



Evaluation of the Model of Delivery for the Sligo East City Community Sports Hub Initiative

ILC

*Submitted by
Humphrey Murphy
ILC
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Evaluation of the Model of Delivery for the East City Community Sports Hub Initiative.



Introduction

Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership (SSRP) has a remit to support participation in sport and physical activity throughout County Sligo. Within this role SSRP has responsibility, since 2006, for developing sports and recreation opportunities as part of the Cranmore Regeneration Project and more recently the Sligo East City, Cranmore and Environs (SECCE) plan¹. Responsibility for sporting opportunities within the SECCE plan was primarily enabled through funding from Sligo County Council's Cranmore Regeneration initiative.

In 2015 under the stewardship of SSRP, the 'Sligo East City Community Sports Hub'² was established as part of the Sport Ireland Community Sports Hub initiative (CSH)³. The Cranmore Estate is a central part of this East City Sports Hub area.

The aim of a Community Sports Hub is to increase the number of people of all ages participating in sport and physical activity in their communities as well as developing and strengthening the links between community organisations, sports clubs and agencies.

In particular Sport Ireland identifies that the primary objectives for Community Sports Hubs are to:

1. Maintain and further develop opportunities for participation in regular physical activity for all members of the community.
2. Support and expand local capacity in the provision of sports and recreation opportunities.
3. Maintain, and further develop, new and existing local facilities, amenities, clubs and school links to provide an adequate infrastructure for sports and recreation in the area.

This report⁴ evaluates the SSRP approach and model of delivery towards achieving the sports and community development objectives of the Sligo East City Community Sports Hub. Evaluating this model of delivery will inform SSRP's future planning and may also inform others undertaking a similar type approach⁵.

The research for this evaluation was undertaken through a series of interviews with agencies, community group representatives, the staff of the SSRP and with a small number of participants on the relevant SSRP programmes. Desktop data was also reviewed as part of the process.



Figure 1: Sligo East City Community Sports Hub Structure and Approach

¹ Initiated by Sligo Borough Council, the SECCE is a plan of action aimed at improving the quality of life in the Cranmore Estate through the better coordination of services, community development and integrated planning.

² This Sligo East City Sports Hub is partially funded under Sport Ireland's Community Sport and Physical Activity Hub initiative. The project has built upon the SSRP Cranmore Regeneration Through Sport Initiative (2006 - 2014), most notably by extending the geographical reach of the project from the Cranmore Estate to embrace the wider Sligo East City area.

³ Financed by the Dormant Accounts Fund.

⁴ The 2015 evaluation of this Cranmore based sport and recreation initiative considered the impacts of the Community Sports Hub on participants.

⁵ Community Sports Hubs are a key delivery model for the Healthy Ireland Framework and the National Physical Activity Plan.

Executive Summary

The role of the Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership (SSRP), is to increase participation in sports and physical activity. The Sligo East City Sports Hub, hereafter the Community Sports Hub, is a collective of progressive community organisations, sports clubs and agencies working together, as part of the Cranmore Regeneration Project, to develop a model of active partnership which leads to increased participation in sport and physical activity in the disadvantaged area of the Sligo East City. Through the support of the SSRP, the Sports Hub provides a diverse range of sporting activities, by engaging with community and sporting groups, encouraging community leadership, enhancing facilities and bringing stakeholders together to plan and deliver sport in the East City area⁶.

Sport and physical activity occupy an important role within the overall Cranmore Regeneration Project. In addition to providing recreational and health benefits, sports can also support social and community development outcomes. This report evaluates the way the SSRP pursued the development of sport within the Cranmore community and the wider East City area via a Community Sports Hub process.

It is apparent that the SSRP's approach involved:

- **Sustained Commitment:** annual commitment on the part of the Local Authority, Cranmore Regeneration Office, SSRP Board (Sport Ireland Sports Hub funding and Health Service Executive funding), enabled the SSRP to establish an enduring presence and the opportunity to trial and learn in partnership with the community. This commitment created a sense of 'stickyness' or continuity in the Community Sports Hub process.
- **Effective Relationships:** the SSRP staff developed a range of meaningful relationships with community representatives, community organisation workers and the representatives from various agencies. These relationships appear to have been central to the willingness of community representatives to invest in and vouch for the Community Sports Hub process.
- **Social Networking and Collaboration:** networking and collaboration takes place across the various SSRP and Cranmore relationships. New external networks were also created with communities and clubs adjacent to the Cranmore area. This networking supported collaboration both within the Cranmore community and nearby communities, clubs and recreational resources and thereby reduced some of the subtle, hidden barriers around the Cranmore community.
- **Aware, Responsive and Guiding:** the SSRP identified and worked according to the stage of readiness of the community⁷. This approach required that the SSRP developed programmes and

⁶ These agencies include Sligo County Council, the Health Service Executive, Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education Training Board.

⁷ This concept of 'readiness' is consistent with the Transtheoretical model of behaviour change, (Prochaska & Di Clemente, 1983).

Sligo East City Community Sports Hub 2015-2017



166 Programmes

(Come & Try programmes, repeat programmes, club initiatives & once off events)



3624 Participant Places

1281 Adults / 2343 Youths



**29 Different Sport &
Physical Activities**



178 Adults Trained



20 Partner Organisations

Figure 2: SSRP and Community Sports Hub outputs.

activities which are congruent with the needs and the capacity of the community. The SSRP typically responded to an expressed need but also initiated programmes and activities as required. Similarly the SSRP appeared to have been responsive to the needs and requirements of the various agencies and organisations, which also provide services and resources into the community.

- Capacity Building: the SSRP sought to grow or enhance the level of readiness of the community. Residents were supported to engage actively in the sports development process and hence grow their skills and confidence as well as the competence of the community as a whole.

At an operational level the SSRP committed to:

- a **regular enduring** presence 'on the ground' via its sports development officer at a co-ordination level and also the SSRP community coaches at an operational level;
- **an alignment** of the sports programmes, structuring and commitment **with the community** via discussion and formal agreements, an openness to reviewing and acknowledging mistakes and sustained efforts to 'respond until resolved';
- actions and programmes which are aligned with the particular **interests of the community**;
- programmes which are **flexible and creatively shaped in partnership** so that they are responsive to the unique needs and the capacity of the community;
- acting as a **translator** of community and agency needs into meaningful responses;
- creating **trust** and parity in the sharing of opportunities amongst the various community organisations.
- targeting **sustainability steps** which were proportional to the level of the community's readiness.

It is apparent from this structure and process that the Community Sports Hub has resulted in a 'buy-in' by the community to the potential of sport. In particular the combination of the Regeneration Plan and the Community Sports Hub, provide a framework, a long-term commitment and a space for the opportunities which sports can bring. The critical success factors of the East City Community Sports Hub include:

- the embedding of the Community Sports Hub concept within Healthy Ireland's National Physical Activity Plan, and the objectives of Sport Ireland, as well as local commitment in the Sligo East City Cranmore and Environs Master Plan (SECCEP), and the ongoing commitment by the SSRP;
- an awareness of the range of community needs and opportunities;
- an appreciation of the readiness of the community; a creative approach to the needs and the capabilities of the various community and agency 'actors';
- creating and integrating social networks;
- sustaining both the depth and the duration of resultant relationships especially with community representatives
- increasing collaboration within the community and with nearby communities clubs etc.

The challenges encountered by the SSRP to realise these critical success factors included:

- Providing the additional staff and time. The unique needs of the Cranmore community, requires a tailored rather than an adapted or a generic approach if a sports and physical activity structure is to be relevant and meaningful. As a result, the SSRP must continue to be open, creative and flexible in how they engage and work with the community and this requires more resources compared to other mainstream SSRP programmes.
- Proportionate sustainability. The sustainability of a Community Sports Hub or its individual programmes depend on the capacity or readiness of the community. Unrealistic expectations

around sustainability can undermine the process, threaten creativity and hide or undermine the small but important progression steps of the community. Sustainability is targeted according to readiness.

- Retaining a balance. The SSRP had to find the balance between supporting the capacity building of the community and leading the community. The SSRP must also ensure that it is not taking on the responsibilities of the community and other agencies. The SSRP managed this balance by demarcating clear areas of responsibility and undertaking an occasional 'step back' to review and evaluate its role and actions.
- Allocating the time and resources which are required to support new staff in partner agencies and organisations to develop relationships and become attuned to the Sports Hub process.

Positive outcomes from the Community Hub process included the following personal and community developments:

- The structures of responsibility for sports development amongst the Community Sports Hub partners are enhancing the way in which these various partners approach other aspects of their work.
- The Community Sports Hub approach has increased the community's sports skills, their experience of success enhanced their sports administration capability, and in addition there are indications that the levels of social interaction between residents has increased as has their confidence in undertaking other community related responsibilities.
- The inclusion of sports clubs and organisations from outside of the community within the Community Sports Hub process, is breaking down the invisible barriers between neighbouring communities.

Also, it is worth noting that as a result of the Sports Hub process, the narrative amongst community leaders, and agency staff became more informed and aligned with the potential of sport and physical activity as a community development resource.

Recommendations

The following are the key recommendations arising from this research and reporting process:

- The Sligo East City Community Sports Hub illustrates the point that high levels of commitment, time and investment and lower sustainability targets are required for low readiness communities and target groups.
- Given the scale, depth and diversity of the promise of sports, strategic leadership, relationship management and network development are increasingly important functions of the SSRP.
- Further engagement and relationship building with external resources, communities and organisations are required to build the capacity of the Cranmore community, and support the sustainability of the community's sports participation progress. Sports development in the Cranmore area is a work in progress.
- The SSRP has an increasing role in sourcing training and support for 'sports makers' in the Cranmore community if it is to realise the promise of sport and leverage local capacity.

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- SSRP must continue to capture the impact of the programme to highlight and support the 'think national and act local' approach of the Sligo East City Community Sports Hub and to aid future funding.
- SSRP has finite resources and a range of responsibilities which extend beyond the East City Community Sports Hub. To realise best value the SSRP must continually engage with others to maximise external inputs and this requires further strategic leadership on the part of the Partnership rather than just an operational or delivery focus.

The SSRP through its primary role of increasing sports participation, realised a number of sport, personal and community development outcomes via the East City Community Sports Hub. This was achieved through a sustained commitment, readiness-awareness, creative tailored approaches, deep local relationship building and by integrating the capabilities of other agencies and organisations.

1.0 Context and Approach

The Sligo East City Community Sports Hub (Hereafter the Community Sports Hub), is based in Sligo town and in particular on the Cranmore Estate (500 homes) which has high levels of deprivation⁸. The Community Sports Hub is part of the Sligo East City, Cranmore and Environs (SECCE) Masterplan, a multi-agency and community led social, economic and physical regeneration project for Cranmore which is led by Sligo County Council since 2006⁹.

The SECCE plan identifies a role for sports and physical activity in promoting community interaction, sustainable community sports structures, community cohesion, social network development and a variety of physical and mental health outcomes.

The SECCE plan and the Community Sports Hub approach are both consistent with, and they are guided by the aims and objectives of the Healthy Ireland Framework the National Physical Activity Plan and Sport Ireland's strategy.

The Sport Ireland primary objectives for the Community Sports Hubs are to:

1. Maintain and further develop opportunities for participation in regular physical activity for all members of the community.
2. Support and expand local capacity in the provision of sports and recreation opportunities.
3. Maintain, and further develop, new and existing local facilities, amenities, clubs and school links to provide an adequate infrastructure for sports and recreation in the area.

In addition to the obvious recreational and fitness benefits of sport, it is intended that sports and physical activity will also realise a range of social outcomes for the Cranmore community via the Community Sports Hub. Hence the role of the SSRP as the Community Sports Hub 'change agent' is to primarily grow the opportunities and the engagement of the community in sports participation and in so doing a variety of recreational, health and community/social development outcomes will be achieved.

This evaluation is particularly focused on the extent and manner through which these primary (sports development), and secondary (community/social), outcomes are achieved.

1.1 The Community Sport Hub Structure

While the SSRP coordinates and provides expertise for the Sports Hub, the Hub is led via the Development Forum through a 'bottom up'¹⁰ community approach. On this basis the community are largely responsible for the choice and the realisation of the sports programmes and activities.

⁸ Low education levels and unemployment are at or near twice the national average, (over 50% unemployment for males), lone parent households at 40% compared to an 18% average in the State, permanent sickness of disability is at 8% which is double that of the State and an Economic Dependency Rate of 1.7 compared to 1.0 for the State.

⁹ To date, €24 million has been invested in regeneration over 12 years, a further €19.4m has been earmarked.

¹⁰ Community development is a central theme within the regeneration project, and this is consistent with good practice whereby the community participates in "planning and development as a partnership built upon the basis of a dialogue among the various actors (stakeholders), during which the agenda is set jointly, and local views and knowledge are deliberately sought and respected (Reid 2006; Uruena 2004; Sanoff 2000; Schneider and Libercier 1995).



Figure 3: The elements of the Community Sports Hub.

The Development Forum includes representation from a variety of community organisations and state agencies:

- Cranmore Regeneration Project Office: Operated by Sligo County Council employed staff, this office has a management responsibility for the realisation of the Masterplan.
- Cranmore Co-operative Society: The Board of the Cooperative is comprised of representatives from the Cranmore community.
- Abbeyquarter Community Centre: A community hub with charitable status and a Board of Management comprising community representatives.
- Resource House Springboard Family Support Project: Provides support for families on the estate through school programmes and initiatives for vulnerable families.
- Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership (SSRP).
- Sligo Leader Partnership Company.

Other agencies with overlapping responsibilities include the Health Service Executive (HSE), Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education Training Board (MSLETB), TUSLA, YAPS and Sligo County Childcare Committee.

1.2 Sports Programmes

The actions or outputs of the Community Sports Hub and the SSRP are made visible through their sports programmes (Appendix 1 Case Studies), which are selected and realised through the following sequence.

1. Specific sport and physical activity related outcomes are identified, either from the consultation process (2013), and consequently the Masterplan, or subsequently by the community via the Development Forum. SSRP advises on the practical issues and in prioritising the sports related outcomes within the Development forum.
2. These outcomes are prioritised by the Development Forum with technical advice from the SSRP.
3. The SSRP then works with community representatives, and with relevant agencies to identify a sport/physical activity programme which offers an appropriate response to the sought outcome.
4. The SSRP and the community identify the resourcing issues and resource sources¹¹ for the programme.
5. The SSRP and the community agree on who has responsibility for the various elements within the programme.
6. A service level agreement, which identifies the various responsibilities and expectations, is completed and signed by all parties. This formal agreement provides clarity around the process, aids planning and pre-empts any future confusion.
7. The programme is delivered in line with the service level agreement.
8. An evaluation process is incorporated at the programme planning stage.

¹¹ The SSRP and the community have agreed that while it is not possible for sport course fees to meet the full cost of provision, all of the sports and physical activity services which are provided, require some level of payment from participants.

1.3 Role of Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership (SSRP)

The SSRP acts as a 'change agent' for sport by working with the community to realise the potential of sport through effective communications, relationship building and assisting in the organisational readiness of the community.

“As well as the benefit of taking part in sport and the health benefits, sports can provide a vehicle for broader regeneration objectives, creating a sense of identity, creating social and community opportunities for interaction, increasing social cohesion, people being connected in and feeling that their neighbourhood is valued.” Chairperson of SSRP

The role of SSRP is to support the sustainable development and uptake of sports and physical activity opportunities within the regeneration process, through the structure of the Sligo East City Community Sports Hub

A 'bottom up' community led approach is central to both the Regeneration Masterplan and the Community Sports Hub. This approach is consistent with good practice whereby the community should "actively contribute to and influence the development process and share equitably in the fruits of development". 'Building from below' through a development process which is initiated within the communities through dialogue among the various actors (stakeholders), and with respect for local perspectives and joint agenda setting, (Reid, 2006; Sanoff, 2000; Uruena, 2004).

1.3.1 The Expectations of Sport

Sport carries a weight of expectation. In addition to the recreational and competitive value, sports participation can enhance the physical and mental well-being of individuals and improve the interaction of communities, they are vehicles for personal development, sources of self-efficacy and more. While these expectations are valid, the primary responsibility of the SSRP is to ensure that sports are meaningful and enjoyable. Meaningful in that they are relevant and engage with the needs of the different members of the community and enjoyable by being appropriately structured, safe and high quality.

In the absence of these meaningful and enjoyable characteristics, a Community Sports Hub will fail to engage with the wider community, they are less likely to attract the champions and volunteers to sustain them and they are also less likely to deliver the expectations of sports.

1.3.2 Sports and Community Development

Sports are also a proxy or a conduit for community development, they are the means through which the community can acknowledge and voice some of its needs and they are a mechanism for agencies which have community development responsibilities to engage with communities. The Sligo East City Community Sports Hub supports some of the wider needs and expectations of the community and agencies, and it contributes to the readiness and responsiveness of the community.

“bit by bit people are getting more involved. They watch their kids take part, they give a small bit of support or assistance and the next time they are more willing to assist a bit more or take some of the responsibility, then they might be ready to offer assistance in other non-sports areas.”
Interpreted community worker comment.

In effect the Community Sports Hub functions as a quasi-community development process. To realise the broader potential of sport and the Community Hub, the SSRP:

1. broadened the understanding of the potential of sport;
2. identified the complementary needs of the participants, community and partner organisations;
3. worked with stakeholders to reconcile these needs through appropriate sports programmes;
4. structured the long-term potential for sports.

This required that the SSRP developed a culture of:

- Awareness: there has to be an awareness amongst the various 'actors' (agencies, community and the SSRP), regarding the specific needs, situation and capabilities of the community/participants.
- Readiness: a readiness by the community and agency actors to make best use of the opportunity of sports.
- Creativity: the sports environment must be shaped and responsive to the needs and the capacity of its community if it is to meet the community's unique and evolving needs.
- Stickiness: sustainability is a moving target. Connecting briefly with the community is not enough, there must be a long-term, robust and deep investment in sports.

1.4 Sustainability

Sustainability is complex. The ideal is that the SSRP provides a resource around sport which the community engages with and takes responsibility for to such an extent that the SSRP can step back. However, it is evident that some communities lack the capacity for this type of sustainability. In these cases, sustainability for achievable aspects of a sports development programme, rather than the entire process, is a more realistic short to medium term target.

For example, a typical sports programme requires the elements of design, administration, communications, delivery supports and follow up actions. After a successful sports programme development process, while the SSRP may still have to invest in programme elements such as communications, delivery and follow up, an administrative element of the programme might have local sustainability as a result of the enhanced working relationships and a growth in the organisation skills of the various local actors arising from the initial programme.

These small sustainability steps must be acknowledged, not just from a reporting and return on investment perspective, but also so the community can recognise its growing capacity.

1.5 Summary

The SSRP has a central role in supporting the Cranmore and the wider East City community to pursue the promise of sport participation in recreation, competition, entertainment, health, community development and personal development. For this promise to be real and sustained, the sports development process must support long-term positive changes for individuals and their community.

To realise this approach the community's needs and readiness must be placed to the forefront, the objectives and the structures of the various agency and community actors must be aligned, and a flexible, creative and robust response is required.

The objectives and structures of the Regeneration Masterplan and the Community Sports Hub provide a framework for the SSRP to engage with the community, develop relationships, and through partnership refine awareness, grow readiness, and generate the appropriate sports programmes.

2.0 The Community Sports Hub Impact

It is apparent from this research that there have been a number of successes such as increased ownership and a buy-in by the community in the sports participation process. This is evidenced by an increasingly effective interaction between the relevant agencies and the various community organisations.

This structural interaction is made possible by the long-term Regeneration Plan and the Community Sports Hub plan both of which provide a framework of commitment and a clarity of approach for the various 'actors'. The multi-annual nature of these Regeneration and Sports Hub plans also provide a temporal space for the community and the SSRP to identify and amend their approach. Conversely a short-term funding approach imposes time sensitive deadlines which can 'force the hand' of the agencies to respond to external rather than internal community needs.



Figure 4: Strategic Context

The relationships which have developed between the SSRP and the community, also allow errors to be acknowledged and amended as a consequence these programmes are better shaped to the needs and the capacity of the community.

2.1 The Sligo East City Community Sports Hub, Critical Success Factors

The following section identifies the critical success factors underlying the Sligo East City Community Sports Hub.

2.1.1 Strategic Context

The Sligo East City Community Sports Hub emerged from and operated within a wider strategic context including the Healthy Ireland Framework and the National Physical Activity Plan, Sport Ireland's commitment to the Community Sports Hub approach and the investment of the SSRP. This wider context provided a national perspective and a local focus for the development of sports and physical activity.

The Regeneration Masterplan identified a local structure and the commitment from Sligo County Council and other agencies to redevelop the Cranmore area.

The Sport Ireland Community Sports Hub Initiative in turn provided the means to realise these planned local sports and physical activity objectives.

The national strategic context and advance local planning, in effect 'lined up the ducks' to avail of the Community Sports Hub opportunity. Hence, the pace and ease of the Community Sports Hub development process was aided by the already established approach, commitment, structures and sought outcomes of the Regeneration Masterplan. Equally this prior planning and structuring provided a confidence and space for SSRP and the community to prioritise and balance their unique needs over the specific objectives or ambitions of a state agency or funding programme.

2.1.2 Funding

A significant volume and range of resources are required to initiate and sustain the development of sports and physical activity in the East City Area. These resources initially and primarily came from Sligo County Council through the Cranmore Regeneration Office and with additional funding from the HSE and latterly from Sport Ireland's Community Sports Hub Programme via the SSRP.

2.1.3 SSRP Expertise

It is apparent that the SSRP brought technical expertise to the Sports Hub, through its knowledge of the different sports, access to equipment and facilities and its ability to engage effectively with the relevant agencies and organisations. The SSRP's access to trained sports staff and its network of others who can deliver and support their programmes was also valued by community representatives, however these representatives in particular noted the value of the interpersonal expertise of the SSRP.

Expertise

- ◆ Technical
- ◆ Network
- ◆ Interpersonal
- ◆ Neutral
- ◆ Resourcing

"They have the contacts, they know what activity can work, they bring ideas, they match the right tutor with the group and the activity, they respect the community, they understand where we are and what we need and they work with us." Community worker regarding the role of the SSRP.

The SSRP was also perceived as not having any particular agenda or baggage, even though it was connected to various agencies, the SSRP was seen as operating independently.

"They are neutral."

"They are independent and that is a big thing." Community Development Worker

Access to funding is a further aspect of the SSRP's expertise. The SSRP due to its status and its sport agenda, can access funding sources, such as the Dormant Accounts funding, which are not available to the other agencies. This positions the SSRP as a valuable interagency player, strengthens the role and capacity of the SSRP as a change agent, increases the resource flow for projects and maximises the value of the SSRP for the community.

2.1.4 Relationship Building

As well as having a 'big picture' understanding of the strategic role of sport and physical activity, the SSRP is conscious of and responsive to the stage of readiness of the community.

"It is very much about the readiness of the community. The extent to which the community has the capacity and is ready to respond to opportunities. That is our first step, to support their readiness" SSRP Co-ordinator.

Rather than 'parachuting in' short sports courses to entertain and occupy the community, the SSRP has developed relationships with community representatives over time. These ongoing relationships build trust and make it possible for the SSRP to fully understand the needs and state of readiness of the community. This understanding of the community, its specific needs and more importantly SSRP's ability to act on these needs, were identified as crucial to developing the relevant approach and programmes which were within the capacity of the community.

Relationships

Internal Relationships:

- ◆ SSRP with the Community
- ◆ Between the various community organisations.

External Relationships

- ◆ As a 'co-conspirator' with other agencies (SCC, HSE, ETB).
- ◆ With other sports organisations (NGBs, Sports Clubs, Tutors)

Disadvantaged communities can be cynical regarding the role of support agencies and the extent of their 'real' engagement. There may be a sense that the community and its needs are perceived as being a box which needs to be ticked rather than being part of a meaningful sustainable process. Furthermore, community organisations can at times operate in isolation from each other due to resource protection

concerns. The ability and willingness of the SSRP to 'work with us' was noted by the community and the SSRP is perceived as a trusted mediator which provides a neutral meeting-ground to support the relationships between the various Cranmore community groups, by focusing all parties on the opportunities through sports.

The Community Soccer programme is an example of cross-community relationship building. Overseen by SSRP, the responsibility for this programme was shared between the Abbeyquarter Community Centre, Cranmore Cooperative Society and the Resource House Springboard Project. The strengths and roles of the three organisations were identified and agreed to under a service level agreement and all three organisations co-operated successfully.

2.1.5 Building Networks

This relationship building by the SSRP also relates to external organisations and agencies. SSRP provides connections between these communities, sports and external organisations, and then develops these relationships via the relevant programmes.

These external agency relationships in addition to bringing resources into the Cranmore community, they can benefit non-sport agencies to access Cranmore residents to promote or 'bolt on' their agenda within a sports programme.

"Sports provide a sort of back door to access the community for other agendas we might have in the Council." Member of staff of Sligo County Council.

This relationship building also breaks down invisible barriers between Cranmore and nearby communities. Similarly, the engagement with other nearby community groups has led to closer interaction across the communities. Through this means the community can be more outward looking as the subtle invisible barriers between communities dissipate and the community's network capital grows.

For example the lawn bowls programme and the surfing programmes familiarised individual residents not just with a different place but also to other participants, lifestyles and sub-cultures. The geographic strangeness and otherness of these places and people are diminished through positive contact.

The East City Walking Group, Sligo Lawn Bowls Club, Couch to 5K, Bike Week, Triathlon and so on provide reasons and processes through which to engage more fully beyond the immediate Cranmore community and geographic area. Furthermore, the outreach of external clubs and organisations into the East City area has resulted in positive and sustainable engagement for example St Johns GAA Club was previously 'not on the radar' of Cranmore residents. Through the integration of this club within the Community Sports Hub activities, there has been an uptake in club membership from Cranmore residents.

2.1.6 SSRP Networking and Collaboration

The relationship building by the community with other organisations and agencies, is supported by the networking and collaboration of the SSRP. For example, SSRP has a strong relationship with Sligo County Council and with individual departments of the Council. The interaction between SSRP and the



Figure 5: Building Relationships and Networks.

Parks Department of the County Council is an example of this type of agency 'cross-pollination' through sports.

"SSRP helped to generate 'anchor tenants' for park facilities through their training programmes".
Member of staff of Sligo County Council.

This combined approach of the local authority and the SSRP secured match funding from the Department of Environment for the Lawn Bowls facility and Sligo County Council enabled access to the expertise and time of the Parks Department staff in developing the recreation infrastructure and further the pooling of resources.

It is apparent that at the SSRP Community Sports Development Officer (CSDO), placed relationship building at the core of her approach. This relationship building was based on regular 'street level' contact with community representatives and members. The CSDO also engaged regularly with other relevant external agencies and organisations and provided feedback to the Board of the SSRP which sustained the 'top down' commitment from the Board of the Partnership. This street and Board level relationship building strengthens the network and interactions of the various agencies with the community and between each other.

These relationships also support a more complete understanding of the needs and the capacity of the community which in turn supported creative responses to their needs.

"They (the SSRP), know how to connect with people, how to interact and engage with. They recognise that one size does not fit all." Community Development Worker.

"They provide tailored solutions for the community and this requires flexibility." Community Development Worker.

2.1.7 Building Capacity

The SSRP understands that it is a partner in a process of responding to and developing the capacity and social capital of the Cranmore community through sports. This capacity building at one level results in the community taking more control of the sports programme. At a more strategic level the growth in the capacity and social capital of the community has the potential for its greater ownership and control around the other challenges and issues which the community encounters.

"There were very few sports available at Cranmore previously. We had a soccer team but we could not get enough adult volunteers on the bus for away matches so that soccer team fell apart." Community Development Worker.

"A lot of people in the community do not have confidence in themselves and they are not willing or do not feel able to do the things that people do as part of other communities do." Community Development Worker.

These specific characteristics of low levels of volunteering and a limited history of community type activities, were identified as being part of this community's unique needs. Developing a volunteering culture through the engagement of parents in sports activities, providing small step responsibilities and confidence building measures are part of the readiness building of the community.

Capacity building is not a quick fix process. A long-term investment is required to bring about relationship building, attitudinal changes and the growth in individual and organisation self-efficacy. The ongoing and consistent engagement of the SSRP within the community is central to a gradual development of its capacity.

“They don’t just come in and tick a box, they talk and listen and you know that they are going to be around and not just do a job and leave.” Community worker regarding the role of the SSRP.

“its not just about what we provide, it is as much about how we operate in trying to achieve our goal of getting more people active” Sports Coordinator

2.1.8 Sustained Investment:

As identified previously ‘stickiness’ is a key part of the required environment for an effective community development through sports programme. This stickiness relates to the ongoing investment of time, effort and finances into a project especially where the returns can appear low with respect to the numbers affected and where these returns may take a long period of time to be realised. In this instance stickiness is dependent on the staff, operational creativity and the strategic commitment of the SSRP.

“The Board recognises that the community requires a range of supports over a long period, and that we must work with and within the community.” Chair SSRP.

“They (the SSRP) are professional, they are on the ground, they know us they are not remote figures they are reachable this cannot be done from behind a desk.” Community Development Worker.

“They (the SSRP) are not just ticking boxes, they have time to sit down and make things happen, because there is no point promoting things unless you put in the footwork, they are here for the long haul.” Community Development Worker.

The enduring relationships of the SSRP and the ongoing commitment of the SSRP Board in concert with the long-term aspirations and investment of the Regeneration Project, provides a secure and dependable base for all parties. Problems which have arisen as part of this process were approached with a long-term outcome in mind rather than a short-term patch and this increased trust and the willingness to experiment and learn.

“Sometimes we had to let things happen which we knew would not work because the community needed to make these decisions and realise the outcomes from them. Sometimes we were right and sometimes we were wrong and they worked. We all are learning as we go along.” SSRP staff.

2.1.9 Inclusivity

It can be simplistic to consider any community as being a homogenous whole. Most communities are themselves a collection of other communities and sub-cultures. Indeed, the extent to which these diverse individuals and sub groups are integrated within a shared identity and group, is partially the mark of a strong community. It is also tempting and common to think about sports participants in a simplistic manner. Sport as equating with youth, male, competitive, fit and so on. This perception belies both the potential and the reality of sports participation and relevance.

The somewhat cliched expressions of ‘Sports for All’ and ‘Sports for Life’ is central to the potential, if not always the reality, of sports in the community. ‘For all and for life’ is in fact the vision and the potential of a Community Sports Hub approach. To realise this vision there must be inclusivity. Inclusivity in sport is about the opportunity for all members of the community to take part regardless of any specific personal characteristics or sub group membership.

It is evident from the range and diversity of sports programmes and supports, that the SSRP and the Community Sports Hub targets a range of community members. For example, the Traveller community, the older person, mothers, men, youth and teenagers via the Boxing Club, Community Soccer, Walking Group, Lawn Bowls and so on.

2.2 Challenges

The unique needs of the Cranmore Community require a specific level or type of engagement from the various organisations and agencies. Low levels of community cohesion and confidence can undermine the impact of a community focused sport programme and so there must be a structured and flexible response to the community's needs and context such as:

- Providing the additional staff and time: The unique needs of the Cranmore community require a tailored rather than an adapted or a generic approach if a sports and physical activity structure is to be relevant and meaningful. As a result, the SSRP must continue to be open, creative and flexible in how they engage and work with the community and this requires more resources compared to other mainstream SSRP programmes.
- Retaining a balance: The SSRP had to maintain the balance between supporting the capacity building of the community versus managing or directing the community while also not taking on the responsibilities of others. The SSRP managed this balance by defining clear areas of responsibility and undertaking an occasional 'step back' to review and evaluate its role and actions.
- Diffusing responsibility: while the practical aspects of sports development are increasingly shared across the various actors, the SSRP is still the core source of sport programming and design. The majority of community programmes are generated and planned by SSRP and as a consequence the Sports Hub process requires a significant investment of the time and resources of the SSRP. The further diffusion of responsibility across the various actors will increase the capacity of the Community Sports Hub.
- Proportionate sustainability: The sustainability of a Community Sports Hub or its individual programmes depend on the capacity or readiness of the community. Unrealistic expectations around sustainability can undermine the process, threaten creativity and hide or undermine the small but important progression steps of the community. Sustainability must be targeted according to readiness.
- Supporting others: While the SSRP is primarily involved in developing and supporting the readiness of the community, supporting the capacity of all actors is central to realising the positive impact of sports in community development.
- Time and resources: These elements are required to support new staff in partner agencies and organisations so that they could develop relationships and become attuned to the Sports Hub process.
- Narrow focus: Sport is not alone in its ability to support community and personal development, for example health and the arts have a similar potential. There is a benefit to ensuring that these other 'agents of change' operate in conjunction with sport rather than in parallel with it.

2.3 Conclusions

The Sligo East City Community Sports Hub approach identifies perspectives and ways of operating which can inform and add-value to other Sports Hub type approaches:

- Shared objectives and a sustained commitment of resources are required and realised through a long-term perspective, clear objectives, Board level commitment, ongoing interaction, a visible and regular local presence and strong relationships.
- Awareness, flexibility and time must shape the approach. The community requires space and time to find its voice and the SSRP must translate the voice of the community and the objectives of the relevant agencies, into meaningful locally relevant sports programmes. This requires a creative and flexible approach rather than generic and prescriptive programmes.
- Relationships are at the core: ongoing individual relationships which are built on sustained engagement and commitment make open and trusting conversations and engagement more likely. While relationships between the SSRP and the community are central, effective relationships between the various agencies and other external groups are also crucial. To realise the promise of sport, an ongoing conversation regarding its potential is required amongst all the actors.
- Proportional sustainability targets, which provide way-points for sport development, must continue to be identified, acknowledged and progressed.

2.4 Recommendations

The following are the key recommendations arising from this research and reporting process:

- The approach and sustainability of this Community Sports Hub illustrates the high level of investment that is required. In particular the lower the readiness of a community or a target group, the higher the levels of commitment, time and investment which are required.
- The Community Sports Hub illustrates that the SSRP must further engage with and build relationships with external resources, communities and organisations to grow capacity, increase opportunity and support sustainability at Cranmore and the East City Area. For example additional club and community links may inform potential stakeholder involvement for the proposed Cranmore community/sports facility.
- Strategic Leadership; In a project such as this, relationship management and network development are key functions of the SSRP. To effectively pursue and exercise these strategic roles the SSRP must continue to develop its strategic vision and capacity.
- Further targeted work is required in Cranmore and the East City area. The successful programmes, relationships, organisations, clubs and so on, point to the need and the opportunity for a larger portfolio of sports and physical activity resources. Impact and sustainability are dependent on the replication/expansion of this process, which remains a work in progress.
- The multiplier effect which is required to leverage sustainable community sports development, is dependent on building the capacity of local volunteers, leaders, committee members and community workers to structure, deliver and promote sport and physical activity. SSRP has an increasing role in sourcing training and support for these 'sports makers'.
- SSRP must continue to capture the impact of the programme and how it delivers on local needs within the context of Healthy Ireland's National Physical Activity Plan and Sport Ireland's

objectives. The increased use of testimonials and case studies can capture insight as well as highlight and support the 'think national and act local' approach to the Community Sports Hub and aid future funding.

- SSRP must further balance its allocation of resources and its street level versus its strategic level approach. This balancing requires that sports and physical activity development takes place within Cranmore and in the neighbouring East City area. This Community Sports Hub experience has demonstrated the value of a community sports clustering approach in which communities collaborate to share resources and engage participants and through which hidden community barriers are overcome.
- The SSRP while continuing to invest in some sports and community organisations which have low levels of readiness, it must also invest in neighbouring higher capacity organisations which have the potential to influence and lead by example. This leveraging of capacity can also lower the SSRP's resource load and increase the impact.
- While the SSRP is central to the Community Sports Hub process, it must continually be aware of its limitations and the potential of others. SSRP has finite resources and a range of responsibilities which extend beyond the East City Community Sports Hub. To realise best value and to avoid overwhelming the SSRP, the SSRP must continually engage with others to maximise external inputs and grow the capacity of the Cranmore Community and the East City Area.

The SSRP through its primary role of increasing sports participation, realised a number of sport, personal and community development outcomes via the East City Community Sports Hub process. This was achieved through a sustained commitment, readiness-awareness, creative tailored approaches, deep local relationship building and by integrating the capabilities of other agencies, communities and organisations.

Appendix 1: Case Studies

Case Study → **Sligo Lawn Bowls Club**



CONTEXT

Sligo Lawn Bowls Club was founded in July 2017, until then there was no history of the sport in Sligo. The facility development was funded by Sport Ireland under Dormant Accounts and supported locally by Sligo County Council and Cranmore Regeneration Office who sourced match funding from the Department of Environment.

AIM	OBJECTIVES
To increase participation in physical activity through the provision of a quality lawn bowls facility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To develop a lawn bowls facility at Cleveragh Park.• To facilitate opportunities for participation in physical activity through lawn bowls.• To develop a sustainable Sligo Lawn Bowls Club• To work in partnership with statutory and community partners to realise a Lawn Bowls facility.

MODEL OF DELIVERY

Partnership approach:

- Sligo Sport and Recreation Partnership, Sligo County Council, Cranmore Regeneration Office, Sport Ireland, Bowling league of Ireland, Health Service Executive and Department of Environment

Facility Development:

- A 4 lane Lawn Bowls Facility at Cleveragh Regional Park developed
- Official Facility launch to promote the facility and the sport in the community
- Installed two sheltered seating areas and an age friendly step onto the green

Capacity Building:

- Lawn Bowls Coaching workshop hosted by the Bowling League of Ireland to build local capacity

Programming:

- 'Come & Try' Lawn Bowls programme delivered involving 60 people
- Weekly all year round Saturday morning club and summer evening programmes
- Inter club friendly competitions

Club Development:

- Initially an interim working Group formed involving 10 volunteer members
- Investment and ongoing mentoring by SSRP
- Action Plan incorporating governance, training, marketing, programming and facility enhancement
- New Club formed with committee identified on 15th July 2017

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PROFILE



The club has a mix of members male and female who are predominantly over 55. Currently, the membership of 40 is inclusive of 15 representatives from the East City area including 5 members from Cranmore estate.



OUTPUTS

- A Lawn Bowls facility created at Cleveragh Park
- Sustained Sligo Lawn Bowls Club developed with 40 club members
- Strong partnership developed with key stakeholders
- Successful age friendly and social community based participation programme
- Residents of the East City area engaged in physical activity at Cleveragh Park.

SUSTAINABILITY

As their competence, confidence and ownership of the club increased, the club members have taken on some key strategic roles including club development, negotiating improved physical access to the facility and conducting inter club visits and hosting tournaments.

SSRP has stepped down its level of direct involvement and actions such as mentoring the committee, linking with the National Governing Body and developing a weekly lawn bowls programme, which are now all undertaken by the club members.

SSRP's role has evolved to that of a strategic Change Agent whereby it now responds to the stated needs of the members, for example engaging with the Local authority Parks Department regarding facility enhancement.

Evidence of sustainability was reflected in the comments from the club committee:

'Little was known by the group in setting up a club and from the start SSRP brought us through it step by step - from insurance to registration to advertising as well as arranging and running over time to form the club. SSRP helped us in developing the club constitution, setting out a code of conduct, etiquette rules as well as other forms that are required in all clubs.'

Club Committee member

"We just couldn't have done this without the continued support and co-operation with SSRP, who has been so helpful, always listens to us and takes our views on board. With the help and backing from SSRP, we now have a plan and the confidence to run a club."

Club Chairperson

Case Study

East City Community Walking Group



CONTEXT

Two Cranmore community groups were supported by SSRP to deliver community based walking programmes including the Monday Morning women's group and the Abbeyquarter Men's Group in 2015. Arising from this a plan to develop a sustainable walking group for the wider Sligo East City area was initiated.

AIM

To increase participation in walking as a form of physical activity in the Sligo East City Community Sport Hub

OBJECTIVES

- To providing a pathway for participation through the development of a sustainable walking group
- To develop community capacity to facilitate a community walking group
- To facilitate an inclusive community walking group
- To increase usage of outdoor recreational spaces in the Sligo East City area

MODEL OF DELIVERY

Partnership approach:

- A community walking group planned and promoted involving SSRP, Cranmore Community Groups, Cranmore Regeneration Office, Get Ireland Walking and Sport Ireland
- Strong link developed with the Riverside Hotel as a host organisation to provide a meeting point for registration and a social tea/ coffee after each walk

Programme Delivery:

- A 5 week Spring Walk Series facilitated in the Sligo East City area
- Ongoing mentor programme by SSRP in place with Sligo East City Community Walking with regard to promotion and planning their 12 week calendar of walks schedule

Capacity Building:

- SSRP workshop facilitated with participants to establish a Community Walking Group
- A 6 week mentor programme led by a SSRP walking leader and supported by programme participants with agreed roles including promoting, registering new members, planning and leading walks
- A buddy system supported by SSRP volunteers to include people with an intellectual disability

Community Walking Group:

- Community Walking Group established and registered as 'Sligo East City Community Walking Group' with Get Ireland Walking

PROFILE

The profile of the East City Community Walking Group includes:

- 9 participants from East City area
- 2 participants with an intellectual disability
- 6 participants from mental health services
- 2 Asylum Seekers from Globe House



OUTPUTS

- A sustainable Community Walking Group developed
- Increased leadership capacity among community group members to plan and organise walks
- Inclusive club with 25 regular walkers including 2 with an intellectual disability supported weekly by a SSRP volunteer buddy system and 6 from mental health services who are supported by two HSE support workers.
- Enhanced facility usage in the outdoors in the East City area including the Sli na Slainte route at Doorly Park and Cleveragh Regional Park.

IMPACT

Promoting Inclusivity:

"We have a mix of all abilities in our group, so we have 3 different sub groups to support all abilities, but everyone meets and returns to the same place at the same time for the cup of tea and a chat"

Sligo East City Community Walking Group leader

"this is just great for our clients, I collect them each week, as it is so good for them, meeting other people, socialising and walking".

Mental Health HSE Support Worker

Facilitating Social Interaction:

"Our group really stayed together, very lively and friendly group and our leaders kept us focused and had a big interest on us, enjoyed it and really would like it to continue"

Walking group member

'If you were at home on you r own you just wouldn't go, but by being part of the a group you would feel like you were letting the group down if you didn't make it'

Walking group member

Quality Leadership:

'The attitude created by the leaders was so encouraging, a really nice atmosphere and respect for all abilities; it has been socially and physically beneficial for me'

Walking group member

Evaluation of the Model of Delivery for the East City Community Sports Hub Initiative.



