



Comhairle Chontae Liatroma  
Leitrim County Council

# Developing a sustainable eco- system of Creative Enterprises in the rural county of Leitrim

Policy Learning Platform Peer Review  
Date of Peer Review: 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2024  
Final Report

June 2024

[www.leitrim.ie](http://www.leitrim.ie)

# Motivation for Leitrim County Council to host an interregional Peer Review

## Profile of County Leitrim

Co. Leitrim is located in the northwest of Ireland, surrounded by counties Cavan and Longford to the east, Roscommon to the south, Sligo to the west and Donegal and Fermanagh to the north. Co. Leitrim encompasses an area measuring approximately 1,590 square kilometres.

In 2022, the population of Leitrim was 35,199 making it the smallest county by population in the State. However, the County has seen consistent growth in recent years and recorded a growth rate of 9.5% between 2016-2022 making it the county with the fastest growing population in the West of Ireland and the fourth highest growth rate in the State. Leitrim is a county of unspoilt beauty with 90% of the population living in rural areas.



## Enterprise

The results from the 2020 Business Demography highlight that the majority (95.1%) of enterprises in County Leitrim employ less than 10 people. The large percentage of small businesses underlines the importance of SMEs and microenterprises to the economic livelihood of County Leitrim.

## Regional & national Context

In 2021 The European Commission downgraded the Northern and Western Region's status from a 'more developed' region to a region in 'transition'. The region is the only one in Ireland to receive this classification. Figures show that the Northwest region has a disposable income that is 80% of the state average (€5,034 below state average and €10,215 below Dublin).

## Local Policy Context

Leitrim County Council has always taken an active role in progressing the overall economic development of the county and to address some of the challenges outlined above. We do this through partnerships with employers, agencies, and community groups. We have also always looked beyond our county administrative boundaries to develop networks and collaborations with other surrounding counties.

We are guided by our Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) in our decision making. Our LECP is monitored on a quarterly basis and will be formally reviewed at a midterm point. We will be in a position to review this in the context of the peer review as required.

## The Creative Sector in the Region

The creative sector in Leitrim and surrounding counties is an important source of employment. The enterprises that are engaged in creative industries in the region are mostly microenterprises employing 1-5 people.

In 2009 the Western Development Commission Publication Creative West noted that the creative sector in Leitrim had the highest proportion of people working within the creative sector (4.4% of total employment in the county) with Sligo the second highest on 4.2%. A more recent report conducted by Indecon Consulting for Leitrim County Council in 2018 showed percentage of the labour force employed in the creative sector in Leitrim remains substantially higher than the national average.

Over the last number of years Leitrim County Council working with local stakeholders has introduced a number of projects with varying supports to foster and grow the creative sector:

- ✓ In 2000 Leitrim County Enterprise Board established Leitrim Design House to support the design and craft sector, it now has over **50 creative enterprise** members.
- ✓ In 2014 Leitrim County Council Arts Office and Local Enterprise Office established Creative Frame as a Continuous Professional Development Network with over **350 members** from the broader performing and visual arts and design sectors.
- ✓ In 2015 Sligo, Leitrim and Roscommon Local Authorities collectively established the SLR Film project with a view to enabling the film sector in the region to grow and develop. It has **188 members** involved in the film sector specifically.
- ✓ In 2019 Leitrim, Sligo and Roscommon formed [Creative Heartlands](#). The project has **invested in equipment** specifically for the **Design and Film sectors**. With over 500 participants on training courses.

We wanted to learn how to build on the foundation outlined from previous and current projects to explore infrastructure and other supports that sustain creative enterprises in the region. The sustainability of creative enterprises is vital to continuing economic development for the region and we were seeking ways to grow and elevate the sector. We wanted to gain an understanding of how other regions have developed and sustained an eco-system for sustainable creative industries.

## List of Participants

### Interreg Europe

- Jason Martinez, Interreg Europe Programme Secretariat
- Antoine Duquennoy, Thematic Manager
- Rene Tönnesson, Policy Expert – Smarter Europe
- Mart Veliste, Policy Expert – Social Europe

### Peer experts

- Paolo Montemurro, Director, Materahub Industrie Culturali e Creative - Basilicata, Italy
- Satu Miettinen, Dean, Professor of service design, University of Lapland, Lapland, Finland
- Luz Molina, European project manager and legal advisor, Promálaga, Andalusia, Spain.
- Piotr Swiatek, Senior Researcher/Project Manager, PDR/Cardiff Metropolitan University, Wales, UK
- Mara Tognon, Regional officer in charge of European project for culture and CCIs, Veneto Region, Italy

### Beneficiary organisation and stakeholders from Ireland

- Rebecca Farrell, Economic Regeneration Officer / Atlantic Economic Corridor Officer, Leitrim County Council
- Joe Lowe, Head of Enterprise, Leitrim County Council
- Geraldine Reynolds, Senior Enterprise Development Officer, Leitrim County Council
- Philip Delamere, Arts Officer, Leitrim County Council
- Rhona McGrath, Arts Officer, Roscommon County Council
- Jeremy Cullen, Enterprise Executive, Roscommon County Council
- Stephen Walshe, A/ Senior Enterprise Development Officer, Sligo County Council
- Emma Cunningham, Manager, Leitrim Design House
- Johnny Gogan, Creative Heartlands Design Project Manager-
- Stuart Lawn, Creative Heartlands Film Project Manager

# Policy recommendations

## 1. Addressing challenges presented by rural areas

- 1.1. Co-create policy / joint vision for the future of the sector
- 1.2. Involve creatives as solution providers to various policy challenges in other fields
- 1.3. Identify separately the needs of the film and design sectors.
- 1.4. Ongoing mapping and monitoring of CCIs and conducting needs assessment
- 1.5. Continuously monitor your impact (not only at the end) & forecast the impact you want to have
- 1.6. When measuring impact of interventions add social (innovation) indicators
- 1.7. Consider using the following indicators:
  - Job creation, Number of services offered by the creative sector
  - Number of cases done in collaboration with Industry
  - Pre- and post analysis for the social impact

## 2. How to build a critical mass of sustainable enterprises?

- 2.1. Generate networks or bring people to existing network
- 2.2. Set up second level organisation – cluster, association, districts
- 2.3. Increase your cooperation with international players
- 2.4. Activate short and frequent mobility programmes (in and out) for local designers and filmmaker
- 2.5. Become more active in European cooperation
- 2.6. Reach out to Ireland's Brussels based offices
- 2.7. Pilot design vouchers – e.g. 5000 euros – business first steps to work with designers
- 2.8. : Consider the 5x5 methodology
- 2.9. Consider setting up a creative “cluster” – a one stop shop for product or service development.
- 2.10. As part of public tenders add stimulating/nudging criteria that would ‘force’ other actors to collaborate with the local artists
- 2.11. Define “Why Leitrim?”
- 2.12. Engage with DCCI and their network initiatives to promote Leitrim as a place for creatives
- 2.13. Consider setting up a film commission to bring foreign productions to the region
- 2.14. Collaborate with researchers during your projects
- 2.15. Where possible seek engagement with financial institutions
- 2.16. Set up a peer to peer and mentoring programme for CCI
- 2.17. Provide crowdfunding training to local CCI

## 3. Investment in facilities and equipment to support the creative sector

- 3.1. Look at CCI incubators as another model of support for CCI startups
- 3.2. Besides physical infrastructures consider facilitating pop up spaces, small spaces for a little time, co-designed and renovated the spaces.
- 3.3. Consider Equipment suggestions (following needs assessment) Digital wall, Red V-Rap ort 8k-camera, Creamsource Vortex led-light...
- 3.4. Return on investment, consider indicators other than monetary
- 3.5. Look into public-private collaboration opportunities – investments from the private sector
- 3.6. If possible include your infrastructure in national research resources and plan long-term (infrastructure investment is ongoing).
- 3.7. Try to create, through a collaboration agreement, the option for CCI SMEs in the region to have access to guarantees to cover their initial financial or investment needs.

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Carrick on Shannon 2nd & 3rd May 2024**

**Calendar of implementation of the proposed recommendations**

Applicability [1]	Recommendations	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Comments
<i>Very likely to be applied</i>	1.1, 1.2, 1.3,1.4,1.5, 1.7, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7,2.8, 2.11, 2.12, 2.14, 2.16, 2.17, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5		1.5, 1.6,1.7, 2.6, 2.12		1.4,2.5	1.3, 2.17, 3.1	3.2, 3.5	2.1, 2.3, 2.11,3.3, 3.4	1.1, 1.2, 2.14	2.4, 2.16	2.7, 2.8			
<i>Depends on specific political decisions/conditions</i>	1.6, 2.2, 2.9, 2.13, 2.15, 3.6													
<i>Rather seen as not applicable at the moment</i>	2.10a, 3.7,													

**Conclusions: any additional reflection on the experienced peer review:**

The peer review was very worthwhile. We found it good to see where we could improve but also to know where we are doing things well. It was also good to hear about the similar challenges faced by other countries It is an intense experience but the organisation and thoroughness of the PLP team is extremely helpful in capturing all the very useful information. We plan to start implementing some of the recommendations straight away.