (now called Roscommon LEADER Partnership). Since earlier 2011 LEADER has come under the remit of the new Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government (DECLG). It delivers the Rural Social Scheme (which is administered by Pobal, a not for profit company that manages programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU). This scheme mainly provides income support to low-income farmers and fishermen. The CLÁR programme, which provides for rural regeneration measures targeted at areas of specific population decline has been delivered by the DECLG. It is in the process of being wound down by government, with just €0.5m allocated to it in 2011, compared to €9m in 2008. One other NDP investment priority, Social Inclusion, contains a further programme of relevance to rural development, Local and Community Development Programme. One final, relatively small-scale programme is the Rural Transport Scheme, administered as part of the NDP by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The centralised funding procedures underpinning these programmes, and their mediation via bodies such as Pobal has arguably reduced opportunities for robust governance structures to emerge at the local and regional levels.

### **4.3 Operational Quality of Arrangements**

At the local level, public administration supports grassroots development activities along three lines: a) initiation, b) advice, expertise and facilitation, and c) finance.

This section further develops the discussion on the forms of direct and indirect forms of support and facilitation, drawing on the more in-depth findings of the 4 selected case study initiatives: Kilbride Community Development; Una Bhan Tourism Co-operative; Roscommon Home Services; Gleeson's Townhouse and Artisan Foods.

#### **4.3.1 Direct Forms of Support and Facilitation**

These are evaluated along two main headings: 1) advice, expertise and facilitation, and 2) provision of finance. Initiation of projects is not noted as predominant.

#### **4.3.2 Initiation**

Setting up initiatives and continuing to provide them with momentum is described as very demanding. However, none of the four initiatives in question here used funding or the intervention of public agencies to initially become established, but first organised themselves and then made decisions around their development aims and objectives, how assistance ought to be sought, and from which agencies.

#### **4.3.3 Advice/Expertise/Facilitation**

Once they had become established, the initiatives approached different agencies for support and advice, depending on their development objectives and what the different agencies provided. It was felt that a lot of support was readily available from the agencies, in the form of help for example, for business plans, from the County Enterprise Board, Teagasc, and from LEADER. Support from Teagasc, particularly in the earlier setting phase, was articulated by two initiatives as being vital. Una Bhan similarly cited the invaluable support they received from FAS and from Failte Ireland. More recently, Pobal is also cited as an agency that provides excellent support and advice through the local agency representative.

One of the main difficulties described is when government makes decisions to change the structure of agencies, and to reallocate support programmes and responsibility for them to other agencies, or to discontinue certain supports and set up alternatives, but also with somewhat changed remits. Changes have also occurred in the case of local employment support programmes which have been a very important source of support for grassroots initiatives. These employment schemes are reported as being vital to the ongoing success of initiatives, as they enable them to take on workers, and reduce the reliance on voluntary effort. It is agreed across the initiatives that reliance on voluntary effort alone is not sufficient to sustain activities in the longer term, and the need for staff who can take on the day to day running of activities is seen as essential. However, the changes with regard to agencies take time to absorb, there is the requirement to become familiar with new rules and regulations, and with new personnel from another agency. It was also mentioned by one interviewee that it is necessary to take account of what may be a changed focus attaching to these programmes, in terms of whether they continue to reflect the aims of the initiative, or draw it in another direction that is not central to these aims. It was reported by all

those interviewed that the agency personnel provide as much support possible in helping them to negotiate these changes. The ability to retain staff who can be employed under these schemes is seen as moving the initiatives to a position where they can develop some financial stability through their various activities. The need to maintain a business-like focus wherever possible was also cited as a reality if they were to succeed. It was clear that a voluntary approach alone was not adequate to maintain momentum. Capacity building could only be effectively achieved with staff who were specifically employed to get on with the day to day running and decision-making of the initiative, with board members (who were voluntary) participating at a more advisory and strategic management level: “If you did not have a staff that were ready to make decisions and move the show on every hour of the day, the project would collapse, because all the board are voluntary, and very busy people, and not here when they are needed”. As it was, it was felt that the level of commitment had to be well outside of conventional hours to make an initiative work: “You have to be fully committed to it, it must be outside of office hours to make the organisation work; if you were only committed to regular hours, it would not work”. Another side to this related to having a bigger picture perspective on the initiative that did not revolve solely around obtaining funding to stay operational: “You have to run it like a business to make it successful; perhaps that is what is wrong with some of the rural development projects – they are too dependent on the grant system”. This flagged again the necessity of expanding the capacity of the initiatives so that they could become self-sustainable in the future, but the importance of support that was not necessarily financial for the period of time needed to get to that point.

The provision of adequate information around existing sources of support and facilitation were raised. One interviewee had availed of an innovation voucher scheme (provided through the BMW Regional Assembly). The value of the innovation vouchers lay in the fact that they could be spent on a need that was specifically identified by the applicant, thus raising the potential value of the outcomes.

#### **4.3.4 Finance**

There was general overall concern about the future of funding sources in the current economic climate. All agencies that would traditionally provide funding have had their own resources severely curtailed.

All four initiatives have received funding from LEADER. It is regarded as an extremely important source, both in terms of funding, and through schemes such as the Rural Social Scheme which allows them to take on employees. Some reservations were raised about the level of bureaucracy involved in making applications. The comment from one interviewee was that when it comes to actually putting enterprises into place, it is almost impossible without access to additional financial support. In the case of sourcing LEADER funding, the project promoter still had to come up with the matched funding, which continued to be a challenge. The Social Economy Programme, provided through Pobal, was also seen as a vital source of funding, but again, the administration attaching to it was seen as onerous.

Concerns were also expressed about the continuation of funding sources. The wish was expressed that initiatives could become free of this kind of funding, but that initiatives could not manage without it in the early stages. It was felt that withdrawal of government funding, if this had to happen, needed to be balanced with the existing

ability of initiatives to be self-sustaining and to continue providing supports and services to the community.

#### **4.3.5 Indirect Forms of Support and Facilitation**

Developing formal and informal information networks was considered vital. All of the initiatives had representatives of their own organisations on the boards of various agencies or their subcommittees, or had developed close working relationships with them over the years. However, the cost in terms of time and energy was also remarked upon: “You have to keep your eye on the ball, that you gain some benefit; you could be at a different meeting every night of the week; but it is like a lot of little dots that will eventually join up and you will get something out of it; you will always get an opportunity that will come out of one or other of these organisations”. Having key personnel on the management committees or boards of initiatives was also considered extremely important. This could include individuals from the agencies, who in turn can advise on issues from a wider development perspective but which also have an impact on the initiative. They also helped to keep initiatives focused on their development objectives and operate in an efficient and businesslike way.

The need to embrace a learning curve when it came to finding out about existing supports and opportunities was made. One of the observations made about initiatives that had not been successful was that certain communities had been left behind, but through their own fault: “This last 10 years has seen more funding put in than we have ever seen for community initiatives; but too many people, too many communities, have not gone out and learned. Another, related point of contention around support was directed at those within communities, including other groups and initiatives, who failed to see the value in local initiatives and did little to give them support and assistance: They [local populations] don’t see their role in helping us to stay well and thriving by coming in and supporting us – sometimes we wonder if we have to spell it out to people that everything we do stays local, is for the locality, that we are there to support them and that they need to support us in turn”. This reflected a perceived resentment towards local leaders who took an initiative that would support a local area in terms of providing facilities, services and employment. The comment was made that “you have to keep going on and on about the local, raising awareness, making the benefits of supporting it obvious. There was felt to be a significant gulf between what local people saw as the problems in their own rural areas and the potential solutions being offered by many local, grassroots initiatives. In this sense, an important potential source of support that would improve overall capacity of these initiatives was being identified, but with more questions than answers about how this situation could be improved. In the case of the Kilbride community, the importance of these dimensions of local support were also clearly understood, and felt to be a key contributing factor to the success of their range of projects.

#### **4.3.6 Expertise/Seminars and Training/Skills Provision**

The agencies provided ongoing facilitation and support in the form of advice and training. This could be tailor-made as required, for example, specific training could be organised by the County Enterprise Board, RIDC or the VEC. One interviewee described the way support is provided via the County Enterprise Board: “I approached them about mentoring (for her staff) and they paid for that. They gave me a list of people, I picked one; he came in and gave a half day, going through different issues

with them". Others had also gone for management training with the County Enterprise Board and the VEC. These were programmes that were advertised, and which had to be paid for, but the point to be made is that these facilities were in place and could be availed of locally. Other forms of support include the provision of venues to hold meetings, particularly through the County Enterprise Board, and organising speakers on specific issues when these are requested. Another important factor is that the management boards of agencies in County Roscommon share representation, in other words, a representative of RIDC sits on the board of the County Enterprise Board, while the manager of the County Enterprise Board is also a member of the RIDC board, etc. This greatly improves information-sharing not only about initiatives, but also leads to a valuable pooling and maximising of ideas and resources which work to the benefit of initiatives.

#### **4.3.7 Research and Consultancy**

All of the initiatives have paid for research and consultancy at some point from private knowledge facilitators. This might be in the form of a feasibility study, or other plan preparation. However, the cost is always an issue here, and it would only be undertaken as part of achieving a key development objective, or, in the case of feasibility studies, as part of preparing a larger funding application.

### **4.4 Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **4.4.1 Direct Forms of Support and Facilitation**

None of the initiatives surveyed could operate without funding supports. However, there was an observed need for more flexibility in interpreting the way in which funding could be applied. Certain conditions and parameters attaching to funding, that may be driven by national imperatives, can have the effect of diluting the core aims of the initiatives as they make decisions to trade off between securing funding that will keep them operating, or trying to go alone without support.

The level of paperwork and perceived 'red-tape' around applying for funding could be better streamlined to reflect the voluntary nature of the initiatives, which would still maintain the transparency of the process and reflect a greater level of trust in both the funding bodies and in their own organisations.

The need to run initiatives in a business-like way is seen as vital for survival. This means realising that voluntary effort alone will not suffice, and that staff must be in place to ensure the day to day running of initiatives will be affected. This need in turn must be reflected through funding conditions, where staff that are taken on can focus on the core aims of the initiative, and not be sidetracked into fulfilling non-core, funding-led requirements.

#### **4.4.2 Indirect Forms of Support and Facilitation**

Formal and informal networking is vital for exchange of information and developing systems of mutual support and facilitation. This could be separated into three categories: a) The ongoing involvement of agencies - this is a core part of the value in this networking, through their ability to act as interface between initiatives and government, which is ultimately the main provider of finance. They are in the position to provide key information and advice on funding and other capacity-building opportunities such as training, or to guide initiatives in the case of major policy

changes. They also provide more informal support through their ability to link initiatives with each other or with other agencies. The fact that agencies in County Roscommon have representatives on each other's management boards facilitates this ongoing flow of information and knowledge, to which initiatives must also (ideally) have access. b) Linking initiatives (through their representatives) into networks which involve agency representatives, either through having them occupy places on agency boards of management, or through having agency representatives on their own (initiatives) boards of management. c) Networks of initiatives, also through mechanisms such as membership of management boards.

Links between the initiatives surveyed and third level institutes were almost non-existent. Support from local communities for initiatives was regarded as an important dimension that would ultimately help to build capacity and ensure success. However, it would appear that levels of local awareness and support varied and were not by any means assured. If there is not support and buy-in from the local community, then an important layer in the knowledge and capacity-building process is missing.

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