



“Revitalising Small Towns on the Island of Ireland:
The Role of Local Government”

Small Town Regeneration: Key Factors for Success

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Overview

1. Capturing coastal dynamism – the coastal community typology
2. Regeneration and Resilience
3. Coastal Community Resilience – characteristics and challenges
4. Key Factors for Success?

Youghal, Co. Cork

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Small Coastal Town Decline

Key Coastal Challenges:

- a disproportionate level of **unemployment** with associated **poor health** resulting in a 'Costa Del Dole' reputation;
- reliance on a declining tourist trade and other **low wage, low skill** and sometimes seasonal employment sectors;
- polarisation in the **quality of local housing** between highly desirable owner-occupied property and often poor quality rented accommodation (including high concentrations of caravans in some areas);
- **peripheral location** in terms of road, rail, energy and digital links, resulting in physical and social isolation and disinvestment;
- a **skewed demographic profile**, often with a higher proportion of older people and transient populations;
- a **negative resort image**, exposure to changes in consumer tastes and lengths of stay, and increasing competition from the global tourist market.



"A look at the recent urban studies and regeneration literature shows that there is surprisingly little research on coastal and seaside town regeneration in the UK, despite their number, importance and the economic and social challenges that many continue to face in the early 21st century"

(Tallon, 2014, p.206)

A differentiated context?

1. Location
2. Demography
3. Historical development
4. Economic inheritance
5. Environmental risk

"Political and academic interest in the subject means that there is now a greater awareness of the problem, but this only highlights the limits of knowledge of 'what works'" (Rickey and Houghton, 2009).

"It should be recognised that coastal areas share many social, economic and environmental features of inland areas and can benefit from the planning skills and practices applied in these areas. However, they also have their own special and indeed unique issues and pressures" (RTPI, 2009, p.13).

Portrush, Co. Antrim

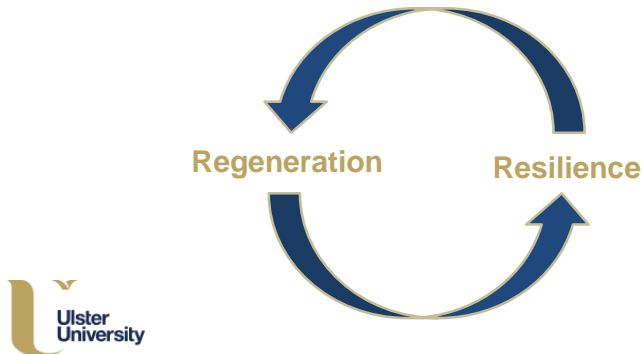
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Regeneration and Resilience

Towards a resilience framework for coastal regeneration

“...the bottom line for sustainability is that any proposal for sustainable development that does not explicitly acknowledge a system’s resilience is simply not going to keep delivering the goods (or services)”

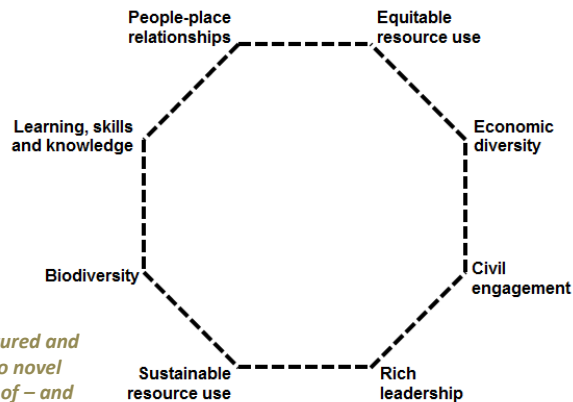
(Walker and Salt, 2006)



Community Resilience

“the ability of a community to cope and adjust to stresses caused by social, political and environmental change and to engage community resources to overcome adversity and take advantage of opportunities in response to change” (Amundsen, 2012, p.45)

- A renewed focus on exploring vulnerabilities at the community level.
- Transformative change at lower levels may enable resilience at higher levels.
- Component of community resilience strengths vary from community to community
- Contested
- The value of resilience lies:



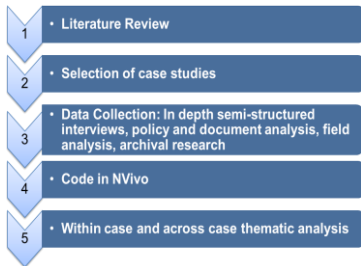
“...not in whether it can be easily captured and quantified, but in whether it leads to novel hypotheses about the characteristics of – and relations between – stressors, various adaptive capacities and wellness over time” (Norris et al., 2008, p.146).

Coastal Regeneration on the Island of Ireland

Context and Methods

Island of Ireland:

- Lies on the periphery of Europe.
- Two jurisdictions - diverse (and changing) governance structure.
- Regional disparities.
- Recognised need for joined-up planning.
- Approximately 6,500km of coastline: Largely rural and highly scenic in nature.
- 60% population live within 50km of the coast.
- Fragmented governance arrangements.



Capturing Coastal Dynamism

Towards a Typology of Small Coastal Resorts

Indicative classifications grouped thematically

Category	Scored above average on indicators relating to...						Potential Case Study
	Demography	Education	Health	Housing	Transport	Employment	
Retiring		■		■		■	Kenmare, Co. Kerry
Striving							Killybegs, Co. Donegal
Reinventing		■	■	■	■		Newcastle, Co. Down
Expanding	■					■	Courtown Harbour, Co. Wexford
Nourishing			■	■	■		Skibbereen, Co. Cork
Prospering	■	■	■	■	■	■	Portstewart, Co. Antrim

Source: McElduff *et al.* 2013

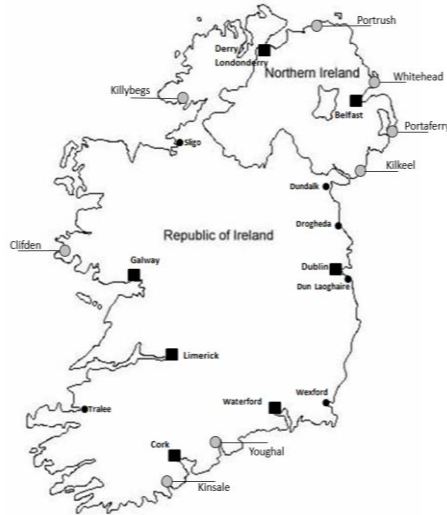
KEY
 ■ Above Average
 □ Below Average

Why are some resorts striving while others are prospering...?

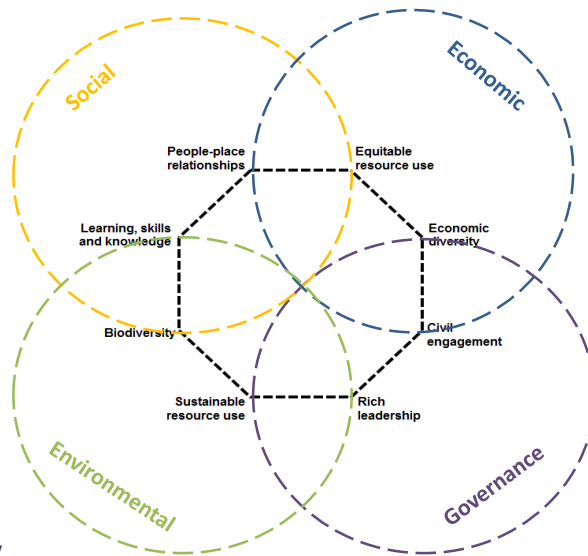
Small Coastal Resorts on the Island of Ireland

Striving, Retiring, or Reinventing?

Case Study	Programme	Key driver	Typology Category
Kilkeel, Co. Down	Kilkeel 2020	Local development company	Striving
Portaferry, Co. Antrim	Townscape Heritage Initiative	Portaferry regeneration group	
Youghal, Co. Cork	Historic Towns Initiative	Local authority	
Killybegs, Co. Donegal	Killybegs Initiative	Local development company / local authority	Retiring
Clifden, Co. Galway	Clifden 2012	Community	
Whitehead, Co. Antrim	Transition Town Whitehead	Community	Reinventing
Portrush, Co. Antrim	Portrush Regeneration Strategy	Local regeneration group / local authority	
Kinsale, Co. Cork	Transition Town Kinsale	Community	

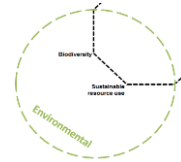


Key Components of Resilient Small Towns?



Sustainable Resource Use

- Natural assets of the resorts provide an important resource for their regeneration: E.g. heritage - Youghal and Portaferry; marine resources - Killybegs and Kilkeel.
- Interdependencies between social and ecological systems.
- A complex balancing act.



“If people are coming here for the natural environment: the walks and the beaches and everything, why are we interfering with that?” (Portrush).

“you simply can’t eat scenery” (Clifden)



- Image and perceptions
- Coastal hazards poorly understood and integrated into wider regeneration goals.

“coastal wise...when we went to Dublin and we were looking to projects or project funding there was an attitude there: sure Youghal’s lovely, why are you looking funding...” (Youghal).

Equitable Resource Distribution and Economic Diversity

- Economic inheritance
- Inability, or unwillingness, to diversify.
- ‘Living on the edge’ has fostered a notable degree of entrepreneurialism.
- Development of niche markets.
- Transferability of existing skills and knowledge.



“Portrush has nowhere else to go. Portrush is driven by tourism. There is no alternative, substitute economic driver in the future” (Portrush).

“I think there’s a huge issue between the money that’s been invested in regeneration but excluding the communities that are actually living in the town” (Portrush).



- Tensions between industries.
- ‘Them and us’
- General feeling of physical and political isolation.

“You’re a long way from Belfast, you’re a long way from the major players and they only ever come down when they want to get their pictures in the paper” (Kilkeel).

Fostering People-Place Relationships

“I don’t want to be employed to do this stuff... this is stuff I do because I want to do it, because I value where I live and I want to put something back in” (Whitehead).

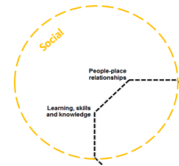
- Underline efforts to regenerate a community: fosters local stewardship.
- Cosmopolitan population - fosters social diversity and generates increased interest and momentum in regeneration.
- Creating a shared identity.



- Gentrification verses ‘costa del dole’ reputation – image is everything.
- Outmigration of young people.
- Resistance to change.

“Luckily for Kinsale, it has a very rich and diverse history; it had an influx of, I would say, external people who were movers and shakers” (Kinsale).

“we’re losing a whole generation” (Kilkeel).



Facilitating Learning, Skills and Knowledge

- Essential pre-requisites.
- Leads to collective action.
- Increases local people’s ability to adapt.
- Platforms for facilitating learning.
- Skills/knowledge may already exist in the local community - these should be valued and utilised in a meaningful way.

“The first thing with heritage is you’ve got to get the locals to appreciate it...” (Youghal).



“There is a definite effort by the Council to try and do something I just wish they would embrace the talent and expertise they’ve drawn into the group in a more open way” (Portrush).





Enhancing Civil Engagement and Leadership

“The regeneration is good in theory: it’s just getting people on board to go with the ideas” (Portrush).

- Inherently difficult...
 - ‘Same faces’
 - Resistance to change.
 - Apathy toward regeneration efforts.
 - Legacy of past ‘mistakes’.
 - Temporal aspect.
-
- Need for strong, influential drivers.
 - May vary in their role and remit; local authority, business sector, community.



“There are lots of ways and means of getting money but unless you have two or three people on the ground who want to make things happen, it won’t happen” (Kinsale).

Some Final Reflections: Key Factors for Success...



PEOPLE

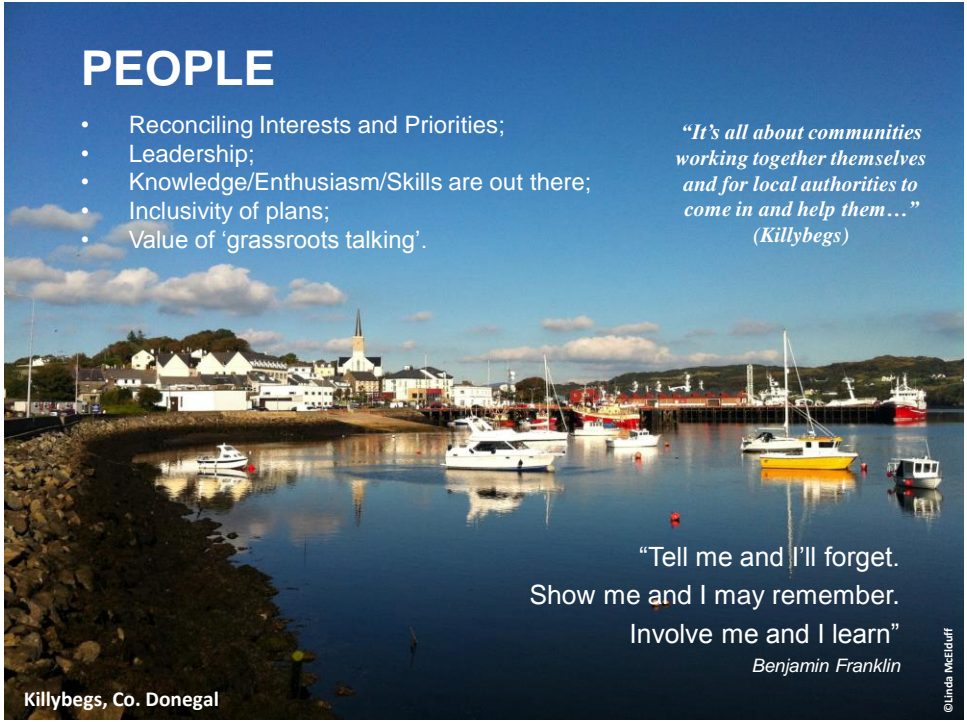
- Reconciling Interests and Priorities;
- Leadership;
- Knowledge/Enthusiasm/Skills are out there;
- Inclusivity of plans;
- Value of 'grassroots talking'.

"It's all about communities working together themselves and for local authorities to come in and help them..."
(Killybegs)

"Tell me and I'll forget.
Show me and I may remember.
Involve me and I learn"
Benjamin Franklin

Killybegs, Co. Donegal

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PLACE

What's your USP?
Small things done better?

"...you only have to look back to the sixties to see that it doesn't always survive it. It does sometimes need to pull itself up by the boot straps" (Kinsale)

Kinsale, Co. Cork

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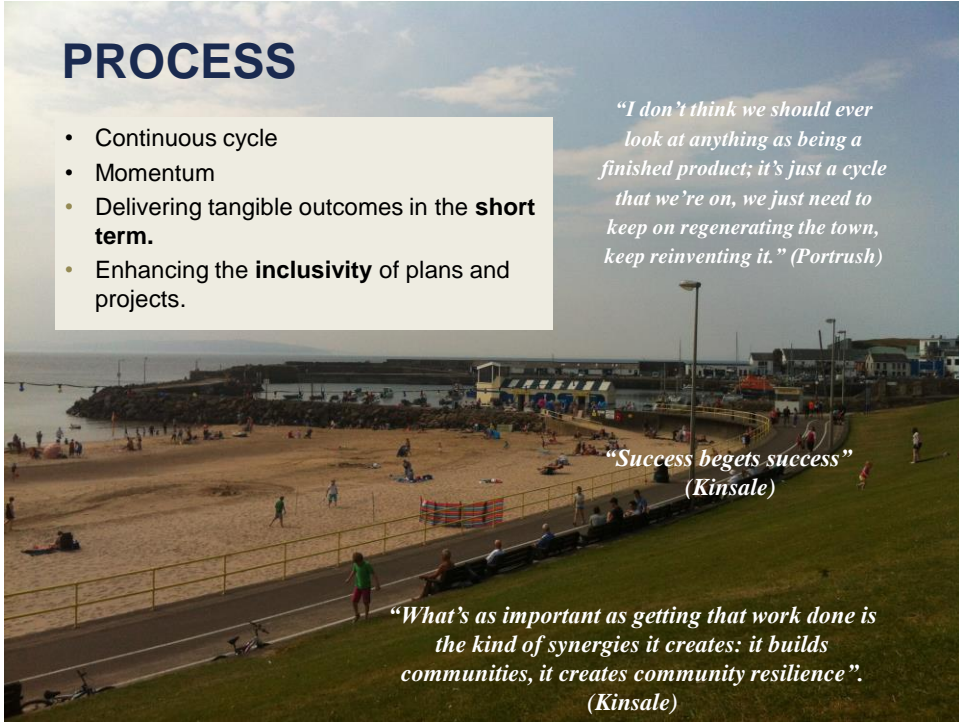
PROCESS

- Continuous cycle
- Momentum
- Delivering tangible outcomes in the **short term**.
- Enhancing the **inclusivity** of plans and projects.

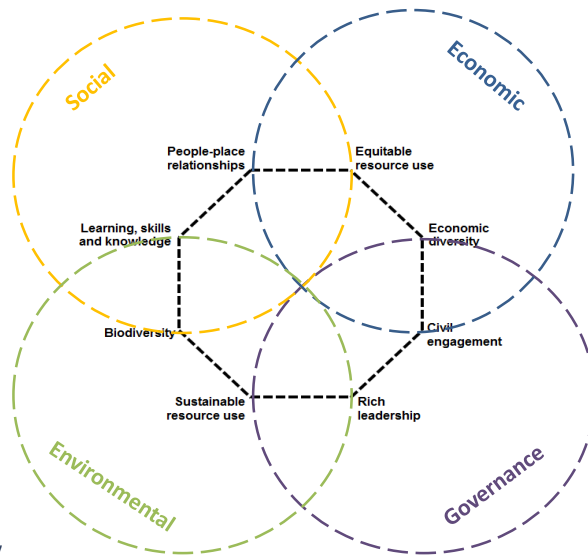
“I don’t think we should ever look at anything as being a finished product; it’s just a cycle that we’re on, we just need to keep on regenerating the town, keep reinventing it.” (Portrush)

*“Success begets success”
(Kinsale)*

*“What’s as important as getting that work done is the kind of synergies it creates: it builds communities, it creates community resilience”.
(Kinsale)*



*“It is the combination and interaction of the various dimensions of community resilience together which shapes community resilience”
(Amundsen, 2012, p.46)*



A Culture Change?

“I think there’s apathy about getting out there and being positive about *anything*. But I think that’s *why* we need to get out there, and *be positive*, and try to get people to think things through themselves; because there probably are answers out there for them if they would just work together at it”
(Killybegs)



Remember...

- ‘Smallness’ is not so much about size as functional characteristics: it’s about ways of acting, self-image, sense of place and aspiration...
- “You are only as small as you think you are – or as other cities make you feel” ...
- “Smallness is as much about reach and influence as it is about population size, density or growth” (Bell and Jayne, 2006).



Portrush, Co. Antrim

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