



**VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE
(VDP & LG)**

Exchange Visit to Kinvara / Eyrecourt, County Galway Ireland

September 17-18, 2007

General feedback report

Colofon/Project coordination

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1. Composition of VDP-feedback team

Feedback team	
<i>Denmark</i>	
Bodil Bertelsen	Rural District Advisor, Municipality of Tønder
Ole Post	Villager of Branderup, volunteer
Kirsten Willadsen	Member of the Local Council in Branderup
Bo Westerbye	Volunteer
Mie Thomsen	volunteer
<i>Sweden</i>	
Irene Karlsson	Elected representative Vara Council
Therese Nilsson	Community elected Mayor, Vedum, Vara
Helena Johnsson	Member of Activa Vedum
Ann-Britt Martinsson	Vara Municipality
Maria Eriksson	Vara Municipality
Kerstin Larsson	Member of Arantorp Local Development Group
Michael Albanson	Member of Kvanum Local Development Group
<i>The Netherlands</i>	
Saskia Croes	Project advisor
Theo Venhoeven	Villager of Bentelo, volunteer
Henk Nikkels	Municipality Hof van Twente
<i>Project Coordination</i>	
Gaston Remmers	Bureau Buitenkans
Marije Pouw	ETC Adviesgroep Nederland / Leader Network the Netherlands
<i>Irish hosts</i>	
Eimear Dolan	Galway County Council
Kieran Coyne	Galway County Council
Catherine Corcoran	Tipperary Institute
Brian Barrett	Galway County Council
Maria Hannigan	Chair, Kinvara Community council
Niall McGauran	Chair Eyrecourt & Districts Community Development Company

2. Key Questions of the Irish partner

CENTRAL THEME:

How do we move the process along from Plans to Implementation?

Background to the question:

Many community groups in Galway, either on their own or facilitated by groups such as GRD-Leader and other organisations, are involved in excellent and highly participatory local planning processes. In many cases, issues relating to spatial planning and environmental issues that fall under the remit of Galway County Council are addressed in these plans. However Galway County Council may have no knowledge of these informal community based plans and are thus unable to respond to local needs and are unable to include them in the statutory, formal, authority based plans they need to prepare. The quality of Local Area plans is thus lagging behind what is potentially possible; at the same time, local plans are not implemented which leads to frustration among villagers.

This leads to the following ideas we would like to receive feedback on:

1. SCHEME

Is it feasible to introduce an agreed 'scheme' between Local Government, Local Development and Communities where a series of Integrated Area Plans (IAPs) can be prepared?

The issues to be considered include co-ordination between different parties who are involved; types of agreements, status of the IAP, how to link the plans content-wise, protocols, working cultures, timeframes and resources

- a) Why is a scheme required? And how can it assist local development (LEADER companies etc.) to build community capacity and local authorities to better identify local needs?
- b) What are the main areas to be covered in such a 'Scheme'?
- c) How would it operate and what resources are required?
 1. Would such a scheme cover issues of responsibility?
 2. Is it clear in the IAP process who is responsible for implementation and monitoring and can this be improved?
 3. If those responsible are not proceeding with actions who can address this or raise this issue?
- d) What criteria can be used by agencies to select villages/communities for Integrated Area Planning?

→ Owner of the question:

Local Authority (Galway County Council) and Local Development (Galway Rural Development) and Tipperary Institute of Rural Development.

2. CRITERIA

2a) what criteria can local authorities and local development agencies use to select villages/communities for Integrated Area Planning?

2b) and under what criteria should communities consider before engaging in IAP with local authorities?

This question is in fact a subset of the former question. It must be addressed in order to prepare an agreed joint scheme to increase the use of Integrated Area Planning by local communities, local development sector and local authority as a community capacity building process and as a pre-planning tool (this means the Integrated Plan prepared can be used to inform the formal statutory planning process as well as state the communities needs and actions to address the needs).

Not all communities in any municipality or administrative area can be assisted with IAP at the same time; therefore 'criteria' are needed so that priorities can be identified and matched to resources. The criteria can be used as a tool to analyse the factors which need to exist for IAP to be of most benefit to the communities involved. Examples of criteria include: location, population; capacity of local groups; development pressures which exist locally; level of deprivation, is the area scheduled for a 'formal' plan by the authorities?

At the same time, communities need more tools in order to decide whether it will be fruitful to engage in IAP with a Local Authority. By what criteria can they judge that their natural counterpart (being the local authority) is equipped to live up to the promises?

Proposed Outcome of this question is:

Galway County Council and Galway Rural Development (and other local development agencies): will have agreed criteria about how to select villages and communities for Integrated Area Planning which can be used to prioritise some areas over others and inform Resource allocation to developing the plans.

For communities: they will have a list of criteria that allows them to judge if engaging in an IAP will deliver results.

→ Owner of the question:

Question 2a) Local Authority and Local Action Group (GRD)

Question 2b) Local Communities

3. AWARENESS

How can we raise awareness on IAP as a process be promoted in County Galway?

The potential of IAP for both improving the Local Area Plans as well as for community development and mobilization in general are insufficiently known. *This leads to a lesser quality LAPs, and also to a missed opportunity for increased democratic inclusion of the villagers.* Besides developing a scheme, we think that

targeted action may be needed to address this issue. This leads us to the following questions:

- a) Can this promotion and awareness be included in a 'scheme' on IAP? How?
- b) What services or resources do *communities* need to become involved in IAP or to network with each-other when they are preparing or have completed IAPs?
- c) What services/resources/support do *local authorities* need to become involved in IAP?
- d) What role can the Galway County Community Forum play in increasing awareness and networking among groups on this issue?
- e) What role can the County Development Board and member organisations play in increasing awareness and networking among groups on this issue?

→ Owner of the question:

Local Development Agencies and Local Communities

4. DEMOCRATIC INCLUSION

How can democratic inclusion in the preparation of Integrated Area Plans be improved?

Background to this question:

The situation regarding local governance in Ireland is quite different to that of many other European countries. One major difference is that most towns and villages do not have a branch of local administration located in their own area. There is no Town Mayor in most towns/villages. There is no systematic local taxation system to speak of. Thus for example, the citizens of Kinvara and Eyrecourt have to refer most significant administrative issues to Galway Co Council officers at central level. Community Councils are voluntary bodies with no official role nor recognition. While local politicians are very active on behalf of individuals, their contact with officials occurs at County level rather than within the exact locality that they represent. Local authorities themselves are constrained in that their funding comes largely from National sources. Their brief deals largely with environmental issues such as planning, roads, water and waste management and they do not deal with areas such as Health and Education. In working with IAP, one experiences the absence of an intermediate level of government. What can be done to accommodate for this vacuum, without having to re-write the Irish Constitution?

So, our questions are:

- a) What can be done within the context of IAP and beyond to overcome this experienced absence of intermediate level of government? What working procedures, personal engagement, methods etc?

- b) How can we, as government officials, communicate with villagers/local communities beyond our formal role?
- c) What methods can be used by the authorities and by the communities themselves to increase the involvement of local people, in particular those most excluded, in the preparation of Integrated Area Plans? (you may want to focus this question on either the situation in Kinvara or Eyrecourt)

→ Owner of the question: Local Communities / local government

3. Feedback of the VDP-feedback team on the questions posed by Ireland.

3A. General observations and problem analysis

Before answering the questions of the Irish team in detail, we would like to highlight a few continuous threads in our observations. In fact, they give direction to the answers on the key-questions.

We are impressed by the enormous endeavour of both the villages of Eyrecourt and Kinvara and Galway County Council to engage in IAP. The goals and scope of your way of conducting Village Development Planning are exhaustive; the integrality with which you approach the issue is large. Likewise the time-frame needed to deliver the IAP is long (1.5 to 2.5 years). After this visit we also understand why: there is a gap between local village affairs and the lowest Administrative level at which most issues need to be addressed. This is in contrast with the situation we experience in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands, where villages and lowest Administrative bodies are closer (in the form of municipalities). So we view your effort to conduct IAP as you do it not only as an intent to come up with plans for the village, but also as a way to fill the administrative and organisational 'vacuum', to an extent far more encompassing than is the case in our realities. Hence, we understand better your insistence on capacity building.

Yet, this tremendous challenge and ambition also comes with its drawbacks, and is quite observable, in the fact that despite successes achieved in both Eyrecourt and Kinvara, there is a tendency to focus on 'what has not happened'. Hence, you experience that implementation of your actions lies way behind the expectations.

One major suggestion is to rethink IAP as a game of 'ladders and snakes' (*ganzenbord* in Dutch). We get a feeling that the IAPs in Eyrecourt and Kinvara were developed quite linearly. That means: we do the IAP process, and then start thinking about implementation. In reality, Village Development planning is so multi-faceted that is advisable to generate multiple and early wins, while the game is on.

We also like to provide you with an image that frames our views on your key-questions. Your situation seems to be that of a fish in a net. You can feed the fish, and it will become more alive, but proper dancing and swimming is difficult due to the net. You do a lot to feed the fish (=community), and are able to make it swim more lively. Yet, true dancing is difficult, as it is trapped in a net. This net, as we perceive it, is made up by your governmental structure that is very centralized, with a big distance between lowest Administrative level and the villages. This makes it impossible to address some of your 'pains in the ass' properly (e.g. the sewage system), and leads to a lot of frustrations, that overshadow local successes, and that tend to confirm time and again patterns of behaviour both on the side of local villages and Administration.

Now, we are well aware of the fact that you cannot change the Irish constitution overnight. We will hence provide you with some feedback as to how to make the fish swim more freely, and with some ideas on bridging the gap between County Council and villages (we leave it up to you to consider adaptation of your Constitution).

3B. Answers to your key questions

1. SCHEME

Is it feasible to introduce an agreed 'scheme' between Local Government, Local Development and Communities where a series of IAPs can be prepared?

2. CRITERIA

a) What criteria can local authorities and local development agencies use to select villages/communities for Integrated Area Planning?

b) And under what criteria should communities consider before engaging in IAP with local authorities?

We answer the questions 1 and 2 in one stroke, as 2 can be seen as a subset of 1.

Is such a scheme useful?

We believe that such a scheme is indeed very useful, as a way to accommodate for the distance between villages and Lowest Administrative level. A well designed scheme will clarify roles and expectations, will prevent the loss of social capital, provides a routine for interaction where there is none, will intensify contacts and hence mutual learning and will, last but not least, increase chances for implementation. In fact, it is the point of departure for implementation.

We view such a scheme as a set of *rules for engagement*, or *rules of the game*. In our view, such a scheme should include a kind of checklist, that allows both Galway County Council and other agencies, as well as local communities, to judge whether it is worthwhile / potentially successful to engage in IAP. The checklist we provide below is qualitative in nature; further detailing depends a lot on the local situation.

Local communities may expect that County Council or other agencies:	County Council or other agencies may expect that local communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have established a stable contact point for the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have organised themselves into a community council or likeminded organisation, that serves as a contact point for Local Authorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ demonstrate a willingness to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ cross sectoral borders with their organisations ▪ establish relationships with other organisations whenever needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have a willingness to go beyond 'single issues' (broader view, birds' eye perspective)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ be very clear and explicit about the regional agenda: what are the plans and policies that frame local actions, with what level of certainty will they be pursued? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have a willingness to accommodate all views in the village, even the dissonant ones, so that the IAP cannot be hijacked by 1 or 2 vociferous individuals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have assured political back-up, so that IAP does not become a toy of good-hearted, yet powerless civil servants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have an eagerness to work on a few issues that they consider important (time etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ are ready to accept unexpected outcomes of the IAP process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ are willing to view the local issues in the light of the wider regional agenda, and develop a sense of feasibility of local proposals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ express commitment to do something with the outcome, substantiated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a budget reservation, preferably unlabeled ▪ a willingness to transfer responsibilities to the village when appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ are willing to focus on possible solutions, instead of on problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ have small amounts of money available to realize 'early win projects while the IAP process is on (don't wait until the end) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ provide clarity on the status of IAP and how it will feed into the Local Area Plan 	
Common issues of both County Council / other agencies and Local villages	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Define roles, responsibilities, competences and resources of both parties! In Twente (NL) the adagium is: competences go along with resources. NB: villagers shouldn't be made liable for budget (but yet responsible). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation. The IAP process should be able to be re-conducted if needed. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Train each other in giving and receiving feedback 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Define a common vision on the output of the IAP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the concept (will it be a plan, an action list, an event etc?) ▪ the content / scope (does it deal with nature, with housing, with cultural heritage, with everything, and also: what does it not deal with?) ▪ the ownership (who is this plan for?, how will it be used?) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'Drop the responsibility where it should be'. E.g.: if the village is not organised, or the IAP obstructed by individuals, let the village sort this out. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A facilitator should allow for maximum room for local people to take the lead, and should defend it is-a-vis the government 	

Of course, this checklist should not become a bureaucratic instrument in itself. Likewise, it will only work well if there is a minimum level of trust. The challenge is to generate actions and behaviour that confirm and strengthen this trust. Only in the most ideal situation all points are covered completely and are quantified to the last digit. Yet, with regard to implementation, it is crucial that some budget reservations are made.

Most likely, it is in the highly dynamic areas that budget is more easily available. This makes it all the more important that when IAP is conducted in areas further away from economic or policy dynamism, budget is prepared. If budget is out of sight, do not conduct an IAP.

When villages are not able to live up to the points mentioned here, County Councils and other agencies still have the option to support the villages in getting prepared. The Exchange Visit to Sweden demonstrated that in such a situation it is either 'kick ass' or 'hold hands'. See the feedback report to Sweden for more details.

3. AWARENESS

How can we raise awareness on IAP as a process to be promoted in County Galway?

Awareness is essential at **all** levels. It is necessary and very important. All levels must be aware of what is going on. By everyone, we mean the people in the villages and the surroundings, the politicians and the municipality/county (or other) officers that will be involved, either from start or later on in the process must be informed before start. Here we provide some suggestions to raise awareness both in the context of an IAP that is going to be conducted in a specific village, and in the context of the awareness of the general and Administrative public in County Galway.

Awareness in the context of an IAP that is going to be conducted in a specific village

Try to organise a project kick off meeting to which you invite all villages, politicians and other stakeholders. Make sure you can discuss about something tangible during this kick off meeting. In Branderup, Denmark, for example, 10 people in the village were given a camera and asked to take pictures in the village of things they liked and disliked, but which could be improved. During the kick off meeting, the photographer explained their pictures, which was the starting point for discussions on the Village Development Plan in Branderup.

It is essential to use press / media to inform a large group about the project and the village. You may also use door-to-door campaigns or meetings to raise awareness and create a situation in which everyone is aware something is going on in the village which is good and which needs attention. Do not be afraid to shout loud! The project and your village are valuable and are worthy to attract (positive) attention.

In order to make sure enough is done in relation to media coverage, communication and the like, it would be a good idea to establish a communication / PR group within the village and the project. The Dutch partner of our transnational project (LAG Twente) was quite successful in this, and got extensive media coverage.

To reach the politicians you must tell good stories and use the media spreading the news. It is also good to establish key-contacts, people crucial for the process and who know the ins and outs of the village. These key-contacts can make sure that the politicians and other officials are invited and feel involved. Politicians often would like to be more involved. In Sweden, for example, open meetings are organised before council meetings where anyone can come to and talk with the politicians.

You also need to ensure to get your politicians out to the area (see for example the village walk principle in Vara, Sweden. When they see with their own eyes what is going on, how much effort is put into the projects etc. usually politicians are more willing to support the project or recognise the problems in the villages.

Awareness in the context of general public and Administrative attention in County Galway.

- Seduce a TV-channel to cover the issue of IAP. Suggestions:
 - Follow and document an IAP in progress
 - Have a series of ‘messages from the villages’ (like postcards, but now containing development related info)
 - Or something like: ‘village wanting government’, as a paraphrase of a popular Dutch serie called ‘farmer searches wife (farmers are a difficult group of people to get married, by giving it attention rural life got a boost)’.
- Create an association of (small) villages at the level of County Galway, and organize attractive events. Galway County Council could facilitate the creation of such an association by providing funding and some expertise.
- Organise, at County level, a Rural Parliament. This initiative originated in Sweden, now adopted by a number of other countries including The Netherlands.
- Continue to engage in transnational projects such as the current one.

4. DEMOCRATIC INCLUSION

How can democratic inclusion in the preparation of Integrated Area Plans be improved?

If you can't change the constitution, develop new kinds of interfaces that narrow the gap between Government and Galway County Council citizens, that empowers the villages, and increases trust of citizens in their political representatives. For example:

Create an Association of Villages at the level of County Galway

- Join with other community councils together and form a strong organisation that can have a strong voice to the county or the government in matters which

concern all. All community councils may delegate 1 representative to this association, or you may choose among 2 or 3 overall representatives that represent the united community councils in regard to the County Galway Council to facilitate communication and easier access to politics (for example, in the County Development Board).

Establish contacts between elected politicians, civil servants and regions within Galway County more frequently

- Have members of County Development Board adopt a sub region in Galway County, whose issues they will tackle in an integral way. It would probably work well if politicians would adopt regions that are not of their own origin, to avoid clientelism. Visit the regions / villages frequently.
- Appoint a civil servant (endowed with some budget /staff) as a specific contact person for each village. Contact persons of different villages accompany each other when visiting villages, so that they can back-up each other in case of illness etc. The contact persons administer a file on each village that can be easily transferred to a successor if needed.
- Civil servants / government officials should be clear about what they **can** and **cannot** do. This is important on the one hand to protect themselves (government officials are often held responsible for all things wrong in the village, even things they are not responsible for), and on the other hand to make clear to the villagers how the Irish system works. Maybe a government official cannot help you immediately or directly, but they can advise you, for example, whom to contact or try to direct you to the person in charge.

Provide IAPs with statutory character

At present, IAPs may be disregarded by politicians. In the Dutch province of Drenthe, after a successful pilot, the Executive Board of the province (about the size of a County) decided that all small villages should be facilitated to have their own IAP, as a crucial building stone for development plans at (sub-)regional level.

An IAP is a document of the village, and should continue to inspire them

- Language should be set to support the local wishes. The language has to be in a way so that all can understand the plan, not intellectual language, and also not too elaborated. Subjects need to be interesting, especially with young people, they have many choices; they will only join interesting subjects and meetings.
- Given this, and in accordance with the village, you may want to add a specific section summarizing the IAP in 'governmental speak', or even decide to restyle the document entirely. Respect, however, always ownership of the IAP.
- Divide the plan into smaller parts, so that you can ask specific people to join in, without asking them to be present / available during the entire process establishing the big plan. There should be someone that monitors the entire process. And agree that it is fine if you only do a little bit, part of the bigger plan. For example, the project in Branderup: groups of people took pictures to

answer 15 questions, good to see different opinions that came out, young people, newcomers were involved.

- The IAP process should not depend on just 1 person in the village risking collapse or undesired interruption of the process cooperation when he/she leaves, or claims too much on his position. More people should be involved / known, so that the process continues
- Last but not least: you cannot involve people that are not willing to be involved

3C. Feedback on your core question on how to increase implementation of village plans?

Throughout the 4 key questions several suggestions were made that may help to increase implementation. In this section we tackle a few additional ones.

Focus on positive developments!

Concentrate on positive developments during the IAP process. Acknowledge that you take small steps in the right direction. Do not stop and freeze in your tracks because of one large dilemma (i.e. sewage system). Try to focus on positive things that are happening, if you do not see any, make them happen. Finally, be aware that it is not dangerous to disagree but you have to get to a compromise with which all involved can live with.

Create and celebrate successes

Success is critical for continuation, however small; it is needed to keep high spirit & enthusiasm. Mark the successes and what you achieved. We can't stress this point enough.

Review and monitor your village plan regularly

The village inhabitants must make their own priorities; they should not do this only once, but preferably every year. Each year, the priorities need to be evaluated and reprioritised again. This enables everyone to stay focused, and they get the 'noses in the same direction'.

Refresh the board of the Community council once in a while

When the plan is made, it is time for implementation. The work in the villages must start at fresh. Have a kick off meeting and show the positive things you have accomplished in your village. This should provide new energy and you should try to blend the experience with new blood. This means, bury the past, start a fresh, bring on new members, change the board and have a new election. And then continue!

Appoint a joint 'working group' to monitor implementation

Keep the relation between local government and community council going, especially when plan is finished. A time schedule should be made -> when / whom to contact. "Keep the kettle boiling." As villagers, chase up the responsible civil servants or politicians if needed. As civil servants, be sure you are in this working group.

Broaden focus from government to other organizations

Don't think that all depends on government. Try to ally and understand the agenda of other 'big' actors in your area, including both institutional organizations and private business. Try to have them adopt (part) of the implementation.

Manage expectations

The definition of success.....is the distance between expectations & reality. The shorter distance, the greater success, and if you cross the lines, it's a great success. So: sort out expectations from every party: be realistic.