

## **Community Workshops on Coastal Futures: Leenane (Killary Harbour) and Spiddal (Galway Bay)**

Leenane Community Centre on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020

The Snug Bar - An Crúiscín Lán on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020

These workshops linked with work on CLIP (Coastal Landscapes & Inclusive Planning). In June 2018, the CLIP project investigated the nature of coastal change through two community workshops in Spiddal and Leenane. The workshops were organised around a “participant-led interactive photo-elicitation” method, in which participants were asked to take photographs of places within their locality “which mean something to them”. During the workshop participants used their photos to highlight social, economic and environmental pressures they are faced with. Data from the workshops were then analysed and categorized into a series of six themes:

- Environmental change
- Government & governance
- Housing, ageing & migration
- Assets, privatisations & economic development
- Coastal tourism & the Wild Atlantic Way
- Cultural heritage & identity

The driver analysis was published in a report titled: “The Future of Coastal Landscapes: Strategic Learnings and Driver Analysis”.

Building on this previous research, the February 2020 workshops in each location divided participants into two teams who were asked to determine as a group the likelihood and significance of themes identified in the previous stage. This helped to identify the critical issues that need to be examined and understood in greater detail. The data will be analysed in detail, but some initial observations lend the following insights into how communities predict their landscape and cultural heritage will be in the future:

In Spiddal, large landscape and community changes were anticipated in the medium and long term. Issues directly regarding heritage that were identified in Spiddal were the high-impact scenarios that the Irish language stops being used in the area, community-led versions of heritage are expected to dominate in alternative tourism experiences and, in the long-term, a maritime museum will celebrate the coast and the struggle for Irish independence. A low-impact scenario that in the long-term the culture of Spiddal becomes unrecognisable because of marketing of the west of Ireland was also identified.

In Leenane, landscape and community changes were concentrated on the short term, unlike in Spiddal where they were more focused on the medium and long-term. Here, a maritime museum is anticipated in the short-term. In Leenane, instead of concerns the Irish language will cease, it is anticipated that the government will prioritise affordable homes for local people and Irish speakers in the area. In terms of exploiting the area’s natural and cultural heritage for tourism, at present large-scale corporate powers were identified as dominating provision of services, but in the short-term this was anticipated to transfer to community-

cooperatives, with all major decisions in the area predicted to be taken mainly by communities. A high-impact scenario that, in the long-term, population change affects the cultural heritage of the area was also identified, although community-led versions of heritage were by this stage anticipated to dominate in alternative tourist experiences, maintaining aspects of heritage such as boat-building, stonewalls and music in some form through this.

Concerns over the future of cultural heritage are evident in both communities. While both anticipate efforts to maintain it, at least in an exploitative form for tourism, there is greater optimism in Leenane over the retention of local people and the Irish language, as well as community co-operatives for tourism, than is evident in Spiddal where it is anticipated that mass marketing of the area will render their culture unrecognisable.

After a brief coffee break, the next step was then to create scenarios and potential strategies to strengthen the resilience of these coastal communities in tackling some of the identified challenges they are facing.

The results from these workshops will be analysed and published in due course. The output will be integrated into a road map that aims to create usable and strategic knowledge to inform coastal communities, policy-makers; government-facing agencies and activists.