

Skellig CRI - Meeting Real Challenges & Enabling Lifelong Learning in a Rural & Isolated Community

AIM: This paper will present the background, unique collaboration and real-time professional practice in establishing a higher education satellite campus being an incubation hub for research, innovation and entrepreneurialism based in Cahersiveen, County Kerry.

Background:

Skellig Centre for Research & Innovation (Skellig CRI) is a unique partnership between University College Cork (driven by Adult Continuing Education), Kerry County Council, and South Kerry Development Partnership focused on the regeneration of Cahersiveen in County Kerry. This town faces extensive and long-term challenges demographically, economically and socially. These challenges are impacting on the identity and sense of viability of the area. This project commenced in 2016 and has now established a Centre in the town of Cahersiveen which is building higher education activity and research in conjunction with the local community and partnerships.

Research Statement:

Skellig CRI is a space that fosters collaboration, community building, and a higher education research spirit. This Centre, or Agora, promotes local level collaboration with national and international research communities, emulating in a local context the impact of a third level institution on a rural community.

The Skellig Peninsula has experienced significant population decline, few employment opportunities, a reduction of services, feelings of isolation and the outward migration of young people. The university is working in partnership with Kerry County Council and South Kerry Development Partnership and with extensive denizen and stakeholder engagement. The project aims to establish a transdisciplinary university hub in the town, aligned with the unique characteristics and strengths of the area in order to deliver new educational experiences, enable research, innovation and social and economic regeneration

Methodology:

The goal of this partnership is to enhance the socio economic fabric of the community which would not only attract new people but would build morale and improve quality

of life for the local community. Improved local employment opportunity is a key objective within a sustainable economic and social model.

There will be many strands to Skellig CRI including a focus on Research, Innovation, Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Economic Adhesion and on Youth. Programme delivery will feature strongly in the day to day business of this Centre, for example, undergraduate and postgraduate modules, workshops, fieldtrips and retreats. Research support and resources will be established within the Centre and harnessed in conjunction with the local community.

The Agora concept is derived from the ancient Athenian term for the central locus of the city for civic, social and economic activity. In the context of the Skellig project it is about animating a range of core community activities, with Cahersiveen as a vibrant centre for the peninsula for social, economic, cultural, creative, education, and research activities. Giving it a renewed vibrancy and shifting the focus of the community towards its own strengths. It is envisaged that this process would enable it to counter tendencies towards dependency on the external supports, setting its own social and economic objective and establishing frameworks of community resilience and sustainability.

Findings:

The overall vision of Skellig Centre for Research & Innovation is to create sustainable economic development in the long term for Cahersiveen and the surrounding area. Within this overarching vision lie more specific objectives mainly:

1. Effective establishment of a University campus;
2. Delivery of higher level educational programmes
3. Provision of a space for research and entrepreneurship
4. As a 'social enterprise' be open to innovation and loyal to the community in which it sits.
5. Promotion of the Skellig Coast in the context of a 'place of learning' nationally and internationally.
6. Create a sustainable model and social enterprise which will directly address the challenge of rural depopulation and related social and economic issues.