

Context & Introduction

The West Cork Development Partnership (WCDP) draws upon 25 years' experience in the high quality delivery of economic, community, social and environmental programmes in West Cork. The vision statement of the WCDP ***“envisages, resources and plans for the development of the West Cork region as a progressive and vibrant rural region of inclusive and engaged communities, where guided by the principles of sustainability, its social, cultural, natural and economic assets are harnessed to achieve an improved quality of life for all”***.

In its planning, resourcing and delivery of local development programmes since 1991, the WCDP believes some of its key assets, strengths and ethos to be:

- A proven ability in developing successful integrated territorial strategies for community and enterprise development.
- A strong appreciation and recognition of local development potential including natural and environmental resources as well as economic and social capital assets.
- A legacy of an experienced, focused and dedicated Board, executive and an administrative structure which offers stability, credibility, expertise and consistency.
- An ability to respond to and reconcile diverse community and enterprise needs within complementary development strategies.
- A strong record in stimulating innovative thinking in the development of community and enterprise initiatives.
- Exceptional local recognition and goodwill which ensures high levels of participation in programme planning and project development.
- A proven ability in building and developing strategic alliances and partnerships for both public and private sector organisations.
- The successful use of animation and capacity building in priming local community and enterprise initiatives for project development. The considerable emphasis placed on animation and capacity building in successive programmes has provided the cornerstone for considerable further project development.
- A strong knowledge of the systems, procedures and requirements of the DECLG in the administration, financial management, monitoring and evaluation of successive LEADER programmes from 1991 to date.
- A proven capacity to deliver on governance, developmental, budgetary, legislative, compliance targets and requirements.
- An exceptional record in securing private sector involvement and expertise in the project planning and development.
- A proven capacity to develop innovative actions from concept/ theoretical stage to commercial realisation.
- A strong strategic and commercial focus that underpins the provision of enterprise supports on a viable and sustainable basis.
- The identification of the financial and human resources necessary and the capacities, skills and systems required to create and develop innovative models, processes and initiatives.
- A strong commitment to inter-agency, inter-territorial and trans-national project collaboration and development.
- An ability to cohere the planning and delivery of complementary development programmes in accordance with high-level developmental and organisational objectives.

Skills and Experience

The WCDP has a skilled and expert team at board and executive level with current staff having in excess of 100 years collective experience in planning, administering, developing, implementing and monitoring LEADER programme activities since 1991. Skills, qualifications and experience are to be found in financial management; corporate governance; strategic planning; portfolio, programme and project management; marketing and promotion; business management; ICT; database management; mentoring and facilitation; community and enterprise development.

The WCDP has an exceptional record in the management of public funds delivering all programme commitments in line with programme objectives and strategy, within budgetary provision and in full compliance with funder's requirements. In governance, compliance and contract management, of particular significance is the fact that a number of key functions and responsibilities were devolved to the WCDP under the RDP/LEADER programme 2007-2013. The process of *Accreditation* covered in Commission Regulation (EC) No 885/2006, makes it necessary to have in place robust and effective control procedures. In this regard the WCDP is rated 'low risk' by the EURDD DECLG in the period 2010-2014 (***source: Certifying Body Recommendations 2014 - Axis 3 and Axis 4 EAFRD Co-funded RDP 2007-2013***)

The WCDP's record in the delivery of successive LEADER programmes is recognised at policy and practitioner levels across the EU, one notable example being the *"European Court of Auditors, Implementation of the LEADER Approach for Rural Development, Special Report No.5, 2010"*. The WCDP, identified therein as "the LAG in Ireland", is referenced as a case in best practice for its innovative use of the Development Officer role; delivery of integrated strategies; networking and co-operation; assessment of deadweight and reasonableness of costs and the management of conflicts of interest. Further to an invitation from the DECLG in 2015 to present its governance and compliance experience and systems at an ENRD seminar in Brussels ***"Seizing the opportunities for improving RDP implementation in 2014-2020"***, the WCDP's experience and processes for risk management and programme compliance has been acknowledged as an example of good practice in rural development from within the EU. Details are carried on the ENRD website (https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/gp_web_template_riskireland_0.pdf)

Area-based approach to economic development in rural areas

The WCDP has considerable experience in developing area-based approaches to economic development. In the delivery of 4 successive LEADER programmes since 1991, this has involved the systematic appraisal and development of:

- The economic baseline, needs, opportunities and capacities for development.
- Endogenous development opportunities taking full account of the physical, environmental, cultural, human, economic financial, institutional and administrative resources available.
- Intangible assets to include culture, identity, image, perception, social capital and fabric.
- Critical mass and coherence in economic development.
- Participative scenario planning.
- High quality thematic and integrated development strategies that build upon local competences and mitigate economic weaknesses.
- Innovative developmental approaches and methodologies.

- Cluster strategies that embrace multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approaches to leverage optimal competitive advantage and economic efficiency for the area.
- Stakeholder engagement and the animation of sectoral and agency networks.
- Key external drivers and influences shaping economic development.
- Future proofed progressive and innovative place-based economic development strategies.

WCDP Strategic Plan/Future West Cork

The Strategic Plan 2015-2020 which defines its vision, mission and values was adopted by the Board of the WCDP in March 2015. It takes a multi-programme approach to the economic and social development of the West Cork area and sets out the 4 central strategic pillars, each with 4 supporting strategic objectives and associated performance measurement metrics. These strategic pillars and objectives have been informed and shaped by widespread public engagement and the needs analysis in the Future West Cork Initiative. They are:

Strategic Planning and Future Visioning:

- Build systemic capacity and skills to support sustainable, long-term planning and delivery.
- Align and co-ordinate key development programmes, actions and resources to support strategic vision.
- Support vision, innovation, leadership and transition/change strategies.
- Formulate and develop an overarching strategic vision for the development of West Cork.

Community Development:

- Support social inclusion policies and deliver actions to build active citizenship and community engagement irrespective of age, gender and social class.
- Build capacity and resources to facilitate community participation in strategic planning and project development.
- Foster an appreciation of and responsibility for West Cork's social, natural, cultural and economic assets.
- Enhance quality of life through equitable and balanced social, economic, and environmental objectives.

Economic and Enterprise Development:

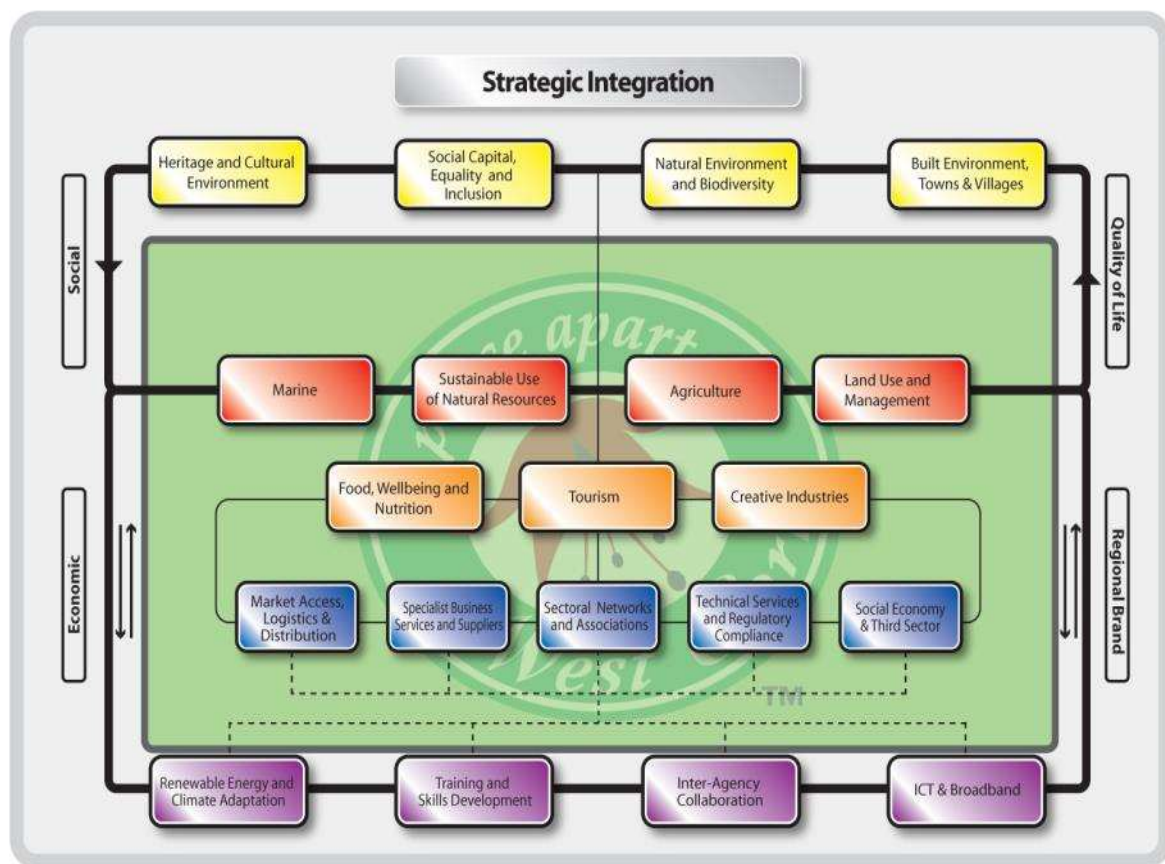
- Support employment creation through renewing, developing and diversifying the region's economic resources.
- Support training, activation and skills development to meet labour market demands and opportunities.
- Support the development of high quality innovative goods and services that reflect West Cork's unique resources, identity and character.
- Leverage optimal competitive advantage through cluster and collaborative actions.

Networking and Partnership:

- Encourage a participative approach to advocate, influence and shape economic, and social interventions.
- Promote collaborative approaches to the planning and the delivery of development initiatives.
- Support networks and partnerships that address local community, social inclusion and economic priorities.
- Achieve added value and enhanced outcomes and impacts through collaboration.

Cluster Activity and Collaboration Principles

A cluster model has as its core objective the evolution of West Cork's economic, social, natural and built environments to support and encourage increasingly sophisticated innovation, collaboration and efficiency across a range of mutually supportive sectors, activities and disciplines. Based upon co-operative and competitive relationships underpinned by strong thematic links, this will facilitate knowledge, expertise and competence transfer and achieve higher levels of resource utilisation, added value and productivity for economic and community development. In a rural development context it represents a new and complementary way of understanding a local society and economy, organising and supporting development and establishing policy and supports placing *Quality of Life* and *Quality of Place* factors at the heart of the local development process.



The West Cork Regional Brand

Initiated and developed by the West Cork Development Partnership, the multi-award winning West Cork Regional Brand (Fuchsia) has played a central role in driving local economic and community development since its launch in 1998. It complements the LEADER 2014-2020 integrated development strategy, its supporting theme and the cluster concept. It is a proven catalyst, driver and nexus for sectoral development as well as that of the region's cultural, social and environmental assets. This multi-award winning development is one of the few cluster development initiatives in Ireland accredited to the EU Cluster Collaboration platform. In 2012, the West Cork Regional Brand was awarded the European Cluster Management Excellence Label according to a benchmarking

approach developed and performed by the *European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis* of VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH.

Smart Specialisation Principles (S3)

Strategies for Smart Specialisation are integrated, place-based economic and societal transformation agendas that build upon a region's strengths, competitive advantages and potential for excellence. Its underlying rationale is that by concentrating knowledge resources and linking these to a selected number of priority activities, regions can become – and remain – sustainable and competitive in a global economy. In a rural context essential elements of its methodology are:

- Assessing resources in rural areas through the lens of contemporary societal trends and challenges, as well as exploring possible directions of change and opportunities to add value to rural assets.
- Identifying and understanding the agents of change that are already engaged in innovative and transformative activities as well as their dynamics.
- Mapping the links between agricultural activities and the wider rural economy and society, an analysis which should be set in the context of the “new economy” which values the links with knowledge, nature and society
- Creating strategic alignments between local, regional, national and supra-national policy agendas, exploring the opportunities that can be derived from multilevel cooperation dynamics that can address both the needs of local communities and the different demands related to new incoming residents, both existing and potential.

Community Engagement & Participation

As a community-led Local Development Company, WCDP, has always put active community engagement and participation to the fore in programme and project planning. The following are the key objectives to be achieved through this process:

1. Improve the quality of information used in identifying key challenges and opportunities to be compiled in the SWOT analysis and in designing responses/solutions.
2. Ensure stakeholder engagement, shared ownership and commitment to the Local Development Strategy and promote inclusivity in planning and implementation.
3. Increase public awareness and appreciation of the role of WCDP and its development programmes to optimise stakeholder input and engagement.
4. Engage communities in the planning process, which, particularly for hard to reach communities, is in itself a means of capacity building for those communities, strengthening social capital and skills.
5. Facilitate interaction at local and sectoral level to improve the quality of analysis and problem-solving by engaging multiple voices and stimulating creative thinking.
6. Prioritise objectives and actions through extensive consultation in a transparent manner.

International Experience

The WCDP has significant experience of leading and participating in transnational and inter-territorial cooperation projects and has developed strong networks and working relationships with LAGs across the EU as well as with ELARD, FARNET, the ENRD and a network of independent EU rural

development consultants and academics. Formal transnational projects delivered to date over successive LEADER programmes centre on themes such as cluster development, rural tourism, regional branding, alternative farm enterprise development, community development and the formulation of innovative integrated development strategies. These projects included partners from Germany, Finland, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Hungary, UK, Italy and the Netherlands. A wide range of development interests, including LAG's from almost all EU member states have visited the WCDP, as have interests from Australia, Russia, USA and Kazakhstan. The WCDP has contributed extensively as moderator and thematic experts to economic and community development events in Belgium, France, Germany, Finland, Poland, Bulgaria, Italy, Hungary, United Kingdom, Spain, Greece, Macedonia, Austria, Lithuania, the Netherlands and the USA. In 2008, the Community Development Society of North America awarded the WCDP its prestigious Innovative Program Award in recognition of its outstanding work in rural development.

The WCDP has recently been chosen by the European Commission as part of a consortium to provide LEADER expertise for the set-up of a new Local Action Group in Georgia under the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development. The West Cork Development Partnership was chosen in recognition of its record in strategic local development but also because the rules of the EU programme require non-governmental experts and so preclude the involvement of Local Action Groups that are tied to local government. Over a four year period it will provide training to the key stakeholders, help to establish governance procedures, host study tours and play a central role in the consultation and writing of the Local Development Strategy. Once the programme is launched in Georgia, The WCDP will support the Local Action Group in the selection of projects and managing grant mechanisms.

ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES

In considering how best local and community participation is achieved, the WCDP posits that there are key attributes that shape successful and sustainable regions and communities. These attributes include:

1. ***Evidence of an inclusive community culture:*** Successful communities are showcases of care, attention, history, heritage and active citizenship. Communities draw upon their unique social capital; they celebrate their successes and have a strong and positive local attitude. Tolerance is a key feature with diversity accommodated by inclusive and engaged communities. Neither gender nor nationality are barriers to participation.
2. ***Investment in the Future:*** Development is an incremental and continuing process towards a shared future. People and skills are key assets which require engagement and investment. Creative talent is fostered.
3. ***Participatory approach to community decision-making:*** Vibrant and engaged communities work towards building consensus. Collaboration and the optimal use of shared resources help attain shared goals.
4. ***Creatively build new economic opportunities:*** Successful communities recognise their economic strengths, assets and opportunities. They seek to build upon these in a coherent fashion. They support a culture of risk taking and innovation and actively seek new opportunities including those enabled by information and communication technologies.
5. ***Support local business:*** In rural areas businesses reflect local endowment. Thriving communities recognise the need for diverse economic activities across a range of sectors. Communities are supportive of and loyal to local businesses and see them as the cornerstone of the local

economy. They contribute to and reflect local distinctiveness and vibrancy and are a key determinant of *Quality of Place*.

6. **Transition of power to new leaders:** Young people have a voice and are engaged and involved in local development. They have the capacity to shape and inform local development by offering fresh thoughts and perspectives. They are confident in articulating their concerns and wish to be part of the solution.
7. **Strong belief in and support for education:** Education and training is critical. Local facilities at primary, secondary and third level (including adult and continuing education) are of a good standard, locally accessible and serve as loci for a range of community and voluntary activity and as stimuli for innovation and development.
8. **Strong presence of traditional institutions which are integral to community life:** Sporting, religious, political, educational, social, business (farming, sectoral and trade associations, etc.), as well as governance, developmental and other representative structures are strong positive influences on community, social and enterprise activities.
9. **Willingness to network:** Communities network and engage with complementary partners, whether state, civic or statutory, to address local community and economic needs. They engage with the State and seek to capitalise on the supports and resources available.
10. **Communities are self-reliant:** Thriving communities believe in self-reliance and use their own initiative to address their own needs. Community structures are strong and accommodate high levels of volunteer and fundraising activity. Communities are pro-active and display a can-do attitude with civic and social responsibility as norms.
11. **Innovation** is the driver that shapes strategy and a vision for inclusion, prosperity and social vibrancy. New ways of *thinking* and *doing* are integral with collaboration central to planning and resourcing of new concepts, strategies, interactions and relationships that create long term economic and societal value in West Cork. Innovation builds upon the region's legacy assets in an iterative manner (including the corporate memory and strategic platform created by successive LEADER and other complementary development programmes) and considers global trends, transformation strategies, new opportunities, optimal resource utilisation and active stakeholder engagement.
12. **Environmental sustainability** effects positive change which respects and builds upon the essential environmental and social systems on which the West Cork region depends. It is wholly dependent on a collective understanding of the critical relationship between communities and their environment and has as its ultimate aim the long-term social, cultural, economic and environmental vitality of West Cork. Environmental quality, its protection and careful stewardship remains fundamental to *Quality of Place*, *Quality of Life* as well as to the sustainable development of key economic sectors (tourism, manufacturing, services, agriculture, food and fishing).
13. Vulnerability to **climate change** is exacerbated by current climate hazards, changing weather patterns, poverty and unequal access to resources as well as financial and technological barriers. In a local context climate change and variability is evidenced by, though not limited to, extreme weather events and frequent river and coastal flooding which have resulted in widespread environmental and biodiversity losses as well as social and economic damage in particular locations. Adaptation and mitigation measures (including sustainable building design, renewable energies, retro-fitting, re-use and recycling of materials, carbon sinks, food security, etc.), which are appropriate, proportionate and cost-effective are integrated within policies (to include assessments of adaptive capacity, vulnerability and adaptation requirements, etc.) and strategic actions in order to achieve awareness, appropriate project planning & risk management and longer term resilience and sustainability.

Current Situation

The West Cork Development Partnership is one of only two Local Development Companies that has failed to secure a LEADER contract for the period 2014-2020. On September 29th 2016, the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission notified the WCDP of its intention to inquire into a “***complaint regarding alleged state aid towards a Local Community Development Committee and irregularities in the selection of a Local Action Group under the LEADER programme***”. This follows a comprehensive complaint from the WCDP to the European Commission in August 2016.

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