Good Practice Guide

Developing stakeholder partnership skills











Thank you to the GeoparkLIFE funding partners















Geological Survey Suirbhéireacht Gheolaíochta Ireland | Éireann



GEOPARKLIFE TOURISM FOR CONSERVATION

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Working productively together



The central premise of GeoparkLIFE is that conservation and tourism must support each other; one depends on the other and neither can flourish without the other.

It is now accepted that the future conservation of our heritage can be ensured only through the active involvement of multiple stakeholders, and in particular, local communities. This is widely reflected in EU and local government policies:

The Faro Convention of 2005 (Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society) is the most comprehensive and diverse international agreement on cultural heritage so far. It emphasises cultural heritage as a resource for sustainable economic development. It recognises the need to involve everyone in society in the ongoing process of defining and managing cultural heritage in a *"framework for considering the role of citizens in the definition, decision-making and management processes related to the cultural environment in which communities operate and evolve. Citizen Participation has become an ethical obligation and a political necessity*".

The co-operation of national and local agencies with local citizens and communities is recognised in the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015), which looks at strengthening public participation by seeking effective methods of partnership, engagement and agreement between public authorities, the general public, voluntary organisations and interest groups to promote sustainable landscape change, protection and planning.

The European Commission's proposals in *Europe 2020* provides an important

GEOPARKLIFE TOURISM FOR CONSERVATION

backdrop to the Irish Government's policy framework for Local and Community Development that encourages **"a** *partnership approach involving public and private partners, such as local authorities, community interests and development bodies,* <u>working productively together</u> to *implement targeted and strategic responses to local challenges".*

The subsequent reforms in local government, enacted in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, emphasised the need for more inclusive policy making processes that allow greater citizen engagement and involvement through Public Participation Networks and Local Community Development Committees. County Development Plans (CDPs) provide the statutory framework and comprehensive planning programme through which specific goals and objectives can be achieved.

A CDP is developed, from an early stage, in consultation with the local communities it represents. Not only should a CDP realise the importance of a County's tourism resource and the measures needed to protect it, it should also recognise the importance of protecting, managing and enhancing its built and natural environment, affording appropriate protection to structures, sites and landscapes of heritage value.

> Our natural and cultural heritage is a core tourism resource.

A CDP also provides the framework for a collaborative approach to conservation through the active participation of local communities facilitated by local, regional and national organisations. It also articulates the role of cultural heritage as a driver for community-based socioeconomic development.

These are the policies and frameworks that encourage stakeholders to work productively together. The reality of working productively together is another challenge entirely, requiring skills and resources to make it happen.



Thinking 'destination'

One of the main challenges to working together is the silo mentality.

This phrase was coined to describe a mindset that occurs in organisations, which is inward looking with little sharing of information and resources with other people or departments within the organisation. If we replace the word 'organisation' with 'destination' we can see how silo thinking is often prevalent within the tourism businesses that provide the visitor product and between the agencies that manage the infrastructure, the transport, the heritage sites and attractions, the facilities and even the signage.

The silo mentality affects most of our tourism and conservation organisations, leading to a lack of joined up thinking, integrated management and planning. The biggest challenge for the GeoparkLIFE programme was to break through this mentality and to develop another way of working productively together. The following are some considerations to take on board when attempting to bring agencies, businesses and communities together and thinking 'destination'.

The European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) was published after the GeoparkLIFE programme was developed and approved. If this had been available earlier, it would have been a major influence on the shaping of the programme. It is a system specifically intended for tourism destinations and is designed to be a locally owned and led process for managing, monitoring and enhancing the sustainability of a destination. It is an excellent toolkit for developing better management decisions, influencing policy and sharing ownership and responsibility for destination management. This tool kit should be the first port of call for destination managers.







Good data helps good decision making and planning. The data needed for destination development is on tourism resources, on heritage sites, on policy, on visitor trends, on social and environmental impacts and on economic value. Collecting this data and bringing the various data sources together in one place helps managers and planners to build a detailed picture of a destination. The Online Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism and the Heritage Sites and Trails Monitoring App will assist in the collection of data and the Heritage Map Viewer is designed to host this data, and other sources, in one location.

Bringing stakeholders together, and keeping them together, to develop a destination approach requires facilitation, a long term commitment, a **destination plan** and a process. The GeoparkLIFE programme provided the facilitation and the plan, and processes developed out of this. Each destination will need to develop its own plan and a process involving the collection of data, collective consultation, decision making and concrete actions. This destination plan should be adopted and supported by the County Development Plan framework.

The stakeholder group should remain motivated through the development and implementation of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) **action plans** that deliver on the objectives of the destination plan. The GeoparkLIFE 'The role of tourism enterprises' and 'Heritage site management' provides guidelines on how businesses and agencies can break through the silo mentality and begin to think and act collectively.

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The 'Case Study' approach

The GeoparkLIFE programme used case studies on conservation that provided on the ground learning on how stakeholders can work together. Everyone learned by doing.

The case studies involved both public and private partnerships and cooperation between agencies, between agencies and locals, between landowners and businesses, between conservation groups, and between second level and third level educational institutions. They contributed to the build up of skills in working together in partnerships and in an understanding of the management of heritage. They brought new perspectives on tourism and conservation policy in action. The learning is grounded in experience.

The case studies covered a wide range of subjects and scenarios relating to conservation. A number of the case studies were brought to the programme by local community groups wishing to progress conservation programmes, others emerged from the specific objectives of the programme. The case studies will stimulate further action beyond GeoparkLIFE for they have provided the foundation and guidelines for the engagement of communities and volunteers in the overall management of the heritage resource within the Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark.

The studies covered the following topics and generated 'how to' checklists:

- the understanding and communication of policy and procedures between agencies and communities
- the management of monuments by community groups
- the training in conservation for community groups
- the management of hedgerows by tourism business
- the support of landowners with heritage assets by tourism businesses
- the adoption of 'Leave no Trace' by businesses and incoming tourism operators
- the increase of biodiversity and natural areas in the Tidy Towns competition criteria
- the development of local heritage assets as a tourism and community resource
- the engagement of schools in promoting conservation within their communities
- the use of the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS) as a framework for communities and agencies to work together.

The case studies and associated checklists can be downloaded at www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/guidesand-toolkits/

The learning is grounded in experience. The experiences of the GeoparkLIFE programme have taught many lessons. These lessons are encapsulated into the following guidelines, which will hopefully be of use to other destinations, agencies and organisations interested in adapting the models produced under GeoparkLIFE.

Guidelines for developing stakeholder partnership skills



DEVELOPING STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIP SKILLS

GUIDELINE 1: Choosing the project

Choose wisely by choosing a project or programme that all stakeholders believe in, have a genuine stake in and that will achieve measurable results.

Here are some questions to ask when deciding on a collaborative approach to a conservation project:

- Does the project have the capacity to show measurable and interesting results? Can it be shown that it generates positive socio-economic benefits for the locality?
- Will the project enhance the tourism offering and the visitor's experience of the area?
- Who are the stakeholders? Are there too many or not enough? Do they include representatives of the agencies and individuals that provide expertise, advice, access, licences, skills, insurances etc?
- Is there genuine buy in by the various stakeholders? Everyone involved need to see the benefits and to appreciate the results. Will a weak link cause problems down the road?

- Who co-ordinates the project? Does the person or group have the necessary skills and time to do so? Is everyone clear about who does what and when?
- Are the skills needed to achieve the project within the group? What skills training are needed? Will external expertise be required?
- Is the project contained enough to be achievable within a reasonable timescale and not be too heavy on resources? If it is to be an ongoing, long term commitment, can it be broken into distinct actions and/or phases?
- Will ongoing management and monitoring requirements emerge from the project? If so, who will take responsibility for this?

If these questions can be answered with clarity and commitment, then the budgeting, funding, management and achievement of the project should be a positive experience of working productively together. Are the skills needed to achieve the project within the group?

DEVELOPING STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIP SKILLS

GUIDELINE 2 Managing expectations

Genuine stakeholder engagement and partnership requires commitment, open minds, focus, flexibility and facilitation. Ultimately it's about building and maintaining trust and developing relationships and skills.

When choosing conservation projects it is important to realise that the levels of commitment, input of resources, response time, understanding of policy and procedures and culture of collaboration can vary hugely between stakeholders. From the outset it is very important to manage expectations of the partnership. The following are some realities to take into consideration:

- Each state agency and local authority has a different culture of stakeholder partnership, engagement and agreement.
- Navigating the world of state and local agency procedures, legislation and national and international policies and directives can be time consuming, daunting and frustrating for those outside of state agencies.
- State agencies and local authorities have a finite level of resources and manpower for engagement in collaborative programmes.
- Recognise that a 'silo mentality' can exist within, and between, state agencies and local authorities. This can lead to a lack of communication, co-ordination and planning.
- Many significant heritage sites are on privately owned land, with the ultimate responsibility of access and care in the hands of the landowner.
- Landowners, businesses and community groups are volunteering their time

and energy. The use of their time should be efficient and focused. Their availability to attend meetings or skills training should be facilitated by agency employees.

- A wealth of skills, information and knowledge on natural and cultural heritage lies in third level educational institutions. Local agencies, schools and community groups can benefit from this knowledge, but its transfer needs to be mediated.
- Facilitation and good communication skills are vital to achieving results.

Prior to embarking on a conservation project with multiple stakeholders it would be important to recognise the motivation, resources and ability to work together of the nascent partnership. In doing so, it will help with managing the expectations of the partnership, with identifying the objectives of the project and with the planning and implementation of the project. From the outset it is very important to manage expectations of the partnership.

GUIDELINE 3 Communication

Clarity between stakeholders and clarity on the management of the project is the most important first step.

Spending time at the beginning developing a clear collective vision and understanding each partner's expectations and motivations will establish solid foundations. The following are recommendations for effective communications:

- Agree and record the vision for the project and use this as the cornerstone for all internal and external communications. This may take a bit of time, but it's a worthwhile exercise.
- Agree how the partnership will operate; identify who is responsible for what, and when that will be delivered. Keep a written record of all decisions and agreements. Track the projects progress in clear unambiguous language. Take lots of photographs of the activities.



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- Clarify, in plain language, any legal and operational procedures required for the project. Ensure that everyone in the partnership is aware of these from the outset. Put effort into overcoming legalistic or establishment language barriers.
- Agree how the stakeholders will communicate with each other by establishing regular meeting schedules, progress reports, adequate response times to emails, etc. Not everyone will be sitting in front of a computer all day every day. It is important to acknowledge that involvement in the project is on a part-time basis for all stakeholders.
- Build in time for face-to face meetings as taking the time to meet each other strengthens communication, keeps the vision in focus, the project on track and motivation high.
- **Does the project need a facilitator?** If so, agree on how much facilitation is needed, prepare the remit and find the right person.
- Agree on how conflicts should be dealt with; identify someone in the partnership, or an external facilitator, who can address conflicts as they arise,

preventing them from escalating and having a lasting negative impact.

- **Develop a feedback loop** between agencies and between agencies and other stakeholders on how procedures can be tailored to be more efficient.
- Use the project to develop and strengthen the linkages between the stakeholders and to build relationships and connections between individuals, businesses, organisations and across levels of organisations. The development of strong and trustworthy relationships will allow the project to be well managed and monitored into the future.
- **Decide** how the project is to be **communicated externally** and who will be responsible for this.
- **Celebrate the successes** and milestones by using social and print media, hosting events such as talks and walks, and if appropriate, applying for awards.
- Always use opportunities to explain how the project adds value to the local community and to the tourism resource of the area.

GUIDELINE 4 Facilitation

The success of a project will depend on the quality of its administration and co-ordination. Such tasks can be a major undertaking for community groups and volunteers.

In most cases, facilitation or co-ordination is necessary for the project to progress. The first port of call is to see if this service is within the scope of the stakeholders to provide as part of their commitment to the project.

Agencies with experience in administration should absorb the administrative and co-ordination tasks. Placing this task on voluntary stakeholders can kill motivation; it is a wiser use of the volunteer contribution to focus on actions and results.

It may be possible to bring in a skilled facilitator to co-ordinate the project. It's a moot point if the facilitator should be outside the stakeholder group with no vested interest in the group or project, or if, for reasons of trust and familiarisation, the facilitator should be well known and connected. The ideal facilitator would be on the ground on a regular basis and be very familiar with the locality. Issues will arise if the co-ordinator is not easily accessible to the group.

The qualities required by such a facilitator are non-exhaustive, but some of the major ones are:

- A good communicator
- Confidence and respect when dealing with all stakeholders
- Knowledge and understanding of agencies and the legislation and policy they operate under
- Ability to communicate complex procedures to all stakeholders
- Acknowledgement of all input and encouraging full participation
- Ability to see the views of all parties involved and communicate those views to others
- Ability to extract positive outcomes, to stay neutral and deal with issues/ conflicts

Another type of facilitation is specialist research, such as a biodiversity report, a specialist building survey or conservation advice. If such skills are not to be found within the stakeholder group, it will be necessary to sub contract them in.

The ideal facilitator would be on the ground on a regular basis and be very familiar with the locality

DEVELOPING STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIP SKILLS

GUIDELINE 5 Training

Every project should identify what knowledge, skills and resources are present and what will be needed to complete the project.

An important outcome of the conservation project is the skills base of community stakeholders in the understanding, management and conservation of their natural and cultural heritage.

The development of skills can be one of the most rewarding aspects of a conservation project for stakeholders. Learning new skills can be a strong motivator and a bonding exercise for individuals and groups. Building training into the programme of activity also helps make the conservation activities more enjoyable and provide an opportunity for learning while achieving results. The very process of the project, its communication and management, is a training exercise in itself

Building understanding and communication between agencies, and between agencies and volunteers is in itself a satisfying and useful outcome. Building skills that can be shared with other volunteer groups and conservation projects in the region is also a very rewarding outcome.

Knowledge and understanding of policy and procedures has been identified by GeoparkLIFE as one of the main challenges for all stakeholders. A core training requirement should be to provide training to <u>all</u> stakeholders in the policy and procedures relevant to the project that will clarify legislative requirements, roles and responsibilities, timelines for licensing, etc.

Training will help stakeholders to use policy and procedures as tools, not to see them as barriers or stumbling blocks on the path to realising the vision of the project.

Training Tips

- Tailor the training to suit the needs of the stakeholders; spend time identifying what is needed and include all of the stakeholders in this exercise.
- Use experienced trainers and the experience of other groups and individuals; the more stakeholders can identify with the training, the more effective its impact.
- Organise the training to suit the schedules of the stakeholders; half day training events are more effective that full day events.
- Hold the training on location if possible, or in a venue close to the project.

- Keep a record of the training event and the participants (sign in sheets and photographs); this may be needed to draw down grant aid and to communicate the project.
- Make it enjoyable and social event, and an opportunity for networking and building the partnership.

The development of skills can be one of the most rewarding aspects of a conservation project for stakeholders.

GUIDELINE 6 Evaluation

It is important to take a step back every so often to evaluate the project and make sure it is still on track.

This is where the initial preparation of the project will come in useful. If the core vision and main objectives of the project are well thought through at the beginning, it will be easy to check if it is still on track.

Some suggestions:

- Evaluate progress at meetings when the stakeholders are well represented. If stakeholders are not willing to voice negative feedback on elements of the programme, provide feedback forms for them to fill out anonymously. Communicating this feedback will require a level of diplomacy and should be presented as an opportunity for improvement and development and not as a fault or failing.
- Keep in mind that the project relies on the good will and positive input of stakeholder's time and energy which is given voluntarily. Too much delay, obstacles to progress and negativity will have a harmful impact on the project. Keep the focus on positive progress and resolution.
- Regular evaluation will help address issues as they arise.
- Encourage stakeholders to be flexible with each other and to accommodate the real life challenges and needs of all of the partners.
- Keep track of expenditure and ensure that it is accountable.

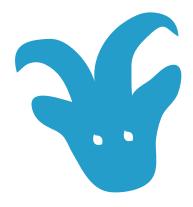




Acknowledgements:

Heartfelt thanks to the agencies, businesses, groups and individuals that gave of their valuable time, experiences and vision.

Case Study 1



The overall GeoparkLIFE programme was an exercise in working productively together. Many of the actions required a lot of investment in resources and a long term commitment by the stakeholders. However, good partnerships can evolve out of smaller and more focused activities, as the following three examples of case studies will illustrate.

Adopt a Hedgerow: Tourism businesses maintaining their local environs

Adopt a Hedgerow is a project developed by the Burren Ecotourism Network. It was set up a part of the conservation activities of the network that serve to protect and conserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Burren.

The activity sees the businesses maintain a stretch of roadside, engage with the local community to collect litter, monitor and report dumping and deal with invasive species. The sections of road chosen by each business were based on their proximity to their premises, or the main routes into their town or village. Collective clean-ups have taken place on a bi-annual basis, at the start and end of the peak tourist season. The spring clean also works in conjunction with the National Spring Clean and network members team up with local schools. Equipment and disposal is provided by Clare County Council. Many businesses now take on the

responsibility of the waste disposal and recycling. Some businesses have opted for the 'little and often' approach. Training to help the group to identify and report on the most common invasive species was provided by the local conservation trust, Burrenbeo Trust. This skills training will be expanded on in the vears ahead. The data feeds into the National Biodiversity Data Centre and assistance in this regard is provided as necessary by Burrenbeo Trust. GeoparkLIFE funded the training and provided initial liaison with the Environment section of Clare County Council.

The core partnership is between the business network and the Council's Environment section. For this partnership to work productively it is important that both parties communicate well with one another.

Please visit www.burrengeopark.ie/ geopark-life/guides-and-toolkits to download a range of 'how to' checklists that have been produced by the GeoparkLIFE Case Studies.



Top tips for working productively together:

For networks

- appoint a coordinator within the network for this programme who will co-ordinate the activity, including who will take responsibility for where and when the activities will take place.
- Record the areas of hedgerow covered and the amount of waste collected.
 This can be really motivating and give a strong sense of achievement.

For county councils:

- identify the contact person within the council and be clear about what services the Environment section can give the scheme such as:
- training on invasive species and how to report them and on risk assessments (health & safety considerations when working on public roads and with potentially toxic waste)
- litter pickers, bags, gloves, high vis clothing
- permits for disposal (when, how and where)
- a central collection point pick up service (this depends on the availability of staff)

Acknowledge the partnership and the voluntary effort involved. Have a section on the Council website that profiles the programme and gives details on how other businesses can get involved.



Case Study 2

Ballyvaughan Tidy Towns: Improving biodiversity through the Tidy Towns Competition

The national Tidy Towns initiative was launched in 1958 to encourage communities to improve their local environment and make their area a better place to live, work and visit. Since 2006. there has been a special category that focuses on wildlife, which encourages initiatives to conserve and enhance the local environment including the improvement of biodiversity. 50 out of 450 marks are allocated to how a town manages 'Wildlife. Habitats and Natural Amenities'. As part of a Tidy Town committee's five-year plan, this category should include a Habitat Survey/Wildlife Survey.

This case study showed how effective the partnership between a national organisation and a local community can be in promoting a conservation ethos within a community. Ballyvaughan Tidy Towns Committee approached the GeoparkLIFE in 2014 to assist with this survey. GeoparkLIFE considered this an opportunity to look at how a national programme, based on competition, can not only have a positive impact on increasing biodiversity in urbanised areas, but can provide an effective template for communities to engage in conservation.

The Wildlife Survey was produced and included a Management Plan with suggestions and recommendations that comply with the requirements of the Tidy Towns Handbook and that worked towards improving Ballyvaughan's score for Wildlife and Natural Amenities.

The committee acted upon the plan, with the help of the local school. The project provided an opportunity for the local school children to create wildlife areas, plant seeds and build bug hotels. The Tidy Towns results for Ballyvaughan have seen an increase for the score on 'Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities' and the village gained a national Tidy Town award in 2016. Moreover, the town of Ballyvaughan has become increasingly proactive in extra conservation activities, such as a Greener Homes Survey and more The skill is to use the Tidy Towns competition to motivate community groups to value biodiversity, and to partner with relevant organisation to produce the survey and action plan that helps communities to enhance biodiversity in practical ways.

businesses getting involved in resource management programmes. There has been an increasing awareness generally of the importance of protecting native habitats that host native pollinators.

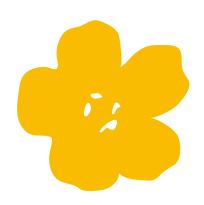
This case study showed how effective the partnership between a national organisation (Tidy Towns) and a local community (Ballyvaughan Tidy Towns committee) can be in promoting a conservation ethos within a community.

The trigger for this was the wildlife survey and a practical management plan. This can be produced with the help of local experts in the community, the County Council's Heritage Office and the destination management organisation. Very little external facilitation was needed once the survey and management plan was produced.



Case Study 3

Meitheal: Tourism businesses 'give back' to local landowners



Over 90% of the Burren is in private ownership and the landowners show great generosity in allowing access to visitors to walking trails and archaeological monuments on their land.

This level of access is a key tourism resource and to show their gratitude, the Burren Ecotourism Network (BEN) of tourism businesses have developed a 'give back' programme called '*Meitheal*'. In the old Irish tradition of neighbours gathering together to help each other, the network of businesses work with the Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers (BCV) and local landowners to repair damage caused to walls and habitats, and to help maintain and improve habitats and access to walking routes. '*Meitheal*' is an annual event at the end of the tourist season. The core partnerships here are between the landowners, the businesses and conservation expertise on habitat restoration and wall building. Conservation expertise can come from a range of organisations; such as a local conservation group, An Taisce, the Rural Recreation office, the County Council Conservation, Environment or Heritage offices. Training in conservation skills is an important part of the experience of '*Meitheal*'. This event also has a strong social aspect to it; it is an opportunity to meet, to share news and experiences, to network, to plan, to enjoy working productively together.

Both BEN and BCV have insurance cover; it's important for landowners that any work carried out on their land by volunteers is indemnified.

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The important skills here are in the quality of the organisation and communication of the event, the positive participation of the landowner, the effectiveness of the onsite training and the sense of achievement and well being for work well done.



Top tips

For networks:

- Appoint a coordinator; make sure they have the time and commitment to carry out all the organisation and communication of the event.
- Use local farming organisations, local conservation groups, rural recreation officers or County Council's heritage/ conservation officers to identify landowners willing to engage and locations that would need maintenance or repair.
- Always consider health and safety and prepare a risk assessment for the activity. Make sure there is adequate insurance cover, either through the businesses or by way of partnership with a local conservation group.
- Team up with the County Council conservation or heritage officer, or local conservation group to discuss and agree the activity and the training needed to do this activity well.
- Charge the participating businesses a reasonable fee to cover training costs.
- Pick a date outside the main tourism season, advertise it well in advance and hope the weather will co-operate! Have a plan B date just in case.

- Keep a record; take lots of before and after photos. Post the event on social media and encourage more participation for the next '*Meitheal*'.
- Celebrate! Have a social occasion after the work. Find a place nearby that can host some refreshments and give everyone a chance to chat and feel good about the day's work.

For landowners:

- Choose a location that is often used by visitors and is readily accessible.
- Be available for the event, it's a good opportunity to get to know local businesses and what they do.
- Give positive feedback to the group; it is the best motivation!

For the conservation specialists:

- Tailor the training as an on-site, learn by doing activity.
- Ensure that the businesses can see progress and have a sense of achievement at the end of the day.
- Make sure there is enough equipment and materials available by clearly communicating to the co-ordinator and landowner on who should provide what.



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