

Community Empowerment Policy

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Contents

1	Summary and Key Points	3
2	Introduction and Definitions	5
2.1	Introduction	5
2.2	Definitions	5
3	Principles of Community Empowerment	8
3.1	An empowered Community is:	8
3.2	The Values of an Empowered Community are:	9
4	Two Proposed Empowering Structures for Communities	13
4.1	Community Councils	13
4.2	A Trusted Intermediary Body	17
5	Empowering Processes for Communities	20
5.1	Creating a Vision for the Wellbeing of the Community for this and Future Generations	20
5.2	Permaculture	22
5.3	Cooperatives	27
5.4	Social Enterprises	28
5.5	Community action added value	28
5.6	Empowerment through the Arts	29
5.7	Participatory Budgeting	30
5.8	Policy Crowdsourcing	31
6	Policy Implementation Costs	33
6.1	Community Councils	33
6.2	Trusted Intermediary Body	34

1 Summary and Key Points

The Climate Crisis and Biodiversity Collapse are already having impacts on communities globally. If we are to succeed in reducing GHGs, and in halting biodiversity loss, absolutely everybody has to do everything they possibly can. This policy seeks to provide the structures and mechanisms to enable and support communities to take action to make change happen on these two enormous crises.

Two key principles of the Green Party, as laid down in the party constitution, underpin this policy:

- All political, social and economic decisions should be taken at the lowest effective level.
- Decisions should as far as possible be on the basis of consensus and respect for the rights of minorities.

Over the past 20 years, a major imbalance has developed in Government-supported community development such that the more local and community centred approach has been effectively obliterated in favour of the more centralised and prescriptive approach.¹

This proposed policy provides the means to empower communities through the establishment of Community Councils in every part of Ireland, together with a supporting Trusted Intermediary Body. This would swing the balance strongly back in favour of a community centred approach.

This policy proposes the introduction of legislation that will require local authorities to enable the establishment of Community Councils across their county or city, based on existing geographical legislative boundaries. The intention is that every person in the state is a member of an empowered Community Council.

¹ Green Party Community Development Policy 2018.

In this context, the policy provides definitions of what is meant here by a community; what are the principles of community empowerment; the qualities and values of an empowered community; and the desired outcomes of empowering a community.

The proposed Community Council structures are intended to incorporate all the above as the basis for creating empowered communities across Ireland, at a scale where it is possible for every individual to be empowered and encouraged to participate in their Community Council. The legislation as outlined below must address issues of power, legitimacy, diversity and support. It should also require the early creation of a shared vision for the wellbeing of the community for this and future generations.

Across the country members of communities are attempting to respond to the critical issues of climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as the social and economic issues pertinent to their area. However, they find themselves running into a whole array of barriers around lack of information regarding available supports, organisational capacity, governance, accessing sufficient funding and at the right time, insurance and so on. Help may be available for some of this but is from diverse sources and often not easily gotten.

For the Community Councils, and for any social enterprises that they might initiate, to be a success, they need to be able to access the help they need from one trusted and proactive source. The establishment of a national Trusted Intermediary Body (TIB) is the second key part of this policy of community empowerment. The purpose of this TIB will be to proactively encourage and resource communities in taking local-level renewable energy and sustainable development action, and as appropriate, helping them to remove barriers that prevent them achieving their objectives.

The establishment of social enterprises by communities is seen as a key part of creating long-term funding and employment in these communities. Getting to the point of having a viable social enterprise is a long journey and the TIB is seen here as a catalyst for the community going down this road.

It is proposed that Community Councils can further empower their communities, socially, economically and environmentally, through engagement with: Permaculture; Participatory Budgeting; Social Enterprise; Policy Crowdsourcing; and the Creative Arts. These and other empowerment resources are described in the penultimate section of the Policy.

2 Introduction and Definitions

2.1 Introduction

Two key principles of the Green Party, as laid down in the party constitution are as follows:

- All political, social and economic decisions should be taken at the lowest effective level.
- Decisions should as far as possible be on the basis of consensus and respect for the rights of minorities.

This proposed policy attempts to put in place structures and mechanisms that will help to deliver on both.

The Climate Crisis and Biodiversity Collapse are two very urgent problems, and if we don't get on top of them soon every community will suffer. If we are to succeed in reducing GHGs, and preventing further biodiversity loss, absolutely everybody has to do everything they possibly can. Communities have enormous capacity, but if people are not working together then they are not a community. This policy seeks to provide the structures and mechanisms to enable and support communities to take action to make change happen.

2.2 Definitions

Community

A Community can be defined as the people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality.

For the purpose of this policy group, we are looking to empower communities as defined by their location, but we envisage the consequent empowerment of communities of interest, minority communities etc. that exist within this community.

'Intentional communities', made up of members of the geographical community but with a focus on specific goals, should be supported by their wider community. Intentional communities can and have acted as catalysts to foster wider community engagement.

It is intended that this policy provides a vehicle for empowerment of both of these types of communities. The optimal situation is that people living in an area are encouraged to develop and strive to meet community scale shared goals.

Community empowerment

Community empowerment refers to the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives.²

Community empowerment should be seen both as a process which focuses on how we work in empowering ways; and as an outcome – for communities; a change which is enduring, which is intended to improve the quality of life for communities and their environments.

Despite the terminology, ‘community empowerment’ is not just about communities, it is also about organisational structures and processes that are ‘empowering’.

Empowerment is a psychological feeling that individuals have when they develop additional skills and knowledge such that they believe they can accomplish chosen goals; it is also political or organisational strength that enables people to collectively carry out their will.³

Empowerment occurs when community members realise that they have the capacity to solve the problems they face, control the means to do so, and have final, authoritative say in decision making.

Empowerment also occurs when community members work together to exploit opportunities that arise which improve quality of life and protect/enhance the environment.

Research has shown that when communities feel empowered, there is:

- greater participation in local democracy
- increased confidence and skills among local people
- more people volunteering in their communities

² https://azslide.com/download/what-is-community-empowerment_5a33c63a1723dd908e8c379e.html

³ [Community Organizing and Development, 3rd Edition, Rubin & Rubin, 2001. P77](#)

- greater satisfaction with quality of life in the neighbourhood

Better community engagement and participation leads to the delivery of better, more responsive services and better outcomes for communities.

3 Principles of Community Empowerment

Desired outcomes of Community Empowerment:

- sustainable, resilient and inclusive community networks⁴.
- increased confidence and skills among community members.
- more people volunteering and engaging with others in their communities.
- greater satisfaction with quality of life in the neighbourhood.
- greater participation in local democracy.

3.1 An empowered Community is:

Confident

A community working in a way which increases people's skills, knowledge and confidence – and instils a belief that they can make a difference.

Inclusive

A community working in a way which recognises that discrimination exists, promotes equality of opportunity and good relations between groups and challenges inequality and exclusion and encourages expression of diversity.

Organised

A community working in a way which brings people together around common issues and concerns in organisations and groups that are open, democratic and accountable.

⁴ The First Status Report on Community Led Action on Sustainability and Climate Action. <https://www.ecolise.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Status-Report-on-Community-led-Action-on-Sustainability-Climate-Change-in-Europe-2019.pdf>
on Community-led Action
on Sustainability
and Climate Change in Europe

Collaborative

A community working in a way which builds positive relationships across groups, identifies common messages, develops and maintains links to national bodies and promotes partnership working

Adaptable

A community that recognises that it needs to think of the future and the many changes for better and worse that will come as a result of human and naturally induced impacts and nurtures its ability to respond to them.

Influential

A community working in a way which encourages and equips communities to take part and influence decisions, services and activities that affect them or in which they have an interest, and which contribute to community wellbeing.

3.2 The Values of an Empowered Community are:**Social Justice**

- Enables people to make decisions about their own lives; help people to work and cooperate together.
- Promoting principles that challenge injustice and promote diversity⁵.
- All the voices in the community are listened to and heard, in order to ensure that no-one is left behind.

Equality

- Ensure there is equality and respect within the group towards one another.
- Having 'empowered' individuals does not necessarily mean that we have empowered communities.

⁵ Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024. Appendix 2. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d8fa3a-sustainable-inclusive-and-empowered-communities-a-five-year-strategy/>

- In an empowered community all individuals are supported in achieving their full potential.⁶

Participation⁷

- Decisions should be made at the lowest possible level (or most appropriate level)
- Providing options for communities to choose from
- True engagement – not:
 - superficial, tick-box interactions
 - Experience of consultations as tick box exercises causing cynicism and lack of trust
 - No account of what happens to inputs to consultations
- *Leave no-one behind* – 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- Many methods of engagement are needed to achieve this
- Aarhus Convention and its implementing legislation as a model
- Aiming for the top rungs of Arnstein’s Ladder⁸
- Focus on “Public Good”
- Inclusion at the beginning of decision-making process, whilst all options are open, and at all stages following.
- Community Wealth Building⁹

⁶<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html#:~:text=Maslow's%20hierarchy%20of%20needs%20is,hierarchical%20levels%20within%20a%20pyramid.&text=From%20the%20bottom%20of%20the,esteem%2C%20and%20self%2Dactualization.>

⁷ How to Design and Build Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships http://www.mspguide.org/sites/default/files/case/msp_guide-2016-digital.pdf

⁸ Arnstein’s Ladder of Participatory Decision-making <https://citizenshandbook.org/arnsteinsladder.html>

⁹ What is Preston Model? <https://www.preston.gov.uk/article/1339/What-is-Preston-Model-?fbclid=IwAR0brvQagIWBhfk7IgyL3DPJofh28dhuraiXiBauCk4SiedeqcKV8mQ0hSA>

- Self-sustaining and sustainable incorporating the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁰
- Effective and transparent communications that create trust in others within the community.

Collaboration

- Community councils – should encourage and support small groups while overseeing the overall decision-making.
- Communities must create ways of working that build trust, across all decision-making and actions, but regarding finances in particular.
- Community empowerment should be happening in a collective, rather than only personal, setting

Learning

- Developing skills among community members¹¹
- Develop and empower groups to arrange themselves as they need to in order to achieve their goals. This may involve training people to develop specific skills e.g. facilitation skills, minute taking in meetings.
- Respect for indigenous knowledge and wisdom alongside specialist subject knowledge
- Communities may need facilitation in developing the necessary skills to start down the road to empowerment
- Enable people to make decisions for themselves whilst involving outside specialist support as needed and available.
- Dealing with conflicts of persons and also policies (example used of local communities supporting LNG vs national and international opposition).

¹⁰ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>

¹¹ Empowering Communities – A Toolkit For Promoting Learning Circles <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/empowering-communities-toolkit-promoting-learning-circles>

- Communities should be empowered to oversee community/participative budgeting.¹²

¹² <https://assets.gov.ie/26890/ff380490589a4f9ab9cd9bb3f53b5493.pdf> Participatory Budgeting in South Dublin “300k-Have Your Say”

4 Two Proposed Empowering Structures for Communities

4.1 Community Councils

Whilst community organisations have been given a voice at local government level through the establishment of the Public Participation Networks in 2014, there is no supported statutory body that enables communities of individuals to come together to empower themselves and their local community. The establishment of Community Councils is intended to fill this gap in provisions for local democracy.

Each local authority area now has a PPN established as an independent structure financed jointly by central and local government. Their primary role is to enable local community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental groups to be collectively represented on a range of local authority bodies. These include influencing in a very real way the spending of the very substantial LEADER and SICAP funding programmes, as well as policy development across the full remit of the local authorities.

In rural areas there is also a PPN at the Municipal District level, bringing the PPN structure to a lower population level. However, this would for example in Co Roscommon still represent a population of 21,500. In Dublin City there is only one PPN serving the population of 544,000.

So, whilst serving a very important role, in particular in bringing together the groups to develop their holistic “Vision for the wellbeing of their community for this and future generations”, the PPNs can hardly be described as bringing all political, social and economic decisions to the lowest effective level.

The key differences between the PPNs and the proposed Community Councils are as follows:

- The population levels in community councils are much closer to the ideal set in the Green Party constitution, being perhaps as small as 5% of those relating to even the Municipal District PPNs, e.g., c.1,500 people in rural areas and c.7,000 in a dense geographic area such as Dublin.

- The membership is made up of individual people not CSOs.
- The Community Councils would have significant statutory rights.

The Potential of Community Councils

Community Councils:

- Can lead to increased social cohesion and informed and empowered engagement
- with the political and planning processes
- Can act as a bridge between individual people and public authorities;
- In rural areas can be geographically based on natural boundaries such as river
- catchments or sub-catchments, making the connection between nature and community.
- Consist of people who volunteer, unpaid, to help address issues on behalf of their local community;
- Enable people to engage in political decision-making and current issues, without having party politics as a basis for contribution;
- Are a way for people with little experience of politics to get involved;
- Work at a local level, open to everyone to attend meetings and take part in public deliberation;
- Have been found internationally to be sometimes more diverse than 'higher-tier' democratic institutions;
- Have, in some places, been leading the way using new 'empowering' legislation and democratic innovations¹³

¹³ [https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/#:~:text=The%20Community%20Empowerment%20\(Scotland\)%20Act%202015%20gave%20community%20bodies%20new,public%20sector%20authorities%20new%20duties.&text=Local%20authorities%20have%20statutory%20oversight,particular%20circumstances%20of%20their%20area.](https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/#:~:text=The%20Community%20Empowerment%20(Scotland)%20Act%202015%20gave%20community%20bodies%20new,public%20sector%20authorities%20new%20duties.&text=Local%20authorities%20have%20statutory%20oversight,particular%20circumstances%20of%20their%20area.)

- Can create more integrated and empowered communities¹⁴

Legislating for Community Councils

The Green Party proposes to introduce legislation that will enable the establishment of Community Councils across the country. The legislation must address issues of Power, Legitimacy, Diversity and Support.

- Under this legislation, local authorities will be required to introduce Community Council schemes for their area, outlining various arrangements including elections, meetings, boundaries, and finance. Local authorities will have statutory oversight of Community Councils and, in consultation with their Community Councils, the freedom to tailor schemes to the particular circumstances of their area.
- These Community Councils will be voluntary bodies which exist within a statutory framework and which will have been granted statutory rights of consultation.
- The general purpose of a Community Council will be to ascertain, co-ordinate and express the wider views of the entire community within its agreed boundaries.
- They can complement the role of the local authority but are not part of local government.
- Recognised Community Councils, unlike other community organisations, will be included in the consultation process for all planning applications. They have the right to receive copies of applications and will be recognised as competent bodies to make representations regarding applications.
- It will be the responsibility of a Community Council to satisfy the relevant Local Authority that they have taken positive steps to ascertain the views of the wider community within their area, before making representations on any matter, on behalf of the community.
- All Community Council meetings will be open to the public, and residents will be encouraged to attend their local Community Council.

¹⁴ Strengthening Community Councils- Scottish Community Development Centre.
<https://www.scdc.org.uk/news/article/2019/4/24/new-report-strengthening-community-councils>

- Compensation schemes should be put in place to support community councillors with accessibility, travel, caring responsibilities, and even loss of earnings. Otherwise, the system is not genuinely open to young people, single parents, disabled people, carers, low paid workers and the self-employed, etc.
- Community Councils will be based on existing geographical/legislative boundaries, incorporating population sizes of between 1000 in rural areas and 8,000 in urban areas.
- The creation of Community Councils will be overseen by the Local Authority, who will be responsible for drawing up maps of the Community Council Areas and for enabling the establishment of the Councils
- Community Councils will be able to make requests to their local authorities and a range of public bodies for any land or buildings they feel they could make better use of. They can request ownership, lease or other rights as they wish.
- Within their first 2 years, Community Councils will be required to develop a “Vision for the Wellbeing of their Community for this and Future Generations”.¹⁵ See Section 5.2 below.
- Community Councils are focused on extending and improving community participation in improving outcomes for communities. The proposed legislation shall enable Community Councils to request to participate in decisions and processes which are aimed at improving outcomes for communities. The relevant authorities will be required to enable this unless legally proscribed from doing so.
- Community Councils should be enabled to participate in participatory budgeting at local regional and national levels.
- All Local Authorities will be required to establish and maintain a register of property which is held by the authority as part of the common good’ and engage with Community Councils in setting up these registers. In this regard, all Local Authorities must:

¹⁵ <https://www.communitywellbeing.iw.ie/>

- publish details of any proposals to dispose of or change the use of common good assets, and open these proposals to community councils for consultation.
- have regard to any guidance issued by the Minister in terms of:
 - the process of creating common good registers.
 - the process of disposing and changing the use of common good property.
 - the management and use of common good property.
- Community Councils will also be eligible to join the relevant local PPN, to enable participation in community planning as well as in the broader roles of the Local Authority.

4.2 A Trusted Intermediary Body

The Green Party proposes to introduce legislation that will enable the establishment of a Trusted Intermediary Body (TIB). The purpose of this TIB will be to encourage and resource communities in taking local-level renewable energy and sustainable development action, and as appropriate, helping them to remove barriers that prevent them achieving their objectives.

Purpose

The Trusted Intermediary Body (TIB) should focus on building the required capacity supports including:^{16 17}

- Mentoring in community development as an essential complement to technical and financial mentoring to improve cultural capacity, organisational capacity, institutional capacity, individual capacity and technical/practical capacity;

¹⁶ Responding to the Energy Transition in Ireland: The Experience and Capacity of Communities (2020) http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/research/climate/Research_Report_337.pdf

¹⁷ Sustainable Voluntary Communities: Support for Sustainable Environmental, Social and Economic Development (2020) <https://www.epa.ie/researchandeducation/research/researchpublications/researchreports/research334.html>

- Reliable, multi-annual sources of core funding for community energy and sustainability groups;
- Funding and governance of community energy and sustainability projects which allows for exploration, experimentation and cross-fertilisation.
- Practical support should be provided for local organisations which already have community support and trust. People with direct community development training and experience should be integrated into the TIB. Approaches should be developed that respond to the varied capacities of different communities.

Legislation

- To this end, this legislation should deliver the following outcomes:
- A national intermediary entity should be established to provide both an impetus and ongoing support for community involvement in taking sustainability-related action.
- A dedicated national online information resource for community-scale energy and sustainability-related action should be provided. This to include a freely available and up-to-date online database of successful actions and how community goals were achieved.
- Detailed and accessible information should be provided on funding allocated to community-scale energy and sustainability-related action.
- The Trusted Intermediary Body (TIB) should be capable of evaluating, and where appropriate, funding proposed more ambitious actions by communities which support greater sustainability – offering legal and financial support.
- The opportunities presented through community-scale energy and sustainability-related projects should be promoted by the intermediary.
- GHG emission reductions, and other intended outcomes, related to community led actions should be measured; this would allow community groups to clearly see the contribution of their actions to meeting national targets.

- Evaluating community energy and sustainability projects should include evaluating societal capacity development, alongside evaluating CO2 and other savings.
- The post of community sustainability action coordinator should be established in each of the four Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs).
- It should be ensured that these community coordinators undertake additional tasks, including encouraging communities to take energy and sustainability-related action.
- The roles of Community Councils and the Trusted Intermediary Body are seen as complementing one another.
- The Trusted Intermediary Body operates at national level, providing information and advice to everybody who seeks it, wherever they live in Ireland.
- It also funds projects, but such funding will be for larger energy-related projects, as proposed by Community Councils individually or in consortia, and more experienced groups of people with a track record in completing sustainability-related projects.
- Funding from Community Councils' own resources will support smaller scale projects proposed by groups within their territory, encouraging and supporting both start-ups and more ambitious action by individuals and groups of volunteers, and related to a wider range of actions to drive greater sustainability.
- Community Councils will also function to support groups of people in the development of project proposals to be submitted to the Trusted Intermediary Body for funding.
- Community Councils are encouraged to join with other Community Councils, and projects that span the territory of more than one Council.

5 Empowering Processes for Communities

One size will not fit all, and communities engaged in empowerment have selected a range of methods for selecting goals, governance and policies.

This section briefly describes a range of tools that Community Councils may find useful to further the empowerment of their community. The first of these, developing a vision for the wellbeing of the community for this and future generations (5.1) is considered as an essential part of the process of establishing the community council. Permaculture (5.2) can both act as a philosophical basis for a vision, and act as a guide for taking actions to develop a sustainable community. Cooperatives (5.3) allow communities to engage in economic activities which are designed to involve and benefit community members. Social enterprises (5.4) are a form of economic activity designed to be non-profit making, often based on waste management and artistic activity, and often employing people who are facing challenges in joining the mainstream work force. Community added value (5.5) acknowledges the common finding that some community members are initially encouraged to become active through the possibility of bringing additional jobs and income into their community. Communicating the advantages of community activism is crucial and has been found to be very effective when it achieved through the arts (5.6). It has been found that communities tend to flourish when members feel that they have a say in policy: in relation to community budget options, this may be achieved through Participatory budgeting (5.7). In relation to policy selection, Policy crowdsourcing (5.8) has been found to be effective in Ireland and many other places in identifying strongly supported community policy options.

5.1 Creating a Vision for the Wellbeing of the Community for this and Future Generations

An empowering process¹⁸ was co-created by representatives of the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) of Longford, Wicklow, Cork City and Roscommon. It is being used across all PPNs to establish common ground for their engagement with each other and

¹⁸ <https://www.communitywellbeing.iw.ie/>

with their respective local authorities. The six domains of wellbeing are represented in the diagram below. Visions are created both at municipal district and county/city levels.

The commitment in the 2020 Programme for Government to develop 'a set of wellbeing indices to create a well-rounded, holistic view of how our society is faring'¹⁹ creates an opportunity for the community sector. The 'Visions for Community Wellbeing' created by PPNs country-wide (intended to be completed by end of 2020) will provide a wealth of diverse, grassroots perspectives on the attributes of a thriving and fair society. Key points from the six thematic areas in the Vision statements could be collated and fed into the development process for the National Wellbeing indicators, thus ensuring that these indicators reflect the values of community empowerment.



¹⁹ https://www.greenparty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-06-15-ProgrammeforGovernment_Corrected-Final-Version.pdf p. 12

5.2 Permaculture

Permaculture is a set of design principles centred on whole systems thinking, simulating, or directly utilizing the patterns and resilient features observed in natural ecosystems. It uses these principles in a growing number of fields from regenerative agriculture, rewilding, and community resilience.

The term permaculture was coined in 1978 by Bill Mollison, senior lecturer in Environmental Psychology at University of Tasmania, and David Holmgren, then a graduate student at the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education's Department of Environmental Design. It originally meant "permanent agriculture", but was expanded to stand also for "permanent culture"²⁰.

Permaculture is founded on three ethics which are central to twelve guiding principles.^{21 22}

The three ethics are:

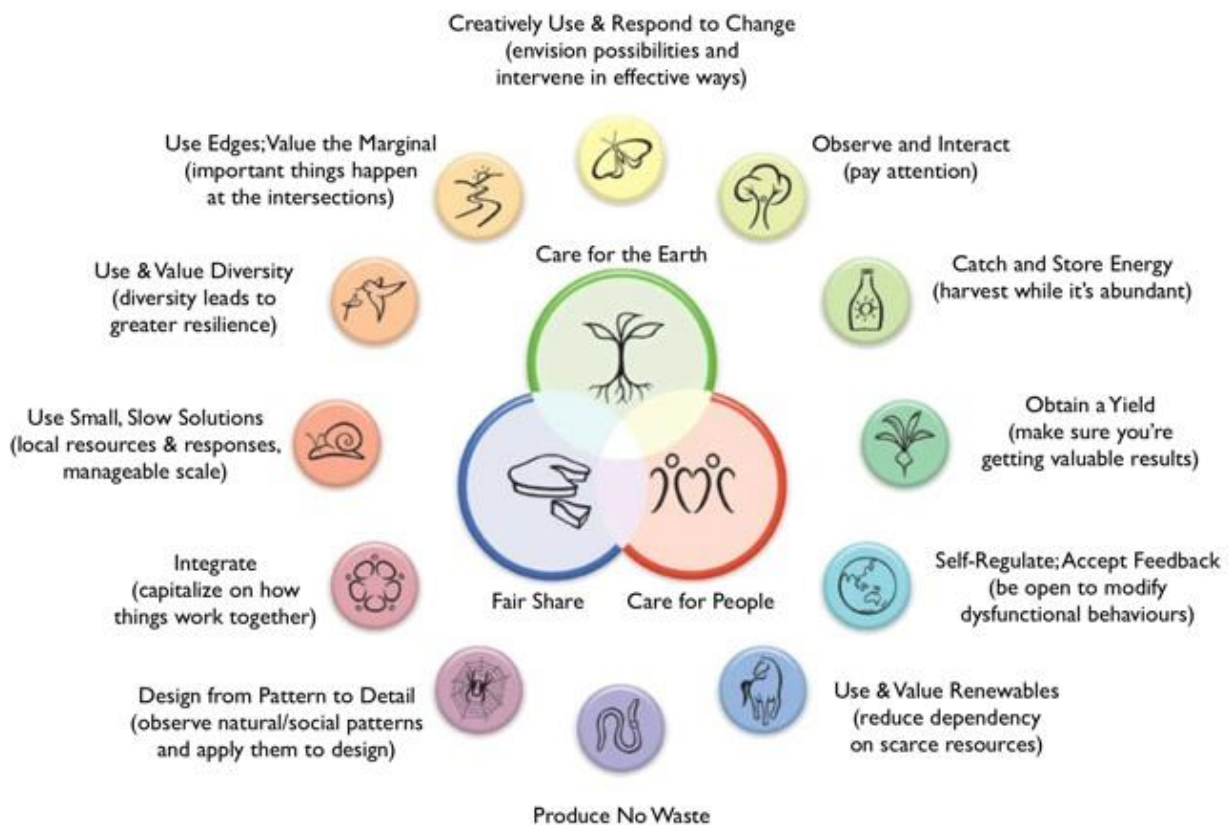
- Earth Care – rebuild nature's capital
- People Care – nurture self, kin and community
- Fair Share – set limits to consumption of resources that ensure the needs of future generations are provided for and redistribute current surplus resources into people care and earth care.

²⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permaculture>

²¹ <https://permacultureprinciples.com>

²² https://files.holmgren.com.au/downloads/Essence_of_Pc_EN.pdf?_ga=2.125310474.1694867933.1601286116-1586676775.1600198471

Twelve Guiding Principles of Permaculture



The Twelve Principles as applied to Communities²³

Observe and interact: Before you begin a new community project, get to know people, consult, and build relationships. Stand back and curb the impulse to jump in or start an action or project straight away. Ask questions and try to understand where things stand currently. Perhaps map what exists first.

Catch and store energy: Find out what energises the community, what kind of interactions, events and projects motivate them and then see how these can be incorporated into how things are organised, e.g., could having a group meal or do a physical activity while talking about community/group matters help? When there is momentum, work with it but also recognise that nothing can keep going all the time at full

²³ Inspiration by/adapted from Erin Meyer blog <https://medium.com/land-and-ladle/the-12-design-principles-of-permaculture-as-rules-of-living-e9fc0176dd16>

capacity without wearing out. People and communities are the same. Deliberately, schedule time to relax and recuperate.

Obtain a yield: Everyone in the community needs to get something out of contributing otherwise they will lose interest and stop engaging. Identify what the community in general will get out of the project but also identify what people can or would individually get out of being involved. Yields that are tangible, recognised and acknowledged, and are self-identified by the community are helpful in building the momentum of a project. Small yields that are relevant can build the foundations for wider engagement.

Apply self-regulation and accept feedback: Self-regulation or self-control allows us to be accountable and it empowers us. Feedback helps us improve which will help us improve things. Things are constantly changing and things don't always turn out as you plan or think they will, communities and community members need to be open to adapting, keeping an open mind and listening. Design feedback systems into any project - how will we gauge how well it is working? Design projects to operate as much as possible around the model of a 'self-organising system', giving individuals the power to make small and large changes as soon as is necessary rather than having to go through a hierarchical and often lengthy decision-making process.

Use and value renewable resources and services: In the context of community, encourage new members to join and participate in community work and actions. Relying on the same people to do all the work all the time is not sustainable. Maintain support for existing members and keep in touch with those who step back for a while, they may want to re-join/get involved again later.

Produce no waste: Community energy and resources while being renewable are not limitless. If people feel their efforts are wasted, they may get demotivated. Perhaps focus on a few projects and see them through to completion rather than starting lots of projects that fizzle out and don't go anywhere. If you do have projects that don't work out, hold a review and see what learnings you can take from it. Keep an easily accessible record of all the work carried out so it can be referred to if needed. Try not to let efforts feel like they are wasted, the community and people should know and understand what the point of what they are doing is.

Design from patterns to details: Permaculture calls for standing back and observing patterns in nature and in society and then filling in the details. Look at the bigger picture first, what is the vision? However, on the ground this can be challenging as people tend to want to get going on action parts of a project and too many 'visioning' type meetings can lose people – it sometimes helps to go for the 'obtain a yield' first or simultaneously, and 'integrate rather than segregate' the visioning into that.

Integrate rather than segregate and use and value diversity: Rather than having lots of individuals or groups in the community working in parallel, create networks so the groups can integrate, collaborate and work together to achieve mutual goals. Support, encourage and value diversity (e.g., people of different age, sex, ability, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, religion/spiritual beliefs, education/experience etc.) within groups and between groups.

Use small and slow solutions: Sometimes quick fixes only solve a problem or part of a problem in the short-term; they do not fix the overall larger longer-term issue. Permaculture uses small and slow solutions because they are easier to manage than bigger solutions and they allow for the use of local community-based resources leading to more sustainable outcomes. Sometimes fast large-scale solutions are required but these are more likely to be coordinated at a national or international level. Or large-scale actions could occur due to networks of smaller scale community level actions.

Use edges and value the marginal: Permaculture suggests that the interface between things is where the most interesting things take place. These are often the most valuable, diverse, innovative and productive parts of the system. Hedgerows around fields, old stone walls, roadside verges are where we see lots of biodiversity in Ireland. Different community groups coming together to interact and collaborate on projects that perhaps are not their core purpose but where their interests overlap can have great value. Social enterprises could be an example, they occupy the space between charities and businesses.

Creatively use and respond to change: While change can be unsettling it also provides an opportunity for transformation, like the phoenix rising from the ashes. Communities can enhance their resilience and can even regenerate by responding to and using change as a

catalyst to think creatively about the possibilities for their community. The 'attitudinal principle' here is: The problem = the solution.

Permaculture Flower

The permaculture journey begins with the ethics and design principles. This thinking is applied to seven different domains needed to create a sustainable culture. The evolutionary spiral path connects these domains, initially at a personal and local level, and then proceeds to the collective and global level. Some of the specific fields, design systems and solutions that have been associated with the wider view of permaculture are listed below.



THE PERMACULTURE FLOWER

BIOLOGICAL FIELD

LAND & NATURE STEWARDSHIP
 Bio-intensive gardening
 Forest gardening
 Seed saving
 Organic agriculture
 Biodynamics
 Natural farming
 Keyline water harvesting
 Holistic Rangeland Management
 Natural Sequence Farming
 Agroforestry
 Nature-based forestry
 Integrated aquaculture
 Wild harvesting & hunting
 Gleaning

BUILT FIELD

BUILDING
 Passive solar design
 Natural construction materials
 Water harvesting & reuse
 Biotechture
 Disaster resistant construction
 Owner building
 Pattern language

TOOLS & TECHNOLOGY
 Reuse & creative recycling
 Hand tools
 Bicycles and electric bikes
 Wood stoves
 Fuels from organic wastes
 Wood gasification
 Bio-char from forest wastes
 Co-generation
 Micro-hydro & wind
 Energy storage
 Transition engineering

BEHAVIOURAL FIELD

EDUCATION & CULTURE
 Home schooling
 Steiner/Waldorf education
 Reading landscapes
 Participatory arts & music
 Social Ecology
 Action Research
 Transition culture
 Voluntary simplicity

HEALTH & SPIRITUAL WELLBEING
 Home birth & breastfeeding
 Complementary & wholistic medicine
 Yoga, Tai Chi & other body/mind/spirit disciplines
 Spirit of place, indigenous cultural revival
 Dying with dignity

FINANCE & ECONOMICS
 Ethical investment & Fair Trade
 Local and regional currencies
 Carpooling, ride sharing & car share
 Farmers markets & Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
 WWOOFing & similar networks
 Tradable Energy Quotas
 Life Cycle Analysis & EMERGY accounting
 Frugal hedonism

LAND TENURE & COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE
 Cooperatives & body corporates
 Cohousing & eco-villages
 Native Title & traditional rights
 Open space technology & consensus decision making
 Sociocracy

5.3 Cooperatives

A co-operative is an enterprise which is owned and controlled by its user members and operates for the benefit of its user members. Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members (ICOS)²⁴

Cooperatives, in particular co-op creameries, have a long history in rural Ireland providing supports and markets for agricultural produce thus supporting economic development.

Today there are other coops such as the Dublin Food Co-operative (which has a focus on sustainable consumption)²⁵, the Quay Coop, Cork,²⁶ vegetarian restaurant and wholefood shop, Cork City and Co-operative Housing Ireland²⁷ (developing coop housing movement). Other examples include Group Water Schemes, those supporting the fishing community (Donegal), Country Markets Ltd., Marts etc. Many of these are also social enterprises.

²⁴ <http://icos.ie/starting-a-co-op/what-is-a-co-op/>

²⁵ <https://www.dublinfood.coop/>

²⁶ <http://www.quaycoop.com/sullivans-quay/>

²⁷ <https://cooperativehousing.ie/>

5.4 Social Enterprises

Definition: Social Enterprises are businesses whose core objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact. Like other businesses, social enterprises trade in goods or services on an ongoing basis. However, any surpluses they generate are re-invested into achieving a social impact.

The benefits from social enterprise activity can include:

- the provision of training, jobs and employment opportunities both in social enterprises themselves and within the wider economy;
- supporting those most vulnerable and most marginalised in society;
- fostering and sustaining local communities, both urban and rural;
- addressing market failures;
- addressing climate change and sustainability challenges;
- addressing other social and societal problems;
- boosting social capital.

Examples include: Community Reuse Network Ireland, Vantastic, Revamp (Longford), Community Power (involved in renewable energy).

5.5 Community action added value

Community members have differing motivations in taking actions which promote sustainability. For some, the prospect of increasing income or reducing financial outgoings for themselves and community members is their primary motivation, as they consider that creating jobs and increasing money in circulation empowers communities to enhance their quality of life.

Enterprises established in this way, and which contribute to sustainability, include the following:

- generating renewable energy for use locally and to sell any surplus to the national grid,
- growing organic food for local consumption,
- developing local arts and crafts and nature reserves as visitor attractions,
- providing local public transport and car-hire,
- retrofitting buildings to reduce domestic and business energy consumption.

Entrepreneurs may adopt legal structures such as partnership, limited company, cooperative and social enterprise. Over time and with support, this process may lead to the development of eco-villages and towns.

5.6 Empowerment through the Arts

Community Arts are a response to the creative aspirations and development needs of individuals and communities. Community Arts groups facilitate the creative examination of local issues, empowering people to bring about personal and social change²⁸.

Participants might be drawn from geographic communities or from communities of interest. There are a number of models for community arts; in some models an artist engages with groups in the community to create a specific work, whilst other models are more focused on process, with artists working alongside participants to explore emergent themes.

Community Art encompasses a range of art forms, including Theatre of the Oppressed, Forum Theatre, Parades/Circus, Collaborative Music-Making, and Street Art. Whatever form it takes, Community Art aims to build participants' confidence within an inclusive, safe space, based on the belief that participatory culture is a pathway to participatory democracy. Therefore support for Community Arts is an important element of a broader strategy for Community Empowerment.

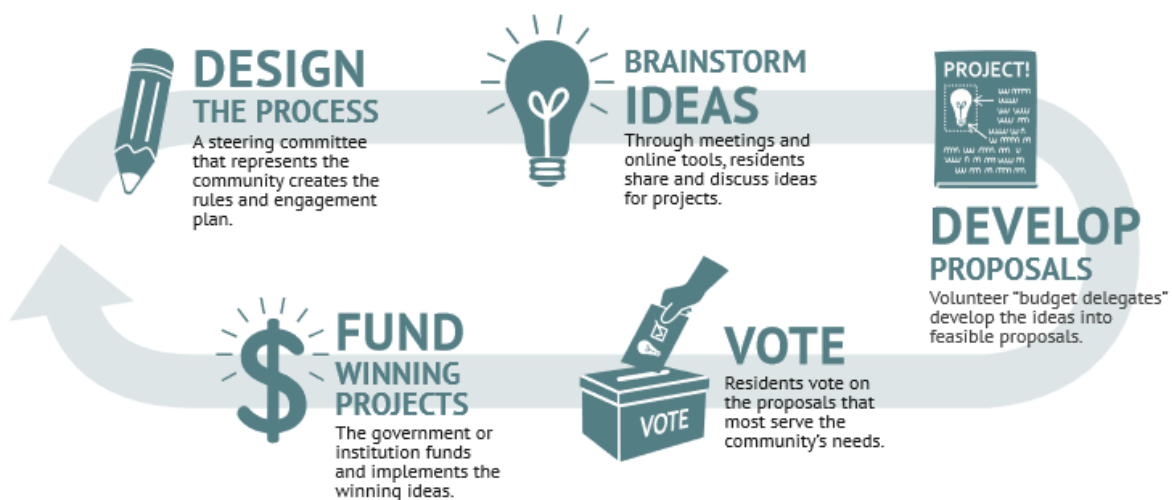
²⁸https://www.academia.edu/37984474/Respublika_Experiments_in_the_Performance_of_Participation_and_Democracy?email_work_card=view-paper

5.7 Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting (PB)²⁹ is a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget. It gives people real power over real money.

PB started in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989, as an anti-poverty measure that helped reduce child mortality by nearly 20%. Since then PB has spread to over 7,000 cities around the world, and has been used to decide budgets from states, counties, cities, housing authorities, schools, and other institutions.

The New York Times calls PB “revolutionary civics in action”— it deepens democracy, builds stronger communities, and creates a more equitable distribution of public resources.



The “€300k – Have Your Say” PB exercise piloted by SDCC in Adamstown, Lucan and Palmerstown is the first PB initiative in the country.³⁰

In Brazil they found that there are a lot of positive results³¹:

- 1) A lot of things that needed to get done, finally got done, including better sanitation, education, roads, etc.

²⁹ <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/what-is-pb/>

³⁰ https://www.ipa.ie/fileUpload/Documents/SDCC_300k_REPORT2017.pdf

³¹ <http://fullerdemocracy.com/participatory-budgeting-what-is-it-and-why-we-need-it>.

- 2) Making decisions in a transparent way cuts down on clientelism, which means less waste. Right now, politicians often approve projects that they believe will bring them votes from small special interest groups or that provide wasteful contracts to third parties, because no one is keeping an eye on the bottom line. This is a lot harder to do when people are making budgetary decisions, because those decisions get scrutinized by a great many eyeballs. There's nowhere to hide.
- 3) Lots of people who were often previously marginalized from politics were able to take part, especially young people, women and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, there is the advantage of just getting what you want more often in a transparent manner. They've been using it in Iceland³² for nearly a decade, as well as in Paris, New York, Portugal (nationwide), cities all over Germany and the UK and in South Dublin. It's cheap, it's easy and you can do it online, you can do it offline, or you can have it both ways.

5.8 Policy Crowdsourcing

Policy Crowdsourcing is an online methodology that enables detailed and public conversations about issues that concern a particular community, region, country or other. In Policy Crowdsourcing, citizens add ideas onto an AI platform, such as "Your Priorities Interface" (YPI)³³, where they provide points for and against a proposal/draft document etc. This informs the debate. The ideas and the argumentation provided by citizens is then up-voted or down-voted by citizens with the most popular ideas and best points for and against visible to everyone.

The YPI interface inspires debate with points for and against placed in different columns. This makes it harder for arguments to go off topic instead encouraging rational debate and positive points, curbing negativity and personal attacks. The trend of the loudest voice becoming dominant is mitigated with minority and majority views having equal weight, helping facilitate consensus.

³² <https://www.demsoc.org/2019/04/11/online-pb-in-reykjavik-making-democracy-easier-and-more-fun/>

³³ <https://yrpri.org/domain/3>

The output of these projects results in the best ideas and solutions of participants, garnering increased civic knowledge of participants and higher public acceptance and satisfaction levels with use of citizens' ideas and contributions.

Two Good Examples of Policy Crowdsourcing:

The Eastbourne EcoAction Network³⁴

Cross-community collaboration to deliver a carbon neutral Eastbourne by 2030, in partnership with Eastbourne Borough Council.

Weymouth Planning Processes³⁵

"WEYMOUTH'S vaunted harbourside development could feature a Premier Inn as its centrepiece" (Dorset Echo). Local People who CARE deeply for Weymouth and Portland think that the Weymouth Peninsula plan is A SOCIAL CRIME. We are giving YOU the chance to say NO! Results will go on the planning portal.

³⁴ <https://yrpri.org/group/2568>

³⁵ <https://yrpri.org/community/842>

6 Policy Implementation Costs

6.1 Community Councils

Community Councils must be given financial support in order to enable them to focus on their function rather than being swallowed up by endless fundraising just to exist. A grant of €10,000 is to be allocated to each community council in year one to cover establishment costs and training. It is estimated that 1,200 Community Councils will be established over the first three years, averaging at 400 per year. Funding to be provided 5/8 by central government 3/8 by local government. This reflects the funding ratio for the Public Participation Networks.

Year	Costs per Community Council	Amount per Community Council (€)	National Total (€)	Local Authority Staff Costs Total (€)	Annual Total Costs (€)
1	Establishment costs and training.	10,000	4,000,000	2,600,000	6,600,000
2	Establishment costs and training, plus annual running costs for established Community Councils	10,000 5,000	4,000,000 2,000,000	2,600,000	8,600,000
3	Establishment costs and training, plus annual running costs for established Community Councils	10,000 5,000	4,000,000 4,000,000	2,600,000	19,600,000
4	Annual running costs for established Community Councils	5,000	6,000,000	1,300,000	7,300,000
5	Annual running costs for established Community Councils	5,000	6,000,000	1,300,000	7,300,000

In addition, it is estimated that each local authority would need to allocate one full time equivalent person for the first three years, and one half time equivalent to manage thereafter. This would amount to approximately €80,000 per annum per local authority in years 1-3 and €40,000 per annum per local authority thereafter. Nationally this would amount to €1.3 million in each of the first three years, and €650,000 thereafter.

6.2 Trusted Intermediary Body

This body should be established in year one of the Community Council establishment programme. Initially it will focus on coordinating and facilitating access to funding streams for work by Community Councils in response to the Climate and Biodiversity crises. This will be broadened to incorporate further aspects of sustainable development over time.

As well as enabling access to existing funding sources this body will also be able to allocate its own funds to support by direct grant and/or loans for capital projects that will also in time create local employment.

Priority will be given to pilots that create innovations at the community level in conjunction with one or more Community Councils.

Responsibility for accessing funding is outlined in section 4.4 above.

Year	Item	Running Cost	Own Grant Allocations	Annual Total
1	Establishment	300,000	0	300,000
2	Operational	400,000	2,000,000	2,400,000
3	Operational	480,000	4,000,000	4,480,000
4	Operational	480,000	6,000,000	6,480,000
5	Operational	480,000	10,000,000	10,480,000