



European Union  
European Regional  
Development Fund

# **South Sligo**

## **SARURE**

### **Action Plan**



**SLIGO**  
COUNTY COUNCIL  
COMHAIRLE CHONTAE SHLIGIGH

**2020**

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# Summary of Rural Retail in County Sligo

The actions proposed within this Plan reflect the needs identified in the demographic, economic and rural retail analysis carried out during 2019-20. Of particular note in this regard is the SARURE Rural Retail and Consumer Survey in County Sligo, the main findings of which are summarised below.

## Rural retail in County Sligo

- 25% of rural retail businesses are run by female owner/ managers.
- The majority of business owner/ managers are in the 45-64 years bracket.
- The most popular types of rural retail businesses are
  - 1) Health and beauty (and fitness)
  - 2) Supermarkets and convenience
  - 3) Fashion, footwear, and textiles
  - 4) Bar, restaurant, accommodation, and off licence
- 91% of businesses have direct sales to the customer, with only 17% having online sales.
- Over one-third of rural retail businesses have been established for 30+ years.
- 8% of businesses stated that their business was in a very good state, 44% good, 34% average and 10% poor.
- Expanding the number of customers was identified as the change most likely to improve rural retail business. The next most likely was Updating the Building or Equipment, followed closely by New Technology and Social Media Activity.
- 50% of the owner/ managers are optimistic or very optimistic about the future of their business. 40% are cautious.
- 65% believe that Electronic Commerce will be positive for their business in the future, while 56% believe Brexit will be negative.
- The two main competitors for rural retail are Larger Retail Stores and Online Sales.
- Personal attention is the main reason why people buy from rural retail businesses.
- Suppliers are contacted mainly by phone and email. Only 36% contact by internet order.
- Social media and the internet is the main form of promotion for rural retail businesses.
- 42% of rural retail businesses do not use loyalty promotions with their customers.
- One third of rural retail measure the impact of their promotions using traditional sales information & accounts. Over one third do not measure the impact of promotions at all.
- One third of rural retail businesses have an online presence comprised of only social media. One third use a basic website and social media. 14% have no online presence.
- 29% intend to enhance their online presence in the next year. 27% do not intend to do so.
- Half of respondents stated that the main obstacle to a good online presence was due to the time involved in maintaining the online presence. One third stated that the main obstacle was lack of knowledge and the price involved.
- The most popular option for improving local retail was the promotion of the town and village. Followed by grants, funding and raising awareness of local retail.

- Three quarters of rural retail businesses employ 1-5 people.
- 46% believe their business will grow. 13% believe their business will decline.

## **Rural consumers in County Sligo**

- 55% of the consumers that responded were female.
- Over 40% were in the age group 35-44 years.
- 39% had an annual income of between €30k to €60k, the highest of each of the income categories.
- When asked what would encourage them to shop local more often, two thirds referred to “a better range of products”, while the next highest factor was “better prices and ways to pay.”
- The main local shops supported by consumers are supermarkets and convenience stores (87%), with the next highest being bar, restaurant, accommodation, and off licence (68%) and fuel (65%).
- The two most infrequent products bought locally are electronics and entertainment (12%) and fashion, footwear, and textiles (17%).
- Interestingly, the two products mentioned above are the two most frequently bought online.
- The product most often bought in Sligo Town is fashion, footwear, and textiles (63%).
- The three products bought most frequently in retail parks or centres are furniture, lighting, and homewares (46%), electronics and entertainment (47%) and DIY and hardware (33%).
- When asked how often they travel outside the local area to shop (not weekly shop), one third stated they do so on a monthly basis.
- Sligo Town is, by far, the most popular destination for shopping outside the local area (77%), followed by Tubbercurry and Ballina (both 12%) and Ballymote and Castlebar (both 7%).
- Value for money is the greatest influencer for not buying local (77%).
- One quarter of respondents stated that they do not inform themselves prior to buying instore or online.
- The vast majority, over two thirds, stated that they intend to buy the same amount as usual in the next 12 months.
- The two greatest influencers to buying online are products not being available locally and prices and discounts.
- The most favourite place to buy online is with general online markets such as Amazon and eBay.
- 56% have never bought or sold second hand goods online. 17% have bought online and 17% have both bought and sold online.
- Two thirds have not bought from a local or Sligo-based shop in the past year, while one quarter have bought a few times online in the past year.

# Relevance to the Local Economic Community Plan (LECP)

## Retail in the Local Economic Community Plan

Retail is mentioned a total of seven times within the Local Economic Community Plan, the two main references to which are summarised as follows:

- The Plan acknowledged the significant role played by the retail and wholesale sector in employing people in Sligo, with 3,528 people employed in the sector at the time the plan was being prepared. The Local Economic Community Plan also referred to the impact of the recession upon the sector, with County Sligo recording the highest commercial vacancy rate in 2013.
- The Plan stated that among its high level targets and indicators of programme, it intended to “Increase employment and improve economic activity” (Target 1), increasing overall numbers employed by 3,500 focusing on a range of sectors , including retail.

The Local Economic Community Plan does not make specific reference to rural retail.

## Updates on vacancy

Since the Plan was written, the vacancy rate has become even starker - County Sligo’s commercial vacancy rates, 18.9%, are the highest in Ireland, with a national vacancy rate of 13.2%. Tubbercurry’s vacancy rate is even higher, at 21.4% in Q4 of 2018, placing it 11th in the top 15 Vacancy Rates by Town for the whole of Ireland for that period. (Source GeoDirectory Database.) Of the recorded vacant commercial premises, 49.1% were in the services sector, with 23.2% in the retail and wholesale sector.

## Recommendations for Local Economic Community Plan

Actions aimed at supporting rural retail extend beyond purely economic concerns, which are of significant value in their own right, into the regeneration and sustainability of rural society in general. The demographic and economic profile of South Sligo has consistently shown a trend towards the depopulation of rural villages and towns, alongside a reduction in the number of local economic ventures, particularly retail and local service providers; further evidenced by the very high level of vacant commercial property throughout the region.

Investment by private businesses within these rural towns and villages is unlikely to be generated independently, and, where it does occur, may prove unsustainable without additional supports. Therefore, addressing this rural decline requires a “local” community-based intervention that adopts an innovative approach, building upon the hidden strengths of the local economy, for example, the “silver economy.”

The following recommendations are therefore being made for the new Local Economic Community Plan:

1. Instead of being included with other sectors, Retail, particularly Rural Retail needs to be given greater priority.
2. It is recommended that Retail is dealt with as a separate economic sector in the new Plan, with Rural Retail being allocated its own set of goals, actions, and targets.
3. Goals, actions, and targets for Rural Retail should reflect the needs identified in the SARURE study, focusing particularly on the opportunity to address rural decline by supporting rural retail initiatives.
4. Rural Retail should form a key part of the drive to promote County Sligo as a place to work, live and visit.
5. Experience from other Interreg models of good practice has demonstrated the need to ensure that any goals, actions, or targets identified for implementation in the Plan should consider the following:
  - 1) A public-private partnership is ideal, because, on its own, the private sector will not be able to generate the change necessary to ensure long-term sustainability in a rural setting
  - 2) It is essential that the local community “buys into” to the actions, to ensure awareness of buying local, as well as securing voluntary input that may be necessary to manage and operate the retail initiative
  - 3) The actions must offer innovative and new ideas to businesses and consumers alike, to hold their interest
  - 4) All stakeholders need to have an agreed plan and a clear vision of what the programme is trying to achieve, and the manner in which it can be achieved
6. Three priority actions, each of which has been informed through engagement with the SARURE project, should form part of the goals for the Plan:
  - 1) Community Hubs
  - 2) A Retail Support Programme
  - 3) Public Realm Enhancements

## **Rural Regeneration and Development Fund**

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund is a commitment of €1 billion by government to be invested in rural Ireland over the period 2019 to 2027. The purpose of the fund is to support job creation in rural areas, address de-population of rural communities and support improvements in our towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas. To date, this Fund has now provided €166 million for 139 projects across Ireland, worth a total of €237 million. This has included, of relevance to this document, funding towards the new Tubbercurry Tourist Information Office/ community facility in Tubbercurry through the redevelopment of the highly visible “Mary Jacks” site on the Square/Teeling Street/ Swifts’ Lane junction with provision for multi-purpose community spaces, e.g. exhibition areas, etc.

## **Town and Village Renewal Scheme**

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme is an initiative under the Action Plan for Rural Development and is part of a package of national and local support measures to rejuvenate rural towns and villages throughout Ireland through the Government’s Project Ireland 2040 Rural Regeneration Programme. The Scheme is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development and administered by the Local Authorities. This has included funding towards Café Fia in the village of Coolaney, Co. Sligo, the goal of which is to establish an economically and socially successful co-operative enterprise to support the regeneration of the village.

# 1 Action - Community Hubs

*To encourage and support the development of “community hubs” in rural towns and villages of South Sligo as a means of revitalising and sustaining rural communities and their economies.*

## **Project Description**

### **Reason for need**

As mentioned earlier, the demographic and economic profile of South Sligo has consistently shown a trend towards the depopulation of rural villages and towns, alongside a reduction in the number of local economic ventures, particularly retail and local service providers; further evidenced by the very high level of vacant commercial property throughout the region.

Investment by private businesses within these rural towns and villages is unlikely to be generated independently, and, where it does occur, may prove unsustainable without additional supports. Therefore, addressing this rural decline requires a “local” community-based intervention that adopts an innovative approach, building upon the hidden strength of the local economy, for example the “silver economy”.

Community hubs, or community shops, are an ideal example of such an intervention, which have proved themselves successful in Ireland, and elsewhere in the European Union, when managed locally.

### **Introduction to Community Hubs**

Locally-based, multi-purpose community hubs provide a mix of retail services, social supports, and related facilities availed of by a wide audience, including the local community, visitors, and other businesses. Typically based in existing underused buildings, e.g. former retail or pub premises, old schools, etc., enhanced to serve their new roles, the hubs have the potential to become important focal points for rural areas. As such, they can attract service users into rural areas thereby increasing local footfall, which will benefit the local economy and, also, act as a catalyst in encouraging new activities and services, as well as job creation.

A key feature of community hubs is their adaptability to the specific needs of the local area, reflecting locally identified needs and demand, i.e. community hubs tend to vary in design and content, depending on the needs of the local community. This may include, for example, accessible multi-purpose spaces for meetings, outreach clinics, tourism and local area information, exhibitions and events, remote working, and retail activities, e.g. shop and, or café, etc. Services delivered through community hubs may include, for example, parent and toddler groups, classes, health and wellbeing activities, citizen advice and information, etc., delivered volunteers, public agencies, or other organisations.



Community hubs need an income to be sustainable, and a range of income sources is usually required to cover all of the costs for looking after the building, and running the activities, e.g. grants, donations, hiring out space, delivering contracts, etc. The community hub model allows communities to proactively affect the range of services and facilities available in their area. Evidence has shown, as per the models of good practice described later, that when owned, managed, and run by local people, community hubs are a viable, adaptable, and effective method of addressing rural decline.

## **Partner organisations**

A co-operative approach has been shown to be an important factor in the successful establishment, and running, of community hubs. This model removes the weight of responsibility for the success of the venture from the shoulders of a single “shopkeeper”, and distributes it among several producers, suppliers, agencies, authorities, local groups, etc. In the case of South Sligo, this could include:

- Members of the local community of the village or town, who can become members/ owners, or volunteers
- Local groups and organisations
- Local producers, suppliers, artists, and craftspeople
- Sligo County Council
- Sligo Local Enterprise Office
- Local community stakeholders

## **Business structure**

The co-operative approach can often extend beyond the management of the community hub, with some models of good practice having formally established themselves as “co-operatives” with shareholdings held by members of the local community. In this case, profits generated by the project can be re-invested into the project itself, or distributed elsewhere in the wider community.

In other scenarios, the community hubs have been run on a self-employed basis, either by adapting an existing retail shop, or developing an existing building and leasing it to private individual.

### Nature of activities to be implemented

Activity	Timeframe	Linking impact to project	Stakeholders	Costs/ Funding
1. Make submission to Local Economic Community Plan review process regarding the development of community hubs	TBD 2021	Providing policy basis for future project/ stakeholder actions	Sligo SARURE group	No cost, propose to, and liaise with Local Economic Community Plan group
2. Familiarisation visit to models of good practice (subject to approval)	Qtr. 1-2 2021	Meeting those involved in setting-up and running successful community hubs, to identify learning outcomes	Sligo SARURE group, and local representatives	Existing SARURE budget allocation (subject to approval)
3. Continue to support the growth and development of the community hubs at Café Fia (a community café in the village of Coolaney) and Mary Jacks (a multi-purpose community spaces in Tubbercurry)	Qtr. 1 2021	Work with local representatives and “drivers” for community hubs, in a limited number of pilot areas within South Sligo	Sligo SARURE group Sligo County Council, local stakeholders	Rural Regeneration Development Funding committed for planning/design phase
4. Identify the steps required to develop two additional community hubs at Gallagher House (Aclare) and Knocknashee (Lavagh)	2020/ 2021	Work with local representatives and “drivers” for potential community hubs in Aclare and Lavagh	Sligo SARURE group, Sligo County Council, local stakeholders	No cost, local consultation. Applications to Town & Village Renewal Scheme 2020/2021

## Relevance of the actions to the interregional exchange of experience

### Models of Good Practice

The concept of the community hub, as well as the activities described in the table above, are based upon the learning outcomes from the models of good practice within SARURE, as well as other examples of similar rural-based community projects in Ireland. A list of these inspirations is provided below.

#### Rural MultiServices in Aragón, Spain

Operating since 2003 and registered as a brand since 2010, the MultiService programme has been introduced to address problems faced by rural areas in Aragón, Spain, which reflect closely those being faced by South Sligo:



- Depopulation of the rural regions
- Difficulty to achieve financial viability of retail businesses, due to the depopulation of towns and villages, and a lack of general awareness of this difficulty
- Ageing of the population
- Lack of services in the area
- Need for training among rural business people

The programme addresses such problems, but promoting the adoption of complementary services within a traditional retail setting, to include:

- Traditional retail goods
- Café, restaurant, and leisure space, all of which can be used as a community meeting place
- Tourist information
- Other services, e.g. WIFI, accommodation, crafts, post office, etc.

The programme is run on a co-operative basis by a range of stakeholders, including local authorities, agencies, businesses, and the local communities. Approximately €23.5k per year is allocated towards supporting a post within the Aragón Chamber of Commerce, which facilitates the monitoring of the MultiService network, ongoing viability analysis, promotion of the programme, training and generating awareness about the importance of buying local. More than 100 entrepreneurs have been employed through the programme, each of which runs a MultiService centre on a self-employed basis.



#### Service Points, Sweden

The Service Point programme originating in Central Norrland, Sweden, aims to expand the services traditionally provided in local shops, gathering several community services in one location. The Service Point addresses the

problem of financial viability among small rural retailers, by providing each shop with a payment in return for executing several services on behalf of the Municipality, receiving between €3k and €5k per year.

This establishes a natural meeting point for people living in the village, as well as a focal point for tourist information to be given to visitors. Depending on the level of services, and potential for expansion, the amount being received can vary with, for example, one Service Point receiving €150k to upgrade facilities and provide more space to accommodate the additional services.

### **Village Community Shops, Saxony-Anhalt, Germany**

In 2019, Saxony-Anhalt began a programme, aimed at supporting village community shops, with the aim of preserving “the rural regions and their villages as independent living, working social and cultural areas”. The programme states that village community shops can be used to improve the quality of life in rural areas because:

- They are social pivotal points of village community life.
- They serve the supply of food and other goods.
- They offer ideal conditions for mutual exchange and thus for the community in the village.
- They offer services (postal acceptance, etc.).
- They contribute to the preservation and design of the village character.

A total of €300k was allocated towards the programme, at a rate of 90% funding, for villages with less than 2,500 inhabitants, with seven projects selected for inclusion in the first round. **The expert opinion of INTEREG Europe is that this is an example of good practice, which increases potential for success by focusing on the community becoming a stakeholder in the project.**

## Utula Village Shop, Finland



Utula village shop, based in Finland and servicing 100 local residents and 300 seasonal visitors, is an example of a privately-owned enterprise that has been adapted to play a significant role in the regeneration of the local community. The shop provides traditional retail services, which are now complemented by community services, including a café, meeting space and focal point for organising events. The income of the shop has grown, with additional benefits arising for the local community, seasonal visitors, and tourists.

## South Karelia, Finland (Interreg project news)

In 2020 South Karelia launched a Rural Service Points pilot project, which uses village shops as the platform for producing and providing services to regenerate rural communities. The co-operative model is the key to this project, ensuring that shopkeepers themselves are not alone responsible for producing and offering the multiple services, but that several producers and suppliers can be gathered in one location, which can be a local authority, association, public body or private business.

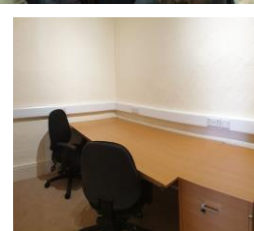
Cooperating this way, like Söderhamn good practice shows, it is possible to exploit resources that none of actors could have achieved individually. Furthermore, the project offers a great opportunity to identify and capitalise upon the demand and customer segments that are particular to that rural area.

## Courtmacsherry Community Shop Co-operative Society, Co. Cork (Interreg Policy Learning Platform)

Despite having a population of just under 500 people, which doubles during the summer months, Courtmacsherry, like so many other rural communities, suffered from the impact of rural disadvantage, culminating in its last convenience closing in 2015.



To help combat the problem of rural isolation and unemployment, and reinvigorate the seaside village, a community shop was proposed, one of the first of its kind in Ireland, and one of approximately eight currently operating. The shop is owned by the local community, with over €34,000 raised by selling 274 shares to locals, tourists, and international shareholders. The shop employs its own staff, as well as being resourced by 45 volunteers. The venture is overseen by a board of management, elected by the shareholders, and currently provides retail space, exhibition space, meeting space, WIFI, tourist information and a small number of hot desks. All profits generated by the community shop are invested back into the local community.



The Courtmacsherry community shop received a Cork County Council community award and has recently been recognised by Flag (Fishing Local Area Groups), a BIM-administered group co-funded under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, receiving €9,400. The community shop also played an instrumental role in Courtmacsherry recently receiving approval to be included on the Wild Atlantic Way.



## Pullough Community Shop, Offaly (not on Learning Platform)

Pullough Community Shop, Co. Offaly, opened in 2017, is another example of a successful community shop, although not part of the SARURE project, providing a wide range of services to the local community including retail, meeting space, youth space and a “social and information hub.” The shop is open seven days a week, and has recently expanded its trading activities to include a delivery service using the community shop van.

### OPENING HOURS

SUNDAY: 10AM-12PM  
MONDAY: 10AM-1PM & 3PM-7PM  
TUESDAY: 10AM-1PM & 3PM-7PM  
WEDNESDAY 10AM-1PM & 3PM-7PM  
THURSDAY: 10AM- 1PM & 3PM-7PM  
FRIDAY: 10AM-1PM & 3PM-7PM  
SATURDAY: 10AM-6PM



The group has recently secured funding from the Applegreen Blossom Fund to support the cost of upgrading their shop's youth space.

## Summary of Learning Outcomes for Community Hubs

The problems facing South Sligo are replicated throughout rural Europe, resulting in a self-perpetuating cycle of depopulation leading to closure of rural retail businesses, leading to further depopulation, and onwards. SARURE has attempted to place circuit breakers within this cycle, which can slow down the process of depopulation, by supporting the regeneration of rural retail. One such circuit breaker has been the Community Hubs, which are based upon the concept of expanding the range of services provided in traditional retail settings, thereby improving their viability and sustainability.

A review of the models of good practice for the community hubs, discussed above, highlights a number of learning outcomes, which can be summarised below:

1. A co-operative approach is a key feature of these models, whether among the stakeholders or as a legal structure for community-owned businesses
2. It is essential that the local community “buys into” to the programme, to ensure awareness of buying local, as well as securing voluntary input that may be necessary to manage and operate the retail enterprise
3. The community hub can be run either as a private enterprise or as a community enterprise, both with funding support. In both cases, employment can be generated directly, in the shop, and indirectly by supporting local producers.
4. The basic design of a community hub must centre around the “need” for the retail services being provided, with financial supports, to the local community and visitors. This correct mix of services expands the attraction of the centre by providing a focal point for community gatherings, social activities, and tourism growth. Not all community hubs are the same and they must be adaptable and nimble based on need.
5. The hubs should aim towards improving viability, with the adoption of complementary services that can generate a trading income, e.g. delivery services, café, rental space, etc., which would not otherwise have been provided in a traditional retail setting.
6. Community hubs can use the demographic profile of rural South Sligo to their advantage, i.e. generating support and trading income from the “silver economy”, as illustrated by the community shops in Pullough (Offaly), Courtmacsherry (Cork) and Utula (Finland.)



## 2 Action - Retail Support Programme

*Provide rural retail businesses with expert advice and strategic focus, to support sales growth and profitability within a rural setting, and capitalise upon the opportunities offered by changes in consumer practice.*

### **Project Description**

#### **Reason for need**

The SARURE Retail and Consumer Surveys, carried out in 2019, identified a shortfall in skills and awareness among rural retail business owner/ managers, focusing on the changing needs of consumers in rural towns and villages. While many retail owner/ managers were aware of the changing nature of retail, there is a dearth of actions among rural retail in South Sligo to capitalise upon the opportunities presented by these changes.

The Retail Support Programme aims to upskill rural retail owners/ managers, using a similar model to that of the Sligo City Retail Support Programme, which was implemented in 2018-19. The focus of the programme was on understanding and increasing Average Transaction Value (ATV), or the average amount spent by consumers in a single transaction. This allowed for a more practical and accessible programme, tailored to each participating business. Practical sales and marketing tips were shared to inform participants about what others are doing successfully and how these might be implemented within their own businesses. Visits included business analysis to identify growth opportunities, management skillsets, customer service initiatives, etc. Upon completion, participants were presented with a written action report detailing practical steps to be taken to improve ATV.

Building upon the success of the Sligo City initiative, this project envisages the delivery of a similar retail training programme specifically tailored to and targeting rural retail business owners and managers in County Sligo. The objective of this is to support the strengthening of rural retail businesses throughout the rural towns and villages of the County, and in doing so to ensure the viability of rural communities and their economies.

### **Introduction to Retail Support Programme**

The problems associated with rural retailing are common to all countries in Europe, as evidenced by the SARURE project, and many solutions are transferrable across regions. Retail businesses benefit from training and tailored supports delivered by retail experts, as evidenced by participants of Sligo City's 2018 Retail Support Programme who reported increased sales arising from their engagement with the initiative. The programme, which was targeted at owners and managers of consumer-facing businesses, e.g. retail shops, cafes, hotels, beauty salons, opticians, etc., consisted of a three-hour seminar about innovation for retail/consumer facing businesses followed by two-hour, one-to-one site visits/ audits conducted by a retail expert.

This short retail support programme is designed to give rural retail businesses expert advice and strategic focus. It is targeted at the owner/ manager of any rural retail business which is consumer-facing, including cafés,

restaurants, hotels, beauty salons, hairdressers, fitness services, shops, etc. The Programme is divided into three parts, i.e. a seminar and a 1:1 visit from a retail expert.

1. Part one of the programme consists of a detailed seminar which will look at global innovation for retail/consumer facing businesses. There will also be a section of this seminar dedicated to practical sales and marketing tips. The objective of this seminar is to learn from what others are doing and implement new ideas for rural retail business.
2. Part two of the Programme comprises an individual Site Audit/Training Session. This session is to facilitate customised training for rural retail businesses in response to their individual needs. The visit will include a detailed business analysis including, identification of growth opportunities, competitor analysis, opportunities to differentiate, management skillsets, customer service initiatives, etc.
3. Part three of the programme will consist of a follow up assessment with the individual businesses to gauge the impact of the programme on their business.

## **Partner organisations**

The programme needs to be promoted locally to ensure effective participation by, and generate demand from, rural retail businesses, who may have a “need” for the training, of which they currently are not aware.

- Sligo County Council
- Sligo Local Enterprise Office
- Tubbercurry Chamber of Commerce
- Local community stakeholders

### Nature of activities to be implemented

Activity	Timeframe	Linking impact to project	Stakeholders	Costs/ Funding
1. Make submission in relation to Local Economic Community Plan review process to support retail business development	2021	Providing policy basis for future project/ stakeholder actions	SARURE Stakeholder Group/Sligo County Council	No cost
2. Identify and seek programme funding	2021	Ensuring the delivery of training programme	Sligo County Council, Sligo Local Enterprise Office (lead)	Sligo Local Enterprise Office
3. Issue request for tenders and contract trainer(s) to deliver programme	2021	Securing qualified trainers to deliver programme objectives	Sligo County Council, Sligo Local Enterprise Office	No cost
4. Identify appropriate rural retail participants	2021	Recruiting 10 eligible rural retail businesses to participate in the programme	Sligo County Council, Sligo Local Enterprise Office (lead), local stakeholders	No cost
5. Deliver programme	2021	Providing rural retailers with training and related programme supports to enable them to improve their Average Transaction Value	Sligo Local Enterprise Office, local stakeholders	Sligo Local Enterprise Office. Programme cost to be determined
6. Conduct post-programme review to inform next steps	2022	Post-training review, Assessing the impact of the programme and informing next steps in supporting rural retail	Sligo Local Enterprise Office, local stakeholders	Sligo Local Enterprise Office

## **Relevance of the actions to the interregional exchange of experience**

### **Models of Good Practice**

The concept of the Retail Support Programme, as well as the activities described in the table above, are based upon the learning outcomes from the models of good practice within SARURE. A list of these inspirations is provided below.

#### **Retail Support Programme, Sligo**

The programme involved the carrying out of a ‘business site audit’ analysing all aspects of 17 retail businesses, based in Sligo City, from front of house to production/warehousing space. The programme sought to challenge what retailers are currently doing within their business, and to look at real world solutions to improve sales growth and profitability. To this end a site audit and follow up sessions were scheduled with each business. The site audit carried out an analysis of business performance under a range of headings, including:

- What's good about the Business – Strengths;
- Challenges facing the Business;
- Overview of the Businesses Online presence;
- Management Overview;
- Sales Targets;
- Margin Improvement;
- Average Transaction Value;
- Staff Motivation;
- Management Development - Developing the skills of key staff;
- Succession Planning;
- Marketing;
- Shop Layout - importance of 'Look and Feel';

The programme was aimed ONLY at Owner/Managers-they were facilitated to stand back and take a more comprehensive approach to their business. Their business was also challenged on its current method of operation. A retail expert that was part of a national television series was brought on board to lend some credibility and kudos to the programme and the support programme received positive feedback for being both innovative and successful in terms of its real world outputs in terms of the profitability of the businesses that participated. The total cost of the programme was €6,000.

The two main learning outcomes from the programme were that (a) success depended on the owner/ manager taking personal responsibility for the implementation of the individual report and (b) a 6-month review should be carried out following the completion of the programme to map progress.

#### **T-ZIR Retail Accelerator Experience, Aragón, Spain**

T-ZIR offered 2 digital projects for rural stores:

1. miZesta, an online food market, with a 2-hour turnaround, from ordering to delivery; and
2. Zerca!, a digitisation kit for rural stores, e.g. digitalisation of catalogues, ecommerce platform, customer service, loyalty programmes, etc.

The project used retail advisors as well as IT and technical support, all of which were financed by a monthly fee of €39 paid by 500 participating stores (and a commission on sales, depending on the sector.)

### **The Extended Store, Aragón, Spain**

This initiative facilitates the transfer of good practices of successful local stores, through informal events and conferences. In conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce, leading companies are identified and invited to speak to rural retail stores, in an informal and direct manner, about their main strengths and how these can be transferred to other businesses. There are 500 members of the Retail Club 4.0, from which 30 stores participate monthly in The Extended Store events. The main learning outcomes from the programme highlight the need to offer innovative activities to a wide range of stores, using a benchmarking process, and timetabling events to the needs of rural retail (to encourage participation and address initial reluctance to participate.)

### **Digital Training Programme for retail and hospitality, Paris Vasco, Spain**

The objective of this programme was to improve competitiveness among retail and hospitality businesses by upskilling business owners and managers in digitalisation. It consists of a training calendar that combines general training workshops, specialised training sessions and showroom demos of digital tools; all hosted in a single adapted space. The total cost of the programme was approximately €10,000 for the training, with additional internal costs for staff allocated to support the programme from one of the major stakeholders.

### **Summary of Learning Outcomes for Retail Support Programme**

- Generating interest in the programme can be difficult, which may result in a “slow start”
- The programme must offer innovative and new ideas to businesses to hold their interest
- Any actions arising from the programme must be “adopted” by the businesses, with the owners and managers taking personal responsibility for their implementation
- A review should be carried out of the impacts upon the participants, at least 6 months after the completion of the programme

# 3 Action - Tubbercurry Public Realm Enhancement & Open Air Market

*Develop Tubbercurry public realm plan incorporating identified open-air market spaces and the securing of capital funding to deliver required infrastructural improvements.*

## Project Description

### Reason for need

The public realm of rural towns and villages plays an important part in strengthening the vibrancy of rural retail as the greater the attractiveness and amenity value of public spaces, the greater the footfall with people stopping and staying longer in these areas. Centrally located, multi-purpose spaces suitable for a wide range of activities and events such as farmers' markets, antique fairs, performances, art exhibitions, etc., provide new opportunities animate and bring life to town and village centres. As evidenced by the increasing popularity of local artisan and farmers' markets throughout the region in recent years, there is a growing awareness of and demand for access to local producers and artisans which such spaces can facilitate. These not only provide income generating opportunities for participating producers, but also benefit local retailers as the result of increased footfall in the area.

### Introduction to Public Realm Enhancement

Building upon the experience of successful examples of best practice, and informed by Sligo County Council's own public realm strategies, this project aims to encourage the enhancing of Tubbercurry town centre through public realm interventions facilitating open air market spaces. Specifically, the development of a detailed public realm plan, incorporating identified open-air market spaces and the securing of the necessary statutory permissions to proceed with same. Furthermore, capital funding will be sought to deliver required infrastructural improvements.

The successful delivery of this project will result in new opportunities for small producers and artisans to earn an income by selling their products direct to consumers, bring vibrancy and life to Tubbercurry town centre and encourage greater footfall in these areas thereby benefitting local retailers and the wider rural economy.

### Partner organisations

- Sligo County Council
- Sligo Local Enterprise Office
- Tubbercurry Chamber of Commerce
- Local community stakeholders

### Nature of activities to be implemented

Activity	Timeframe	Linking impact to project	Stakeholders	Costs/ Funding
1. Make submission in relation to Local Economic and Community Plan review process to support markets	2021	Providing policy basis for future project/ stakeholder actions	SARURE Stakeholder Group/Sligo County Council	No cost
2. Develop comprehensive public realm plan in Tubbercurry in consultation with local community stakeholders	2021/2022	Establish public realm enhancements to encourage improved Market activities	Sligo County Council, local stakeholders	Rural Regeneration Development Fund €296,000
3. To seek statutory permission for a significant public realm enhancement to the historic market square in Tubbercurry	2021/2022	Establish public realm enhancements to encourage improved Market activities	Sligo County Council, local stakeholders	Rural Regeneration Development Fund
4. Apply for funding for implementation of Tubbercurry Regeneration Scheme (inclusive if the enhancement of the market space within the square in Tubbercurry)	2021/2022	Source funding to facilitate the actions identified	Sligo County Council, local stakeholders	Rural Regeneration Development Fund

## **Relevance of the actions to the interregional exchange of experience**

### **Models of Good Practice**

The concept of the Public Realm Enhancement programme, as well as the activities described in the table above, are based upon the learning outcomes from the models of good practice within SARURE. A list of these inspirations is provided below.

#### **Small Towns' Open-Air Malls, Aragón, Spain**

This is a very comprehensive public-private programme, aimed at providing rural retailers with the opportunities and resources to compete with large shopping centres in urban areas. The Retail Plan produced by the Regional Government of Aragón provided a range of subsidies to retail business, the most relevant here was the promotion of small towns open-air malls, with funding of up to 80%, including the cost of employing a commercial promoter and technician. 14 small towns' open-air malls were supported in Aragón, with another 45 activities being organised on a regular basis by retail association in the area. The success of the programme has depended upon the close collaboration between the public and private stakeholders, the skill of the person promoting the open-air malls, the attractiveness of the open-air malls and the degree to which the councils take care of the public realm on which they are held. On the other hand, it is acknowledged that, without good promotion and publicity, the open-air malls would not be sustainable.

#### **Open Mall in Rural Areas, Macedonia, Greece**

The Open Mall Initiative has been in place for several years in Greece, aimed mainly at upgrading shopping areas within cities to facilitate open retail settings. This programme has since been adapted for rural areas, using the lessons learnt in the urban initiative, to encourage locals and visitors to spend money in local rural retail shops. The central objective is to upgrade the functionality and aesthetics of public realm space in rural locations, which can be used to establish Open Malls that, in turn, can be used to regenerate the rural economy. The success of the programme has already been evident in the original Open Mall Initiative, although it is strongly recommended that all stakeholders work hard to agree upon a common vision of what is meant by the term "Open Mall."



## **Commercial Revitalisation through Fairs, Aragón, Spain**

This initiative involves the annual publication of a calendar of fairs in the area, as well as facilitating an annual call for grants to support the provision of fairground activities. In this case, the term fairground refers to events that would be called markets in Ireland, including cheese fairs, exhibition stands, crafts sales, etc. 120 official fairs were organised in 2020, which were supported by funding towards personnel and capital expenditure. The learning outcomes highlighted the need to use areas with experience in the hosting of fairs, and the need to ensure innovation, as well as maintaining a professional approach when being run for the first time in a rural area.

## **Summary of Learning Outcomes for Public Realm Enhancement**

- Quality public realm space is important to the vibrancy and viability of rural towns
- Markets/Casual Trading increases footfall at urban locations and thereby underpins the viability of rural towns.
- The stakeholders need to have an agreed plan and a clear vision of what the programme is trying to achieve, and the manner in which it can be achieved

# Stakeholder Endorsement

ACTION 1 of 3

## 1. Action - Community Hubs

Date: 17/12/20

Name of the organisation(s) involved in the funding of the actions:

SLIGO COUNTY COUNCIL

\_\_\_\_\_

Signatures of the relevant organisation(s):

*Dorothy Clarke*

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\_\_\_\_\_



**ACTION 2 of 3**

**2. Action - Retail Support Programme**

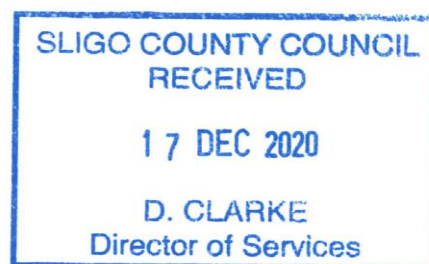
Date: 17/12/20

Name of the organisation(s) involved in the funding of the actions:

SLIGO COUNTY COUNCIL  
SLIGO ENTERPRISE OFFICE

Signatures of the relevant organisation(s):

*Donal Clarke*  
*John Keill*



**ACTION 3 of 3**

**3. Action - Tubbercurry Public Realm Enhancement & Open Air Market**

Date: 17/12/20

Name of the organisation(s) involved in the funding of the actions:

SLIGO COUNTY COUNCIL

\_\_\_\_\_

Signatures of the relevant organisation(s):

*Dorothy Clarke*

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