

Local Involvement in Countryside Management

KEY Questions

- What have we learned?
- What works?
- Concerns

Frank Convery – Comhar

What we have learned from experience:

- Nobel Prize awarded last week to 3 economists for their focus on ‘incentive compatibility’ and understanding what works and why some things, sometimes don’t work in the public interest
- Proposes that statutory orgs should be obliged to engage with communities and NGO’s who must in return meet required standards to be both viable and productive
- Getting the right organisational incentives and imperatives to drive public/civil servants – not viewed as wimpish to engage
- Need to understand professional imperatives
- Professionalising the performance of communities, NGO’s – e.g. being informed, 2 hr. max meetings with agenda, minutes, agreed key action points and good chair. Having and sticking to mandate and agreements

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What we have learned from experience:

- Understanding and mobilising commercial advantages and market failure
- Valuing and cherishing enthusiasm and encouraging informed risk-taking
- Take politicians seriously by engagement with well-argued positions supported by evidence - avoid negative attitudes
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities to avoid ambiguities and 'cute hoorism'
- Good information – understand the present to inform the future
- The importance of personality – ability to combine astuteness, humour, link evidence to action, communicate in ways that don't alienate, be informed but with humility.

The Wicklow Uplands Council

Experience

- Genesis – Common cause - diverse upland interests: landowners, recreational interests, community and tourism concerned by proposed interpretative centre
- Success Factors: agreed Mission Statement

Structure based on :

- Trust and consensus approach
- Innovative responses to local issues
- Networking – relationships with other groups
- Supporting projects which benefit those living, working and recreating in Wicklow

WUC Projects

- Young Observers Education project
- Village interpretative panels
- Vegetation Management Project
- Landscape Change
- Recreation strategy for Wicklow
- Forestry forum
- Rural homes website
- PURE litter dumping project
- Wicklow Dublin Mountains Board
- Walk and Talk gatherings

Effective structure and professional staff delivering benefits to all through projects

Concerns:

- The willingness of statutory bodies to engage?
- Other 'representative' bodies setting up without the community's involvement or mandate
- Farmers don't want to be restricted. They want to keep freedom to adapt to market
- Deer control measures need to be implemented

Is there a future in farming the environment?

Resounding YES!

Novel approaches needed to address diverse problems

Put a monetary value on environment

Listening mechanisms must be developed

Otherwise we will end up with a canopy of hazel over the Burren or overgrown heather in Wicklow

Identify issues, propose and cost interventions through pilots which influence policy developments

Don't lose knowledge and make informed decisions

Broad principles, not one size fits all

Whose forests are they?

Potential benefits of community forestry:

- Involvement and ongoing care builds a sense of pride in the community
- Sense of local ownership very important
- Need for flexible approach – no. 1 standard
- Importance of good partnership – roles understood and good spirit
- How to involve – projects – letting people – making it normal to be involved

LEADER's role in countryside recreation and eco-tourism

Strengths: Bottom-up approach , quick decisions, consultation on the ground

Challenges: proliferation of policies, how to involve people in projects

Getting young people involved

Delay in getting new scheme in place

LEADER's role is to work in partnership to improve countryside recreation for all

Working in partnership to manage rural environments

Key Characteristics of Good Partnerships:

- Well represented
- Confidence in ability to deliver
- Good Chairperson – objective – confidential – fair
- Motivation – bring local democracy to communities
- Networking support
- Common mission or goal – balance on board – respect and trust

Rural planning and sustainable rural communities

Wide range of opinions:

- Involve community by arriving without pre-conceived ideas
- Rural development
- History and reality check
- Build with communities - looking at maps and models
- Link between countryside and urban - must be linked
- Professionals bring expertise at second layers
- Planning process needs to be changed
- Pressures on planners gives them no time
- Merits of clusters and one off housing issues

Rural planning and sustainable rural communities contd.

- Uplands are a universally owned resource?
- Issue often needed to develop policy and create local interest in planning
- Significant inconsistency in planning decisions
- Locally sensitive policy
- What is a sustainable local economy?
- Knowledge of local expertise
- Local regeneration of communities

Local authorities and community partnership in trail development

- Initiation within the community, common and shared vision and keeping the volunteers on board throughout
- Consult with the experts on best practice trail development early
- Community groups approaching locals to get feedback on what route to take, rather than local authority.
- Listen to the locals, hear the story of each field to build a solid foundation. Landowner consent and benefits
- County Manager needs to pick the right person (champion) who has enthusiasm and local knowledge for the task (not add to existing long list of 'to do' chores)

Concluding Observations

- The value of **shared interest and use of an inclusive structure** (partnership) in formulation of one voice to deliver on projects which confer great benefits on communities. Ni neart le cur le céile

Examples include BurrenLIFE Project and WUC's projects.

Concluding Observations

Importance of **committed personalities** with communication and technical skills to link evidence to action. Burren, Tochar Valley Rural Community and WUC

Importance of **Communities and NGO's** to raise the professionalism to be viable and effective in doing their business.

Importance of **maintaining a living landscape** and not to lose the existing skills of farmers in marginal farmland. We have to identify issues and in partnership develop pilot interventions, which provide the research and data to convince policy, politicians and funding agencies

Concluding Observations

- Listen to the communities and farmers
- ‘Listen to hear what is not said’ Maureen Lally
- Develop incentives which deliver quality landscape, products and meaningful lives for the local population
- Local involvement in planning is vexed by shortage of planners
- Uplands are a universally owned resource?
- Professionals should bring their expertise only at the second layers
- Get young people involved
- Bottom up approach is key perspective of local partnerships