The Work of ICBAN in Leitrim

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Organic Centre, Rossinver—the home of two ICBAN funded Projects.

2005 SEES THE Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) celebrate the 10th anniversary of its work across the counties of the central border region including Leitrim. Over the past 2 years ICBAN have administered just under €5 million of EU INTERREG IIIA funding to projects based in Leitrim and additional monies have funded a number of region wide projects that also impact equally and positively on the county.

The border area has been acknowledged as an impediment to social, economic, environmental and spatial development—the selection of the projects below are intended to give a flavour of cross-border co-operation that ICBAN promotes in order to help mitigate the disadvantages that these borders present by overcoming the peripheral status of the cross border regions and improving the living conditions of the population.

Such projects can be broken down into the following broad categories:

Tourism

Ballinaglera/Boho Tourism Partnership is based on the tourism potential of the two areas, similar profiles of economic and social disadvantage coupled with scenic beauty and an interest in economic development that does not damage the environment. The project aims to explore new market opportunities for environmental tourism in Ballinaglera and Boho; to develop sustainable initiatives in environmental tourism/leisure infrastructure and products in order to increase tourism numbers and create jobs and to develop area-based marketing initiatives.

The Green Box Sustainable Tourism project will develop an ecotourism destination in the border areas of Fermanagh, Leitrim and parts of neighbouring counties (West Cavan, North Sligo, South Donegal and North Roscommon). The main aim of the Project is to promote the establishment of the target area as an ecotourism destination, a conceptual and spatial 'Green Box' containing environmentally sustainable products, accommodation and attractions within a context of clean natural resources. The type of tourism products and activity generated will have a minimal impact on the ecology of the area, be of benefit to the community, and match the needs of environmentally friendly visitors. Overall, the project will encourage economic development through low impact tourism.

Lá Nua aims to establish a Rural Holidays Cottage Company to build 10 ecologically renovated cottages using sustainable construction methods and materials, part serviced by wind, water or solar power as a cross-border tourism amenity. The project falls within the Green Box area and also within the eco tourism of that network.

McNean Tourism Development project aim is to develop the natural area of Lough McNean introducing festival events to attract potential tourism to this undiscovered area on a seasonal and non seasonal basis, to boost tourism in towns and villages that rest on Lough McNean, both North and South, by marketing the high potential area of Lough McNean through a joint venture with the McNean Community Partnership in Belcoo. This has involved employing a full time worker to research the full potential of the area to promote the culture, heritage and tourism sectors for the economic benefit of the local communities around Lough McNean.

Erne Lakelands Tourism develops and promotes tourism and local activity around the Erne. This project will develop and market new and existing tourism activities. It will map, co-ordinate and market current local community festivals and tourism activities. It will take advantage of existing resources and activities which have not been used for tourism marketing purposes, such as community events, and develop attractions and packages around them. It will co-ordinate tourism enterprises and support providers in implementing new/enhanced product developments. It will identify gaps in tourism infrastructure and work with the tourism support agencies and private sector to identify innovative ways of filling these.

Business

The Innovation Enterprise Initiative Project aims to improve the innovation capacity of SME's in Leitrim and Omagh in new product development, technical and process innovations and improvements. It will be achieved through developing innovation hubs and networks to facilitate the cross border flow of information between SME's enterprise development agencies, universities, training providers etc. The

project will target micro enterprises in each region with the two Enterprise Centres operating as one stop shops, sign posting and liaison organisations. Most of the target businesses are likely to be in manufacturing, tradable service and digital media sectors.

Visual Design is a project that aims to work up a cross border craft cluster between Lisburn and Leitrim Council areas. The background to the project was the delivery of a previous project (due for completion March 2004) that upskilled hobby craft workers to self employment status. However, no real cluster development resulted. This project aims to enhance the business capacity of the individual businesses and collectively improve their marketing activities

Agriculture

The South East Leitrim and Tempo Farmers Group Business Development Project aims to consolidate and expand the network and business networking activities of the two groups on a 50:50 cross border basis, involving 70 farm businesses in marketing, business management and input sourcing, the objectives of which are to undertake various networking events and activities aimed at enhancing capacity and business arrangements; Develop bulk purchasing projects through employment of a PT administrator, self sustaining after two years through profit established whilst reducing farm input costs and implement a range of measures aimed at improving stock, breed, management, welfare, health and safety.

Added Value Organic Food Product Development is an initiative undertaken by Atlantic Organics (formerly the Western Organic Strategic Initiative (WOSI)) and is a strategic partnership made up of: North Leitrim Organic Co-op, Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-op and the Organic Centre with facilitation coming from the Western Development Commission. The project sets out to develop a number of new added value organic food products to include test marketing, packaging and determination of all necessary technical and regulatory requirements to enable the project to commence production within 18 months. All raw materials will be locally sourced and organic. A new business entity owned and controlled by organic farmers will be established to run the business. In a separate project a Development Manager has been employed to continue to facilitate and develop the network; oversee the implementation and development of projects identified by WOSI; and provide support to the members to allow the business to develop into a viable commercial concern.

Social Economy

is a social economic project designed to boost the potential development of the Community Partners in the field of ICT training and childcare businesses. To achieve these objectives the MEDS Network have employed a Project Director who would maximise each centre's potential, and work with each centre on a regular basis to: Improve their community business potential in Enniskillen and Dungannon; Develop Manorhamilton and Sligo along the same lines as the New Hope Centre in Enniskillen.

The Rural Men project is aimed at assisting single rural men who are in danger of being socially and economically excluded, increase their essential and personal skills to enhance their chances of employment and the quality of their lives. It has arisen through co-operation and discussion between Fermanagh College and North Leitrim Men's Group where there has been recognition of the problems facing single rural men. It will build upon the work done since 1996 by the North Leitrim Men's Group in providing support to the target group. The North Leitrim group considers that although the work they have done has been of immense benefit to those involved, the lack of a structured training programme has inhibited further progress and

Participants on the Rural Men Programme gain woodworking skills.

re-integration into the community. The project is based in the McNean Basin that covers parts of the counties of Fermanagh and Leitrim, two of the most rural and deprived counties in Ireland.

Leitrim shares with the other nine member local authorities of ICBAN, (Fermanagh, Omagh, Armagh, Cookstown, Dungannon, Sligo, Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal) many geographical, economic, social, administrative and political characteristics. The projects funded through ICBAN have a similar goal of making these areas a better place to live and work by overcoming the common characteristics and problems that arise from living in a border region through cross-border co-operation. Such co-operation encompasses all cultural, social, economic and infrastructural spheres of life, having both knowledge and an understanding of a neighbour's distinctive social, cultural and economic characteristics is a prerequisite for any successful cross-border co-operation.