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**Operationalising Contemporary EU Rural
Development: socio-cultural determinants
arising from a strong local fishing culture**

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Operationalising Contemporary EU Rural Development: socio-cultural determinants arising from a strong local fishing culture

Áine Macken-Walsh¹

Abstract

The paper begins with a review of the contemporary rural development agenda, highlighting the primary policy aims of the EU governance and rural development model. The methodological approach of this study and a review of some of the main economic, social and cultural characteristics of Iorras Aithneach are then presented. The second half of the paper focuses on operational strategies of the main rural development agencies in Iorras Aithneach, and presents an analysis of primary qualitative data collected in Iorras Aithneach between 2006 and 2008. The analysis of the qualitative data explores the context of poor engagement in contemporary rural development programmes in Iorras Aithneach and points to a range of pragmatic factors (bureaucratic, economic) and socio-cultural factors (tradition and identity-based) that represent central inhibitors.

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1.1 Introduction

The contemporary rural development agenda seeks to focus less on mainstream production in the agricultural and fisheries sectors and more on innovative diversification of the rural economy (CEC, 1988; CEC, 2005). The EU governance and rural development model, operationalised by the EC LEADER programme, employs a participatory approach to the development process, which aims to harness the capacity of local stakeholders in designing and implementing development interventions (see Curtin and Varley, 1995; Ray, 1999). Considering the rationale underpinning the contemporary rural development agenda as presented in the bureaucratic and academic literatures, areas like Iorras Aithneach are potentially valuable sites for enterprises selling local ‘design value’ because they are laden with cultural commodities. However, the types of enterprises that are at the core of the contemporary rural development agenda – artisan food production, cultural tourism, and the valorisation of natural resources (see CORASON, 2009) – remain peripheral to economic activity in Iorras Aithneach. The central crux of understanding the failure of the contemporary rural development agenda to manifest itself strongly in Iorras Aithneach lies in the complex interplay between how this agenda has manifested itself in operational forms and policy discourses on one hand, and the local factors (social, cultural and economic) that make up the implementation ground in Iorras Aithneach on the other (see Macken-Walsh, 2009). This paper presents local contextual and qualitative data collected in Iorras Aithneach, highlighting current and path-dependent socio-cultural factors that are determining how inhabitants are engaging with the contemporary rural development agenda.

The paper begins with a review of the contemporary rural development agenda, highlighting the primary policy aims of the EU governance and rural development model. The methodological approach of this study and a review of some of the main economic, social and cultural characteristics of Iorras Aithneach are then presented. The second half of the paper focuses on operational strategies of the main rural development agencies in Iorras Aithneach, and presents an analysis of primary qualitative data collected in Iorras Aithneach between 2006 and 2008. The analysis of the qualitative data explores the context of poor engagement in contemporary rural development programmes in Iorras Aithneach and points to a range of pragmatic factors (bureaucratic, economic) and socio-cultural factors (tradition and identity-based) that represent central inhibitors. The paper concludes by grounding a discussion of the cultural and physical resources in Iorras Aithneach in contemporary rural development rhetoric and highlighting the potential, as well as the main barriers, for rural development in the area.

1.2 The Governance and Rural Development Model: Partnership & Subsidiarity

The EU LEADER programme is emblematic of a shift in emphasis in EC policy-making to include post-productivist development goals but is also representative of a new governance-based approach to development. The argument driving the design of contemporary rural development policy approaches is “If the endogenous potential of rural regions is to be properly developed, local initiatives must be stimulated and mobilised” (CEC, 1988, p.62). Specifically, LEADER was formulated to “provide the European Union’s rural areas with a development method for involving local partners in the future of their areas” (Fischler, 1998). Rather than a programme for economic development, LEADER is described as “a multi-dimensional process that seeks to integrate, in a sustainable manner, economic, socio-cultural and environmental

objectives (Kearney et al., 1994, p. 128, cited by Moseley, 2003a, p. 4) and “a sustained and sustainable process of economic, social, cultural and environmental change designed to enhance the long-term well-being of the whole community” (Moseley, 2003a p.4).

The LEADER approach claimed to “enable a better understanding of the area and its living strength” (CEC, 1988) and is described as “an innovation and a lever of innovation” (LEADER European Observatory, 1997). The main aim of the programme is to find innovative solutions to rural problems on a localised basis by facilitating the creation of links between localities and external organisations in order to “stimulate and support locally based development” (LEADER European Observatory, 1997). The operationalisation of such an approach requires the active participation of local development stakeholders and its central challenge is to “invent new (participatory) institutions which not only can mediate and get beyond conflict by providing representation to a wide span of local interests but can be an effective means of developing local economies” (Curtin & Varley, 1997, p.142). The tangible results of governance and rural development programmes, such as increased employment, are not ends in themselves but are meant to be born from an integrative process that focuses on sustainability, capacity building, community and social inclusion. This process is supposed to become embedded in the institutional character of the locality, adding longevity and sustainability to the tangible goals of development and spurring further development (Moseley, 2003b, p. 9). Referring to this process, an evaluation of the first LEADER programme in Ireland states:

“development is not simply a question of undertaking projects, nor of achieving objectives specified in narrow economic terms. Development is also a process, by which is meant the creation of social products such as upgraded local leadership, a culture of enterprise and innovative action, or the enhanced capacity of people to act in concert, purposefully and effectively so as to cope with the threats and opportunities they face” (Kearney et al, 1995).

The programme operates on the basis of two principles: hierarchical decision-making structures being replaced by mechanisms involving representatives from a wide range of governmental and non-governmental groups (principle of partnership) (Osti, 2000, p. 172); and decision-making taking place as close as possible to the site of implementation (principle of subsidiarity).

It is envisaged that partnership and subsidiarity, by providing a mechanism for the participation of a variety of sectoral stakeholders at the local level, give rise to an ‘integrated’ approach and thus has the capacity to address the rural development problem more broadly. It is claimed that partnership gives rise to more effective rural development because of its usage of different sectoral resources, both human and material. Bryson and Anderson (2000) for example, say that a multi-actor approach allows for “an enhanced amount of information to be brought to bear on a problem, the building of commitment to problem definition and solutions, the fusion of planning and implementation, and shortening the time needed to bring forward policies, programmes, services and projects” (p. 143). Echoing this are the officially perceived benefits of the partnership approach at the EU level according to an EC evaluation:

- Greater effectiveness in programme development and monitoring;

- More effective project selection;
- Greater legitimacy and transparency in decisions and decision-making processes;
- Greater commitment and ownership of programme outputs;
- Opportunities for reinforcing innovation and learning across organisational boundaries; and
- Development of institutional capacity at sectoral and territorial levels.

(CEC, 2001)

Of the participatory aspect of partnership, Hart and Murray (2000) state that not only does it encourage integrated development, but it “is about making a holistic contribution to the alleviation of social exclusion, poverty and deprivation thus helping to build a more inclusive society” (p. 6). By including local stakeholders in the decision-making process, decisions are considered to be more likely to ‘stick’ (Moseley, 2003b, p. 2). Partnership is thus conceived of as a way of addressing locally specific development issues and according to the principle of subsidiarity, the participation of local interest groups is crucial for its operation.

1.3 Globalisation and the ‘Culture Economy’

The contemporary rural development agenda is representative of a movement away from staple development concerns (such as food security and poverty alleviation), towards the valorisation of local resources through high value-added production. One of the main incentives behind the participation of local organisations in EU governance and rural development relates to the benefits of a locally-customised development agenda in an era when diversifying beyond primary commodity production is emphasised. It is claimed that partnership and other governance models are not simply multi-tier versions of centralised policies but represent a chance for localities to focus on their individual attributes, resources, and forms of capital and exploit them (Walsh, 1995, p. 1). The type of development that arises from such a local focus veers away from the productivist sectoral development model and towards a more locally-subjective place-based rural development ideology. This rural development ideology (which has been discussed in the context of post-modernity, see Bryden and Shucksmith, 2000) is closely related to the influence of globalisation on the economies, societies, cultures, and political systems in the EU:

“Globalisation, (thus) is a complex set of processes – not a single one - and these operate in contradictory or oppositional fashion. Most people think of globalisation as simply pulling power and influence away from local communities and nations into the global arena and, indeed, this is one of its consequences; nations do lose some of the economic power they once had. Yet, it also has an opposite effect: globalisation not only pulls upwards, it pushes downwards, creating new pressures for local autonomy.” (Giddens, 1999)

Ray (2000) says that these new pressures for local autonomy “manifest themselves at the level of individuals and of territories. They are an outcome of the escalating awareness of, contact with and borrowing from, other cultures and polities as goods, people and ideas circulate on a global scale” (p. 5). Echoing Giddens (1999), Lash and Urry (1994) see this as the paradox of globalisation: “it produces on the one hand, cultural and political cosmopolitanism and, on the other, an increasing awareness of,

and wish to preserve, diversity, that is, ‘indigenisation’”. Moseley (2003b) states that the development strategy of ‘adding value to local resources’ requires a positive attitude both to the potential of local resources and to the implications of globalisation. In the latter case it means seeing the opening up of world markets as an opportunity as well as a threat, and seeking not a rejection of globalisation but a judicious positioning within it” (Moseley, 2003a, p. 48)

Rhetoric surrounding discussion of the ‘culture economy’ (see Ray 1997; 1998; 2000) has obvious linkages with strategies of indigenisation and differentiated production for the purposes of rural development. Lowe et al (1998) define the ‘culture economy’ approach in rural development as “an admixture of: the economic theory of competitive advantage and international trade; the marketing concept of niche markets; and a response to the critique of exogenous development and the notion of modernity as a ‘cultural melting pot’” (p. 53). Ray (1997) articulates that “the term culture economy refers to the definition and exploitation of a territorial identity through local cultural resources” (p. 1), and “cultural symbols, including historical references, and the value systems they represent, are the resources of, and often the rationale for, these territorial initiatives” (Ray, 1997, p. 2). The role of culture in rural development is frequently acknowledged in bureaucratic literature that promotes rural tourism and artisan foods and crafts. Ireland’s White Paper “Ensuring the Future – a Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland (1999), for example, states:

“Rural communities are closely associated with Irish traditions, heritage and culture which have been critical in shaping the national identity. The cultural heritage embraces the language, life-style and traditions, traditional music, song and dance, landscape, unique products, monuments, national games, the arts, etc... In economic terms, culture and the arts, and in the Gaeltacht, the Irish language, contribute directly and indirectly to the creation and retention of employment in rural areas and present an image of an area as a basis for tourism and business investment. Traditional and modern crafts represent a significant and growing sector of the small business economy in many rural areas and provide opportunities for people to generate income from their personal resources and skills. The preservation and enhancement of local culture is also a feature of rural areas which has potential for generating new kinds of economic activity. In recent years the film industry has not only generated local economic activity but has promoted the image and attractions of rural areas for tourism purposes” (Ensuring the Future – a Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland, 1999, p. 53).

Situating the culture economy in the context of development theory, Lowe et al (1998) state that “the approach can be located in the logic of economic growth within consumer capitalism in which a cultural system is seen as a means to create space-specific resources for economic exploitation” (p. 54). Inevitably, however, the culture economy is a manifestation not only of the consumption of locally ‘differentiated’ goods but of the production of such goods (see Macken-Walsh, 2009).

1.4 Investigating Engagement in Contemporary Rural Development: Local Participation

At the core of the contemporary rural development agenda is a transition in emphasis from ‘material and labour value to design value’ (Ray, 1999). The transition from policies that encourage the production of mainstream commodities towards high

value-added diversified rural development entrepreneurship inevitably causes a rupture of old development contexts (see Pratt, 2004). This transition represents a set of new challenges for rural inhabitants, particularly those involved in primary rural industries such as agriculture and fisheries (see Macken-Walsh, 2009).

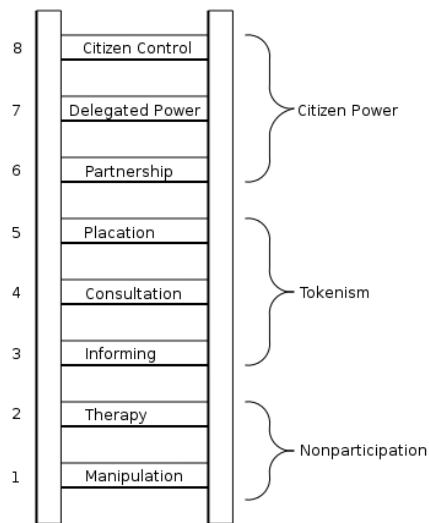
In facing new challenges and coping with ruptures of old development contexts, a diversity of social, cultural and economic factors at the local level come into play in determining how rural development programmes take shape and operate on the ground. Research has sought to explore how contemporary rural development programmes operate in practice in various local contexts (see Varley, 1991; Curtin and Varley, 1997; Osti, 2000; Esparcia-Perez, 2000; Buller, 2000). Some valuable studies have elaborated how changes in rural development policy have differently enfranchised and disenfranchised various social groups. Kovach and Kucerová (2006), for example, detect the rise of a “project class” that is particularly well suited to new rural development opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe. From another perspective, Osti finds in a study of the EC LEADER programmes in Italy that farmers’ organisations are “bewildered by the disappearance of their traditional, privileged channels of influence” (2000, p.176). In Ireland there has been scarce qualitative ethnographic research in recent years on the types of actors that become involved in contemporary rural development programmes and the nature of development activities that such programmes foster. There are, however, some recent valuable studies on specific industries such as ‘alternative’ food movements and the organic farming sector that shed light on how specific aspects of rural development is taking shape in Ireland (Tovey, 2002; Moore, 2003; Tovey, 2006; Tovey and Mooney, 2006).

While the partnership model is symbolic of a procedural method of power devolution, the operation of the model in practice varies from case to case in reflecting the political and economic context in which the model becomes operational as well as a wide range of local social and cultural determinants. A compulsory partner in most state-funded networks/partnerships/alliances is the state, which is seen by some commentators as the ‘coordinator and manager’ of pseudo-governance mechanisms (Murdoch and Abram 1998, p.41; Varley 1991a). Curtin and Varley (1997) state that in the case of Irish area-based partnerships, “What the Irish state/EU have in mind in the area-based partnerships is not the simple handing over of responsibility to local actors. On the contrary, the expectation is that external actors must be centrally involved in providing resources, deciding what is required to be done, who is to be admitted as legitimate partners and how the partnerships are actually to operate” (p. 142). O’Toole and Burdess (2004) convey a similar view when they say “higher levels of governance “steer” the self-governing processes of (funded) small rural communities, expecting them to “row” for themselves (p.433)”.

In the establishment and operation of locally-led development there is the risk that only a limited number of local inhabitants will get involved, confining participation to “a very small number of enthusiastic members” (Armstrong quoting Breathnach, 1984). Mannion (1996), for example, points to the danger of local development

ending up in the hands of a few². Similarly, Varley (1991b) notes that local community-based development movements “tend to be dominated by a small group of enthusiasts, adept at assembling the illusion of consensus that allows the interests of some to masquerade the interests of all (p.236)”. It is known that participatory models for decision-making can sometimes amount only to tokenism, placation, even manipulation in practice (see Arnstein, 1969). One of the better known models for analysing different levels of community participation is Arnstein’s (1969) eight-step ladder of degrees of participation.

Figure 1.1: Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation



Source: Arnstein, 1969

1.5 Understanding engagement in rural development from the perspectives of different social groups

Understanding the circumstances of engagement with the contemporary rural development agenda goes beyond theories based on economic rationale, where actors are expected to indiscriminately adopt profit maximising strategies. Burton (2004) notes that inflexible models of behavioural analysis employ a simplistic approach to understanding behaviour, while ‘new’ methodological approaches emerging with the ‘cultural turn’ in many other areas of social science focus on “the importance of understanding language, meaning, representation, identity, and difference” (p. 360). The approach of this study is broadly informed by theories of existential rather than economic rationality where the focus is on the individual’s subjective experiences of, and agency with, the outside world. Understanding existential rationality is instrumental for accounting for individual and social behaviour, where the aim is to understand human subjectivity, i.e. human feelings, perceptions and inclinations which are generated internally by the self and can be influenced by collective socio-cultural influences such as locally-held values, tradition and forms of knowledge.

² There is a debate in the literature concerning the legitimacy of non-elected actors and non-governmental organisations playing a significant role in governance at local and international (European) levels (see Goodwin, 1998, p. 8).

It is important to represent the ‘local voice’ in rural studies (Crick, 1989, cited in Kneafsey, 1998) and to thus explore the social and cultural ‘scripts’ which ultimately determine identities, attitudes, and behaviour (Canetto, 2005, cited in Feeney, 2008). The Socio-Cultural Research Unit of the UNFAO (2008) states that qualitative research is necessary to reach “an in-depth understanding of the cultural context and the factors that determine local level outcomes is crucial for the formulation and the success of policies and programmes that are acceptable, appropriate and sustainable”.

The classical sociological text “The Sociological Imagination” by C Wright Mills (1959) provides a prominent theoretical paradigm for understanding the interplay between the individual person and external pressures and forces. Using such a paradigm, external forces (public issues) can cause “contradictions” or “antagonisms” when they are incompatible with individuals’ own world values and/or when the means by which they can realise these values are threatened (private troubles) (Wright-Mills, 1959). Bourdieu’s (1993, 1996) theory of capital as framework, where three main forms of capital are elaborated: economic capital (material property); social capital (networks of social connections and mutual obligations); and cultural capital (prestige) is useful for understanding how different forms of capital are at play in the creation of contradictions or antagonisms which ultimately impacts on decision-making in relation to income-generating practices.

The theory of capital as framework is instrumental to understanding individual behaviour and but also trends in collective behaviour within social groups. Sets of values and worldviews are identified with to greater and lesser extents by individual members of the same social group, but nonetheless provide an effective modus for interpreting attitudes and behaviour which are found to offer more explanatory power than social and demographic variables (Kelly et al, 2004, p.1). Kelly et al (2004) for example in their research on environmental attitudes and behaviours in Ireland arrive at three theoretical explanations that identify different sets of values and worldviews: post-materialism; the new environmental paradigm; and cultural theory/grid group theory (Kelly et al, 2004, pp. 4-6). To elaborate for the purposes of clarification just one of these theoretical perspectives: post-materialism draws from the work of Inglehart (1981) whose basic argument for understanding cultural behaviour is “that there has been a shift away from the materialist concerns of pre-industrial and industrial societies (that is, support for the established order through maintenance of law and order and the preservation of economic gains) towards post-materialist values (that is greater emphasis on individual self-expression, greater participation in decision-making, freedom, and quality of life)” (Kelly et al, 2004, p. 4). The hypothesis underlying this theoretical perspective is a generational theory where “each successively younger post-war cohort is more post-materialist than its predecessor” (Kelly et al, 2004, p. 4).

1.6 Farmers and Fishers: distinctive social groups

Small-scale production in the farming and fishing sectors represent the Chayanovian model where income-generating (economic) practices are embedded in an existential system of meaning and inseparable from social and cultural practices (see Chayanov, 1925). Vanclay (2004) evaluates farming as a ‘socio-cultural practice’ and a ‘way of life’, and not just a technical or income generating activity (p. 213). Similarly, in a report compiled for the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organisation (UNFAO),

McGoodwin (2001)³ emphasises the need to understand the socio-cultural dynamics of fishing communities for effective fisheries management. McGoodwin notes “to a greater degree than seen in large-scale approaches, the fishing occupation is closely tied to the fishers’ personal and cultural identities. Among most small scale fishers, fishing is perceived not merely as a means of assuring one’s livelihood, but more broadly as a way of life, indeed a way of life which is vivified by important occupational values and symbols which in turn underscore core aspects of small-scale fishers’ individual and collective identities” (McGoodwin, 2001).

Burton (2006) takes a social psychology approach to understanding farmer behaviour and decision-making and argues that social scientists should focus on social practices rather than on individual experiences or social structures alone (Burton, 2006. p. 96). Applying Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration to his study of farmers, Burton (2006) notes that “human ‘agency’ (e.g. farmers in the context of our study) is, thereby, expressed through social sciences (e.g. farming culture), beliefs, attitudes and identities (e.g. occupational or religious identities), while structure is based on rules (e.g. agricultural policy, politics), resources (e.g. farmland) or other exogenous forces (e.g. the wider political economy of farming) influencing farmers’ actions and thought” (p. 96). Burton’s social psychology approach to understanding farmer behaviour is equally applicable to a study of members of the fishing community.

Normative methodological approaches, using, for example, surveys where interviewees select pre-defined responses, can incompletely portray the range of contextual issues which, as a whole, ultimately guide behaviour and decision-making. Qualitative research methods have the capacity to take a case-specific approach to understanding comprehensively interviewees’ personal circumstances, and to detecting the inter-dependent nature of experiences and perceptions, which analysed on their own, can be meaningless or misleading (see Wilson, 1997). In this sense, qualitative research involving either un-structured or semi-structured interviewing can deconstruct an individual’s behaviour and decision-making by identifying the complete range of issues and perceptions that combine to explain each interviewee’s rationality, subjectivity, or ‘view of the world’.

1.7 Methodological Approach

Methodologically, the task of analysing development programmes that are implemented locally is different to analysing top-down sectoral development. The former changes its very nature and dimensions once it becomes local. Qualitative methodologies, therefore, are highly represented in governance and rural development research where the empirical focus is on individual case-specific processes. Many case-studies have been conducted on rural development partnerships in Ireland and elsewhere in the EU (Curtin and Varley 1991; Ward & Ray, 2000, Osti 2000; Buller, 2000; Bruckmeier, 2000; Esparcia-Perez, 2000; Moseley, 2003). Of such case-study analyses, Doria et al (2003) state that “given the open, magmatic character of the transformation of rural development, such processes continuously offer precious hints which contribute to reshaping the picture” (p. 1). Case-study analysis has the capacity to illuminate dynamics that are represented in other economic, social, and cultural contexts and thus offers complex baseline understandings of the interplay between

³ Page numbers are not specified for quotations and citations drawn from McGoodwin (2001) as the document is published online in html format and lacks page numbers.

policy measures and socio-cultural determinants. Underpinning the usage of qualitative methods in the social sciences are the key concepts of ontology (the scenario or ‘social reality’ which is being investigated) and epistemology (‘systems of knowledge’ i.e. what is known in term of applicable theories to understanding the relevant scenario or ‘social reality’). Though the empirical focus is narrow, the research has broader theoretical (epistemological implications) which extends the significance of research findings beyond the empirical focus used for the analysis. Heanue (2009) states: “in contrast to statistical generalisation to a population, qualitative research facilitates analytical generalisation”. In such a sense, case-study research can clarify, improve, and validate our understandings of the theory that explains interactions between farmers and fishers and contemporary rural development programmes (Heanue, 2009).

The Barriers to Change project involved qualitative sociological case-study research of Irish farmers’ and fishers’ engagement in contemporary rural development programmes⁴. The objectives of the analysis were to explore the contemporary EU rural development agenda in terms of its operational form and the type of development it gives rise to; to identify the socio-cultural factors that are present in farmers’ and fishers’ decision-making with regard to engaging in contemporary rural development; and finally to arrive at conclusions on how the circumstances of farmers’ and fishers’ engagement could potentially be improved. In line with these objectives, the methodological approach employed by the ‘Barriers to Change’ project was threefold:

1. Policy & literature analysis (secondary data analysis)
2. Empirical field research (qualitative empirical research)
3. Contextualisation of research findings in policy environment (focus-group interviewing with expert practitioners and policy-makers)

The first stage entailed an analysis of the contemporary EU rural development agenda, framed by three major paradigms: post-productivism, globalisation governance (see Macken-Walsh, 2009). The analysis aimed to articulate the contemporary rural development agenda as a policy framework, an operational model and a socio-cultural movement. The analysis involved secondary data analysis of bureaucratic literature focusing primarily on EC policy instruments, national policy instruments, and data relating to the measures and activities of the LEADER programme nationally. Qualitative interviews conducted with policy-makers and rural development practitioners in the second and third phases of the research also complemented the final analysis.

Informed by contextual findings emerging from the first phase, the second phase of the research involved the design and implementation of primary empirical qualitative field research exercises. Unstructured and semi-structured qualitative interviewing and participant observation methods were used to explore interviewees’ subjective views and the context surrounding their poor engagement participation in the contemporary rural development agenda. Narrative-type accounts were produced by the qualitative interviewing process that sought to portray the diversity of factors

⁴ The case-study of farmers is presented in Macken-Walsh (2009) and Macken-Walsh (in-press).

influencing interviewees' world views and associated decision-making processes (see Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; 2004; Wengraf, 2001). There were two main stages to the qualitative in-depth interviewing. The first stage involved an unstructured interview where an open ended question was posed to stimulate the interviewee's narrative. The second stage of the interview occurred at the end of the unstructured interview and involved posing a series of questions to the interviewee in order to clarify and/or elaborate issues that arose in the unstructured interview. Participant observation was conducted at community-based events and public meetings.

The case-studies of the farming and fishing communities were confined to one spatial location to allow for an in-depth analytical approach in determining the factors that arise from local environmental and institutional (social, cultural and economic) conditions. The peninsula of Iorras Aithneach in Co. Galway was chosen for the coastal case-study, which is within the catchment area of a local LEADER rural development programme (administered by Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta (MFG)). Participant observation took place at meetings, conferences and events within the case-study locality and outside of the locality (where relevant to the research questions of the study).

Different types of qualitative interviews were conducted. In-depth interviews were conducted with members of the fishing community and with local policy makers and rural development practitioners within the case-study area. Additional in-depth interviews were conducted with fishers, policy makers/rural development practitioners outside of the case-study area who were active in representative groups of fishing organisations and these interviewees were classified as 'key informants'. Shorter qualitative interviews were conducted with inhabitants of the case-study area for the purposes of validating local contextual (social, cultural, economic, institutional) data. All interviews were conducted by the author face-to-face with the interviewee apart from in cases where validation and follow-up questions were necessary and in such cases supplementary questions were posed by the author using the telephone. The in-depth interviews conducted with members of the case-study social groups and with practitioners and representatives of policy-makers, lasted an average of 2 hours, ranging from 1 hour to 3.5 hours. The interviews with local inhabitants were shorter, ranging from 10 minutes to 50 minutes.

In-depth interviews were in the most part conducted in the interviewees' homes, with a small proportion taking place in pre-arranged meeting places such as a hotel or a public house. While most of the primary interviewees that represented the fishing communities were male, many of the supplementary interviews conducted were with female members of the community. Interviews conducted with representatives of Iorras Aithneach fishing community were not confined to any definitive occupational group because many people engaged in fishing in the area are typically also engaged in other forms of income-generating activity.

Interviewees were identified in adherence to the principles of grounded theory (see Strauss 1987, Strauss & Corbin, 1990), where the author came to interact with individuals in the localities and sourced interviewees through an iterative process. Some of the practitioners and policy-makers were known to the author and others were identified and contacted through the agencies to which they were affiliated. The interviewee sub-groups are set out below in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1: Composition of Qualitative Interviews

Interview-type	Coastal case-study
Practitioners & Policy-makers (in-depth)	13
Members of case-study social group (in-depth)	21
Supplementary Interviews	8
Key informants (in-depth)	4
Total Interviews	46

The third phase of the methodology involved exercises that sought to contextualise research findings emerging from the analysis of primary data to have greater practical relevance and policy application for the rural development, farming and fisheries sectors. This was achieved by conducting focus group interviews, which are structured interviewing processes where prompts are used to steer a discussion among a group of expert participants that is relevant to the research questions at hand. For the ‘Barriers to Change’ research project, two focus group interviews were conducted to facilitate discussion of the different sets of policy-related issues that emerged from research findings of the two social groups analysed. Participants in the focus groups represented local institutions and agencies where the research was conducted and national institutions with policy competency and responsibility in the area of rural development. The data generated by the focus groups was used to identify strategies and policy actions to respond to key ‘barriers’ identified through the research, and to broaden the discussion beyond the case-study localities in which research was conducted to give greater applicability to research findings generated from the project. Participants in the focus groups represented a range of statutory, non-statutory and semi-state bodies:

- Teagasc
- Department for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
- Údarás na Gaeltachta
- Cumas Teo (Connemara, South)
- FORUM (Connemara, North)
- Comhdháil Oileán na h’Eireann
- National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG)
- Department of Law Reform, Justice and Equality

1.8 Iorras Aithneach, Connemara, Co. Galway: Presentation of the Case-Study

Iorras Aithneach is located on the west coast of Ireland in the South Connemara region which is a *Gaeltacht* area of Ireland, denoting that Irish is a spoken daily language. Similar to other *Gaeltacht* areas of Ireland, Iorras Aithneach continues to typify much of what is conceived as uniquely traditional in Ireland with respect to language, culture, and landscape. There are two main villages or town-lands on the

peninsula – Carna and Cill Chíaráin. The spatial boundaries of the District Electoral Divisions (DED) classification used by central and local government do not correspond with the boundaries of Iorras Aithneach, Carna, or Cill Chíaráin. For this study An Cnoc Buí, a DED located within the peninsula, is used for the purposes of presenting statistics that are representative of a DED within the peninsula.

Figure 1.2 Carna, Iorras Aithneach, Connemara, Co. Galway



Source: www.connemara.ie/maps

Traditional agriculture and mariculture activities persist in the peninsula. The 2000 Census of Agriculture records that a total of 105 Annual Work Units⁵ (AWU), an increase of (37 AWU from 1991) were expended on agriculture, fisheries and forestry in An Cnoc Buí, representing a total of 167 agricultural workers categorised as follows: holder; spouse; other family workers; other non-family workers. The 2000 Census of Agriculture shows that An Cnoc Buí has one of the highest representations of agricultural holdings among all DEDs in Co. Galway. The last Census of Agriculture (2000) recorded an increase in agricultural holdings from 101 in 1991 to 118 in 2000. The DEDs in which there is the highest number of agricultural holdings are: Inishmore (223) (the highest number of holdings in Co. Galway); Gorumna (158); Crumpaun (126); and Rinvyle (126). All of these DEDs are in Connemara and represent the persistence of small-scale agricultural holdings in the area.

In terms of employment, the Galway Socio-Economic Profile (Galway Co. Council, 2008) shows that the Census of Population (2006) records that 19 people in An Cnoc Buí are employed under the category of “Agricultural, Fishery, and Forestry Managers”; while 7 are recorded as unemployed in the same category (8% of the total working population). A further 11 (9 employed, 2 unemployed, totalling at 3%) are recorded under the category of Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry workers. As regards other categories of employment, the following percentages of the total population in An Cnoc Buí are recorded: Professional: 15.9%; Building & Construction: 13.8%; Manufacturing: .9%; Services: 7.6%; Sales: 6.5%; Office and Clerical: 6.2% Administrative and Government: 2.6%; Transport: 2.4%; Other: 24.4% (Galway Co. Council, 2008).

⁵ An Annual Work Unit (AWU) is calculated as 1800 hours of work per person per annum.

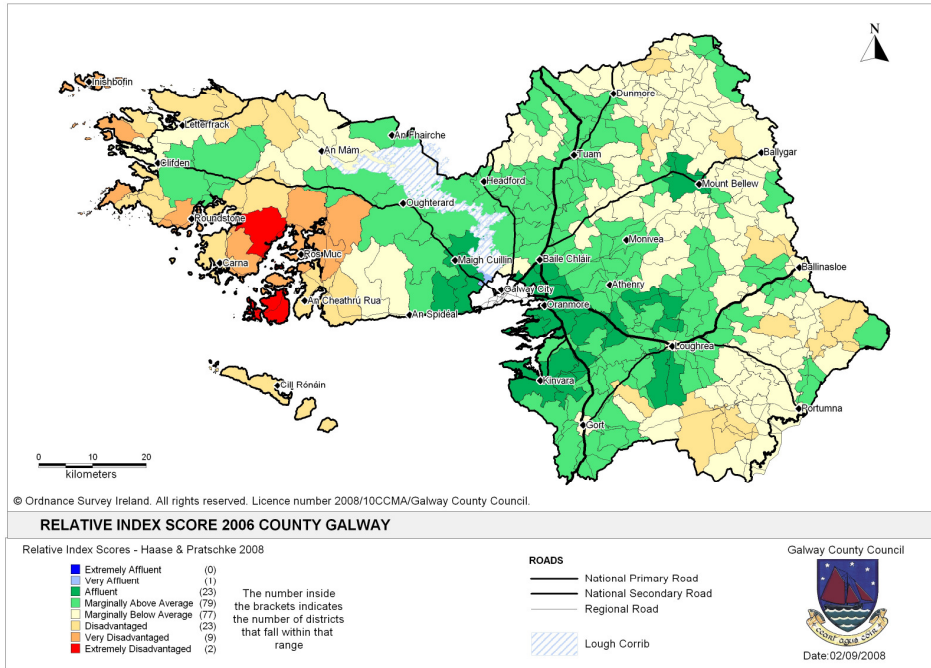
Galway County Council (2008) identifies An Cnoc Buí as one of 6 DEDs in County Galway in 2006 where there is an unemployment ‘blackspot’ (i.e. where the labour force exceeds 200 and the unemployment rate exceeds 20%). The remaining five DEDs were also in the Connemara Gaeltacht: Scainimh; Gorumna, Sillerna, An Turlach and Cill Chuimín. Iorras Aithneach and many of its surrounding areas are affected by poor employment opportunities, with most of the working population commuting to Galway City. While there is an official unemployment rate of 29.1%, the total proportion of people in An Cnoc Buí who are engaged in the labour force is 49.1% (CSO, 2006). Of those who are engaged in the labour force, 47 (13.8% of total workforce, comprising 42 persons employed and 5 persons unemployed) were engaged in the increasingly unviable area of building and construction-related activities in 2006.

Sixty three percent of the inhabitants of An Cnoc Buí have no internet access and, unlike other areas of Connemara (predominantly areas in North Connemara), there is little tourism infrastructure. The 2006 Census of Population reveals that 13.5% (108) people are involved in voluntary activity. Given that by definition it is located in the *Gaeltacht* it is unsurprising that 88.6% of people speak Irish, and 79.2% speak it daily.

The population in the area is gradually falling which is attributed by inhabitants interviewed for this study to a lack of employment opportunities but also due to quality of life issues, such as a deficiency of social outlets, facilities and services. The age-profile of the area is quite high and the largest proportion of inhabitants of the area are in the bracket of 55-59 years, representing 9% of the total population, compared to the Galway County average of 5.6%, and the State average of 5.3% for the same age-bracket. Among those who stay and live in the area, there is a high dependency on social welfare allowances and state medical benefits.

Figure 1.3 below presents a Deprivation and Affluence Index developed by Haase and Pratschke in Galway Socio-Economic Profile (2008), which assigns a score in relation to: demographic profile; social class composition; and labour market situation (Galway County Council, 2008). The figure below shows a relative index score representing the position of all DEDs in Galway relative to all other DEDs in 2006.

Figure 1.3: Relative Index Score by ED, County Galway, 2007



Source: Galway Socio-Economic Profile, 2008

The following table presents information on population change; employment levels; educational attainment; and the prevalence of the Irish language in the DEDs that are located in Iorras Aithneach (Abhainn Ghabhla; Scainimh; An Cnoc Buí):

Table 1.2: Population Change, Employment, Education, and Language

	Population			Change in Pop. as %		Unemployment Rate %	% 3 rd Level Education	% Daily Irish Speakers
	1996	2002	2006	1996-2002	2002-2006			
Camas	395	388	367	-1.8	-5.4	26.4	16.4	90.9
Cill Cuimín	129	118	122	-8.5	+3.4	18.7	16.5	84.4
Turlach	545	477	552	-12.5	+15.7	29.8	9.2	85.7
*Maíros	152	134	143	-11.8	+6.7	15.1	19.8	
Abhainn Ghabhla	334	341	314	+2.1	-7.9	34.6	9.6	75.2
Scainimh	667	648	619	-2.8	-4.5	35.3	12.5	92.2
An Cnoc Buí	906	831	801	-8.3	-3.6	29.1	18.9	81.4
*Cloch na Rón	102	87	94	-14.7	+8.0	24.3	19.2	

Source: Gaeltacht Area Development Plan: 2006-2012, Galway County Council

1.9 ‘Rural Development’ in Iorras Aithneach

Development activity undertaken by local agencies in Iorras Aithneach include services to the public that include advocacy, occupational development, and social welfare assistance; and practical and financial supports for the development of local enterprise. *Údarás na Gaeltachta*, a nation-wide agency for the economic development of *Gaeltacht* areas is the single largest development agency operating in Iorras Aithneach. Other rural development institutions are *Cumas Teo* and *Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta* (MFG), which in 2007 were planned to be consolidated. MFG has been responsible for the implementation of the EC LEADER programme. All three institutions offer services through the Irish language.

Cumas Teo is a partnership company and “aims to enable and strengthen communities through local development programmes”⁶. It undertakes three main functions: a community information service, which provides information about rights, e.g. social welfare, tax and grants and aids local people with the relevant administration and form-filling; the *Treóir* programme, which offers assistance to the unemployed with training, preparation for interviews; mediation with employers and community development, which offers support for disadvantaged groups. The work of *Cumas Teo* reflects the high numbers of social welfare recipients and their particular needs by providing its related information and advocacy service. According to staff at *Cumas Teo* and corroborated by interviews conducted with inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach, these services are highly utilised by the local population. Similarly, under the *Treóir* programme, the ‘back to work’ schemes offered by *Cumas Teo* in conjunction with state training and education schemes (for example FÁS⁷) are in high demand, and such programmes constitute a necessary phase in the transition towards employment or for the retention of social welfare benefits. There are two back to work schemes offered by *Cumas Teo*. One is for those who are in receipt of ‘jobseekers’ allowance’ and offers short-term employment in improvement, maintenance, and restoration of local public buildings, roads and walls⁸. The second scheme offers educational re-skilling in computing (specifically, the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)) and is offered to those who are in receipt of unemployment benefit or assistance in order to encourage recipients back into the workforce. The course is obligatory as without attending the course, eligibility for jobseekers’ allowance is forfeited. *Cumas Teo* also offers courses in arts and crafts. These are mostly attended by women and are popularly conceived as hobby activities rather than as activities that can be used for income-generation.

MFG is a LEADER partnership company and administers the LEADER programme for all *Gaeltacht* areas nationwide. The main aim of MFG is “to empower communities through guidance; by encouraging self-confidence and self-development throughout the community in every aspect of community life, including economic development and development in social, cultural and environmental arenas”⁹. MFG classifies the projects that they fund as pertaining to the following strategic areas of development: Enterprise, Crafts & local services; Training; Agricultural and Mariculture products; Rural Tourism; Environment, Culture & Heritage; and Analysis and Feasibility studies; Trans-national; Inter-territorial. As is clear from the table below, over 70% of LEADER funding was administered to support projects relating to Rural Tourism and Environment & Culture and Heritage. This is in line with the LEADER + programme measures (2001 – 2006) and reflects very much the key areas of tourism and natural resources that are at the core of the contemporary rural development agenda (see Macken-Walsh, 2009)

⁶ www.cumas.ie

⁷ www.fas.ie

⁸ Social welfare benefits of those who are employed by these schemes are not affected.

⁹ See www.mfg.ie

Table 1.3: Total funding categories & allocations administered by MFG in Connemara Gaeltacht in 2006

Category	Funding	% of Total
Enterprise, crafts, local services	€29,799.59	4.0685447
Training	€96,547.67	13.181675
Agricultural and Mariculture products	€1,250	0.1706628
Rural tourism	€253,018	34.544604
Environment, culture, heritage	€271,414.61	37.056298
Analysis and Feasibility studies	€34,850.43	4.758137
Trans-national	€6,671.56	0.9108696
Inter-territorial	€17,176.13	2.3450609
No category	€21,710.56	2.9641476
Total	€732,438.55	100

Source: Compiled from data received from MFG

Table 1.4 below presents the distribution of MFG LEADER funding in the last programming period, highlighting the discrepancy between the funding allocations to some of the areas that have tended not to engage with the programme (e.g. Carna, Cill Cháráin, Rosmuc) and the area that has engaged with the programme most successfully (Acaill).

Table 1.4 Funding administered by MFG in 2006 in Carna, Cill Cháráin, Rosmuc & Acaill

Area	No. Project Applications	No Projects Funded	Funding allocation	% of total funds
Carna	4	2	€5,550.00	0.695978392
Cill Cháráin	4	2	€7,341.00	0.920572501
Rosmuc	1	1	€6,940.00	0.870286494
Acaill	44	32	€329,430.58	41.31109287

Source: Compiled from data received from MFG

Of the total funding allocation to Acaill, €94,032 was awarded to a local community development organisation, *Comhlacht Forbartha Áitiúil Acla*. A total of €114, 234 was allocated to tourism projects (including allocations to *Comhlacht Forbartha Áitiúil Acla* and *Turasóireacht Acla* among others). The largest single grants issued were: €100,000 (allocated for the restoration of a school and conversion of the building into offices) and €65,000 (allocated to *Comhlacht Forbartha Áitiúil Acla*). Excluding these two sums from the total of MFG funding administered within the area of Acaill, 69% of the remaining projects were rural tourism initiatives. This emphasises further the significant proportion of tourism projects funded by MFG LEADER.

Údarás na Gaeltachta was established in 1980 as “the regional authority responsible for the economic, social and cultural development of the Gaeltacht”¹⁰. The overall objective of Údarás na Gaeltachta is to protect and promote the Irish language in Gaeltacht regions. Údarás na Gaeltachta has three main strategic areas: economic development, cultural development, and social development. The work of Údarás na Gaeltachta is broad and concentrated mostly on offering financial and practical support to companies, cooperatives, and community organisations and over 12,000 people are employed in client companies of the organisation. Aside from its work in assisting community organisations in providing crucial services such as childcare and administrative assistance to community and enterprise groups (for example the Connemara Hill Lamb Producers’ Group) Údarás offers grant aid to private enterprises in Iorras Aithneach regions. Údarás na Gaeltachta received 131 applications for grant aid from private enterprises in the Carna and Cill Chíaráin areas over the period from 2000 to May 2009. It administered a total of €4,749,089 to successful applicants. Údarás also provided grant aid to community organisations and invested in infrastructure totalling €5,659,243.

Table 1.5 Funding categories and allocations administered by Údarás na Gaeltachta in Carna and Cill Chíaráin, January 2000 - May 2009

Category	Funding	% of Total
Enterprise Grants		
Natural Resource & Marine Enterprises	€3,137,418	66.06%
Food enterprises	€1,128,893	26.93%
Engineering enterprises	€14,537	0.84%
Service-based enterprises	€1,576,837	4.42%
Culture, Art & Craft Enterprises	€19,168	0.25%
Sub-total	€4,749,089	100
Other Funding		
Capital Investment (Buildings and Industrial Space)	€5,136,029	90.75%
Community Development & Community-based Enterprises	€523,214	9.39%
Sub-total	€5,659,243	100%
Total	€11,536,096	

Source: Compiled from data received from Údarás na Gaeltachta

As shown in Table 1.5 above, the majority of grants administered by Údarás (66%) in Carna and Cill Chíaráin were awarded for the development of ‘Natural Resource & Marine Enterprises’, which contrasts with the small proportion (.17%) of MFG LEADER administered to applicants in the Connemara *gaeltacht* in the counterpart category of ‘Mariculture and Agriculture Products’. Of the total funding allocation under the Údarás category of Natural Resource & Marine Enterprises, 93.4% or €2,943,300 was accrued by ten large fish farming and processing companies in the area. The largest number of individual grants to support ‘marine enterprises’ were funded through two schemes that are offered by Údarás to assist small-scale fishers. The first is a scheme to assist inshore fishers, which provides grant aid to purchase a new currach, outboard engine and/or pot hauler. A total of €107,249 was administered

¹⁰ www.udaras.ie

to 43 applicants through this scheme from 2000-2003 (the scheme was discontinued in 2003) and the average individual grant was €2,447. The second scheme, which is ongoing, is targeted at supporting seaweed harvesting and provides grant aid for the purchase or repair of currachs and the purchase of outboard engines. A total of €6,751 was granted through this scheme to five applicants in Carna and Cill Chíaráin from 2000 up until May 2009 and the average individual grant was €1,687. Funding administered within the category of natural resource and marine enterprises was also channelled to other marine enterprises such as seaweed growing and a research and development project conducted by the Martin Ryan Institute, NUI Galway.

Two grants were administered to a seaweed processing factory and a fish processing factory under the 'Food Enterprises' category, amounting to €1,441,580. Six grants totalling €14,537 were issued under the category of 'Engineering' for the design and building of boats. Under the category of services, the largest grant (€1,182,500) was allocated for the purpose of providing nursing care facilities for the elderly. Tourism enterprises are categorised under the 'Services' category and most of the grants awarded for tourism were allocated for the direct purposes of providing accommodation amenities. In addition to the funding categories listed in the table above, Údarás na Gaeltachta administers management grants to local community organisations and allocated a total of €523,214 to three community organisations¹¹ from January 2000 – May 2009.

It is clear from the figures presented above that Údarás na Gaeltachta is a source of major financial support to Iorras Aithneach, while the funding of MFG LEADER is comparatively small. It is significant to note that the funding allocations of MFG LEADER reflect core economic activities of the contemporary rural development agenda, concentrated in the categories of Rural Tourism and Environment, Culture and Heritage. Funding allocations of Údarás na Gaeltachta, on the other hand, are concentrated on such activities to a lesser extent and are highly represented within the category of Natural and Marine Resources.

1.10 Pragmatic and Bureaucratic Barriers to Change

In the context of small-scale fishing becoming increasingly unviable due to regulative and other constraints, the contemporary rural development agenda is representative of a policy response to create alternative avenues of enterprise and employment. As evident from the data presented above, while mariculture is continually popular among inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach, there is low uptake of financial assistance in the area of tourism and other activities that are in line with the contemporary rural development agenda.

Interviews conducted with inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach revealed pragmatic barriers to the take-up of small enterprise grants, primarily in the form of bureaucratic constraints and fears of losing social welfare entitlements. The latter issues are framed in the most part by a socio-economic context where there is a high dependency on social welfare assistance. Primary deterrents cited in the interview data were in relation to financial constraints, echoed in the hesitancy of local people to compromise their eligibility to social welfare entitlements by becoming involved in

¹¹ These community organisations are as follows: *Comharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara* (Connemara Shellfish Cooperative); *Comharchumann Chonamara Thiar* (Connemara South Cooperative); *Forbairt Chonamara Láir* (Connemara Development).

private enterprise. In this context, many interviewees remarked that their existing income-generating activities, for example fishing and seaweed harvesting, are already being policed and regulated to the extent that they are unviable. Interviewees emphasised their perception of unfair taxation on seaweed harvesting and other types of income-generating activities. One interviewee, who had attempted to start a business in the previous year but failed to get planning permission for a small premises remarked “... *life is tough enough out here already without being taxed on every little bit we get...A business would probably fail out here anyway. We can't take that chance*”.

A common barrier cited among those interviewed was limited experience of bureaucracy (particularly reporting and formal business planning) coupled with a perception that the bureaucratic procedures in place were excessive to the extent that they rendered the process of gaining and utilising funding inaccessible for most local people. Inhabitants expressed opinions such as “*the civil service way of thinking and our way of thinking don't match up*”. A number of interviewees related their own personal experiences of interacting with local bureaucracies, and of their feelings of frustration and powerlessness in relation to the difficulties that arose: “*They want us to prove that the business will work before we've even started it*”.

The main bureaucratic obstacles cited were in relation to obtaining planning permission, business planning and form-filling, and perceived contradictory and unsatisfactory rules governing how funding can be utilised (see Macken-Walsh, 2009 for an elaboration of bureaucratic obstacles identified by rural development practitioners). References were also made to linguistic problems in the application processes, as expressed by one inhabitant: “*We're native Irish speakers yet we come across vocabulary and terminology in the literature and application forms that we don't understand and have never come across before. It's like new words are invented for these forms*”

While the information and advocacy service supports of Cumas Teo were identified by interviewees as a key support to local people in the area, negative attitudes were evident in relation to the ‘back to work’ schemes provided by FÁS. It was commonly perceived by interviewees that the course is arbitrary as the target group for these courses are unemployed individuals in older age-brackets who do not identify with technological culture. Interviewees who had participated in the course articulated that the course was cognitively and culturally unsuitable for them and made reference to having experienced feelings of humiliation and frustration. Some interviewees also noted that technology-based employment opportunities in the Connemara area are generally lacking, as noted by one interviewee – “*it's a myth that these 'class A' jobs will become available in our community*”.

Overall, interviewees expressed disappointment at the lack of economic and social progress in their area, as well as a lack of confidence in the overall direction of how ‘rural development’ was being progressed in general. Interviewees were of the view that most young people born in the area would leave to have a more successful life elsewhere. A lack of hope prevailed in relation to the likelihood of employment opportunities becoming available into the future.

1.11 Socio-Cultural Barriers to engagement in ‘Rural Development’

The contemporary rural development model is designed to accommodate local resources as well as socio-cultural norms in the development process (see Lowe et al, 198; Macken-Walsh, 2009). Through the governance model, local people are expected to be able to take control of local development issues and become ‘empowered’ through income-generating practices that are reflective of local culture and local resources. In cases where normative components of the local culture and economy clash with or are estranged from extra-local conceptions of what constitutes rural development, ‘barriers’ to engagement ultimately emerge at the outset. Therefore, how the community views its local economy and culture is an important point of departure for exploring such ‘barriers’ and for identifying avenues of rural development for the community that are socially and culturally appropriate.

From the data generated through qualitative interviews conducted in Iorras Aithneach, it was clear that forms of cultural and social capital were predominant in subjective accounts of decision-making in relation to income-generating practices. Fishing, in particular, arose as a main subject in how interviewees articulated what is intrinsic to their local economy. Underpinning this conception of fishing as intrinsic to the local economy were forms of cultural capital that took pride in the skills required to fish knowledgeably and efficiently in the area. Forms of social capital were evident with respect to interviewees’ ascription to collective norms, most of which served the purposes of maintaining numbers of fishers in the area. These forms of capital are discussed below.

Cultural Capital

Fishers interviewed for this study made reference to particularly oriented forms of cultural capital. The predominant way in which prestige was attached to fishing practices related to how fishers managed to effectively interact with their local fishing grounds. Fishers spoke with pride of how their inshore fishing practices have been informed for generations by a deep knowledge of the local seabed and local natural conditions. It was claimed by interviewees that local fishing families have special knowledge of boulders and crevices on the seabed, and of the specific areas where different types of fish, shellfish, and seaweed can be found. It was furthermore explained by interviewees that different types of weather and different times of the day give rise to a set of different variations in knowing what fish can be caught in different parts of the bay and when. As articulated by one interviewee:

“The seabed is made up of seaweed, all different types of weed, gravel, broken ground. It’s deep in some areas, then shallow, there are rocks and breakers. Currents all over the place, recurring in the same place, but at different strengths. Depending on the wind direction. We know the names of rocks, the common rocks are written down, but the less known rocks, their names are being forgotten about. Lobsters like around the edge of seaweed, crabs are on the sand, it all depends on the ground... Knowledge about where crayfish congregate, would all be based about where you fish, the rocks, the names of the rocks, the behaviour of breaks, at certain weather, in accordance with the swell, at certain tide-heights, you’d know about it, you’d have heard it from someone else. There are places you go for different types of fish, it’s all handed down. In general, no matter where you go, you’ll get a few mackerel. In the evening when the tide is in, you go to one area, when the tide is out, you have to go to another area”.

References were also made to the skills of previous generations:

“No matter how you compare it, they were brilliant fishermen and we were never as good. We have engines now and horsepower and new gadgets but we’re still not fishing as well as they used to. They made their own pots, from rods, if you needed a few hundred you’d get them from a neighbour and give them back again. Back then, everything was made and done specifically to how you’d want it. Everything was done in a way that was suited to how you’d need to do things here, and they knew every bit of the water and beyond”.

The cultural capital of fishers interviewed for this study was clearly rooted in forms of knowledge that are locally innate and peculiar intuitive ability that is seen as necessary for effective fishing.

Social Capital

Duggan’s (2004) notes from her research conducted in Carna that while farming is “absent from the local conceptual framework of occupations within the area”, fishing represents a “distinct and coherent collective occupational identity” (p. 10). Duggan (2004, p.11) notes that despite this coherent occupational identity being without “objective validity” (only half of the 400 households at that time in Carna had a full-time or regular fisher):

“The local society...has defined itself as a fishing economy. The interests and well-being of the fishermen are seen as the interests and well being of the entire area. Local people invariably refer to the area in such terms as “this is a fishing area” and “everybody here fishes, it’s all they’ve got” (Duggan, 2004, p.11).

Interviews conducted for this study revealed that indigenous local fishers are bound in a broader network of members of the local community, where embedded conventions and norms are present to govern collective action in response to issues of concern to the local mariculture economy. There is a significant history of how the inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach have mobilised effective and sophisticated campaigns of collective action in reaction to issues impacting on their local fishing industry. Duggan (2004) documents how the inhabitants of Carna have over time demonstrated a high level of resistance to attempts at undermining their local management of fishing resources. The first incident corresponded to a Gael-Linn scheme for the purchase of fishing boats, when a contract for the supply of parts and engines for the boats was awarded to a prominent local fish buyer. The fish buyer stipulated to local fishermen that the sale and supply of parts was conditional on their sale of their fish catches to him, which would result in his control of the local market. The local fishermen resisted this coercion by organising the purchase of parts directly from the UK, and boycotted the buyer to whom the contract had been awarded. A second example of fishermen’s resistance to external control occurred ten years later, when a US-based company proposed to local fishers to provide large boats and pots for the harvesting of lobster in Cill Chíaráin bay. The proposal was that the fishers would be paid on the basis of their catch. It was claimed by the company that there were €6 million worth of lobster in the bay (Duggan, 2004, p. 7). Local fishers evaluated the proposal as being both exploitative and unsustainable from the perspective of the long-term viability of the

lobster beds and refused to cooperate with the company. The fishers publicly opposed the ambitions of the company, until such a time as the company desisted in its efforts and left the area following the bombing of one of its large fishing vessels in Cill Chíaráin bay. A third example occurred less than a decade later, when Gael Linn purchased oyster beds within the area, which although previously in private ownership, had been publicly fished by local fishers for generations. Gael Linn's strategy was to improve the long-term viability of the beds for the use of local fishers, and this involved the imposition of a two year ban on fishing the beds. While local fishers agreed in principle with this strategy and adhered to it over the two years, when Gael Linn extended the ban to a third year the fishers protested and organised a week-long 'fish in' and subscribed the appropriate licences to avoid penalisation (see Duggan, 2004). Gael Linn found itself out-manoeuvred and abandoned the imposition of a third year of a fishing ban. A further example of the fishers' affirmation of autonomy was the arrival of the multi-national Carroll's to the area and the company's attempt to establish a large salmon farm in Carna Bay. Local people within the area had serious concerns about the environmental impact of such a development, and the associated threats to the sustainability of their existing fishing practices (see Duggan, 2004). The locals' response to Carroll's proposed development was orchestrated through a specially formed local cooperative. While questions were being raised by the cooperative about the legitimacy of granting state licences to the Carroll's multi-national were addressed by means of a public enquiry, Carroll's attempted to 'ingratiate' themselves with the local community (Duggan, 2004, p.7). The outcome was that Carroll's did indeed establish a salmon farm in the bay but only after assisting the cooperative to purchase the oyster beds from Gael Linn. The main stated objective of the cooperative was to secure livelihoods for as many local fishermen as possible, whereas a capitalist model would have employed only 20¹² (Duggan, 2004, p.7). Today, according to local reports, the cooperative *Comharchumann Sliogéisc Chonamara* has 80 active members and many of these operate on a seasonal basis.

Disempowerment

As far back as the 1930s the local mariculture economy in Iorras Aithneach was undermined in favour of the development of a 'petty agricultural commodity economy' despite the former being linked to strong international markets (see Duggan, 2004). It is clear that inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach have been vigorously challenging threats to their local fishing economies over time. As discussed above, fishers' 'tenacity' tends to arise less from economic rationale and more from issues of cultural and social capital. McGoodwin (2001), for example, notes "to a greater degree than seen in large-scale approaches, the fishing occupation is closely tied to the fishers' personal and cultural identities. Among most small scale fishers, fishing is perceived not merely as a means of assuring one's livelihood, but more broadly as a way of life, indeed a way of life which is vivified by important occupational values and symbols which in turn underscore core aspects of small-scale fishers' individual and collective identities" (McGoodwin, 2001).

Contemporaneously, interviews conducted with inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach and particularly those conducted with fishers made frequent references to threats being experienced to sustaining their fishing culture. Rather than the threats arising such as

¹² Lawrence Taylor's (1990) paper "The River Would Run Red with Blood: Community and Common Property in an Irish Fishing Settlement" echoes interestingly with the Iorras Aithneach case.

they have traditionally in a way that is visible within the community more recent threats are perceived as arising externally, manifested in the lack of fish stocks in the area and legally enforceable regulations on fishing practices. Threats to the sustainability of community-based fishing were identified by interviewees as stemming from a broad range of policy related issues, and in particular, to the impact that large-scale fishers were having on mariculture resources in the area:

“In a currach, you’d generally have about 100-200 pots for commercial purposes. Other people who are at work, would only have a hundred pots. The weight of lobsters have dropped hugely, they’re all just about the legal weight. Only one in seven pots will have a lobster in it. Out of ten pots, you might get two lobster. A few years ago, 200 pots was a huge number of pots. The problem nowadays is the number of pots that boats are fishing, There are trawlers with a 1000 pots, 6-8 times more than what a currach will have, and that includes two men. People who aren’t from here come in and put pots all over the place. The rest of us haven’t a hope. A bigger boat can fish what it likes, for as long as it likes. They’re all outside the bay, the fish never get a chance to come in, the whole perimeter of the place is littered with pots”.

Local fishermen in Iorras Aithneach claim that there is no financial incentive to fish due to excessive monitoring of fish catches and policies that favour larger fishing vessels. Local inhabitants’ sense of anger and frustration in relation to the diminishment of their fishing livelihoods and their lack of credence in the range of policies that are currently regulating fish stocks were foremost in all of the interviews conducted:

“I saw a boat on TV that can catch 500 tonne of mackerel with one net...it’s not fishing, it’s hoovering. What they throw away, we wouldn’t catch in a year. Around here, all you can catch are six mackerel and two Pollack or else you’re categorised as a commercial fisherman. By law you can’t even catch enough to eat.”

In December 2003, Údarás na Gaeltachta was instructed by the Department of Communications, Marine & Natural resources to cease their Inshore Fishermen Support Scheme (which took the form of grant aid for the purchase/repair of currachs and the purchase of outboard engines and pot haulers) due to the scheme being ‘in breach of EU legislation’ because of issues relating to tonnage; engine power; and increases in the effectiveness of inshore fishers’ fishing equipment’. The cessation of the Inshore Fishermen Support Scheme had been popular in the area and caused a great degree of debate and anger in the local community. Dissimilar to the reactionary nature of past campaigns that had been instigated by local inhabitants for the protection of their livelihoods, interviewees claimed that in the face of current threats such as incompatible regulations and noticeably diminished fish stocks, they feel powerless and disenfranchised:

“I’m so angry about what they’ve done to us that I can’t even talk about it. I really don’t know what to do. Nobody does”

There was evidence of anti-EU sentiment in how fishers interviewed for this study attributed blame for the unviability of their livelihoods as fishermen:

“from now on, I will vote no, no, and no again to any treaty that comes my way from the EU”

Frustration at the ‘criminalisation’ of fishing practices breaching regulations and legislation was frequently conveyed in the interviews conducted. This issue has also caused consternation among fishers’ interest groups at the National level:

“We hold no brief for serious offenders in fisheries but the use of this type of language indicating a capital crime should have no place in the lexicon relating to fishing, which is a totally legal activity of great benefit to the State and is a proud and honourable way of life in our coastal communities. The inclusion of fisheries offences in the Criminal Justice bill is a disgrace and is very regrettable evidence of an effort to mis-place public perception of the sector by people who should know better” Lorcán O Cinnéide, Chairman of the Federation of Irish Fishermen.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to analyse in any depth the impact of the fishing policy framework on fishing communities, feelings of frustration and disempowerment are inevitably implicated in understanding fishers’ engagement in the contemporary rural development agenda. In circumstances where local people are faced with leaving their fishing traditions behind, it has been the case that ‘barriers to change’ are often perceived as owing to ‘passiveness’, or worse, ‘backwardness’ on the part of the community (see Duggan, 2004). According to the governance and rural development literature, such perceptions require confrontation as a first step in the analysis of understanding barriers to engagement and in helping to chart a more socially and culturally acceptable route for rural development.

“People from the dominant culture often accuse those remaining in societies whose culture has been eroded or destroyed of lack of initiative and enterprise... The removal from the community of control over their own destiny leaves a depleted community without a belief in its own worth, its own capacity to change things” (Bryden, 1991, p.17 quoted by Ray, 1997, p. 16).

1.12 The Contemporary Rural Development Agenda and Iorras Aithneach

It is claimed that partnership and other governance models are not simply multi-tier versions of centralised policies but represent a chance for localities to focus on their individual attributes, resources, and forms of capital and exploit them (Walsh, 1995, p. 1). The valorisation of local traditions and customs represents the central aim of the culture economy, representing thus a more conducive development route than heretofore productivist policies for areas like Iorras Aithneach. Lowe et al (1998) note that the culture economy promotes:

“further participative rationale...in the empowerment of an historically repressed or marginalised cultural system... such as Gaelic, Breton or Lap” (p. 54) where such cultural commodities can provide a focus for the development of cultural economies. In such a fashion, the culture economy is claimed to have the capacity to “raise local consciousness of territorial identity... and raise confidence in the ability of the area to regenerate itself” (Lowe et al, 1998, p. 54).

Rural areas, it is conceived, particularly those that are remote and have been heretofore marginalised by mainstream policies, can often still hold many of the ‘raw’, authentic and increasingly rare cultural commodities such as “speakers of the regional language, traditional foods, remnants of craft skills, important historical and archaeological sites and the native flora and fauna” and therefore are particularly well-positioned to develop a localised culture economy (Lowe et al, 1998, p. 55). In addition, it is claimed that through the development of the culture economy and the associated valorisation of local custom, tradition, and skill, higher status jobs are created for local people (Lowe et al, 1998, p. 56). In line with principles of governance, the culture economy is claimed to put local inhabitants, as “producers/guardians”, in control of the management of local resources (Lowe et al, 1998, p. 57).

So, what are the unique local resources in Iorras Aithneach that stand to provide a basis for both a vibrant local economy and the reinstatement of local confidence? In light of arguments put forward in the literature on the potential of the culture economy, the following section identifies primary local resources in Iorras Aithneach and observes the extent to which they are currently being valorised or promoted through contemporary rural development initiatives. A summary of these resources is presented in Table 3.5 below.

Table 1.6 below presents summary information on local resources, and factors influencing the utilisation of these resources¹³.

Local Resource/ Practice	State/Agency Initiative(s)	Local Utilisation/ Uptake	Influential Factors
Small-scale Fishing	Údarás na Gaeltachta	Traditionally major, currently ‘illegalised’	Policing; Regulations; Licensing
Boat building / Boating	Údarás na Gaeltachta	Falling numbers engaged in boat building	Grant-aid under threat; fewer young people entering the practice
Seaweed harvesting	Údarás na Gaeltachta	Traditionally major, now diminished	Non- lucrative; unfavourable taxation.
Food production/ Domestic food processing	None	Traditionally major, now diminished	Regulations, no tradition of or facility for local market-place sale
Tourism	Údarás na Gaeltachta; MFG	Minimal	Cultural disinclination towards tourism
Irish Language	Tax incentives for hosting students of Summer Language Schools	Strong uptake from indigenous population	Tax exempt; recently built new houses facilitate an increased number of students

¹³ While Cumas Teo is not listed here, it is important to note that Cumas Teo’s information and advocacy service is instrumental in local knowledge of and access to initiatives and grants.

Connemara Lamb	Marketing Food Initiative; Teagasc; Údarás na Gaeltachta	Minimal	Lack of awareness; Tax issues
Connemara Marble	Údarás na Gaeltachta	None	–
Pony Breeding	None (private farmers)	Moderate	Local sale; lack of representation and agency
Irish Music & Dance	Various: Údarás na Gaeltachta; MFG; National Arts Council.	Major	Part of strong local tradition; aided by festival support

Iorras Aithneach: a fishing community

Mariculture does not received equal attention to agriculture in the rural development literature, yet arguments in favour of ‘real’ or ‘new paradigm’ rural development are as much relevant to fishing as they are to farming. ‘Real’ or ‘new paradigm’ rural development, by placing the role of fishing, and the forms of local knowledge that underpin it at the heart of the local economy, is a development route for Iorras Aithneach that has obvious potential. Contextualising ‘real’ rural development to fishing, it seeks to re-centralise primary production activities in rural development, transforming understandings of

“the role of [fishing] in rural development, moving it from a peripheral and dying to a central activity in rural places” (Tovey, 2006, p.173). In the literature, ‘new paradigm’ rural development is described as emerging from “cognitive liberation”, “autonomous processes” and “in spite of official attempts at rural development” (Tovey, 2006). It is stated that small to medium [fishers’] experience of the disastrous effects of trying to integrate themselves into the dominant modernisation model, with its goals of continuous expansion of scale, industrialisation of production and integration into increasingly globalised [mari]-industrial corporations force them to find a range of ways to ‘jump over the boundaries that model prescribes for them” (Van der Ploeg and Renting, 2004, p. 234).

In this sense, ‘new paradigm’ rural development is understood as a ‘counter-movement’ (Marsden, 2003) and a ‘widespread resistance paysanne’ (Van der Ploeg and Renting, 2004; Tovey, 2006). Arguments in favour of ‘real’ rural development

“restates rights and possibilities of rural inhabitants to generate a livelihood for themselves from a sustainable use of the natural, cultural and social resources specific to their own rural locale” (Tovey, 2006, p.173).

While the engagement of disenfranchised farmers and fishers in ‘real’ rural development does not represent a significant social movement in Ireland, the paradigm offers nonetheless a progressive route for fishers’ involvement in the contemporary rural development agenda using their existing skill sets. Tovey (2006) notes that the numbers of rural inhabitants engaging in ‘new paradigm’ rural development are difficult to determine but references the estimation of Van der Ploeg and Renting (2004) that 50% of all farmers in the EU are engaging in these types of

activities and the less optimistic view of Marsden (2003) that “the possibilities of its full realisation are unequally distributed across European rural space and will never become ‘mainstreamed’ unless given strong and appropriate state supports” (Tovey, 2006, p. 192-173).

In Iorras Aithneach, from interviewees’ accounts of their difficulties in sustaining their fishing way of life, the realisation of ‘real’ rural development seems threatened. As discussed above, constraints and challenges to the livelihoods of small-scale fishers’ have given rise to a virtual cessation of their fishing practices. What is more, any hope of this reversing this trend would require a drastic overhaul of fishing legislation and the protection of small-scale fishers as a special group under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

The previous sections on forms of cultural and social capital elaborate the connection between fishers and local forms of knowledge that have been handed down for generations. Currently, much of this local knowledge is not being transferred to younger generations and is being lost as a result of fewer numbers taking up careers in fishing:

“Only one or two of the young lads know where to go to fish. All of the old things like where the seaweeds are, or where you’d see marine life like seals, is all forgotten about. It’s a pity because there is an enormous resource of folklore and skills that’s trickling away”

Similarly, associated traditions to the strong tradition of mariculture in Iorras Aithneach such as boat-building and seaweed harvesting are in threat of discontinuation.

Traditional Boats

Iorras Aithneach is renowned for the building of Irish traditional boats. While these boats were traditionally used for transport around the islands of South Connemara and further afield, today these boats are used in the most part for sailing and racing. Údarás na Gaeltachta offers grants for the repair and building of traditional fishing boats specifically the *Huicéir*, *Gleoitóóg* and *Pucán* boats. However, local inhabitants referred to the possible discontinuation of such grants and the threat this posed to losing skills required for the building of the boats:

“If the boat building stops now you may as well say that it’s gone forever because not that many have the skills even now”.

There are currently sixteen festivals that celebrate indigenous boating traditions and all but three of these take place in the Connemara Gaeltacht,¹⁴ where they are attended in the most part by local people. Local people attach great prestige (cultural capital) to

¹⁴ The festivals are: *Féile Eanach Mheáin*; *An Áird Mhóir*, Cill Chiaráin; *Céibh an Mháimín*; *Féile na gCurrahaí*, an Spidéal; *Beal a’Daingean*; *An Patrún*, Inis Mór; *Féile Bóthar na Trá*; *Féile Mhic Dara*, Carna; Roundstone Festival; *Féile Chuigéil*, Leitir Mealláin; *Féile an Dóilin*, An Ceathrú Rua; *Cruinniú na mBád*, Kinvara; *Féile Caladh Thaidg*, An Ceathru Rua; *Féile na nOileán*, Leitir Mór; *Féile na Mara*, Cill Chiaráin.

their unique local tradition of boat-building. However, while a significant number of young people participate in these festivals as spectators, it is noted by local inhabitants that comparatively few are involved in boat building and racing:

“Sometimes we have misconceptions of what our local resources are. Údarás put money into local boat racing festivals but there’s also the need to support setting up training for currach racing. Most of the people involved in boat racing are getting old and no young lads are going into it. There’s nothing wrong with promoting festivals, but if we’re not careful we won’t have anyone to sail and race the boats”.

The changing significance of traditional Irish boats from working boats, to recreational boats, to heritage boats was noted by inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach interviewed for this study. Attention was drawn to these changes at the opening address of The *Cruinniú na mBád* festival in Kinvara (Co. Clare) where the speaker stated that *“It is hoped that the destiny of the Galway Hooker is to remain sailing in the sea where it belongs, and not suspended from the ceiling of Galway City Museum”* (Breathnach, 2006).

Interviewees in Iorras Aithneach claimed that water safety regulations prevent the usage of a traditional type of boat, the *currach*, used locally for harvesting both shellfish and seaweed. The boats are small and accommodate two persons on average for fishing purposes. Due to this size constriction, it is reported that the boats are not large enough to carry the safety equipment required by regulation.

Seaweed Harvesting

Seaweed is an organic prolific resource in Iorras Aithneach and its harvesting is an indigenous income-generating practice that dates back several hundred years. Historically the seaweed was sold as fertiliser to traders who would transport it to fertile agricultural land in East Galway. Today, there is a seaweed processing plant in Cill Chíaráin, *Arramara Teo.*, that is funded by Údarás na Gaeltachta and utilises local harvests. Údarás offers grants for the purchase and maintenance repair of currachs and engines to be used for collecting seaweed. The harvesting of seaweed as an income-generating practice in Iorras Aithneach has diminished over the past two decades, however, and regularly there is not enough seaweed being harvested to meet the factory’s demand. Though the factory also buys seaweed from seaweed cutters based in other parts of Ireland, such as in Counties Mayo and Donegal, the shortage of seaweed caused the factory to close for several weeks during the summer of 2007, putting employees on mandatory leave of absence. There are no enterprises in Iorras Aithneach that grow seaweed or process local seaweed supplies to create high value-added products, although the lucrative use of seaweed properties for manufacturing pharmaceuticals and food is well documented and practiced elsewhere in Ireland and particularly abroad. The National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) is host to the Irish Seaweed Research Centre and its Marine Research Institute has a laboratory based in Carna. The centre receives funding support for research from Údarás na Gaeltachta.

From interviews conducted in Iorras Aithneach, more disadvantages than advantages were cited in relation to the harvesting of seaweed. While seaweed is prolific and

widely available on the peninsula, it was claimed by past and present local seaweed cutters interviewed for this study that seaweed cutting is both life endangering and non-lucrative (cutters explained that they received €40 per tonne of (wet) seaweed¹⁵). A further disincentive identified by local cutters is that the €40 per tonne is taxed, and that government revenue officials visit the factory regularly to inspect details of seaweed suppliers. It is clear that the harvesting of seaweed has become a devalued practice and very few younger people are taking it up:

“Anyone who is harvesting seaweed is either too old to do anything else or is unable to do anything else. No one has any respect for it and you get no money out of it. Long ago you could get something out of it, but then you had fishing as well”

It is noted that contemporarily, in light of the collapse of the building and construction sectors, that seaweed harvesting is increasing in South Connemara. According to local reports, the seaweed factory processed approximately 25,000 tonnes from May 2008-May 2009. However, similar to fishing and boat building, the skills of seaweed harvesting are not being transferred to younger generations. It is noted furthermore that there is a demise of local knowledge of different seaweed types and where they grow. In recent years complications are arising in relation to ‘seaweed rights’ which are claimed by individuals from generation to generation:

“people have completely lost touch with the tradition of their area. The link was broken two or three generations ago. They don’t go to the bog, don’t go fishing, cutting seaweed or fishing, or picking winkles, they don’t know how to sow a spud. In Brussels they might think that people in coastal areas of Connemara know how to cut seaweed to supply it to the factory in Cill Chíaráin, but they don’t. If you went into the local school and asked the kids to bring you down to the shore and show you some dilisk, they wouldn’t be able to recognise it”

Subsistence Farming and Household Processing

Although Iorras Aithneach, due to its poor soil and weather conditions, has never been conducive to large-scale intensive farming, the small household farm has been a dominant characteristic of the landscape. The farm household has traditionally functioned less as an income-generating practice and more as a diverse food-source, primarily of pork (domestically preserved by salting); ‘black pudding’¹⁶; mutton; chicken; eggs; butter and other dairy produce; and *cáca baile/caiscín* (“home bread” - a light wheaten bread). The consumption of raw dairy products is discouraged by health regulations contemporarily, as well as the domestic production of butter; salted pork (bacon); and associated pork products (such as ‘black pudding’). Today, the domestic processing of dairy and pork products has become rare in Iorras Aithneach, as well as throughout Ireland, and it is illegal to produce for private consumption or sell such domestic produce without conforming to the relevant regulations and licensing procedures.

¹⁵ The factory dries and packages seaweed but is not currently producing additional high value-added products.

¹⁶ A product made from pork blood and cereal.

Similar farm household processing is ongoing outside of Ireland in other EU member states where they are acknowledged to be at the heart of the artisan food industry (see Fonte 2008). However indigenous household food processing in Ireland, similar to the usage of seaweed as a food and food ingredient, has gone into virtual discontinuation. This was presented as an accepted fact among interviewees in Iorras Aithneach and as stated by one interviewee:

“We don’t produce any of that food anymore. It became extinct with regulations and because we could buy it in the shops. There are a few still around that can make pudding, usually the sheep’s pudding, but the young people don’t know. They wouldn’t know what even it tastes like, let alone make it”

Cultural Tourism

One of the main vehicles identified in the literature for the valorisation and exploitation of local resources is the tourism industry, or more specific to contemporary rural development initiatives, ‘cultural tourism’. The West of Ireland is recognised in the literature as a site possessing unique cultural commodities. Kneafsey (1998, p.113) citing Nash (1993, p. 86) writes that “Images of the western landscape function in promotional publications as a shorthand notation for the landscape of Ireland in general”. Kneafsey (1998) furthermore identifies the broader cultural, political and social connotations of the West of Ireland as being “endowed with particular qualities ranging from lawlessness, sensuality and physicality in the writings of Synge, to peasant resilience, Puritanism and courage in the vision of nationalists such as Pearse and MacNeill” (Kneafsey, 1998, p. 113). Kneafsey notes how these political and cultural connotations are “sustained in contemporary tourism images and texts. For instance, Uris (1978, p. 60) writes of the West as “the Irish conscience” describing its people as “the gentle beauty of Ireland, soft and unsophisticated yet so full of wisdom and so dogged”; “the last great peasantry of Europe”; and “the backbone of the race”” (Kneafsey, 1998, p.113). Byrne et al (1993) state that despite different constructions of how, and the extent to which, Connemara is perceived as an authentic tourism experience, “Connemara has been seen as a magical peripheral area, a paradigmatic contrast to urbanised industrial life, or else as the repository of intrinsic Irishness...” (p. 236). Similarly, Fáilte Ireland West in its Regional Tourism Development Plan (2008-2012) states “Ireland West is arguably an iconic region of Ireland due to the perception of the rugged Atlantic Coast, the wilds of Connemara, the culture and heritage of the islands, and the attractions of Galway. It is in many the ways the essence of the Irish tourism product” (p.12).

Despite this cultural and political romanticism, tourism in Connemara tends to be mostly concentrated in the North of the region. Tourism in Iorras Aithneach was identified in the current study as being an aspect of the local economy that is undeveloped. Many of the inhabitants and development workers interviewed for this study noted the virtual absence of a tourism industry in the area and stated that there is little on offer for tourists in terms of organised activities and amenities such as quality restaurants. One rural development professional remarked:

“If we see a group of tourists passing our window, we wait to see how long it takes them to turn back. They have probably taken the wrong route on the way to Clifden...”

“What is there for tourists around here? Nothing”

Inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach interviewed for this study showed an overall disinclination towards tourism. In discussing the potential for tourism in Iorras Aithneach, many interviewees were disdainful of the image of Connemara that is portrayed in the tourism industry. Interviewees were reluctant to speak about how the cultural uniqueness of Connemara is commonly articulated (e.g. as a place of ‘intrinsic Irishness’ or as the culture being ‘the backbone of the race’) and gave the impression of being uncomfortable with or embarrassed by “such talk”.

“The tourists rave about things around here, the scenery and that. I don’t listen to that kind of talk. I love Connemara, it’s where I’m from. Tourists see it in a different way”

The attitudes of interviewees in Iorras Aithneach were reminiscent of a quotation presented in a 1979 report on the arts and culture in the North and South of Ireland:

“to an Irishman who has a social conscience, the conception of Ireland as a romantic picture, in which the background is formed by the lakes of Killarney by moonlight, and a round tower or so, whilst every male figure is a ‘broth of a bhoy’ and every female one is a colleen in a crimson Connemara cloak, is as exasperating as the conception of Italy as a huge garden and art museum inhabited by picturesque artists’ models is to a sensible Italian”.

GB Shaw (1896) cited in *A Sense of Ireland*, (1979, p.39).

Inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach were of the perception that tourism is “*full of fanciful notions*” and not based on the realities that frame living in Connemara:

“the music and dancing that’s put on for tourists is fake carry on”

“There’s nothing here for tourists, only the wind and the rain. Hardship is what we have here – would the tourists like that? Some of them come through cycling. I don’t know what they’re looking for”.

Compared to how practices such as fishing and boating were spoken about with genuine passion, the majority of inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach interviewed for this study were unenthusiastic overall about tourism. Such attitudes are associated with the ‘artificial separation between production and consumption’ (Pratt, 2004; see Chapter 1) that often arises in the culture economy, where consumption and the desires of consumers are the main drivers. Despite the emphasis of the culture economy on promoting authentic place-based branding, is noted in the literature that a type of ‘bogus’ culture can emanate in the context of cultural economies. Ireland’s tourism economy is susceptible to bogus cultural portrayals:

“...critics of the rapidly developed heritage industry in Ireland have accused it, among other things, of creating ‘twee’ (McDonald, Irish Times, 22/09/1992), ‘jumbled’, ‘folksy’ (Busteed, 1992), ‘stereotypical’, ‘nostalgic’, and ‘biased’ (Mullane, 1994) images of Ireland and the Irish. An overarching theme of these

criticisms is the idea that heritage centres contribute to the ‘trinketisation’, commercialisation, and trivialisation of culture” (Kneafsey, p.113).

The lack of a developed tourism industry, according to the literature, makes the cultural commodities in South Connemara all the more untouched and authentic on the premise that: “[W]hen indigenous inhabitants of places like the West of Ireland gradually abandon local criteria regulating forms of reasonable thought and feeling, they will have become much more similar to people everywhere else” (Byrne et al, 1993, p. 253, cited by Kneafsey, 1998, p. 113). In this light, the threats of cultural tourism (see Lowe et al, 1998; Ray, 2001; Macken-Walsh, 2009) ought to be considered in the development of the industry in Iorras Aithneach.

The Irish Language

In the context of a dominant a national language in the public and private sectors, it is noted in the literature that regional languages can often be perceived as “inferior, and lacking utility in modern life” (Ray, 1998, p.62). It is claimed that contemporary rural development initiatives, however, can position that minority languages can be a driver of local economic development (see MacKinnon, 1991; Ray, 1999; Ray, 1997). Lowe et al (1998) note that in the context of contemporary cultural economy approaches

“regions where there is a regional language issue can respond in two ways: they may argue that a regional language should be maintained for its function as a cultural marker; and they may promote the language as an agent for territorial economic development” (p. 62).

Both these ways of positioning the Irish language in the context of contemporary rural development are evident in the case of Iorras Aithneach. The cultural significance of the Irish language is becoming stronger as an industry in reflection of Ireland’s growing social movement relating to the preservation and consolidation of Irish culture and heritage. This movement has been promoted by national agencies such as Gael Linn and Údarás na Gaeltachta. Alongside this wider cultural movement where the Irish language is attaining a cosmopolitan status, consumers from a diversity of sectors are coming to South Connemara to learn the language. There are a number of schools operating in South Connemara that cater for school-going and adult learners and the schools have tended to adopt an immersion approach to the learning process, where students typically live with an Irish-speaking family for the duration of their language course.

Many households in Iorras Aithneach are hosts to Irish language students and earnings from the provision of domestic accommodation and food for Irish language students are tax-exempt. This is claimed to be a major incentive locally. Many of the inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach interviewed for the purposes of this study had a positive attitude towards the Irish language summer schools, yet problematic issues were identified with regard to the extent to which the attending students were genuinely integrating with the local community. The vast majority of students attending language summer schools in South Connemara are of secondary school-going age and it was noted that these students were “cordoned off” from the local community, causing some dissatisfaction among local youngsters:

“The local kids can be very disgruntled about the special treatment that the summer school students get. They’re not encouraged to speak to them, they’re not allowed to participate in any of their activities, they’re not allowed to go to the discos”

It was claimed by several interviewees that adults visiting the area for the purposes of attending language schools:

“...get the same treatment as the youngsters. Every evening, they go to an art class or some activity in the school and there’s no way of getting them to find out about the area or meet the locals. The only people who speak to the students are the local shopkeepers”.

It is argued in the literature that the linkages between tourism and place-based identities are best understood by analysing the social relations that are constructed between the two. Kneafsey (1998) in her research on tourism and place identity in the rural town of Foxford, Co. Mayo, differentiates between categories of visitors to the area in terms of how (and the extent to which) they interact with local people and local institutions. In this sense, Irish language students in Iorras Aithneach can be understood as representing less the type of tourist who “are incorporated into the rhythms and routines of the place” (Kneafsey, 1998, p.116) and moreover as “the swallows who return ever summer” (Kneafsey, 1998, p.116). As distinct from Kneafsey’s analysis of angler visitors to Foxford who return annually and have ‘become part of the extended community’, however, the language student visitors to Iorras Aithneach are different each year and therefore do not typically form lasting social relations in the area. In the findings of a Teagasc study of Gorumna, a neighbouring DED to Iorras Aithneach, it is interesting that only 1% of inhabitants identified the value of the Irish spoken language as being of advantage to tourism (Frawley et al., 2005). It is also recorded in this survey that 18% of respondents associated “no advantage” with the Irish language while the majority of total respondents to the survey (55%) attributed the benefit to a subjective cultural value - “it’s our culture” (Frawley et al, 2005).

Irish Music and Dance

Irish music has a particular tradition in Iorras Aithneach and surrounding areas of South Connemara. The unique tradition in the area is sean-nós singing and dance, and Iorras Aithneach is where many of the primary exponents of the sean-nós tradition have originated. Music and dance legends such as Muintir Uí Íarnáin and the Devane family are native to Iorras Aithneach. The main arts festival to celebrate local music and dance tradition is *Féile Joe Éinniú*, a renowned but small festival that celebrates the life of Joe Éinniú (Joe Heaney) and attracts enthusiasts of the sean-nós tradition. Attendance at the festival is dominated in the most part by local people and *gaelgóirs*¹⁷. The festival showcases local talent in Irish traditional music generally as well as the sean-nós traditions combined with guest musicians and performers.

Iorras Aithneach also has another tradition of music, which is popular among local inhabitants in public houses and other venues for social interaction. This is branded Connemara Country and Western or *Ceól Tíre*, and demonstrates the significant

¹⁷ People who can speak the Irish language.

influence American culture has had on South Connemara, in the most part mediated by returning and visiting emigrants from the region. The music and lyrics that have been composed within this genre, all using the medium of the Irish language, has been vast. There is, however, no festival or initiative that focuses on this tradition.

‘Connemara Ponies’; ‘Connemara Lamb’; ‘Connemara Marble’

Additional local resources that are associated with the Connemara area are high value added products that are widely marketed, such as ‘Connemara Ponies’; ‘Connemara Lamb’; and ‘Connemara Marble’.

The breeding of horses and Connemara ponies is the most prevalent of these three forms of economic activity, and Caladh Mhaínse (an area within Iorras Aithneach) is one of the breeding strongholds. Connemara Ponies, however, are mostly fêted elsewhere at national and international events and there are no tourism activities in Iorras Aithneach that valorise the tradition of Connemara ponies. The main body that represents pony breeders is the Connemara Pony Breeders’ Association, which is an international association with a comprehensive business mandate. This association operates on a global basis and clearly represents a high-end lucrative industry. Connemara ponies are sold by Iorras Aithneach breeders in the most part at local markets in nearby areas of Clifden and Maam Cross or through direct sales ‘from the field’. Inhabitants of Iorras Aithneach interviewed for this study claimed that individual farmers receive low prices for their ponies, which are then sold on by dealers at a profit. One interviewee claimed that a pony sold by his father to a dealer for less than €500 was sold on at a profit of several hundred percent six months afterwards. Similar stories were related by other interviewees. It is notable that there is no agency or cooperative in South Connemara representing the breeders who in the most part are individual farmers. Inhabitants claimed that the Connemara Pony industry is centred in Clifden, and that local breeders based in Iorras Aithneach do not have roles in vetting ponies or judging competitions.

Connemara marble, although the subject of a lucrative industry nationally and internationally, is not utilised for the purposes of high value added in the region. It is quarried in Recess, but is crafted elsewhere. While this is so, the quarrying of marble in Recess was supported by Údarás and represents a successful enterprise, employing six people at the end of 2008¹⁸.

Connemara lamb is another high-end product that is associated with the region yet there have been few local cooperatives established to valorise the unique way in which lamb is reared on local mountains. Recently, however, a producer group ‘Connemara Hill Lamb’ or ‘*Úain Sleibhte Conamara*’ has emerged and in March 2007 and the group’s product was listed as a protected foodstuff by the EU (Protected Geographical Indication Status), which recognises the lamb as unique to Connemara and prevents it being produced and marketed as Connemara lamb elsewhere. Announcing this development, Ireland’s then Minister for Agriculture emphasised the place-based value added of the project: *“I am particularly delighted to announce the registration of this product, unique to the far-famed Connemara region. In protecting the traditional origins of our regional foodstuffs we strengthen our regional*

¹⁸ There was a past attempt to process marble tiles which was hindered by technical and financial difficulties.

identities" (Sheehan, 2007). The formation of this producer group was assisted by Teagasc and the group currently receives administrative support from Údarás na Gaeltachta. Currently there are six producers involved in the group and of these none are located in Iorras Aithneach¹⁹. However, with advances made by the Connemara Hill Lamb Producers' Group, the production of lamb may represent a key area for growth into the future.

1.13 Operationalising 'Real' Rural Development in Iorras Aithneach

Of course there are 'barriers' arising from how local governance and rural development initiatives are operationalised and from how local participation is fostered in the design and implementation of local development. Local inhabitants interviewed for this study were critical of some existing organisations and community organisations that have strong local support are notably lacking in Iorras Aithneach. However, there are broader socio-cultural issues that are hindering the realisation of the contemporary rural development agenda. The agenda, which is said to give rise to new opportunities for developing unique cultural and physical resources in local communities, has borne little or no evidence in Iorras Aithneach. According to contemporary rural development rhetoric, local knowledge and resources have the status of key drivers for local development initiatives yet it is evident from this study that many unique forms of knowledge and resources in Iorras Aithneach are continually marginalised.

Traditional income-generating practices such as fishing and seaweed harvesting draw from existing knowledge and culture and therefore represent obvious routes for development in Iorras Aithneach. Other development avenues utilising the place-based value-added of Connemara (i.e. ponies, lamb; cultural commodities such as the Irish Language and sean-nós dance; and tourism projects) also represent significant potential. Some fundamental adjustments are required, however, in how the contemporary rural development agenda for Iorras Aithneach is conceptualised and in identifying initiatives that represent a feasible, as well as socially and culturally acceptable route for rural development.

In order to realise the objectives associated with the rhetoric of governance and rural development, fishing as a central feature of local cultural and occupational identity must be re-instated into the core of local development initiatives. Much of the literature, although relatively recently acknowledging the importance of farming culture and agriculture as a central activity in achieving food security as well as socio-cultural sustainability (Marsden, 2003; Van der Ploeg and Renting, 2004; Tovey, 2006), is lacking in references to mariculture in how the contemporary rural development agenda is described and theorised. That is not to say that arguments in favour of "transforming understandings of the role of agriculture in rural development, moving it from a peripheral and dying to a central activity in rural places" (Tovey, 2006, p.173) cannot be applied to fishing.

In their elaboration of 'real' rural development Van der Ploeg and Renting (2004) and Tovey (2006) emphasise the importance of: 'deepening'; 'broadening' and 're-grounding' processes in relation to the production of local food (Tovey, 2006, p. 176; see Chapter 1) where value is added to food products (i.e. fish) within the locality in which it is produced. Annexed income-generating practices to the core fishing

¹⁹ The producers are located in Cor na Mona and Recess.

enterprise are crucial for achieving sustainability. Income-generating activities that surround fishing culture such as sea-weed harvesting and boat-building are also crucial for realising 'real' rural development. Additional examples of 'deepening', 'broadening' and 're-grounding' are selling fish to local restaurants, establishing fish markets for direct sale, processing local mariculture resources, and fishing tourism activities (further examples are presented in Macken-Walsh, 2009). It should be noted, however, that fishers themselves may not be inclined towards service-based and processing income generating activities, such as market-based sale and tourist services. As such, a holistic family approach in appraising available skill-sets and occupational preferences is requirement from rural development practitioners.

Surrounding the core income-generating activity of fishing, households in Iorras Aithneach have traditionally been engaged subsistence agriculture and domestic food processing (the latter was undertaken predominantly by women). Connemara lamb, as discussed above, is a potentially high value-added product, yet no farmer from Iorras Aithneach is involved in the Connemara Hill Lamb Producers' group. As Connemara Lamb is now a protected food stuff (see above) there is existing potential for Iorras Aithneach farmers to become involved in a marketing scheme to sell their lamb at a higher profit. Associated by-products, such as sheep's pudding, hold potential in the artisan foods industry. For pony farmers in Iorras Aithneach, there is a clear need for stronger agency in how they are represented in sales and judging arenas. Local concerted efforts are required bring recognition to the area as a breeding stronghold and to take control of the means by which profits are generated through the sale of locally-reared and bred ponies in order to retain a more significant proportion of these profits within the community.

While the 'cultural homogenisation' threat of tourism is acknowledged in the literature (see Byrne et al, 1993), Lowe et al (1998) identify opportunities associated with new forms of cultural tourism as a primary vehicle for the valorisation of unique cultural and physical resources: "Until comparatively recently, the view of cultural theorists and regionalists was that tourism represented a threat to the viability of local cultural systems, bringing with it international consumerism and the threat of cultural homogenisation – what Ritzer (1993) defined as *McDonaldisation*. However, the new approach argues that this may no longer automatically be the case and that a tourism sector and an indigenous culture are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, tourism, as an explicit recognition of the worth of a local culture, can play a role in building community self-confidence which, in turn, can drive its rejuvenation" (Lowe et al (1998, p. 57)

Avoiding, then, the 'spectacularisation' of consumption associated with the culture economy (Pratt, 2004; see Macken-Walsh, in press), cultural tourism (if managed appropriately) redresses the "artificial separation of production and consumption" (Pratt, 2004) by placing local culture as the driver of the local economy. In this sense, cultural tourism can be understood less as conventional tourism where services and goods are produced in reflection of what tourists visiting an area want and more as a means of attracting consumers to a rural locality to pay for services and goods that are attached to cultural commodities and income generating activities that exist, in the cultural sense, independently of tourism.

In Iorras Aithneach, unique local knowledge underpinning boat building, fishing, local marine navigation, local folklore, the Irish language, Irish music and sean-nós

singing and dance is in abundant supply for the purposes of establishing a critical mass of high-value added enterprises. Recognising “the particular role of cultural tourism in raising local self-confidence and socio-cultural vibrancy”, Lowe et al (1998, p.175) note “the argument used by *Comunn na Gaidhlig* in support of their approach to Gaelic development in Scotland is that cultural tourism can generate higher status jobs for local people”. Given the problems of disempowerment and demoralisation experienced by disenfranchised fishers in Iorras Aithneach, cultural tourism may represent a positive aspect of what tourism could achieve as one part of the community economy in Iorras Aithneach into the future.

1.14 Conclusion

It is evident that fishers interviewed for this study ascribe cultural capital (prestige) to the skill and local knowledge that underpins local fishing practices; and social capital to norms governing equitable and sustainable usage of fishing resources among members of the local community. Fishing, as highlighted by Duggan (2004), is intrinsic to community identity in Iorras Aithneach, despite the number of full and part-time fishers having gone into decline. The popularity of the Inshore Fishermen Support Scheme administered by Údarás na Gaeltachta’s is demonstrated by the relatively high number of applications (48) submitted for support under the scheme in comparison to the four applications that were submitted to MFG from 2000-2006. The virtual loss of the local fishing industry has given rise to significant disillusionment and disempowerment, and is exacerbated by the absence of collective action on the part of the community to deal with local challenges and to strategise ways of dealing with these problems.

While the evaluation of policies that have impacted on the viability of the fishing industry is beyond the scope of this study, how local knowledge has become devalued within a changing policy context has crucial implications for the current discussion of principles underpinning the contemporary rural development agenda. In contrast to ‘top-down’ approaches, one of the claims of the governance model is that it has the capacity to hone in on the peculiarity of local conditions and circumstances. Though governance and rural development models are purported to promote a ‘power to’ rather than a ‘power over’ approach, local governance agencies can be powerless in the face of greater economic national and supranational forces. In Iorras Aithneach, external factors (such as stringent fishing regulations) have given rise to a decay of income-generating practices that utilise unique resources and knowledge and local development initiatives have no remit to challenge these factors. Antagonisms between ‘top-down’ sectoral policies and EU development initiatives that have a mandate to respond to local culture give serious questions about how ‘bottom up’ the contemporary rural development agenda can aspire to be. Governance and rural development initiatives can be faced with the significant challenge of engaging with a community that is suffering from problems of disempowerment and disempowerment, caused by policy measures and forces that are generated outside of their control.

A central obstacle to operationalising and realising the contemporary rural development agenda in Iorras Aithneach is that distinctive income-generating activities that are underpinned by local forms of cultural and social capital (i.e. fishing; the harvesting of seaweed; domestic processing of agricultural produce; the Irish Language; and sean-nós music & dance) have somehow failed to link up, conceptually and practicably, with rural development initiatives. The findings of this study would suggest that fishing culture continues to represent a significant lynchpin of community identity and as such,

local rural development programmes should be grounded in and developed from traditional fishing. Grounded within the context of traditional fishing, a wide range of economic activities, such as cultural tourism and artisan sea-foods production (see above and Macken-Walsh, 2009) are possible in Iorras Aithneach. What is more, such economic activities that celebrate local culture are likely to give rise to greater confidence within the community. For this, however, strong collective action on the part of the Iorras Aithneach community is required to articulate and negotiate a local development agenda. The merits and benefits arising from participatory development discussed at the beginning of this paper are only realisable when there are genuinely representative institutions in place to lead the type of collective action that is required in this context.

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