

The People's Transition Mountbellew

Implementation of Community-Led
Development for Climate Justice



Celebrating
21 Years

Addressing inequality and sustaining democracy since 2001

August 2023

Acknowledgements

This paper outlines the application of The People's Transition model for implementing community-led development for climate justice solutions in Mountbellew. Mountbellew is one of thirty communities on the island of Ireland where The People's Transition model will be applied between 2022 and 2025. This project has been led by the Think-Tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) and backed by AIB.

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The People's Transition describes a model for participative decision-making that is intended to enable a community to benefit from the transition to a zero-carbon society. It aims to design climate solutions that give local people and communities ownership of assets of transition and thus enhance public support for climate action by tackling inequality and raising standards of living.

The Mountbellew People's Transition began in November 2022. The intention of the project was to listen to, and learn from the community's needs and abilities in Mountbellew and then attempt to design several climate solutions that would benefit the community and address a number of the main development priorities of the community.

The project had three phases. The first phase was the Mapping Phase. The mapping phase aimed to build a picture of the Mountbellew community, outlining a geographical scope for the project that represents the people who live there. The key was understanding how people within the community could be included by assessing who was at greatest risk of being excluded. In addition to demographics and circumstances, the area was studied to understand the distribution of institutions and organisations, such as schools, churches and community groups, that play a significant role in the locality.

The mapping phase informed the rollout of the second phase – the Listening Phase. To gather inputs on community needs, priorities and strengths, the TASC team engaged with local volunteers, active community members and several harder-to-reach groups, such as residents participating in CE employment schemes, students and older members of the community. As the Listening Stage came to an end, a survey was distributed to gather further input from community members in Mountbellew and ensure that the emerging picture of the community was correct.

Throughout the various groups engaged, a number of common themes emerged. These included the range of services currently present in the town alongside issues with phone and internet connectivity and mobility options. Community members also spoke of the lack of tourist accommodation in the town and the need for support in moving away from fossil fuels such as turf.

Based on the listening phase, the TASC team worked with experts in an array of fields to identify and substantiate viable climate solutions that would address local needs and build on the community's strengths. The first solution focuses on community-owned accommodation to support community-based tourism. Several groups identified the lack of accommodation within the town as a factor which is halting Mountbellew's potential to be a site of slow tourism. By providing a space for tourists to stay in the area, a community-owned hotel could support community wealth building while also increasing the opportunity for environmental education.

The second solution presented in this report is a small-scale hydroelectric co-operative. This solution builds upon the industrial history in the area where a water-powered mill previously provided energy to Mountbellew. Although this would provide limited energy to the town, its development could help to reduce energy prices for community members.

These solutions should not be considered the only possible collective climate initiatives community members could undertake in Mountbellew. Others, looking at the same set of needs and priorities, may land on different climate solutions. However, it is hoped that the process, as much as the proposed solutions, provokes thought about how the investment in climate action can address existing development needs rather than perpetuate them.

1. Introduction

1. Introduction



Tackling climate change requires urgent and unprecedented action in communities all around the world. Given the interdependent nature of the crisis, if climate action is to be enduring, then it must be inclusive and equitable, ensuring that its burdens and benefits are shared throughout society. While the importance of inclusive climate policy seems to be widely understood, there are few tried and tested frameworks for the co-creation of climate policy in European communities.

The People's Transition (McCabe, 2020) attempts to address this. It is a participative decision-making model for climate action. It views climate action as an enabler of local development, giving people and communities ownership of the transition to zero-carbon societies. The model, which was developed through extensive consultation with communities and organisations around Ireland, seeks to deliver a bottom-up approach to transition that builds local wealth, enables local ownership of climate action and empowers local people. It aims to tackle inequality and raise standards of living through the delivery of climate solutions, thus proactively building social approval, and demand, for climate action.

To transfer the People's Transition model into practice, TASC will apply the People's Transition model in thirty communities throughout the island of Ireland over a three-year period. This report deals with the project undertaken in Mountbellew. A small town located in the West of Ireland, Mountbellew is unique in that it is a university town due to the presence of the ATU Mountbellew agricultural college. The town is also rich in biodiversity due to the presence of Carrownagappul Bog, one of the most accessible raised bogs in Ireland. Mountbellew has adopted the EU 'Smart Village framework.

The project had three phases, leading to the co-creation of solutions that address the needs of the community. First, a mapping phase made use of existing geographical and census data to outline the groups of people that live in the community, giving particular attention to vulnerable groups and identifying challenges and opportunities for climate action. This information was used to design a listening phase, through which the TASC team engaged directly with the community to understand different groups' and individuals' needs and priorities.

The solutions identified and researched in detail are a community-owned accommodation and a small-scale hydroelectric co-operative. These specific solutions are designed to meet the need for climate action whilst also being realistic and beneficial for Mountbellew. They provide a blueprint for how the People's Transition Model might be applied in a specific context.

This report presents the findings of all three phases in a narrative which aims to take the reader through the People's Transition process to illustrate why it is important to consider climate action from a people or community-centred approach. By listening first and ensuring that all voices are heard, it is hoped that climate action will benefit from greater social approval and thus will be in higher demand.



Key Terms

Climate action

Political, collective and individual action on climate change can take many forms. Climate action means stepped-up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-induced impacts, including climate-related hazards in all countries; integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning; and improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity with respect to climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning. There are other challenges that intersect climate action and environmental protection such as enhancing biodiversity and improving water quality.

Community Wealth

Community wealth building or local wealth building is a new people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. Community wealth building is a response to the contemporary challenges of austerity, financialisation and automation. It seeks to provide resilience where there is risk and local economic security where there is precarity

Anchor Institution

An anchor institution is one that, alongside its main function, plays a significant and recognised role in a locality by making a strategic contribution to the local economy. Anchor institutions generally have strong ties to the geographic area in which they are based through invested capital, mission and relationship to customers and employees. These institutions tend to operate not-for-profit. It is much simpler for private businesses to move, so there is no guarantee they will continue serving the local community in the long-term. However, there are examples of for-profit organisations playing the role of an anchor institution.

Local Development

Local development is the identification and use of the resources and endogenous potentialities of a community, neighbourhood, city or equivalent. The local development approach considers the endogenous potentialities of territories. Economic and non-economic factors influence local development processes. Among the non-economic factors, social, cultural, historical, institutional, and geographical aspects can be decisive in the process of local economic development

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient future for people and planet. For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonise three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected, and all are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies.

2. Phase I: Mapping Phase

2. Phase I: Mapping phase

The mapping phase aimed to build a picture of the Mountbellew community, outlining a geographical scope for the project that represents the people who live there. An area was mapped to include the anchor institutions, such as schools, churches and community groups, that play a significant role in the locality. These institutions are important since they make a strategic contribution to the local economy and society on a long-term basis (McCabe 2020). Identifying key actors and community leaders in various fields allowed for the inclusion of the groups associated with them in the project, helping the TASC team to connect with the community and identify their needs and priorities.



Located in the East of County Galway in the West of Ireland, Mountbellew is a small town with a long history. Founded by the Bellew family in the 17th Century, Mountbellew has a range of public amenities originating from the Bellew family estate (Galway County Heritage Office, 2020). This includes the Mountbellew Coillte Forest Recreation Park, the Mountbellew Workhouse, and the Franciscan Brothers Agricultural College (now Atlantic Technological University Mountbellew). Unique to a town of its size, Mountbellew is home to two secondary schools, Holy Rosary College (Convent) and Colaiste an Chreagain (GRETB). Mountbellew is also the site of one of

the most accessible raised bogs in Ireland (Carrownagappul Bog). In the centre of the town is a monument to the racehorse Bobbyjo, which won the British and Irish Grand Nationals in the late 1990s. Mountbellew also has a history of community members coming together to achieve economic development for the town. A corn mill was developed by the Mountbellew Co-operative Agricultural Society in 1922 (Galway County Heritage Office, 2020). Using two turbines driven by water from the nearby Castlegar River, electricity was also produced to provide power to the town. In more recent times, Mountbellew has embraced the EU Smart Villages initiative. Smart Villages are defined as communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience to the challenges they face (Malone, 2021) These include the use of Information and Communication Technologies or community-led actions and projects to address issues relating to health, education, energy, transport and retail among others (European Network for Rural Development, 2021).



Similar to many rural areas in Ireland, there are a high number of active organisations and community focal points that were identified, including Moylough-Mountbellew GAA, Mountbellew Vintage Club, Mountbellew and District Heritage Tourism Network alongside schools, health centres, and pubs among others. This information gave an idea of some places where the community is already meeting and institutions that might be involved in a plan for community-led climate action.

More detailed information was gathered from the area using census data. This allowed for an assessment of potentially underrepresented groups so that inequalities in participation could be better addressed during the listening phase. The mapping phase also helped identify potential barriers people might face to participate in climate action. On the flip side, opportunities for engaging in climate action were identified, with information collected on resources available to the community that might strengthen the project.

2.1 Community data

Data from the most recent census was utilised in the mapping phase. As the full 2022 dataset is not yet available at local level, data from the 2016 census was used. The electoral division of Mountbellew consists of the town of Mountbellew and the village of Moylough. On the Pobal Deprivation Index, Mountbellew is classed as marginally above average. Over the past 40 years, its population has grown consistently. In 1981, the electoral division's population was 1,205. As of 2016, it had a population of 1,913. It is a relatively young area as the number of people under 19 is double that of those over 65. The community's population is diverse, as 13.7% of residents were born outside of Ireland. While most of this group were born in the UK, there is also a contingent of Lithuanians, Polish and people born outside of the EU residing in Mountbellew. 15% of the population of Mountbellew also have a disability. This is slightly higher than the national level

as 13.5% of people in the Republic of Ireland were found to have a disability in the 2016 census (National Disability Authority, 2018). Mountbellew has seen a significant level of residential development over recent decades. 41% of the housing stock was built after 2001. Only 2.1% of houses are owned by the local authority compared to a national rate of 8.9% (Central Statistics Office, 2017a). There is, however, a reliance on solid fuels for heat. 31.8% use peat as their primary source of heating. This is far higher than the national average as just under 6% of houses across the Republic of Ireland used peat as the main source of residential heating (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, 2022). A ban on the retail sale of turf in the Republic of Ireland came into effect in October 2022 (Hosford, 2022). Due to opposition to this measure, the issue of using turf as a source of energy became an area for debate among decision-makers (Mooney, 2022; O'Connell & Gataveckaite, 2022). Mountbellew has a relatively low unemployment rate of 4.97%, while 12.2% of the population are students.

In contrast to the national rate of 13.3%, Mountbellew has a lower rate of early school leavers, as 9.33% have no formal education or completed education at primary school level (Central Statistics Office, 2017b). A high proportion of the population has secondary education, while 18.8% of people have technical and vocational qualifications or apprenticeships. A further 11.2% have an honours bachelor's degree or professional qualification. In the area of employment, 30.9% are classed as working in professional services. 21.9% work in commerce and trade, while manufacturing industries represent 11.9% of employment in Mountbellew. A notable finding from analysing census data is the dependence on cars for travelling to work, school or college.



Almost three-quarters of Mountbellew rely on cars to travel where they need to go. This compares to 4% who use the bus, 9% who walk and 0.5% who cycle. It is worth noting that, as a result of the concentrated number of schools in the area, the weekday population in Mountbellew greatly increases. In terms of connectivity, one in five people do not have internet access. While these figures may have decreased since 2016, this could have implications for the ability of community members to access online services.

2.2 Anchor Institutions

Anchor institutions hold the potential to play a significant role in a locality by making strategic contributions to the local economy. They generally have strong ties to the geographical area in which they are based through invested capital, mission and relationship with community members. The diversity of potential anchor institutions available to the community offers various potential partnerships for community-led climate action. Within Mountbellew, a potential anchor institution is the presence of the Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Mountbellew Campus. The campus provides courses in agri-business, agri-engineering and agri-science (Atlantic Technological University, 2022). Alongside providing academic courses, the campus also consists

of a 169-hectare farm with a dairy and beef stock, ewes, 20 hectares of forestry and a state-of-the-art grain store and milking parlour (Atlantic Technological University, 2022). Other possible anchor institutions in the town that align with co-operative ownership principles are a local dairy co-operative (Arrabawn), a co-operative livestock market and a credit union (McCabe, 2020).



2.3 Active Citizenship

Mountbellew is one of sixteen locations in Ireland to be designated as a 'Smart Village'. The project is administered by Mountbellew Smart Villages CLG, alongside Galway Rural Development, the local development company for County Galway (Walsh, 2021). Adding additional value, Galway Telework Group is a Community Services Office that supports local voluntary Groups and local festivals alongside working with elderly and unemployed groups. They have been working on a tourism initiative focused on the Carrownagappul bog, a designated Special Area of Conservation (iGailimh, n.d.). Beyond organisations focusing on local development, Mountbellew has a range of clubs and societies active in the town. These include an active retirement association, a mental health association and various recreational organisations.

It was clear from an early stage that any suggested solutions emerging from the People's Transition would need to complement, rather than duplicate, existing efforts and that the future success of the proposals from this People's Transition pilot project will rely on the adoption by the strong network of community groups and anchor institutions. The mapping phase highlighted information that was the foundation of the listening phase. An understanding of the community dynamics, vulnerable groups and demographic data allowed TASC to design a listening phase that was inclusive and built on existing community relations and social fabric. This listening phase set out to understand the needs and priorities of the community, thereby taking steps towards identifying suitable community-led climate solutions to meet societal needs.

3. Phase II: Listening Phase

3. Phase II: Listening Phase

3.1. Community outreach

The Listening Phase was designed to foster trust, gather knowledge and build capacity whilst identifying community needs and priorities. A communications plan was developed to bring attention to the People's Transition project, increasing engagement in the listening phase and informing the community of the project's outcomes. The first focus groups, held at the beginning of 2023, received coverage in local print media, and community members spoke about the project on local radio. The team also worked with local rapporteurs in Mountbellew to ensure the involvement of groups that might not typically have their voices heard. Groups that were engaged included people participating in the community employment scheme, Transition Year students, members of the Mountbellew Men's Shed and a local arts and crafts group.

The aim of these conversations was, first and foremost, to listen. Each focus group was asked the same questions: what do you like most about Mountbellew, what do you think are the main challenges facing Mountbellew, and what do you feel is lacking in Mountbellew? Listening to the lived experiences of a diverse community allowed the project team to build a picture of the challenges facing community members in Mountbellew. To gather further data, a community-wide survey was developed. The survey aimed to check the findings from listening to community members about the key issues identified. The survey was digital but distributed as widely as possible. Community organisations such as schools and sports clubs were contacted to share the survey among their members. The Listening Phase of the People's Transition for Mountbellew ran from January 2023 to April 2023. In total, 98 people were involved: 71 people engaged through focus groups and interviews and a further 27 through survey responses.



3.2. What we heard – needs, priorities & strengths

3.2.1. 'A great place to raise a family'

When asked what they like most about Mountbellew, several groups spoke of the range of services available in the town. One member of the Men's Shed spoke of how they can '*get everything I need*' in the town because of the presence of shops, chemists and vets, among other services. Another person described how they were lucky to have a bank, post office and credit union in Mountbellew. Community members highlighted the range of health services in the town, such as doctors and dentists. People from outside the area also come to Mountbellew for occupational therapy. Mountbellew was described by one person as '*a very sociable town*' due to the number of cafés present. While the number of cafés is increasing, the number of pubs in the town is decreasing. Other amenities present in the town include a golf course, a garden centre and a mart. One of the newer developments in the town is a dog kennel. One person described it as a '*five-star hotel for dogs*' while another spoke of how:

'The pets are looked after better than the people!'

A common theme among community groups was the emphasis on education within the town. Mountbellew was described as an '*education town*' due to the presence of a preschool, primary school, secondary schools, a special school and an agricultural college. A positive aspect of Mountbellew described by community members was its central location between larger urban areas such as Galway City and Roscommon town. This has made Mountbellew a commuting town which has also helped to increase the number of pupils in the town's schools. Aligned with this was the view that Mountbellew was a safe and compact town with a great sense of community and a good mix between young and old. Community members also spoke of the range of active community groups in the town. This includes the Mountbellew-Moylough GAA club that won the Galway Senior Football Championship in 2021, a Vintage Club, a community hall association, an Arts and Crafts group and active retirement. Another positive within the town is the presence of a bus service which connects Mountbellew to Galway at an affordable rate. This was considered particularly beneficial for students and people who require access to Hospitals in Galway.

When asked what they liked about Mountbellew, groups spoke of the connectedness to nature and heritage. To the forefront of this was the Demense and Carrownagappul Bog. Community members spoke of how people across Ireland visit Mountbellew to walk the forest. It was also noted that during COVID-19, local people began to use the local amenities more. The area was also described as having a large collection of bats. One of the benefits of the local environment is that it brings a lot of tourists to the area to learn about the biodiversity present. As one person participating in the community employment scheme described, people outside the area '*probably appreciate it more than we do*'.

While community members spoke of what is in the town, they also described amenities that have gone to waste or become overgrown. These include a privately owned artificial lake alongside the mill which used to provide electricity to the town in the past. One person noted that if the right company managed it, it could provide free electricity to the town. Similarly, there was an old forge museum with equipment used by communities in rural Ireland. However, when the museum's curator retired some years ago, the museum ceased to function.

3.2.2 Internet connectivity

In terms of the challenges facing Mountbellew, one of the most common issues raised by community members was the poor internet connection and phone signal within the town. One person described how they have to stand outside a pub in the middle of the town to get a phone or internet connection. The lack of coverage was described as having a 'huge impact' on businesses as well as the ability of people to relocate back to Mountbellew. Alongside the impacts of poor internet connection, community members also spoke about employment and the development of the town's expansion. Because of the town's relative closeness to Galway City, some people commute from Mountbellew to work there. One person described how commuting for one and a half hours daily is bad for the environment and family life. The lack of industry in the town was noted by some community members who described the need for 'more employment' and 'local jobs'. A suggested idea was developing an industry that focuses on recycling and sustainability.



3.2.3 Accommodation

In terms of what was lacking, various groups described the impact that a lack of a hotel and accommodation has on the town. While there had been three B&Bs in the town in the past, these have all closed. Similarly, while there had been plans for a hotel near the Mountbellew golf club, these plans came to a halt following the financial crash in 2008. The types of accommodation suggested by community members ranged from glamping sites which could be located in or around Mountbellew Forest as well as a site for a hotel and swimming pool. One reason for the focus placed on accommodation was the emphasis placed on the new opportunities that increased accommodation could bring to Mountbellew. This was highlighted by one person who suggested that:

'If there was a hotel, the town would be booming.'

New opportunities discussed by community members included the potential for ATU in Mountbellew to run a summer school focusing on sustainability, a cycleway connecting Mountbellew to the nearby village of Moylough and the centre of the town to Carrownagappul Bog. One of the main benefits of developing accommodation in Mountbellew is that it would provide a new source of employment to the town, as people who visit the amenities in the area would have somewhere to stay. One person also described how promoting Mountbellew as a tourism site would be based on 'sensible tourism, not fast tourism' as they could learn about sustainability. Community members also suggested that developing an accommodation site

could provide a space for community activities. Examples of this mentioned by community members included building upon courses provided by Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board in areas such as IT, horticulture and care assistance, as well as events from outside the town that could be hosted in Mountbellew. One of the perceived challenges of developing accommodation in Mountbellew is the lack of available land where it could be located.



Alongside the need for accommodation for tourism, community members also spoke of the need for affordable housing within Mountbellew. This included the need for adequate accommodation for older people and developing Mountbellew as a campus town due to the large student population the agricultural college brings. Alongside the accommodation issue, a further challenge described by people involved in community groups was receiving funding for projects. One person described how when they were working on a heritage project, there was '*paperwork day after day*' which needed to be completed. This led to the suggestion of creating a position on the Community Employment scheme that would focus on providing administrative support to community groups. A further problem facing community groups is the need to match the funding provided to benefit from a grant. This leads to the need for fundraising on the part of community groups which one community member described as a reason why people get turned off from participating in community groups. The Mountbellew Smart Villages CLG initiative was described as a positive for the town as it provides an umbrella connecting different community groups and sharing information.

Other amenities identified as lacking in Mountbellew included a gym and a community allotment. While there is a gym in the agricultural college, this was described as not being used since the COVID-19 pandemic. There are initiatives looking to establish a community allotment, but the timescale is not determined. Other suggestions included a community arts centre where people could learn new crafts and more space for young people to play sports. Beyond amenities, improving information communication was also identified as something that could improve Mountbellew.

3.2.4 Environmental impacts

Community members identified several challenges facing the community related to climate action. One example of this was the call for '*affordable climate solutions*'. In the area of energy, one community member described how there had been a dependence on turf for energy in the area. They noted that there has been '*no conversation on helping the area to shift*' away from using turf. A suggestion some community members raised was evaluating the mill's lake and its waterways as potential use for generating electricity. Aligned with the town's tourism potential, there was the view that the lake was being underutilised as it had not been maintained for many years. Other suggestions made by community members which focused on energy included introducing electric vehicle charging points into the centre of the town. Alongside issues relating to energy, the sewerage capacity of the town was discussed as an issue that was restraining the development potential of the town. The lack of an adequate sewerage system was described as causing pollution to the Castlegar River, which flows into the Suck River, a tributary of the River Shannon. Other suggestions for climate action at the local level identified by community members included developing a water collection system as well as a recycling centre.

3.2.5 Accessibility and transport connections

Community members identified several areas where the town could be enhanced regarding accessibility. The unevenness of sections of the footpaths and the height of footpaths in certain parts of the town were described as being negative for people who use mobility and support devices such as wheelchairs. Another issue was that people may need to travel a long distance to be able to get on and off footpaths. Areas with poor lighting were also described as negative for people who have a visual disability. These issues led to a feeling that parts of the town are '*not inclusive for everyone*'. The poor conditions of roads around the town were also described as a negative feature of the town. As noted by one person, this wasn't fair for businesses in the town or for people's cars. Aligned with this were people's safety concerns due to cars driving too fast in the town. Older people, people walking into town and cyclists were identified as people who could be particularly vulnerable to dangerous driving. While flashing lights had been installed on the edge of town, this was described as having made a difference for a small amount of time.

Another issue with car use in the town was the lack of parking in the square. A factor influencing this was the number of people who get the bus to Galway and park their cars in the square. One good thing about Mountbellew, described by a community member, is that there is '*no paid parking*'. In terms of public transport, while community members described that the town was well-serviced in going to Galway, one means of enhancing public service would be to provide a connection to Dublin. Alongside increasing the presence of cycle lanes in



the town, community members also spoke of the lack of taxis present. While there had been taxi services in the past, one community member described how there is now only one active. Issues with insurance were identified as one of the factors impacting the lack of taxi services operating.

3.3 From community needs to community solutions

Building upon what was learned during the Mapping and Listening phases, the TASC team worked with several stakeholders to flesh out solutions for climate action that address community needs and priorities. Understandably, not all needs identified by residents could be addressed through community-led climate action, so it was necessary to hone in on several pertinent issues. It must be stressed that this is not an exact science, and others, looking at the same needs and priorities, may land on different climate solutions. However, it is hoped that the process, as much as the proposed solutions, provokes thought about how the investment in climate action can address, rather than perpetuate, existing development needs.

The engagement process with local communities shone a light on several issues that interlink with climate action. This included the potential for Mountbellew to develop as a tourist location due to the presence of biodiversity within the area. A number of groups addressed the absence of accommodation to support sustainable tourism. Furthermore, the move away from turf as a source of energy, a topic relevant to many communities across rural Ireland, was identified as an issue relevant to Mountbellew.

By adopting an intentionally inclusive approach and foregrounding groups whose voices are not often heard, the People's Transition for Mountbellew has sought to enable the creation of solutions grounded in expanding the capabilities of community members. In this way, the project hopes to be a catalyst for community-led local development in a way that works for Mountbellew. Fundamentally, climate action based on rights, equity and dignity is most likely to proactively build social approval.

4. Phase III: Solutions Phase

4. Phase III: Solutions Phase

Throughout the engagement process, there were two ideas which were referenced by several groups. The first was the need for accommodation in the town, while the second focused on using Mountbellew Lake and its waterways to produce energy again. Based on these ideas, the TASC team worked with relevant experts to advance the idea of a community-owned hotel and a small-scale hydroelectric generation to accelerate climate action, address local needs and priorities, and build community wealth. These solutions should not be considered the only possible collective climate initiatives that could be undertaken in Mountbellew, they were just two initiatives the team felt would be feasible and implementable.

4.1 Solution 1: Community-owned hotel

4.1.1. Policy context: Tourism and Just Transition in Ireland

As part of the European Union's Green Deal, a Just Transition Fund (JTF) has been established to support regions most affected by policy measures that will be introduced to achieve climate neutrality by no later than 2050 (Government of Ireland, 2022a). The focus of the Just Transition Fund is to support the diversification and modernisation of the local economy in the face of job losses in unsustainable sectors in these regions. Due to the reduction in peat production, the Midlands is the focus of Ireland's Just Transition Fund. Ireland's Just Transition Fund territory consists of Counties Offaly, Laois, Longford, Westmeath, and Roscommon, alongside Municipal Districts in Galway, Kildare and Tipperary. As Mountbellew falls within the Ballinasloe Municipal District, it is eligible for funding from the Just Transition Fund. Ireland will receive €84.5 million under the EU JTF for investment. This will be matched by exchequer resources, resulting in a total fund of €169 million for initiatives





focusing on achieving a just transition in the region. Regarding opportunities from the JTF, a particular focus has been placed on tourism. This includes sustainable “slow” tourism and strategic trail development. Within the €169 million of funding available, €68 million has been allocated to Fáilte Ireland as part of the Regenerative Tourism Scheme (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.b). As part of this, €3 million has been allocated to developments focusing on Alternative Low-Carbon Accommodation such as glamping, redeveloping existing buildings and log cabins (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.a).

4.1.2. Community-Based Tourism

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation defines tourism as ‘the activities of a person travelling outside his or her usual environment for less than a specified period of time whose main purpose of travel is other than for exercise of an activity remunerated from the place visited’ (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2019). Tourism is a sector of international economic importance, representing around 10% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and accounting for around 300 million jobs (approximately one in every eleven jobs in the world) (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2019; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2021). The significance of tourism does, however, mean that it can adversely impact habitats, the environment, and local economies (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2021). This results in the need for changes in the sector to become fairer and more sustainable (Strydom & Mangope, 2019). One possible means of achieving this is through the idea of community-based tourism (CBT).

Community-based tourism is a form of tourism that is community-managed, comprising locally owned businesses to provide economic, social and cultural benefits to the community while also supporting the idea of conservation (Dodds *et al.*, 2018; Strydom & Mangope, 2019). In contrast to mass tourism or conventional tourism, which focuses on sun, sea, and sand, CBT emphasises nature, heritage, and cultural experiences (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2021). This provides new opportunities for tourism development in rural, coastal and island communities (Lee & Jan, 2019). As opposed to being a profit-maximising model, CBT focuses on impacts on the community and environmental resources (Strydom & Mangope, 2019). As described by Dodds *et al.* (2018), a

central aim of CBT is to improve livelihoods and create community development opportunities whereby assets are owned and managed by the community, who receive a significant portion of the benefits. Studies also describe the role of local participation in tourism planning processes (Caceres-Feria *et al.*, 2021; Fan *et al.*, 2023). Community participation allows for greater involvement in decision-making while supporting community entrepreneurship in developing new ideas, products and activities (Sarabia-Molina *et al.*, 2022).

Giampiccoli & Mtapuri (2021) present a list of principles which are central to CBT. These include but are not limited to education, empowerment, equity, entrepreneurship, experience and enjoyment. Community-based tourism also aligns with ecotourism, whereby the main focus is appreciating the natural environment (Dłużewska & Giampiccoli, 2021). The study by Raftopoulos (2020) does, however, describe the need to be cautious about ecotourism as it could threaten the well-being of wildlife and habitats if managed incorrectly. Examples of CBT initiatives include community-owned hotels, day trips and tour packages (Dodds *et al.*, 2018; Fiori & Foroni, 2019). In terms of how such developments are structured, Giampiccoli & Mtapuri (2021) describe a range of models. These include a community-owned approach and individually owned developments that are organised under a communal umbrella organisation.

4.1.3. Benefits of CBT

The first benefit of community-based tourism is the direct economic opportunities that can be developed (Lee & Jan, 2019). These include creating new forms of employment, such as in community-based accommodation and tour guides, and the potential of new income streams for local suppliers, such as farmers (Dodds *et al.*, 2018). The creation of new sources of revenue within the community can be used to support the creation of new amenities in the community. Dodds *et al.* (2018 p.1548) describe how CBT 'minimises leakages, maximises linkages, empowers locals, and instils a sense of ownership'. In this context, leakage refers to the revenue lost to the community due to the absence of suitable accommodation. As tourists currently do not have somewhere to stay in Mountbellew, visitors stay in accommodation outside of the town. By having a community-owned accommodation in place, there is the potential for further economic activity within the town's shops, cafes and restaurants. With relevance to what was discussed by community members, CBT could enhance services in Mountbellew. This includes improving the quality of roads and phone and internet connectivity (Lee & Jan, 2019). Beyond the potential for financial gains within the community, CBT can help promote collective action and community well-being while supporting capacity building among community members (Caceres-Feria *et al.*, 2021). This is relevant to creating new forms of employment in the town, such as hospitality and tourism management, alongside wider skills such as marketing, communication, finance, and governance (Dodds *et al.*, 2018). Raftopoulos (2020) describes how creating a link between conversation



and tourism can help to increase awareness of biodiversity, environmental projects and the need to protect natural resources, such as those found in the Carrownagappul Bog Special Area of Conservation.

4.1.4. Challenges of CBT

The study by Dodds *et al.* (2018) describes various challenges to securing community-based tourism development. These include financial viability, marketing, product development, land ownership/management, and capacity building. There is also the possibility of negatively impacting the local environment if tourism is not managed appropriately. These include the potential to create pressures on infrastructure, energy consumption, increase the price of goods, services and housing alongside potentially disturbing biodiversity (Dłużewska & Giampiccoli, 2021). This could destroy important ecosystems. Dodds *et al.* (2018) describes how the financial viability of community-based tourism is essential to ensuring success. Put simply, they describe how there must be enough customers to make the development financially viable. One potential means of overcoming this issue is working with organisations outside of the community that can assist in providing access to markets alongside skills training. Focusing on Mountbellew, these organisations could collaborate with Fáilte Ireland or the Department of Heritage & Tourism, Humanities, Applied Languages & Communications at the Atlantic Technological University. Referencing research into CBT initiatives in South America, CBT initiatives focusing on accommodation had an average occupancy rate of 5% (Dodds *et al.* 2018). Aligned with this is the fact that funders will not provide support for initiatives that do not have financial plans or a clear route to market. There is also the potential for seasonal lows and wider economic conditions, such as recessions, to impact CBT. Regarding the seasonal nature of tourism, Fiori and Foroni (2019) recommend that community-owned hotels undertake marketing initiatives to address the possibility of reduced occupancy levels at certain times of the year.

While support from outside organisations, such as government bodies or civil society groups, can be important in assisting development, community members cannot rely on these groups alone as they cannot manage and run their own enterprises (Dodds *et al.*, 2018). While there is the potential to create new jobs in a community, these jobs may be deemed low-skilled and low-paying (Lee & Jan, 2019). For this reason, initiatives must benefit communities equitably (Strydom & Mangope, 2019). Similarly, ensuring community members can work together towards a common goal is critical to securing successful development (Dodds *et al.*, 2018). Another issue is that communities are not uniform, and all community members must benefit from these initiatives. For this reason, inclusive decision-making processes must be placed centrally within new developments. Furthermore, it is important that there is not an overdependence on tourism for local development.

Due to the investment that is needed in facilities, such as accommodation, there is the possibility that it will take a long time for the local community to profit from the development (Strydom & Mangope, 2019). Related to the development of new facilities is the presence of amenities and accessibility. Given that many CBT initiatives are located in places of high biodiversity value, there could be the issue that these locations are remote, which may be difficult for people to access. Alongside the road conditions referenced by community members, there is also the need to consider the environmental impact of going to places lacking public transport options. For this reason, support is needed from local and national decision-makers in terms of putting adequate

infrastructure (bus connections and cycle lanes) in place that could ensure sustainable transport to and from community-based tourism initiatives.

4.1.5. Community-owned accommodation overseas

As mentioned in section 4.1.2., a common example of a CBT initiative is community-owned accommodation. In Australia and Scotland, there are several examples of community-owned accommodation. One example of this is the Renmark Hotel in South Australia. Since 1897, this has been a co-operatively owned hotel (Stories.coop, 2012). A common theme across community-owned hotels in Australia is the coming together of community members in rural parts of the country. In the village of Apsley in the state of Victoria, 12 farming families came together to buy a hotel. The hotel now represents a social hub where clubs and organisations in the local area use the pub as their gathering place (Wright, 2020). As described in the report by Wright (2020), the community's ownership of the hotel has 'brought a soul back to the area'. In Scotland, there have been several case studies in recent years of communities that have sought to buy pubs and hotels to support community development. One such example of this is the Black Bull Hotel and Pub (Stuart, 2019). In terms of how community-owned hotels can be structured, the Renmark hotel is run by an elected board whose members are required to be local residents (Stories.coop, 2012).

Regarding the benefits of a community-owned hotel, the first is employment and revenue generated. The hotel can provide a space for community groups to meet for free while also acting as a potential source of sponsorship for local groups and activities (Stories.coop, 2012). In Scotland, as the Black Bull pub is managed as a community benefit society, any profits from the business must be reinvested towards its social objectives (Stuart, 2019). In North Arran, on the Western Isles of Scotland, the local community benefit society received almost £500,000 to purchase a local hotel which will operate as a community inn to combat rural isolation and provide a year-round meeting space (Gilmour & Walker, 2022). Similarly, the Black Bull pub also seeks to address social isolation and the lack of activities & facilities for young people in a rural location (Community Shares Scotland, 2023). Aligned with this is the benefit that a community space can have for people working in high-pressure jobs, such as agriculture (Treloar & Hollingworth, 2018). Another benefit of community-owned hotels is their ability to provide a market for good quality, locally-sourced food and drink and an alternative venue for entertainment, music and social events (Community Fund, 2019). In terms of support for developing community-owned accommodation, a number of the examples in Scotland benefitted from funding from nationwide initiatives such as the Scottish Land Fund and Community Shares Scotland (Gilmour & Walker, 2022).

4.1.6. Community perspective: Sliabh Beagh

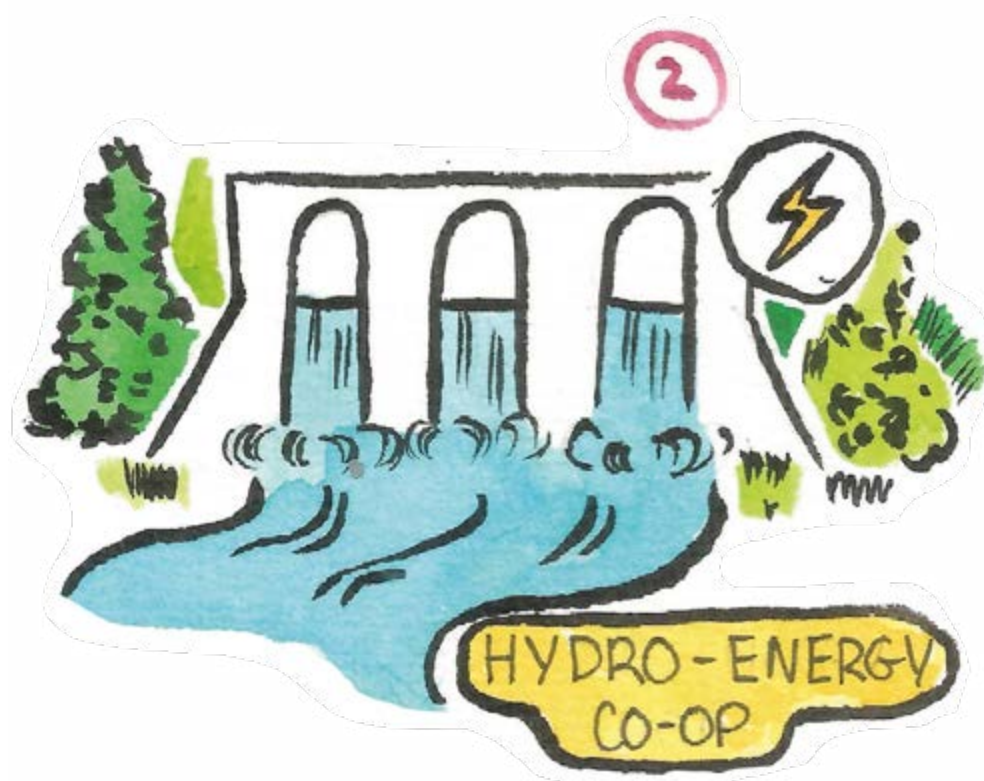
The Sliabh Beagh Hotel in County Monaghan is Ireland's only community-run hotel (Grisewood, 2021). The hotel is named after a 380-metre mountain located on the borders of Monaghan, Fermanagh and Tyrone. The area has been designated a special area of conservation and is listed under the European Habitats directive. There are some similarities between this area and Mountbellew. Alongside the presence of a special area of conversation, the Sliabh Beagh area also consists of an expansive bog (Ó Conghaile, 2021). The hotel has 14 rooms, a bar, an events hall and a restaurant. The hotel was opened in 2000 with funding from several sources, including the International Fund for Ireland, the INTERREG programme, and the Peace and Reconciliation

Fund (Grisewood, 2021). The original intention of the community group was to establish a bar and restaurant and self-catering accommodation. However, following advice from Fáilte Ireland, the community went about developing a hotel (Grisewood, 2021).

The hotel is run by members of the community and consists of a voluntary board of directors (Grisewood, 2021). Benefits of the hotel include providing a venue for meetings for local groups such as a bowling club, dancing for senior citizens, a women's group and a Foróige group (Grisewood, 2021). The venue also caters to social events and provides subsidised Sunday meals for older people and vulnerable members of the community (Ó Conghaile, 2021). In terms of the future development of the hotel, there is the aim of developing accommodation packages suited to the community and its wilderness (Ó Conghaile, 2021). The successful development of the hotel has resulted in further amenities being added to the local area. This includes three Astro-turf pitches on land beside the hotel, funded through revenue raised from the hotel alongside support from the LEADER programme (Grisewood, 2021). The hotel also received council support in areas such as putting in street lighting, footpaths and a sewerage system.



Solution 2: Hydroelectric energy co-operative



4.2.1. What is hydroelectric energy

As identified in the mapping phase and referenced by community members in the engagement phase, there is a history within Mountbellew of using water to provide energy to the local community. Hydropower is the generation of energy from falling water. Flowing water drives a turbine which produces a mechanical energy which is converted in electric energy (Galway County Council, 2021). Hydropower is described as being the largest source of renewable electricity in the world (Tabi & Wüstenhagen, 2017). Examples of largescale hydropower developments in Ireland include the Ardnacrusa Dam in County Clare and Poulaphouca Dam on the Kildare/ Wicklow border (Galway County Council, 2021). While these largescale dams were developed to provide energy to nearby cities, there is also the potential for hydropower to be developed at a smaller level. Hydropower can be used within community energy projects whereby there is a greater level of local ownership and local control in the production of energy (Rygg *et al.*, 2021). As described by Galway County Council (2021), small-scale hydroelectric schemes have been used to support the energy needs of individuals and communities. This description reflects the use of turbines in the Castlegar river to produce energy in Mountbellew in the past. A small-scale hydro project is described as one which can generate up to 10 megawatts and tend to be operated by private developers and small companies (Caslin, 2020). They can be used to power homes, workshops or villages with excess electricity being sold to the national grid. Across the EU 91% of hydropower installations are below 10 megawatts and they generate 13% of all energy coming from hydropower (European Commission, 2018). One of the main benefits of using hydropower is that it can help to reduce the impacts of climate change by reducing reliance on fossil fuels while

also improving energy security by increasing the amount of energy that is produced at the local level (Armstrong & Bulkeley, 2014; Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, 2020).

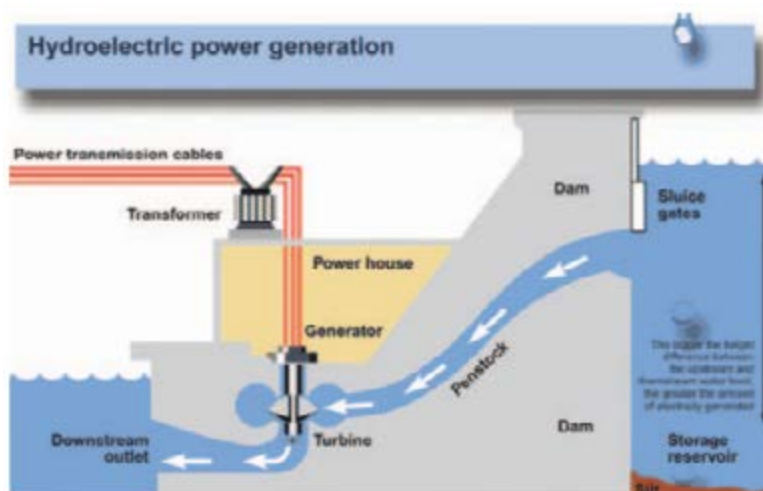


Figure 1: Hydroelectric power generation (Caslin, 2020).

4.2.2. Policy context

In 2018, Ireland was ranked 12th in the EU for producing renewable energy (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, 2020). A common feature among the top performing countries was that they have large hydropower resources. Hydropower accounted for 2.5% of the energy mix in the Republic of Ireland in 2018 (Eirgrid, 2019). In Northern Ireland, the figure was even lower at 0.2% (EirGrid, 2019). Focusing on renewable energy alone, hydro produced 7%. This contrasts with wind energy which produced 85% of renewable energy in Ireland in 2018 (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, 2020). Galway County Council (2021 p.v) also highlights the critical role which the county plays in the production of renewable energy, particularly from wind. Galway generates 'approximately 11% of national wind energy capacity despite having 8% of Ireland's land area'. Reducing emissions coming from energy is an important step to meeting climate goals. Despite this, energy related emissions increased by 5.4% in 2021 (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, 2022). In terms of policy measures which seek to increase renewable energy generation, the Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) scheme supports community energy installations from 0.5 to 5 megawatts (Government of Ireland, 2022b). At the local level, the County Galway Draft Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy describes how hydro-energy development will be supported where appropriate (Galway County Council, 2021). Furthermore, it states that Galway County Council will facilitate and encourage renewable energy generation.

4.2.3. How does hydroelectric energy work?

A report from the De Boer *et al.* (2020) describes how hydropower is appropriate for small and medium enterprises, commercial and industrial buildings, agriculture, community and social enterprise and citizen energy communities. They do however state that hydropower is not suitable for domestic homes and that SMEs, community energy groups and social enterprises are less likely to have direct access to a suitable resource to install a micro-hydro scheme. A key factor

which influences the workings of hydropower is the water levels in place. This means that the amount of rainfall in a particular year could impact how much energy is produced (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, 2022). Hydropower can produce consistent power throughout the entire year (De Boer *et al.*, 2020). Weather events such as ice and snow can however impact the ability of hydropower to produce energy. For this reason, it is important that hydropower systems are installed in environments with known and predictable resource conditions (De Boer *et al.*, 2020). Other factors that can influence the workings of hydropower is the potential for faults or the need for maintenance within hydropower systems. There are a number of ways in which water can generate energy. These include Run-of-the-river Schemes; Impoundment Schemes; Energy Storage Schemes; Restoration Schemes. Both Impoundment and Energy Storage schemes tend to occur at a larger scale while Run-of-the-river and Restoration schemes are more relevant to projects of a scale that is relevant to community-owned energy. Within run-of-the-river, electricity is produced using the existing flow and drop in the elevation of a river (European Commission, 2018). Restoration involves repurposing sites of older water-power projects, such as mills, that are restored with modern technology to generate electrical energy (Galway County Council, 2021).

At a global level developing community-owned energy provides communities with the ability to develop energy that fulfils their electricity needs (Salgado *et al.*, 2020). One of the benefits of a community ownership approach is that it can encourage communities to take on further projects within the community and build a greater sense of attachment to the place because of their active involvement (Salgado *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the creation of new jobs can entice young people to stay within the community. At the local level, Galway County Council (2021) describe how hydropower is most effective on a local community scale as it is more manageable than large scale projects and also does not require damming which could have negative environmental outcomes. Studies discuss how a sense of local ownership can bolster support for hydropower within communities (Tabi & Wüstenhagen, 2017; Linnerud *et al.*, 2019; Rygg *et al.*, 2021). Community ownership can create a sense of being a part of something or allowing people to have an influence and a say in how decisions are made, thereby providing community members with the opportunity to have their voices heard (Berka & Creamer, 2018). Furthermore, community groups are likely to be more trusted and more accessible compared to government or industrial bodies. This can allow for the incorporation of local knowledge within decision and allow for decision-making processes which align with the needs of community members (Berka & Creamer, 2018). Aligned with this is the importance of addressing people's concerns about potential ecological impacts of hydropower.

As described within Stojmirovic and Chu (2011) there are a number of factors which need to be considered in order to identify whether it is feasible to undertake a hydropower project at the community level. These include a site inspection, hydrological modelling, hydropower assessment, social and environmental issues, preliminary design and costings. A first decisive factor is whether the local area is suitable for hydropower. This requires the measure of the hydrological flow or stream that would be used to generate power as well as the mean annual rainfall as this will impact the amount of water that is available within a river. The possibility of landslides caused by hydropower must also be considered (Stojmirovic & Chu, 2011). Related to this is the need to consider potential environmental and social impacts within a feasibility study. Possible changes include impacting stream flow and fish migration, threats to species, changes to community water supply and impacts from construction such as road safety and noise

(Stojmirovic & Chu, 2011). At the European level, legal requirements which must be considered include the Water Framework Directive, the Floods Directive, the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Environmental Assessments Directives (European Commission, 2018). Alongside social and environmental sustainability, a feasibility study must also consider the economic viability of small hydropower developments. An assessment of energy demands is necessary as well as consideration for whether hydropower is more economically viable compared to other forms of renewable energy. A final factor to consider when evaluating the suitability of hydropower is the cost that will be involved in its development. Costs which need to be factored into developments include the cost of hydro-mechanical equipment, cost of grid connection and engineering and project management costs (Stojmirovic & Chu, 2011). To address this issue, Galway County Council (2021) calls for support for the rehabilitation and renewal of existing hydro-power installations.

4.2.4. Benefits

One of the main benefits of hydropower is that it is a renewable source of energy that can help to address dependence on fossil fuels such as oil and gas, as well as potentially supporting the move away from turf in communities such as Mountbellew (Islar, 2012; Manders *et al.*, 2016; Caslin, 2020). It is described as having relatively minimal disruptions to habitats and environmental quality compared to other energy production methods (Slee *et al.*, 2011). Both Slee *et al.* (2011) and Nife & Ahmed (2012) describe how hydropower production can support the redevelopment of former mills that had been used to generate energy in the past. This aligns with the wider message of the potential of hydropower to support rural regeneration. The creation of new sources of income from the production of energy can provide revenue which can be used to address immediate community needs (Berka & Creamer, 2018). Focusing on the case study of Cwmclydach in Wales, the study by Bere *et al.* (2017)

describes how income from hydropower was used to subsidise staff at a local day care and nursery with the explicit intention of helping parents return to work. The generation of revenue from producing local energy also provides communities and community organisations with a greater amount of autonomy as they are less dependent on

grant funding and loans. It also means that communities would not need to raise match funding revenue for grants (Bere *et al.*, 2017). Other community benefits which a community-owned approach to hydropower could provide include more jobs in the local community as well as creating a common goal in order for community members to work together (Koirala *et al.*, 2019). The successful development of community-owned energy can also lead community members to take on further projects which seek to promote sustainability. The report by Salgado *et al.* (2020) describes how community ownership can make community members more conscious of how energy is produced and consumed.



4.2.5. Challenges

In terms of the challenges of developing hydropower in Mountbellew, there are a number of important factors to consider. The first is these is the need to assess potential environmental impacts (Nife & Ahmed, 2012). These include the potential for hydropower to disrupt water quality, flood defences and land drainage for agriculture (Slee *et al.*, 2011; European Commission, 2018). While these factors may be more relevant to larger scale hydropower developments, there is the need to undertake environmental assessments in order for developments to be sustainable (Galway County Council, 2021). Of particular importance is considering the impact that hydropower could have on local biodiversity. Changing groundwater levels and installing turbines could result in fish being injured or killed. (Armstrong & Bulkeley, 2014; Manders *et al.*, 2016; European Commission, 2018). Changing water conditions may also impact the ability of fish to travel up and down rivers, thereby possibly resulting in the fragmentation, isolation and disappearance of freshwater fish populations (European Commission, 2018). The challenge of finding the balance between using water for power and for the protection of biodiversity is also described in the report by the European Commission (2018) in terms of degradation of rivers due to pollution and how this impacts local biodiversity. They call on the need to undertake restoration. This could be potentially relevant to Mountbellew given that community members spoke of how the manmade lake has become derelict.

There are a number of practical issues which can impact the viability of hydropower. The first is the amount of water available. This is particularly the case when there is a spell of warm weather which means there is less water available (Manders *et al.*, 2016). Galway County Council (2021) describes how, in this scenario, there may be a need for a water storage area which holds excess water during wet weather which can be used to ensure a consistent flow of water during warm weather. A further issue is the impacts which location and site conditions will have on the cost of installing hydropower (Caslin, 2020). These factors make it difficult to provide an accurate forecast regarding what the cost of hydropower will be (De Boer *et al.*, 2020). While the price of other forms of renewable energy may be decreasing due to increases in their use, De Boer *et al.* (2020) describe how this is unlikely to occur with hydropower. While the cost of installation may be reduced, the low level of small-scale hydropower in the country means that it is unlikely that there will be an economy of scale large enough for a significant reduction in price. The report by De Boer *et al.* (2020) uses British Hydropower data to provide an estimate of how expensive the installation of a small-scale hydropower system could be in Ireland. It describes how the cost of installing one kilowatt (kW) is £8,000 with a further £8,000 in fixed costs. Data from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on hydropower describes how Mountbellew has a potential installation capacity of 13 kW (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, n.d.). Factoring in currency conversion from sterling to euro, the cost for installing hydropower in Mountbellew would be approximately €126,000.

Acquiring the funding needed to develop hydropower is also noted as a challenge. This is relevant to the need to participate in competitive bidding process for grants which may not cover the entire cost of a development as well as the potential unwillingness of commercial lenders to provide the capital needed for development (Armstrong & Bulkeley, 2014; Rygg *et al.*, 2021). De Boer *et al.* (2020) also notes that costs for micro-hydro developments can be higher compared to solar energy. A further issue is the cost of small-scale developments compared to larger scale

hydropower. The European Commission (2018 p.29) report describes how subsidies needed to support small-scale hydropower results in a higher economic cost compared to the amount of CO₂ emissions that have been avoided. This leads the report to claim that 'further exploitation of the potential of small hydroelectric power plants is not a priority for climate protection'. In support of this is Berka and Creamer (2018) who describes how socio-economic regeneration from hydropower is likely to be limited to medium or large-scale projects. While the development of hydropower can boost economic activity at the local level, the number of direct jobs created will be limited to a small number of jobs focusing on operation and maintenance (Bere *et al.*, 2017). Beyond financial supports, there is also the need for involving groups outside of the community who have experience and knowledge relating to the development of hydropower (Armstrong & Bulkeley, 2014; Berka & Creamer, 2018).

4.2.6. How could hydroelectric energy operate in Mountbellew?

On their website, the SEAI has a hydro map which presents potential hydro sources in the Republic of Ireland. Data from the website comes from a report published in 1985 by the Department of Energy called Small Scale Hydro Electric Potential of Ireland (Department of Energy Ireland, 1985). In terms of evaluating the potential for development, the report presents site ratings based on the payback period which would be required. This is calculated by dividing the total cost of the scheme by the annual amount of energy that would be produced. There are three rankings: Good, Fair and Marginal. The development of hydropower in Mountbellew is described as marginal as the payback period would be between 10 and 20 years. Alongside a potential installed capacity of 13 kW, the use of hydro in Mountbellew could produce 76 milliwatts per year. At a practical level, in 2021, the average house in Ireland consumed 20,424 kilowatts per hour which is equivalent to 24 milliwatts. This means that the installation of hydropower, at the maximum level would provide enough energy to power, on average, 3 homes in Mountbellew year-round. While the development of hydropower would not provide enough energy to completely support Mountbellew in transitioning away from fossil fuels, its development could be tailored towards supporting a reduction in energy prices for public services and businesses in the town.

Although the undertaking of research on solutions has taken place between April and July of 2023, a potential issue for developing hydropower in Mountbellew which occurred in July was the drying of the lake. Mechanical failures with the sluice gate, which controls water flow out of the lake, has resulted in the lowered lake levels (Connacht Tribune, 2023). Not only might this have an impact on the water level and the potential to develop hydropower but also a potentially negative impact on local wildlife in the area. Another factor to consider is that there are currently different owners of the mill and the lake, the sluice gate and the sluice channel which could be used to provide energy. For this reason, a collaborative approach would be required to bring the different resources together to support the development of small-scale hydropower for Mountbellew.

5. Conclusion

5. Conclusion

The model described in *The People's Transition: Community-led Development for Climate Justice* aims to systematically include people and communities in the design, implementation and ownership of climate action such that communities would begin to see the benefits of sustainable development in their lives and thus would support a rapid deep decarbonisation push towards zero emission societies. It also recognises that the public investment in climate action, if directed towards community-led initiatives, could provide an enormous boost for local development across Ireland and could address issues of inequality that exist on the island.

But theory is one thing, and practice is another. Thanks to the backing of AIB, TASC has been able to work with the community of Mountbellew to bring the People's Transition model to life. As a designated Smart Village, Mountbellew has the potential to act as a model for other communities of its size in the move towards a more sustainable future. Among the various groups with whom the TASC team engaged with, a number of important themes emerged. These include issues with internet connectivity, the need for support in the move away from fossil fuels as well as the need for accessible transport. Given the lack of case studies of community-owned accommodation in Ireland, the development of this solution in Mountbellew could provide a template for how community-owned hotels could create new opportunities in rural communities as well as providing a space for community groups to operate. Furthermore, developing small-scale hydropower could create a link between community heritage from the past and the need for a more sustainable future. By investing in community-owned assets, a community wealth fund can be developed that provides finances that can be channelled towards developing community-owned amenities. This can ensure that climate action aimed provides tangible benefits for communities and highlight the benefits of a just transition.

In terms of next steps, while the three phases of the People's Transition model have been completed, this is not the end of TASC's connection with Mountbellew. Upon the publication of this report, TASC will continue to engage with community members to identify actions that can help to support the development of the solutions proposed in this report. Focusing on the solution of a community-owned hotel, as Mountbellew is eligible for funding from the Just Transition Fund, it could benefit for funding from funding for Alternative Low-Carbon Accommodation. TASC will seek to engage with community groups in Mountbellew as well as external organisations to support an application for funding.

We hope that the solutions outlined in this research serve as a blueprint or a catalyst for community members in Mountbellew and for communities across the island of Ireland to engage in community-led climate action and seek to build community wealth through responses to climate change.

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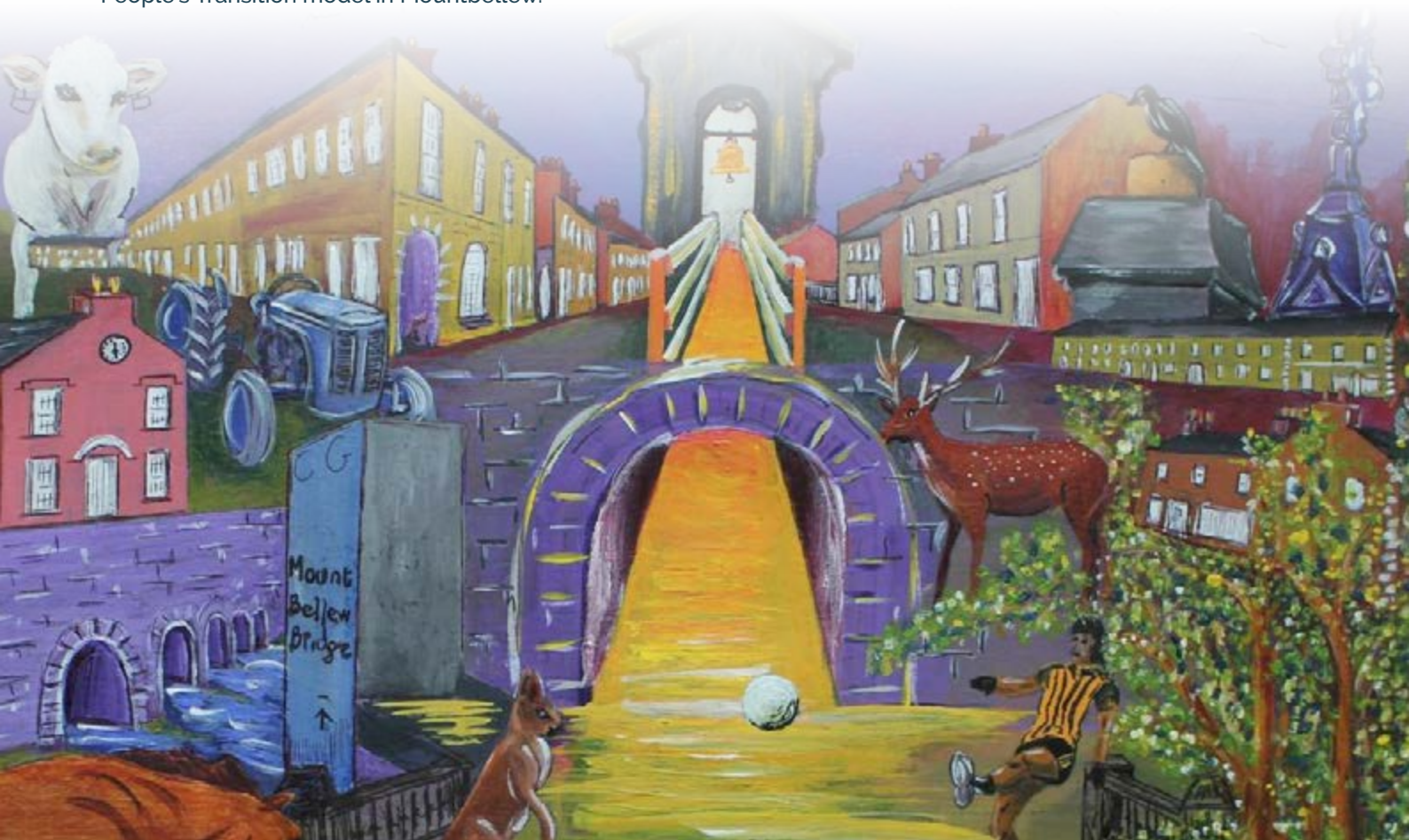
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The People's Transition describes a model for participative decision-making that is intended to enable a community to benefit from the transition to a zero-carbon society. It aims to design climate solutions that give local people and communities ownership of the assets of transition and enhance public support for climate action by tackling inequality and raising standards of living. This report details the application of the People's Transition model in Mountbellew.



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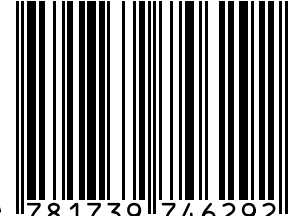
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