The logo for 'Taobh Tíre' is contained within a white rectangular box with a thin blue border. The word 'Taobh' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font on a solid blue rectangular background. The word 'Tíre' is written in a bold, green, sans-serif font on a white background.

Taobh Tíre

**A better
library service
for rural areas**

Interim Project Report



Donegal County Council

Public Library Research Programme Report 1

A better library service for rural areas

Public Library Research Programme

The Public Library Research Programme assists local authorities in carrying out public library research. The Programme is co-funded by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and local authorities, and managed by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna / The Library Council.

Public Library Research Committee

- Betty Moriarty/Orlagh O'Sullivan, Assistant Principal, representing the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government;
- Norma McDermott, Director, representing An Chomhairle Leabharlanna / The Library Council;
- Fionnuala Hanrahan, County Librarian, Wexford County Council, representing the Library Association of Ireland;
- Professor Michael Casey, Department of Library and Information Studies, National University of Ireland, Dublin.
- Chair: Annette Kelly, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna / The Library Council
- Executive Secretary: Domitilla Fagan, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna / The Library Council

Funding Bodies

Taobh Tíre is funded jointly by:

- Local authorities
- Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- Donegal County Council
- Information Society Fund
- EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation
- An Chomhairle Leabharlanna / The Library Council
- Údarás na Gaeltachta

In addition to the above, the project management team wishes to acknowledge funding and other support given directly to Taobh Tíre service points by a range of national and community bodies.

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In particular, the project management team thanks

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- An Chomhairle Leabharlanna / The Library Council
- Donegal County Library
- Donegal County Council Information Systems Division
- Donegal County Council Research and Policy Section
- The Western Education and Library Board

The project management team wishes to record its appreciation of the past, present and future contribution of all participating agencies, community groups and individuals who have enthusiastically embraced the Taobh Tíre service. It is only through such participants that a project like Taobh Tíre can be a success.

The Team wishes to thank particularly the staff of Donegal County Library who adopted this new initiative with energy and enthusiasm.

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Foreword

Donegal County Council has been happy to take a lead role over the last eighteen months in investigating and implementing innovative methods to deliver library services to remote and isolated communities through the Taobh Tíre project.

I was pleased that Donegal County Council Library Service was selected by the Public Library Research Programme to undertake this research, which when completed will have put in place a significant new service for the people of Donegal and which will be applicable to isolated communities throughout Ireland. The success of this initiative to date has encouraged the view that the final report recommendations will be adopted by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for a national programme.

In Donegal, the new partnerships created with local communities have demonstrated the real benefits of networking and cooperation in delivering local authority services. The Information Society provides new opportunities to meet the needs of all the people of Donegal. The Taobh Tíre project provides a vision for a new sustainable, inclusive public library service which Donegal County Council is delighted to promote and support on behalf of all citizens of the county.



Michael McLoone

Donegal County Manager

Executive Summary

Taobh Tíre is a **libraries research and action project** carried out by Donegal County Council with the support of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. It is funded under the Public Library Research Programme with additional assistance from the Information Society Fund, Donegal County Council and the EU Peace II cross-border programme.

The project is investigating and implementing **innovative methods to deliver library services** to remote and isolated communities. While Donegal is the location for the pilot, the results will be applicable to isolated communities throughout Ireland.

The project team is working **in partnership with local stakeholders** – community development groups, commercial companies, a rural transport initiative, a Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and others. This partnership approach is both innovative and very successful to date.

The **first eighteen months** of the project are now complete. A further twelve are envisaged. In this first period, the project carried out the following:

1. Desk research on best practice and international state of the art
2. Identification of models for innovative and appropriate service delivery and the definition of the service to be delivered
3. Identification and profiling of possible host communities
4. Local consultation
5. Selection of host communities
6. Identification of potential partner organisations
7. Recruitment of partner organisations
8. Establishing pilot services
9. Analysis of work to date
10. Marketing of project services
11. Project management
12. External validation and monitoring

“My name is Deirdre Cannon. I am ten years old. I live in Kilcar, Co. Donegal. I think Taobh Tíre is a great idea because if the book you are looking for is not in the Library you could find it on Taobh Tíre. What I like best about it is that you can also borrow cds and Videos. I love going on line and seeing what books are in stock. I don't like waiting for two weeks for my book. But I know that can't be helped. I also like borrowing the videos because if you wanted to rent the videos in a rental store you only get it for one night but on Taobh Tíre you get to keep it for about two weeks.”

A better library service for rural areas

Results to date have been impressive. Ten partnerships have been established and ten service points are now delivering facilities to isolated communities across Donegal. There are now 492 registered Taobh Tíre members. 42% of WebOPAC (online catalogue) requests are from Taobh Tíre members.

Each service point includes a taster collection of books, access to the library catalogue and facilities to reserve and request books from this catalogue, PCs linked to the Internet, and access to library services such as reference, business information and inter-library loan. Service points are typically sited in community centres, co-ops and other public spaces, and staffed from the local community.

The project is delivering **real benefits** to all stakeholders – the people of Donegal, the Donegal County Council library service and other local agencies. Quality of life is being improved and new opportunities for education, life-long learning, leisure and personal development have been opened. Several spin-off initiatives have begun, including two major cross-border projects.

Project findings are outlined in the final sections of this report, along with the core conclusions and the most important **recommendations** for the next phase:

- The project should run another twelve months, in order to reach its full potential in terms of service delivery and research and analysis of the outcomes.
- Additional service points should be established. Consideration will be given to the addition of a service point in an urban area.
- Reader development is critical to the creation of a demand for library services where no such services were available before. Reader development should be an important strand going forward.
- Marketing should be an important focus in the next phase.
- New services such as online reference and Ask-a-Librarian should be rolled out.
- The facilitation of replication of the project work by other local authorities should be a priority.

“Hi, my name is Rachel McHugh. I live in Bavin, Kilcar, Co. Donegal. I am 8 years old. I have two brothers, Mark and Ryan. I like sport but my favourite subject is reading. I read at the morning and at the afternoon and bed time. I like the books at the library and I like Taobh Tíre but sometimes they can be a bit slow. But that's ok. I like going on the computer. I think it's really enjoyable. I love books and libraries but most of all I like Taobh Tíre.”

Achoimre Fheidhmiúchain

Is é atá i dTaobh Tíre **tionscadal taighde agus gnímh leabharlann**, atá á reáchtáil ag Comhairle Contae Dhún na nGall i gcomhar le Comhairle na Leabharlann. Tá an tionscadal á mhaoiniú faoin Chlár Taighde do Leabharlanna Poiblí, agus tacaíocht bhreise ar fáil ó Chiste Shochaí na Faisnéise, ó Chomhairle Contae Dhún na nGall agus ó chlár trasteorann Síocháin II de chuid an AE.

Tá **modhanna úrchruthaitheacha le seirbhísí leabharlainne a sheachadadh** chuig pobail imeallacha iargúlta á scrúdú agus á gcur i bhfeidhm ag an tionscadal. Cé go bhfuil an treoirhionscadal seo suite i nDún na nGall, beidh torthaí an tionscadail fóirsteanach do phobail imeallacha ar fud na hÉireann.

Tá foireann an tionscadail ag obair **i gcomhpháirt le páirtithe leasmhara áitiúla** – coistí forbartha pobail, comhlachtaí tráchtála, tionscnamh taistil tuaithe, Coiste Gairmoideachais agus eile. Tá nuálacht ag baint leis an chur chuige comhpháirtíochta seo, agus tá ag éirí thar barr leis go dtí seo.

Tá an tionscadal i ndiaidh **ocht mí dhéag** a chur thairis. Tá sé i gceist dhá mhí dhéag eile a bheith againn. Sa chéad tréimhse, seo a leanas na rudaí atá bainte amach ag an tionscadal:

1. Taighde deisce ar an chleachtas is fearr agus ar an chaighdeán idirnáisiúnta is déanaí
2. Múnlaí seachadta seirbhíse, atá nuálach agus fóirsteanach, a aithint, agus an tseirbhís atá le seachadadh a shainmhíniú.
3. Pobail, arbh fhéidir freastal orthu, a aithint agus a phróifíliú.
4. Comhairliúchán áitiúil
5. Roghnú na bpobal a raibh sé i gceist freastal orthu
6. Eagraíochtaí comhpháirtíochta a aithint
7. Eagraíochtaí comhpháirtíochta a earcú
8. Seirbhís phíolótach a bhunú
9. Scagadh a dhéanamh ar an obair go dtí seo
10. Margaíocht a dhéanamh ar sheirbhísí an tionscadail
11. Bainistiú an tionscadail
12. Monatóireacht agus bailíochtú seachtrach

A better library service for rural areas

Tá ag éirí thar barr leis an tionscadal go dtí seo. Tá deich gcomhpháirtíocht curtha ar bun, agus tá deich n-ionad seirbhíse ag soláthar áiseanna do phobail imeallacha ar fud Dhún na nGall. Tá 492 ball cláraithe ag Taobh Tíre. Baill Taobh Tíre a dhéanann 42% d'iarraitais WebOPAC (catalog ar líne).

In achan ionad seirbhíse tá cnuasach leabhar le léitheoirí a mhealladh; is féidir catalog agus áiseanna na leabharlainne a úsáid le leabhair a iarraidh agus a chur in áirithe ón chatalóg seo; tá an t-idirlíon ar fáil ar ríomhairí; agus tá teacht ag an phobal ar sheirbhísí leabharlainne, mar shampla, foinsí tagartha, eolas gnó agus iasachtaí idir-leabharlainne. De ghnáth, is in ionaid phobail, i gcomharchumainn agus in áiteanna eile pobail a bhíonn na hionaid seirbhíse suite, agus daoine áitiúla ag obair iontu.

Tá na páirtithe leasmhara uilig ag baint **an-tairbhe** as an tionscadal – muintir Dhún na nGall, seirbhís leabharlainne Chomhairle Contae Dhún na nGall agus gníomhaireachtaí áitiúla eile. Tá feabhas á chur ar shaol na ndaoine, agus tá deiseanna úra ar fáil maidir le oideachas, foghlaim fadsaoil, caitheamh aimsire agus forbairt phearsanta. D'eascair roinnt tionscadal eile as tionscadal Taobh Tíre chomh maith, ar a n-áirítear dhá thionscadal trasteorann.

Tá cuntas ar thorthaí an tionscadail ag deireadh na tuairisce seo, chomh maith leis na príomhchonclúidí agus **na moltaí** is tábhachtaí don chéad chéim eile:

- Ba cheart go leanfadh an tionscadal ar aghaidh go ceann dhá mhí dhéag eile, le go mbainfí gach buntáiste agus is féidir as ó thaobh seachadadh seirbhíse agus taighde de.
- Ba cheart tuilleadh ionad seirbhíse a bhunú. D'fhéadfadh ionad uirbeach a bheith i gceist anseo chomh maith.
- Tá an-tábhacht le forbairt léitheoirí chun éileamh ar sheirbhísí leabharlainne a chruthú in áiteanna nach raibh seirbhís ar bith ann roimhe seo. Ba chóir go mbeadh forbairt léitheoirí ina cuid thábhachtach den phróiseas amach anseo.
- Ba cheart díriú ar chúrsaí margaíochta sa chéad chéim eile.
- Ba cheart seirbhísí úra ar nós foinsí tagartha ar líne nó “Fiafraigh den Leabharlannaí” a fhorbairt

Ba chóir tábhacht ar leith a leagan ar obair an tionscadail a leathnú go dtí údaráis áitiúla eile.

Introduction



Typical Taobh Tíre Community Landscape – South-West Donegal

Taobh Tíre is a research and action project which is using new methods to deliver library services to remote areas. In this pilot-phase, the project is taking place in County Donegal; however, the results will be applicable to remote and isolated communities throughout Ireland.

This report describes the first eighteen months of activity of the project, from its initial inception to the establishment of new service points in remote communities throughout Donegal. It describes the progress of the initiative to date and its objectives for the coming year.

“On behalf of my mother, Nellie Byrne, who will be 97 in March – and on my own behalf, we wish to express our appreciation of Taobh Tíre, a terrific facility. For my mother, the availability of books in large print is particularly satisfying. Furthermore, as a full-time carer which limits free-time, the helpfulness of the Áislann Cill Chartha staff in ordering books on-line on our behalf is something for which we are both most thankful. Michael and Nellie Byrne.”

A better library service for rural areas

The report has the following structure:

1. The **executive summary**, which provides a brief digest of the most important points of the report/
An achoimre fheidhmiúchain a thugann athchuireá gear ar na pointí is tábhachtaí atá sa tuarascáil.
2. **Introduction**
3. A **description** of the Taobh Tíre project – who is behind it and what it does
4. An outline of the **policies** which the project addresses, the reasoning behind the project and the manner in which the project meets the objectives of the Information Society, the public library service and Donegal County Council.
5. A statement of the **objectives of the project**.
6. A review of the **progress of the project** to date, including the research carried out, the organisations worked with, and the locations served
7. A description of the **marketing work** carried out by the project team to promote the service
8. An overview of the **external monitoring and evaluation** process
9. An outline of how the project is **managed**
10. A description of the **achievements** of the project, the **benefits** delivered to isolated communities and the **new initiatives** which have been spun off from the project.
11. An analysis of **the findings** from the project, both for the project team and for other organisations who may wish to replicate the project
12. An exploration of **future options** for the project, focusing particularly on the next twelve months
13. A collection of key **conclusions and recommendations** for the future.

This document is an *interim* report: while the project has achieved its objectives to date, it remains ongoing. A final report will be issued when the project ends. A key recommendation of this interim report is that the project should continue for at least a further 12 months, in order to build on its success to date.

What is Taobh Tíre?

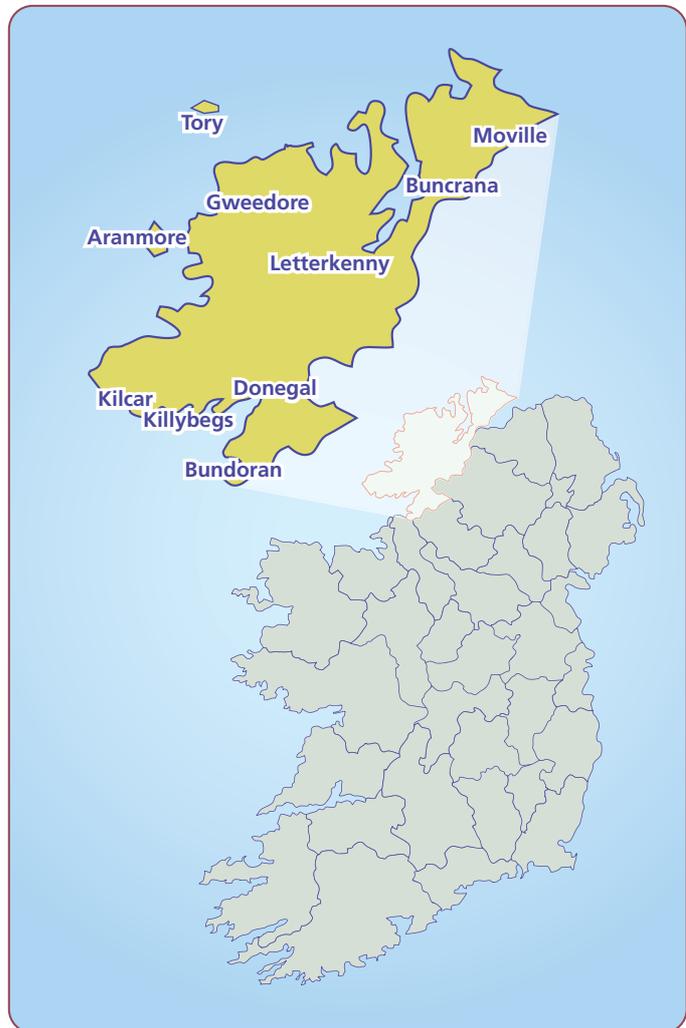
Taobh Tíre is an initiative of Donegal County Council supported by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, with funding from the Public Library Research Programme, the Information Society Fund and Donegal County Council resources. The project is **developing and implementing new and innovative ways to deliver library services to remote communities** in isolated locations, including offshore islands.

Taobh Tíre delivers library services through a network of **service points** into remote and isolated communities. A service point consists of a small collection of books, provided by Donegal County Library (a **taster collection**) and a range of **additional library services** such as reference and business information, inter-library loan, etc. A service point also has one or more **PCs connected to the Internet**, thus providing access to the online catalogue of the County Library's main holdings, various online information resources and the wider Internet. A service point is staffed by staff trained by County Library personnel, and is open for a significant number of hours (typically 20–60 hours) per week.

Taobh Tíre has established ten new library service points in rural Donegal, including two on offshore islands. New service points are established in partnership with the local community, most commonly in the form of community development associations and co-operatives.

Taobh Tíre is run by a project officer seconded from the staff of Donegal County Libraries. The project officer reports to a project management team which includes representatives from Donegal County Council and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. An external consultancy organisation provides monitoring and evaluation services to the project.

Taobh Tíre is an exciting and valuable project because it extends to remote areas cultural services which have typically been the preserve of larger towns. This helps to reduce the sense of isolation experienced by small remote communities and to improve the quality of life of the population in peripheral regions. By working in partnership with local stakeholders, Taobh Tíre is demonstrating new paradigms for service delivery. These are relevant not just in Donegal but in every county in Ireland which has isolated communities.



Map of Ireland showing Donegal County

Why Taobh Tíre – the Policy Background

Taobh Tíre is a project of the **Public Library Research Programme**, a national initiative, funded jointly by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the local authorities, and managed by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. Taobh Tíre was proposed in response to a Call published by the Research Programme. It addresses a theme common to many Irish counties, that of serving small and remote communities which are not large enough to support a full-scale branch library. This theme was identified as a priority for research and action by the Research Programme, reflecting the findings of *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*¹, the review of public library policy published in 1998. Subsequent reports such as the *eInclusion*² report and the *Report of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning*³ have again underlined the need to provide for the knowledge and cultural requirements of all citizens, including those in isolated communities.

The **Information Society Fund** has as a key priority the support of initiatives that encourage the propagation of Internet access throughout the country and the engagement of the wider population with new technologies. Remote communities, farmers and fishermen are particular target groups of the Information Society as identified in (for example) the *eInclusion* report and the *Third Report of the Information Society Commission*⁴. The strong Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) focus of Taobh Tíre means that it meets the objectives of the Information Society; this is reflected by the generous additional support of the project by the Information Society Fund.

In parallel with the activities of the Research Programme, **Donegal County Council** has been pursuing an agenda of *inclusive cultural services*, reflected in the County Council planning statement, *Saol agus Saoithiúlacht, the Strategic Plan for Cultural Services 2001–2004*⁵ and the County Development Board's *An Straitéis, the Donegal County Strategy 2002–2012*⁶. With its large number of isolated communities, including the off-shore islands, the delivery of services to isolated areas is central to Donegal County Council policy. These services are an important element of ensuring the sustainability of small rural communities and of the delivery of equitable services across the wider Donegal population, both key planks of Donegal County Council policy.

1 *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*. (Stationery Office, 1998). ISBN: 0-7076-6174-9

2 *eInclusion: Expanding the Information Society in Ireland/Report to the Information Society Commissions* (by) Dr. Susan O'Donnell, Helen McQuillan, Dr. Anna Malina. (Information Society Commission, 2003).

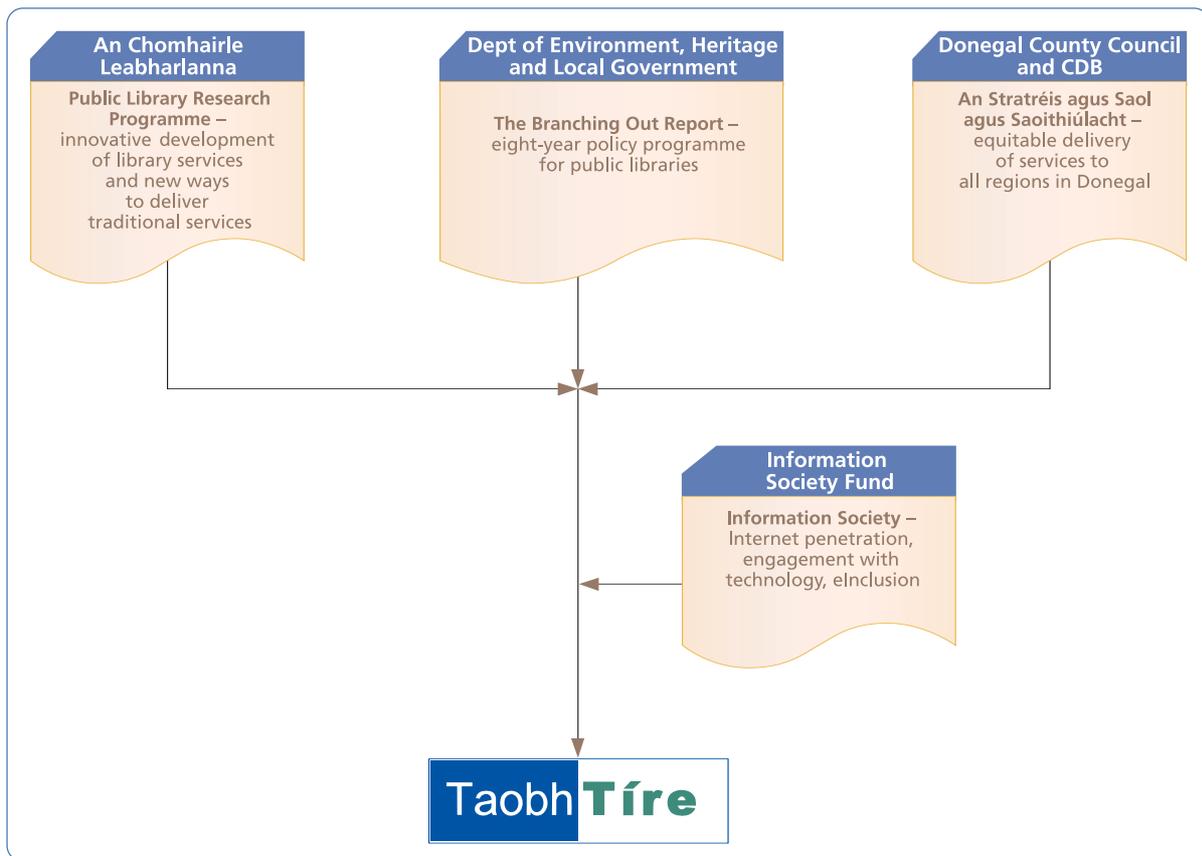
3 *Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning*. (Stationery Office, 2002).

4 *Information Society Ireland/Third Report of Ireland's Information Society Commission*. – (Stationery Office, 2000). ISBN: 0-7076-6599-X

5 *Saol agus Saoithiúlacht: Strategic Plan for Cultural Services – libraries, arts, museum, archives, 2001–2004*. (Donegal County Council, 2001).

6 *An Straitéis: Donegal County Implementation Plan, 2002–2012*. (Donegal County Development Board, [2002]).

By supporting, developing and delivering the Taobh Tíre project, Donegal County Council is in a position to meet its own objectives as well as those of the Public Library Research Programme. By supporting the project, the Research Programme can build on the work of Donegal County

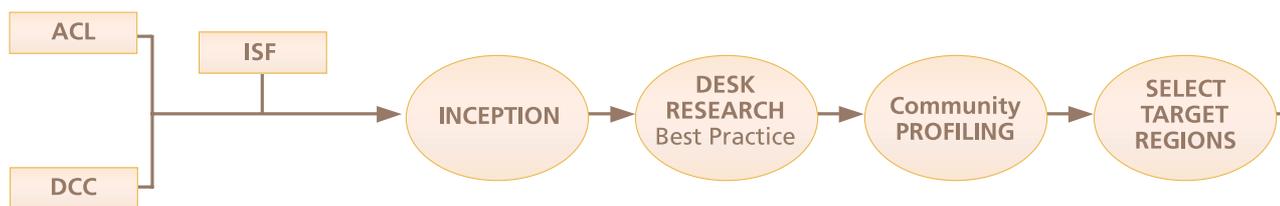


Council and ensure that the results are suitable for replication across the country, thus delivering benefits on a national level.

Taobh Tíre Objectives

The Taobh Tíre initiative is a research and action project, exploring new ways to provide library services to remote and isolated communities and then delivering on the results of that exploration. Its objectives are as follows:

1. To identify new and **innovative ways of delivering library services**, including lending, reference, information and cultural services to the public.
2. To explore the various **environments** in which library services could be delivered, other than the traditional branch library network. These could include public areas such as community halls or commercial environments such as shops or post offices.
3. To identify third parties with whom **partnerships** could be established, such that the third parties cooperate with Donegal County Council library personnel to deliver library services to their communities. These might include community development groups, parish councils, shop owners, etc.
4. To **deliver the library services**, serving the public and increasing the value of the library system to the overall community.
5. To **improve the quality of life** of the population by facilitating access to library collections and services. The project should not merely investigate new service delivery – it should deliver real benefits to the public.
6. To establish a **replicable methodology** whereby partners are selected, library service points established and the population served, in an efficient, effective and customer-focused manner. The ability to replicate the project results in other local authority areas is a critical success factor for the project.
7. To **monitor and evaluate** the project throughout its lifetime, with the particular objective of replicating the new services in other counties around Ireland.



Taobh Tíre Progress

Introduction

This section reviews the progress of the project during its first eighteen months, from inception to the present report. It describes the project progress in relatively general terms – more detailed progress reports are available in the Taobh Tíre area of the Donegal County Council website at www.donegallibrary.ie/findit/taobh/default.htm

Inception

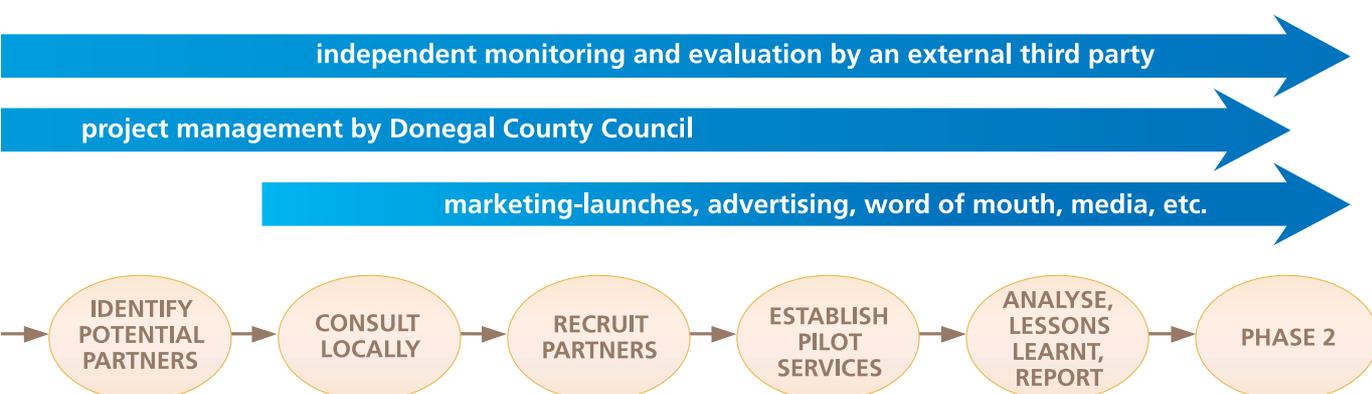
The project was, as outlined above, agreed between the Public Library Research Programme (managed by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna) and Donegal County Library (part of Donegal County Council), in 2002. The project has two further partners – the Community Development and Enterprise Division, Donegal County Council and the Information Systems Division, Donegal County Council. Both of these have played essential supporting roles in the project.

A steering committee was established for the project, to which the project officer reported. This committee maintained a watching brief on the project and ensured that it remained focused on meeting the project plan and achieving its contractual objectives.

The project began in December 2002. The project coordinator (from early 2003 onwards) was Eileen Burgess, a senior member of the County Library staff, who remained the driving force behind the project up to the time of this report.

Background Desk Research

It was essential that, before building any new services themselves, the project team be aware of the **state of the art and best practice** both nationally and internationally. An extensive desk research operation was carried out by Donegal County Council (focusing on the national state of the art) and by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (reviewing international best practice). A recent survey by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna of the Mobile Library service also provided a valuable insight into one common approach to serving widely-distributed small communities.



A better library service for rural areas

The desk research underlined the need for comprehensive cultural services as an important requisite for the **sustainability** of small rural communities. The cycle of reduced population leading to lower standards of service, again driving depopulation, is a common one across all the countries reviewed. Library services are widely viewed as important contributors to quality of life, with service delivery projects in the US, the UK and Denmark particularly relevant to Taobh Tíre.

The role of Information and Communications Technology (**ICT**), particularly the Internet, in the delivery of cultural services is a recurring theme in the international projects reviewed. However, ICT alone is not enough – the importance of both *high-speed Internet access* (ideally broadband infrastructure) and also *training and support* was repeatedly underlined. Various training schemes and buddy systems have been tried, each reinforcing the message that support is critical.

Research also focused on how other countries had formed **partnerships beyond the libraries sector**, to deliver library services. These included the hosting of collections in shops and post offices, exploitation of local transport networks such as the post-bus and the embedding of libraries in other service centres such as medical centres.

The potential of the **mobile library** to serve distributed communities is clear. This was explored in some detail in the USA and Denmark, with a number of approaches being taken to improving the service to the public. These included changing the contents of the mobile library to reflect the population being served (e.g. loading more children's books when playgroups or schools were being visited), the delivery of reader development services and story-telling as well as book issues and the provision of IT training using a mobile IT trailer. An important dichotomy was repeatedly apparent – the conflict between the number of centres which can be served and the duration that a mobile library remains in each location.

National Best Practice

The delivery of library services to isolated communities is not a new concept in the Irish context. There are two main approaches to this which are followed in Ireland today – the use of mobile libraries and the establishment of library centres. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna recently completed a major review of the mobile library service across all the library services using it (sixteen library authorities use mobiles, or some 50% of the total).

Mobile Libraries

The mobile library is a common sight in sixteen counties of Ireland. The mobile typically covers several towns or villages each morning and afternoon, stopping for a period from a few minutes to an hour or more. Library users can select and borrow books as in a branch library.

The most modern mobile libraries provide online catalogue access and Internet access to the public. Mobiles can be used to supplement smaller library centres, with regular refreshing of their holdings. This occurs, for example, in Rosmuc, Co. Galway, where the mobile library replenishes the stock of books available in the local community centre which also hosts a cyber café, art classes, meeting facilities for a writing group and senior citizens. Library members can borrow items from both the mobile library and the deposit collection.

The mobile library has a number of important strengths and weaknesses. Its major **strengths are**

- It can serve communities which are too small to support a branch library, and so can deliver at least some level of library service where otherwise there would be none.
- It delivers cultural services to the most remote areas and the smallest communities, where few other cultural services are available
- It provides a social link for residents of outlying communities
- It is flexible in what it carries and where it goes, in that its schedule can be adapted and reviewed in response to changing populations and requirements
- It can contribute to other forms of library service, by supplementing and refreshing libraries centres (as outlined for Rosmuc, Co. Galway, above)

However, it has a number of important **shortcomings:**

- There is a direct conflict between the number and remoteness of locations which can be served and the amount of time that the mobile can spend at each such location.
- A short stop, once a week or once a fortnight, means that users need to be aware of when the mobile is coming. If the mobile does not turn up on time, there is a real risk of users, who have traveled from the hinterland to use the library, missing it entirely and rapidly becoming disenchanted with the service.
- Short stops at fixed times mean that many members of the community cannot be served by the mobile library. For example, members of the workforce are unlikely to be free to visit the library unless it happens to stop near them at lunchtime or at the end of the workday. This is reflected in the fact that the large majority of mobile library users are female and that some users select books on behalf of other members of their families.
- The small size of the mobile (relative to a library building) effectively restricts the number of books on any topic which a mobile can carry. Unless the contents of the mobile library are regularly refreshed, there is every likelihood that users will find little that they have not already seen.
- On the other hand, the relatively large vehicles used for mobile libraries require a certain quality of road if they are to be able to travel safely and efficiently. In many remote parts of Ireland (including parts of Donegal), the road network is not of sufficient quality to allow the safe driving of mobile libraries. This has impinged on mobile library services in Donegal.

Mobile libraries are a viable way to deliver a certain level of library services to remote communities. They suffer from small collection size and restricted opening hours, but can act as a traveling advertisement for the library service as a whole, as well as providing at least some level of service to remote locations.

A better library service for rural areas

Library Centres

Library Centres are another method of delivery of library services to small communities. A library centre consists of a collection of books, smaller in size than a full branch library, with restricted opening hours. The book collection is refreshed from time to time by the branch library network. Books can be issued and returned at the library centre.

Library centres are used in remote communities, as well as offshore islands such as Inisbofin, County Galway. Staffing is provided by the library service in the form of local branch librarians.



Library Centre, Inisbofin, Co. Galway

Other Research Initiatives: Cranny, Co. Clare

Clare County Library has implemented a virtual library branch in Cranny, Co. Clare. This virtual branch is hosted at the Cranny Rural Renewal Centre and has extensive opening hours. Material can be ordered from the stock of Clare County Library via the online public access catalogue. The items are delivered to the Centre which acts as a collection point. Currently, this service is only available to adult members of the community

Service Definition

The desk research, combined with the results of discussions with local librarians, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and other experts, enabled the Taobh Tíre team to define in some detail the services which would be delivered in a Taobh Tíre service point (or site). A Taobh Tíre site has the following elements:

1. A taster collection of books: this is a small selection from the holdings of Donegal County Library, with a few examples of books from many subject areas. The taster collection both provides a selection of books for users to choose from and also acts as a shop window to the larger and more comprehensive holdings of the County Library. A considerable amount of new stock, focusing on fishing, islands and other specific relevant issues not well represented in general stock was also acquired.
2. Access to library services: a member of the public in a Taobh Tíre service point has access to a range of services similar to those available in a branch library. These include reference and business information services, book reservation and inter-library loan and access to public sector information.
3. Access to ICT: each Taobh Tíre site has at least one PC connected to the Internet. This provides access to the online catalogue (OPAC) of the County library, from which reservations and book requests can be made. Such requests are then delivered to the service point. The PC can also be used, of course, to access the greater Internet, including online information and news services, email, etc.

Taobh Tíre service points are staffed by personnel from the locality, who have been trained by County Library staff.

Local Consultation

Having reviewed how other library authorities at home and abroad are delivering services to remote communities and decided what services to deliver it was important that the project team now consulted locally. This would allow the project to be sure that the proposed services would in fact serve a real need in the community.

A major **local profiling exercise** was carried out by the Community and Enterprise Division of Donegal County Council. This exercise identified nine target areas, each of which was geographically isolated or disadvantaged in some other way (low population, high unemployment, etc.). Each target area was profiled in terms of available services, infrastructure, community development activity and possible obstacles to service delivery. The areas profiled were as follows:

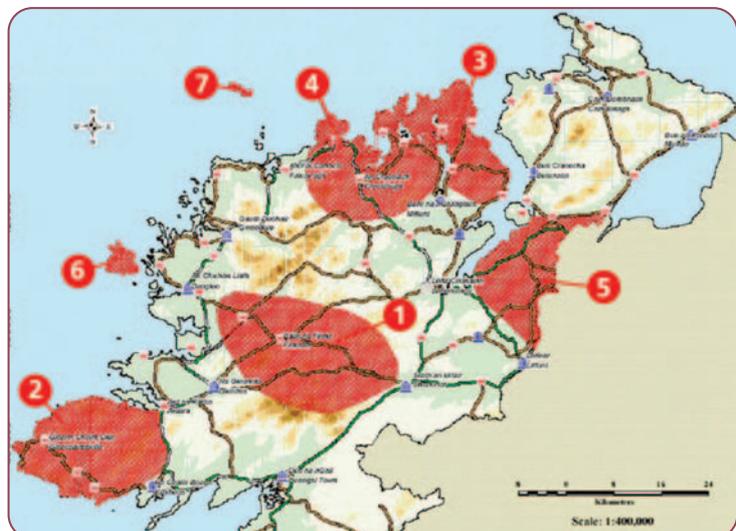
1. South Donegal
2. South-West Donegal
3. The Rosses
4. Arranmore Island
5. Tory Island
6. An Ghaeltacht Láir (Fintown, Cloghan, Glenfin)
7. Rosguill
8. Fanad
9. East Donegal

Of these areas, seven were then selected for the establishment of the first pilot service points. There were a number of important **criteria for selecting the locations of the service points**. These included the following:

- Distance from existing branch library
- Access (e.g. off-shore islands have particular access issues)
- Availability of existing physical infrastructure (community hall, parish centre, shop or post office, etc.)
- Record of community development activity – an active community development group to act as the champions of the project in the community could be expected to greatly increase the impact of the project
- Availability of ICT infrastructure, including Internet access

Each location was reviewed in the light of these criteria. Consultation with the relevant local stakeholders took place, to assess the viability of a new service in each location, the likely take-up, any special local issues, etc. Following consultation, seven areas were selected for initial pilots:

1. An Ghaeltacht Láir
2. South-West Donegal
3. Fanad
4. Rosguill
5. East Donegal
6. Arranmore Island
7. Tory Island



A better library service for rural areas

These seven areas were grouped into five distinct regions. While these five regions are those which are active at the time of this report being prepared, there has been **considerable interest from other locations** to have a service point established. It is expected that this will lead to a wider network of service points being set up as part of the next phase of the project.

Implementation Models

Having selected the locations for establishing service points, the project reviewed the approach to be applied in each location. The project team had originally envisaged that three separate approaches to the installation of service points could be tested, each in a distinct location, as suggested in the Donegal County Council short term cultural plans. These approaches were as follows:

1. The extensive use of ICT, particularly to enable Web-based access to the library catalogue, Web request, reservation and renewal.
2. Partnership with existing community groups to provide a library service point in a community-run facility such as a community hall or parish centre, perhaps in parallel with other cultural, heritage or information elements;
3. Partnership with other state, regional or local agencies, such as the delivery of library books by a local bus service, cooperation with An Post, or a shared service in partnership with the Health Service

However, following the service definition and consultation process, it became clear that what was required was a judicious mix of these approaches, combining elements of each to create a solution tailored to the individual needs and circumstances of each target community. Thus, the first ten pilot service points were to include partnerships with community groups, cooperation with a rural transport initiative, integration with a shop/post office and extensive use of computers and the Internet.

The most common implementation model used by Taobh Tíre was **partnership with a local community development group**, with the service point established in an existing building and staffing provided by the partner group on a voluntary basis. This **partnership model has significant advantages**:

- *Low cost and rapid service point establishment.* The availability of voluntary personnel means that investment of local authority staff time is reduced to training, familiarisation and support. This allows a library service point to be established in a community which would otherwise be too small to support one. The use of existing buildings means that a new service point can be up and running in a matter of weeks.
- *Validation of the local group* – by working in partnership with the library service to bring a new facility to the community, the partner organisation demonstrates its value to the community. A community development organisation that brings a library service into its area or village is clearly delivering results for the village. This encourages increased involvement in such community development groups by the local population.
- *Additional value derived from existing infrastructure* – the service points have in many cases been established in community halls, resource centres, parish halls, etc. The service point increases the level of use of the facility and gives the local residents another reason to visit it.
- *Local groups can act as champions for the service* – working in partnership with a local community group means that the group takes ownership of the project. The group promotes the new service within the community and can provide support to new users.
- *Sustainability* – the low costs and community involvement makes the ongoing viability of the new service easy to envisage. While the service is vulnerable to decreases in local enthusiasm, the delivery of a high quality of service will mean that the service remains popular. With a strong user base, the future of the service is in good shape.

The partnership model used by Taobh Tíre depends on the availability and enthusiasm of local groups in the community development and voluntary sectors. The existence of such groups is a key enabler for Taobh Tíre and were such groups not to exist the Taobh Tíre implementation model would not be viable. However, community groups are widespread in rural Ireland and the level of enthusiasm for the Taobh Tíre service was found to be very high.

The partnership model also has **some disadvantages** which the project has had to deal with to date and must take into account for the future.

There is an **ongoing requirement for the time and effort** of the partner organisations. These organisations are typically community run, often with short-term funding schemes, which can create difficulties for long-term planning. This difficulty can however be dealt with in a number of ways:

- A high quality of service, delivered by the library elements of the project, will help to establish the Taobh Tíre service as a valuable part of the community. When the project is seen locally as a success and an asset to the community, making the case for future community-funded schemes is greatly facilitated.
- Embedding the service point in a location which is staffed for other reasons greatly reduces the need for dedicated fulltime personnel. If the service point is in a busy and central location such as a regularly-used resource centre, a shop/post office or a community centre, it will both see more use and be less of an overhead on the community. It may be noted that a service point was established by Taobh Tíre in a shop/post office; the ongoing usage differences between this point and others will be noted with interest by the project team.

Despite these approaches, the Taobh Tíre service points do involve a significant investment of staff time by Donegal County Library. Sustaining this investment as the service is mainstreamed remains an important issue for the project to address.

The Taobh Tíre service point is **restricted to the existing infrastructure** and is governed by its limitations. Thus, for example, should the service point be hosted in a building which does not have access for the people with disabilities, this impacts on the ability of Taobh Tíre to deliver a service to the whole community. However, if the Taobh Tíre service is very popular, this will provide stimulus and encouragement to the local community to make access to the service point (and to the infrastructure as a whole) more inclusive.



*Project Coordinator
arriving on Tory Island*

Pilot Regions

Five regions were selected for the initial network of Taobh Tíre service points. These regions are all isolated or disadvantaged in one way or another; they provide a representative mix of the types of environment which must be served by an initiative such as Taobh Tíre. Each of these regions is briefly profiled in a sidebar.

South-West Donegal

The South-West Donegal target region includes all points west of an imaginary line drawn from Ardara to Killybegs. This includes a number of small, remote villages such as Kilcar, Ardara, Glencolumcille, Malinbeg, Malinmore and Carrick. Two of these villages, Ardara and Kilcar, have very active community development movements.

South-West Donegal



South-west Donegal is a remote corner of the county, jutting into the Atlantic to the west of Donegal town. Its rugged landscape has separated its communities from one another since its earliest history – its centres of population are primarily small seaside villages with a focus on the fishing industry. Small farming, handicrafts and tourism are also important. Road and other infrastructure are poor and Internet penetration is very low.

South-West Donegal does have a strong tradition of community development, however, and the local community and voluntary sector is strong. Interest in library services is well established in both communities.

Existing Organisations

Development organisations in Kilcar (Áislann Chill Chartha) and Ardara (Ardara Parish Council) are very active within their communities. Both of these organisations have dedicated buildings and provide a range of services to the community.

In addition to the development organisations, the Taobh Tíre project also investigated commercial shops and companies, as well as the busy Rural Transport Initiative, Seirbhís Iompair Tuaithe Teoranta (SITT).

New Partnerships

Taobh Tíre sites were established in the community centre (Áislann) in Kilcar and in a shop/post-office/petrol station in Meenaneary. In addition, a cooperation agreement was agreed with SITT and a taster collection is also hosted by a local employer in the company canteen. Unfortunately, the Ardara site was not found to be viable in the longer term.

Other potential sites for Taobh Tíre installations were identified in South-West Donegal, and will be developed in the next phase.

Kilcar and Ardara



Surfing the Web

Both Ardara Parish Council and the Áislann Chill Chartha community centre were considered as candidate partners by the project team.

However, it was found that the location of the Ardara facility was less than ideal, while the available voluntary manpower was not sufficient to deliver a viable service. This led to the decision being taken not to host a service point at the location in Ardara.

Kilcar village includes a community centre – **Áislann Chill Chartha**. This centrally-located building includes meeting rooms, an IT suite and other facilities, dedicated to providing new services and opportunities to the people of Kilcar. The Áislann is supported by an active local community development group. The new library service point is proving a popular resource. The Áislann now hosts a Taobh Tíre access point, open for over 60 hours per week. Áislann Chill Chartha is a good example of providing a library service point by embedding it in an existing community facility, in partnership with an established community development group.

The official launch of the Kilcar Taobh Tíre service took place in March 2004. There are now 95 registered Taobh Tíre members at the Áislann.

Meenaneary Post Office and the SITT Bus Service

In addition to the community-centre service point in Kilcar, the project also identified two further potential partners – a shop/post office and a local bus service.

Meenaneary Post Office

Following extensive visiting and consultation, a suitable commercial premises was identified to host a Taobh Tíre service point at Meenaneary Post Office and Shop. This is close to a national school and church and has a pub and petrol station attached. It is in close proximity to the major local employer, Earagáill Eisc (a fish processing company). The installation of a service point (a PC, linked to the Internet and so to the online library catalogue and a taster collection of book stock) required some reorganization of shop stock; however, this was greatly facilitated by the positive attitude and approach of the proprietor.

A better library service for rural areas

The Meenaneary service point is of particular research interest for the project, because it is the only commercial location for a full service point. In the event that the service point continues to be a success, other commercial premises have been identified as possible candidate locations for the next phase.

The Meenaneary service point is supplemented by a taster collection installed in the canteen of the fish factory nearby. This example of a library installation in the workplace is also of particular interest as a library outreach initiative.

SITT Local Bus Service

SITT is a local Rural Transport Initiative service in South-West Donegal. It serves small villages and individual houses, bringing members of the public to Killybegs, Donegal Town and other centres. The service has both a driver and an assistant/conductor.

Negotiations with the SITT organisation has lead their agreeing to deliver books to housebound library members on their routes. This is an important quality-of-life service to the public and a very promising indicator of other inter-agency partnership potential.

The project has had discussions with An Post, to explore the potential of working together. The synergy with An Post's universal delivery is very clear, and further discussions with An Post are envisaged for the next phase of the project.



South-West Donegal

An Ghaeltacht Láir

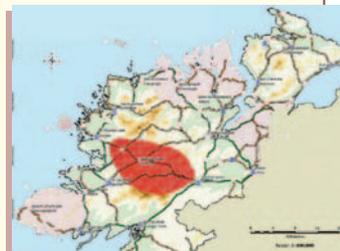
The Gaeltacht Láir area of central Donegal includes the villages of Fintown (Baile na Finne), Glenfin and Cloghan. The area, though less geographically isolated than some of the other target areas, is sparsely populated and lacks a central focal point. It is divided by the River Finn into a number of small centres, of which the most significant are those mentioned above.

An Ghaeltacht Láir

An Ghaeltacht Láir is a sparsely populated area, with a number of centres including Glenfin, Cloghan and Fintown/Baile na Finne. The area has c. 300 families who are very dispersed. Baile na Finne/Fintown is the most central village and is a Gaeltacht area.

The area is traditionally a farming area, with some small businesses operating (e.g. sawmills, engineering). Many people travel for employment to larger centres, such as Glenties, Dungloe, Ballybofey/Stranorlar and Letterkenny. Physically, the River Finn divides the area. To a certain extent, this has resulted in many small community catchments. The river is a valuable resource, being an important salmon and trout river. Some tourism facilities have also been developed.

Baile na Finne (Fintown) has been identified by Údarás na Gaeltachta as the location for industrial, social and cultural facilities to serve the Gaeltacht Láir area. When the area was being assessed for Taobh Tíre partners and locations, a vacant craft unit built by Údarás na Gaeltachta stood out as an attractive, well located building.



An Existing Cultural Organisation – Coiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin

The Coiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin purchased a collection of 4000 antiquarian books of Irish and Irish/American interest from the estate of local man returned from America, Seán Mac Aoidh. Since purchasing the books, the Coiste have been seeking support to create a Cultural Centre for the area, with the collection as a centrepiece. A suitable location had not yet been identified.

A New Partnership

Once a suitable building was identified and Údarás na Gaeltachta confirmed their support for the Taobh Tíre project, a working group of the Coiste, Údarás and Donegal County Library was set up. With additional financial support from Meitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta and a number of local councillors, it was agreed that the antiquarian book collection would be hosted by the Taobh Tíre centre. The collection is now housed in the Áras Sheáin Bháin, along with a taster collection of library stock, 4 public access PCs and other facilities. There are now 66 registered Taobh Tíre members in Baile na Finne.

As a spin-off of the project work, a community Web server was established with the assistance of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna for the Fintown area. This Community Web server (which uses technical resources developed by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna's AGORA project) enables local people and organisations to easily publish cultural, personal, business and other material online at the address www.bailenafinne.ie. Training in the use of the service was provided by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna personnel to members of the Fintown group – this group is now in the process of digitizing cultural material and placing it online as a digital culture exhibit.

A better library service for rural areas



Áras Sheáin Bháin, Fintown

The Fintown service point is an excellent example of the creation of a partnership with an existing community development organisation. Fintown and the surrounding Gaeltacht Láir district has a wealth of local community organisations focusing on tourism, culture, enterprise and local development. Coiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin is just one example. By aligning the objectives of the local group with those of the library initiative, the

project was able to secure all-important local backing and involvement. Local needs were also met: cooperation with Taobh Tíre lead to the identification of a location to host the Coiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin book collection.

The Fintown service point was officially launched in February, 2004.



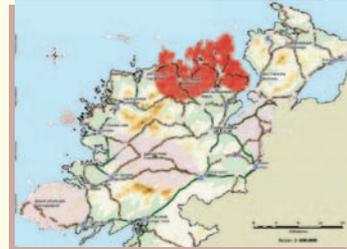
Young Internet surfers in Fintown

Fanad and Rosguill

The Taobh Tíre team established a partnership with the Ionad Lae (day centre) in Trialough, a community facility which provides services to older people. This partnership allows this specific target group to be addressed. Partnership agreements were also reached with two other local service providers – the Mevagh Resource Centre in Rosguill and Fanavolty Hall in Fanad. Cooperation agreements were established with the Men's Education Initiative in Mevagh, the Vocational Educational Committee's Adult Learner Guidance Service and its mobile IT unit and the Citizens' Information Centre.

Fanad and Rosguill

The Fanad and Rosguill peninsular areas are some of the most isolated in Donegal and include a number of Irish-speaking areas. Farming and fisheries are the major employers. There is no large centre of population, with Milford and Letterkenny the nearest towns of any size.



Existing Organisations

Fanad and Rosguill are sparsely populated, with a large proportion of older, single residents living on dispersed smallholdings. It was decided to target older people in the area and work with the Ionad Lae in Trialough, a local day centre, in cooperation with Donegal VEC. As a result of depopulation the older people using the Ionad Lae have relatives abroad and are interested in the benefits of technology for keeping in touch. The Ionad Lae is open two days a week. Many of the older people are over 80 and women outnumber men.

Mevagh Resource Centre (Rosguill) and Fanavolty Hall (Fanad) are also working with Taobh Tíre. It is envisaged that use of the Taobh Tíre facilities will be incorporated into the Men's Education Initiative in Mevagh. Citizens' Information Centre staff and library staff will jointly run outreach activities and information sessions in the area.

New Partnerships

In each case, a taster collection was established and Internet access PCs were installed, with training and support provided where necessary.

The importance of partnership with other service providers and the need to build upon the services already available was underlined in Fanad and Rosguill. By working with bodies already active with older people the project was able to reach specific target groups. This was a good deal more fruitful than trying to establish contact with these groups ab initio. The partnership agreements reached with the VEC and with the Citizens' Information Centre reduce the ongoing cost of providing the library service in this remote area.

The Mevagh service point was officially launched in February, 2004. There are now 148 registered Taobh Tíre members at Mevagh Resource Centre.

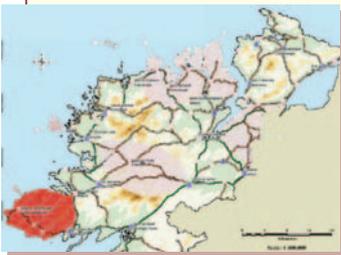
Treoir-Réigiúin

Roghnaíodh cúig réigiún don chéad ghréasán d'ionaid seirbhíse de chuid Taobh Tíre. Tá iargúlacht nó míbhuntáiste éigin ag baint le gach ceann de na réigiúin seo, agus is samplaí iad de na cineálacha ceantacha a gcaithfidh tionscadal ar nós Taobh Tíre freastal orthu. Seo a leanas cur síos gairid ar gach ceann de na réigiúin seo.

Iardheisceart Dhún na nGall

Is é atá i gceist le réigiún Iardheisceart Dhún na nGall ná gach pointe siar ó líne samhailteach ó Ard an Rátha go dtí na Cealla Beaga. Tá roinnt sráidbhailte beaga iargúlta sa limistéar seo, mar shampla, Cill Charthaigh, Ard an Rátha, Gleann Cholm Cille, Málainn Bheag, Málainn Mhór, agus Carraig. Tá gluaiseachtaí forbartha pobail an-ghníomhach in dhá cheann de na sráidbhailte seo, mar atá Ard an Rátha agus Cill Charthaigh.

Iardheisceart Dhún na nGall



Is réigiún iargúlta sa chontae é Iardheisceart Dhún na nGall, ag gobadh amach insan Atlantach siar ó Bhaile Dhún na nGall. Mar gheall ar an tírdhreach garbh, bhíodh na pobail éagsúla sa réigiún scoite óna chéile ar feadh na mblianta. Tá na pobail is mó daonra sa réigiún le fáil i sráidbhailte beaga cois farraige ina bhfuil béim mhór ar an iascaireacht. Tá tábhacht le feirmeoireacht teaghlaigh, ceardaíocht agus turasóireacht chomh maith. Tá na bóithre agus infrastruchtúir eile go holc, agus níl an t-idirlíon ar fáil ag mórán.

Tá traidisiún láidir ag Iardheisceart Dhún na nGall maidir le forbairt phobail, áfach, agus tá an earnáil phobail agus dheonach an-láidir sa cheantar. Tá suim agus tairbhí ag an dá phobal i seirbhísí leabharlainne.

Eagraíochtaí atá ann cheana féin

Tá eagraíochtaí forbartha an-ghníomhach i measc an phobail i gCill Charthaigh (Áislann Chill Chartha) agus in Ard an Rátha. Tá foirgnimh dá gcuid féin ag an dá eagraíocht seo agus cuireann siad réimse seirbhísí ar fáil don phobal.

Mar bharr ar na heagraíochtaí forbartha seo, rinne an tionscadal Taobh Tíre scrúdú ar shiopaí agus ar chomhlachtaí tráchtála, chomh maith leis an tSeirbhís Iompair Tuaithe Teoranta (SITT).

Comhpháirtíochtaí Úra

Bunaíodh suímh Taobh Tíre san ionad pobail (Áislann) i gCill Charthaigh agus i siopa/oifig an phoist/stáisiún artola i Mín an Aoire. Lena chois seo, socraíodh comhaontú comhoibritheach le SITT agus tá fostóir áitiúil i ndiaidh cnuasach meallcach leabhar a chur i seomra bia an chomhlachta. Ar an drochuair, ní rabhthas den tuairim go raibh an suíomh in Ard an Rátha inmharthana go fadtéarmach.

Aithníodh suímh eile fá choinne ionaid Taobh Tíre in Iardheisceart Dhún na nGall, agus déanfar iad a fhorbairt sa dara tréimhse.

Cill Charthaigh agus Ard an Rátha

Rinne foireann an tionscadail Comhairle Paróiste Ard an Rátha agus Áislann Chill Chartha araon a mheas mar pháirtneírí.

Mar sin féin, bhíothas den tuairim nach raibh suíomh an ionaid in Ard an Rátha fóirsteanach, agus nach raibh go leor oibríthe deonacha le seirbhís inmharthana a sheachadadh. Dá bhrí seo, socraíodh gan ionad seirbhíse a bhunú sa suíomh in Ard an Rátha.

Tá ionad pobail i sráidbhaile **Chill Charthaigh – Áislann Chill Chartha**. Insan fhoirgneamh lárnach seo tá seomraí cruinnithe, seomra TE, agus áiseanna eile, agus é de chuspóir seirbhísí úra agus deiseanna úra a chur ar fáil do bhunadh Chill Charthaigh. Tá tacaíocht ar fáil don Áislann ó choiste forbartha pobail sa cheantar. Tá an-ráchairt ar an ionad úr leabharlainne. Tá ionad rochtana de chuid Taobh Tíre san Áislann anois, atá oscailte don phobal níos mó ná 60 uair in aghaidh na seachtaine. Is eiseamláir mhaith í Áislann Chill Chartha de sheirbhís leabharlainne atá suite in ionad atá ar fáil ag an phobal cheana féin, i gcomhpháirt le coiste forbartha pobail atá ann cheana féin.

Rinneadh seirbhís Taobh Tíre Chill Charthaigh a sheoladh go hoifigiúil i mí Mhárta 2004. Tá 95 ball cláraithe le Taobh Tíre san Áislann.

Oifig Phoist Mhín an Aoire agus Seirbhís Bus SITT

Le cois an ionaid seirbhíse san ionad pobail i gCill Charthaigh, d'aithin an tionscadal dhá pháirtneír eile a d'fhéadfadh a bheith páirteach sa scéim – siopa/oifig phoist agus seirbhís áiditúil bus.

Oifig Phoist Mhín an Aoire

I ndiaidh tréimhse chuartaíochta agus chomhairliúcháin a dhéanamh, socraíodh go raibh Oifig an Phoist/Siopa i Mín an Aoire fóirsteanach le hionad seirbhíse de chuid Taobh Tíre a lonnú ann. Tá an t-ionad seo cóngarach don scoil náisiúnta agus don eaglais, agus tá teach tábhairne agus stáisiún artola in aice láimhe. Tá sé cóngarach fosta don phríomhfhostóir áitiúil Earagáill Éisc (comhlacht próiseála éisc). Bhí gá le stoc an tsiopa a atheagrú leis an ionad seirbhíse a bhunú ann (ar a n-áirítear ríomhaire, nasc leis an idirlíon agus leis an chatalóg leabharlainne ar líne, chomh maith le cnuasach meallacach leabhar); ach bhí úinéir an tsiopa an-bháúil agus thug sé an-chuidiú don tionscadal.

Tá an t-ionad seirbhíse i Mín an Aoire an-tábhachtach ó thaobh taighde de mar gurb é an t-aon suíomh tráchtála amháin atá ag feidhmiú mar lán-ionad seirbhíse. Má bhíonn rath ar an ionad seirbhíse seo, tá áitribh thráchtála eile aitheanta againn ina bhféadfaimid ionaid seirbhíse a lonnú iontu sa chéad tréimhse eile.

Tá cnuasach meallacach leabhar ar fáil fosta sa seomra bia sa mhonarcha éisc in aice leis an ionad seirbhíse i Mín an Aoire. Is ábhar mór spéise é an t-aonad leabharlainne seo atá lonnaithe san ionad oibre, mar thionscnamh forochtana leabharlainne.

A better library service for rural areas

Seirbhís Bus Áitiúil SITT

Is Tionscnamh Iompair Tuaithe in Iardheisceart Dhún na nGall é SITT. Déanann sé freastal ar shráidbhailte beaga agus ar thithe aonaracha, leis an phobal áitiúil a thabhairt go dtí na Cealla Beaga, Baile Dhún na nGall agus áiteanna eile. Tá tiománaí agus cúntóir fostaithe ag an tseirbhís.

I ndiaidh tréimhse idirbheartaíochta le SITT shocraigh siad ar leabhair a sheachadadh, mar chuid den tseirbhís bus, chuig baill leabharlainne atá gafa sa teach sa cheantar. Is seirbhís thábhachtach í seo a chuireann le caighdeán saoil an phobail agus táthar ag súil go leanfar leis an chineál seo compháirtíochta le gníomhaireachtaí eile.

Bhí foireann an tionscadail ag caint leis An Post, chun na féidearthachtaí comhpháirtíochta a phlé. Is léir go mbeadh buntáistí móra le córas seachadta An Post, agus tá sé i gceist tuilleadh plé a dheanamh leis An Post sa chéad tréimhse eile den tionscadal.

An Ghaeltacht Láir

Tá na sráidbhailte Baile na Finne, Gleann Fhinne agus Clochán suite sa Ghaeltacht Láir. Cé nach bhfuil an ceantar seo chomh hiargúlta le cuid de na sprioc-cheantair eile, tá an pobal an-scaipthe agus tá an ceantar gan aon lárionad daonra a bheith aige. Tá sé roinnte i sráidbhailte beaga ag Abhainn na Finne, agus is iad siúd thuas na hionaid daonra is suntasaí atá sa réigiún.

An Ghaeltacht Láir

Tá daonra an-scaipthe sa Ghaeltacht Láir, a bhfuil Gleann Fhinne, An Clochán agus Baile na Finne ina lárionaid daonra ann. Tá thart fá 300 teaghlach sa cheantar agus iad an-scaipthe óna chéile. Is é Baile na Finne an sráidbhaile is lárnaí agus is ceantar Gaeltachta é.

Is ceantar traidisiúnta feirmeoireachta é, ina bhfuil roinnt gnólachtaí beaga chomh maith (ms. Muilte sábhadóireachta, innealtóireacht).

Bíonn cuid mhór de mhuintir na háite ag taisteal amach as an cheantar chuig a gcuid oibre sna Gleannta, ar an Chlochán Liath, i mBealach Féich/Srath an Urláir agus i Leitir Ceanainn. Go fisiciúil, tá an ceantar roinnte ag Abhainn na Finne. Is é an toradh atá air seo, a bheag nó a mhór, ná go bhfuil cuid mhór pobal beag sa cheantar. Is acmhainn luachmhar í an abhainn, ós rud é go bhfuil idir bhric agus bhrádáin inti. Rinneadh roinnt áiseanna turasóireachta a fhorbairt sa cheantar chomh maith.

Tá Baile na Finne aitheanta ag Údarás na Gaeltachta mar ionad tionsclaíochta, sóisialta agus cultúrtha don Ghaeltacht Láir. Nuair a bhíothas ag déanamh scrúdú ar an cheantar chun suímh agus páirtneírí a aimsiú do Taobh Tíre, sheas aonad ceardaíochta gan úsáid de chuid Údarás na Gaeltachta amach mar fhoirgneamh atá tarraingteach agus suite in áit chuí.

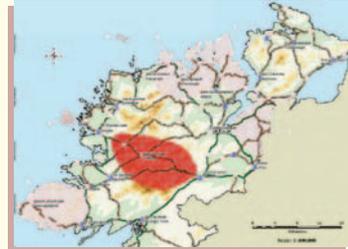
Eagraíocht Chultúrtha atá ann cheana féin – Coiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin

Cheannaigh Coiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin bailiúchán de 4000 leabhar seanda Éireannach agus Gael-Mheiriceánach ó fhear áitiúil a phill ar Éirinn ó Mheiriceá, Seán Mac Aoidh. Ón am a cheannaigh siad na leabhair, tá tacaíocht á lorg ag an Choiste chun Ionad Cultúrtha a fhorbairt don cheantar, agus an bailiúchán leabhar a bheith ar taispeáint ann. Níor aimsíodh suíomh fóirsteanach go fóill.

Comhpháirtíocht Úr

Nuair a aimsíodh foirgneamh cúí agus nuair a chuir Údarás na Gaeltachta in iúl gur mhaith leo tacú le Taobh Tíre mar thionscadal, cuireadh coiste oibre le chéile ón Choiste féin, ó Údarás na Gaeltachta agus ó Sheirbhís Leabharlainne Chontae Dhún na nGall. Nuair a fuarthas tacaíocht bhreise airgid ó Mheitheal Forbartha na Gaeltachta agus ó roinnt comhairleoírí áitiúla, aontaíodh go mbeadh an bailiúchán ar taispeáint san ionad seirbhíse de chuid Taobh Tíre. Tá an bailiúchán ar taispeáint anois in Áras Sheáin Bháin, chomh maith le cnuasach meallcach leabharlainne, 4 ríomhaire don phobal agus áiseanna eile. Tá 66 ball cláraithe le Taobh Tíre i mBaile na Finne.

Ar eascairt ón tionscadal féin, bunaíodh freastalaí idirlín pobail do cheantar Bhaile na Finne, le cabhair ón Chomhairle Leabharlanna. Is é an buntáiste atá leis an Fhrestalaí Idirlín Pobail (a úsáideann áiseanna teicneolaíochta a forbraíodh mar chuid de thionscadal AGORA de chuid na Comhairle Leabharlanna) ná gur féidir le daoine áitiúla agus eagraíochtaí áitiúla ábhar cultúrtha, pearsanta, gnó agus eile a chur ar an idirlíon go héasca ag an seoladh www.bailenafinne.ie. Chuir an Chomhairle Leabharlanna traenáil ar fáil maidir le húsáid na seirbhíse do bhaill an ghrúpa i mBaile na Finne – tá an grúpa seo i mbun ábhar cultúrtha a dhigitiú san am i láthair agus é a chur ar fáil ar an idirlíon.



A better library service for rural areas

Is eiseamláir den chéad scoth é an t-ionad seirbhíse i mBaile na Finne de **chomhpháirtíocht idir an tseirbhís leabharlainne agus coiste forbartha áitiúil atá ag feidhmiú cheana féin**. Tá neart eagraíochtaí pobail i mBaile na Finne agus sa Ghaeltacht Láir ag plé le turasóireacht, cultúr, fiontraíocht agus forbairt áitiúil. Níl i gCoiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin ach sampla amháin den chineál coiste atá le fáil ann. Trí chuspóirí an ghrúpa áitiúil a chomhcheangal le cuspóirí na seirbhíse leabharlainne, bhí an tionscadal in ann tacaíocht agus rannpháirtíocht an phobail áitiúil a fháil. Agus bhí buntáiste ann don phobal áitiúil chomh maith: trí chomhpháirtíocht a dhéanamh le Taobh Tíre, fuarthas ionad do bhailiúchán leabhar Choiste Éigse Sheáin Bháin.

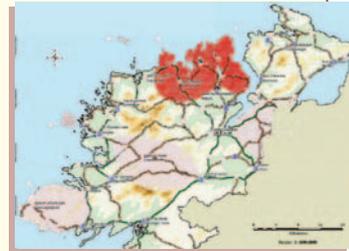
Rinneadh an t-ionad seirbhíse i mBaile na Finne a sheoladh go hoifigiúil i mí Feabhra, 2004.

Fánaid agus Ros Guill

Bhunaigh foireann Taobh Tíre comhpháirtíocht leis an Ionad Lae in Trialough, áis phobail atá ag freastal ar dhaoine níos sine. Tá an chomhpháirtíocht seo ag díriú ar riachtanais ar leith an spriocghrúpa seo. Chuathas i gcomhpháirtíocht le dhá ghrúpa áitiúil eile chomh maith, mar atá Áis-Ionad Mhíobhaí i Ros Guill agus Halla Fan an Bhualtaigh i bhFánaid. Rinneadh comhaontú comhoibritheach le Tionscnamh Oideachais na bhFear i Míobhaigh, le Treoirsheirbhís an Choiste Gairmoideachais don Fhoghlaimeoir Fásta agus lena aonad taistil TE, agus leis an Ionad “Eolas Pobail”.

Fánaid agus Ros Guill

Tá Fánaid agus Ros Guill ar chuid de na ceantracha is iargúlta i nDún na nGall, agus tá roinnte ceantracha ann ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge á labhairt go fóill. Is iad feirmeoireacht agus iascaireacht an dá earnáil is tábhachtaí ó thaobh fostaíochta de. Níl aon lárionad daonra ann, agus is iad Baile na nGallóglach agus Leitir Ceanainn an dá bhaile mhóra is cóngaraí.



Eagraíochtaí atá ann cheana féin

Tá an daonra i bhFánaid agus i Ros Guill scaipthe go maith, agus tá cuid mhór seandaoine ina gcónaí leo féin ar ghabháiltais bheaga scaipthe. Aontaíodh gur chóir díriú ar sheandaoine sa cheantar agus a bheith ag comhoibriú leis an Ionad Lae in Trialough, i gcomhar le Coiste Gairmoideachais Dhún na nGall. Mar thoradh ar bhánú an phobail ón cheantar, tá daoine muinteartha ag cuid mhór de na seandaoine a úsáideann an t-Ionad Lae ag cur fúthu thar lear agus tá suim acu an teicneolaíocht a úsáid le coinneáil i dteagmháil leo. Tá an t-Ionad Lae oscailte dhá lá sa tseachtain. Tá cuid mhór de na seandaoine thar ceithre scór bliain d’aois, agus tá níos mó ban ná fear.

Tá Áisionad Mhíobhaí (Ros Guill) agus Halla Fan an Bhualtaigh (Fánaid) ag obair le Taobh Tíre chomh maith. Táthar ag súil go ndéanfar áiseanna Taobh Tíre a chomhcheangal le Tionscnamh Oidieachais na bhFear i Míobhaigh chomh maith. Beidh foireann Eolas Pobail agus foireann na leabharlainne ag obair le chéile le imeachtaí agus seisiúin eolais a reáchtáil sa cheantar.

Comhpháirtíochtaí Úra

In achán chás, bunaíodh cnuasach meallacach leabhar, cuireadh ríomhairí ar fáil agus nasc leis an idirlíon, agus cuireadh traenáil agus tacaíocht ar fáil de réir mar ba ghá.

I bhFánaid agus i Ros Guill cuireadh an-bhéim ar thábhacht na comhpháirtíochta le soláthraithe seirbhíse eile agus ar an ghá a bhí le tógáil ar sheirbhísí a bhí ann cheana féin. Trí bheith ag comhoibriú le heagraíochtaí a bhí ag freastal ar sheandaoine cheana féin bhí an tionscadal in ann spriocghrúpaí ar leith a shroichint. Bhí sé seo i bhfad ní ba ráthúla ná a bheith ag iarraidh teagmháil a dhéanamh leis na grúpaí seo as an úr. Laghdaíonn na comhpháirtíochtaí seo leis an Choiste Gairmoideachais agus le hEolas Pobal na costais a bhaineann le seirbhís leabharlainne a sholáthar san cheantar iargúlta seo.

Rinneadh an t-ionad seirbhíse i Míobhaigh a sheoladh go hoifigiúil i mí Feabhra 2004. Tá 148 ball cláraithe le Taobh Tíre in Áisionad Mhíobhaí san am i láthair.

A better library service for rural areas

East Donegal

East Donegal is located along the border with Northern Ireland. Despite its relatively central location, it includes pockets of severe deprivation. It is the target of several initiatives promoting cross-border development. Unemployment is an important problem in this area.

East Donegal



The East Donegal area is located along the border with Northern Ireland. Agricultural land is generally good and there exists a large farming community. Nonetheless, one of the biggest challenges locally is unemployment. The target area contains pockets of severe deprivation. There is no secondary school and teenagers travel to schools in Stranorlar, Letterkenny, Raphoe and Derry. The rate of early school leaving is quite high.

One of the unique features of East Donegal is the continued use of Ulster-Scots terminology in everyday speech. Phase II will investigate options for developing projects with young people using Ulster-Scots terminology.

Existing Organisations

Community infrastructure in this area has developed to a good standard, with an excellent Family Resource Centre located in St. Johnston. The building also houses the Health Centre. The local community is highly motivated to improve services locally. Taobh Tíre is working with the Resource Centre to extend library/information services to the area.

New Partnerships

Teenagers are the main focus of Taobh Tíre efforts in East Donegal. A Taobh Tíre programme is being drawn up in conjunction with the Resource Centre. Text messaging will be an important means of communication. Library staff gave introductory talks on Taobh Tíre and the library service generally to the local Youth Project. On the first night, of 29 in attendance, only 1 was a library member. All others since joined up.

The St Johnston/Carrigans new virtual library is up and running. Resource Centre staff assist new users of the WebOPAC. Staff of the Central Library in Letterkenny register new members and forward requested items. Initial discussions with the teenagers and the Youth Worker have taken place and a programme is being implemented.

St Johnston

St Johnston is a typical East Donegal town, with an excellent Family Resource Centre which was identified by the Taobh Tíre team as a possible location for a service point. There is a strong community development spirit in the area and support for the Resource Centre is strong.

It was decided to focus on teenagers in East Donegal, in order to ascertain their service requirements and priorities and how best to serve them. Meetings with the local Youth Project took place and text-messaging (SMS) software was purchased for communication with members. In addition, the Web-OPAC catalogue was installed in the Resource Centre and a process for requesting and delivering books from Letterkenny was set up.



***John Hume** at the launch of the St. Johnston/Carrigans new virtual library with **Sean Moloney** (former) Councillor, **Eva Browne** Donegal County Library Staff, **Alun Bevan** An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, **Martina Boyle**, Donegal County Library Staff, **Eileen Burgess** A/County Librarian (Former Taobh Tíre Project Co-ordinator)*

East Donegal again demonstrates the value of embedding library services in an existing service environment, in partnership with community groups.

The East Donegal service point was launched in May 2004. There are now 37 registered members; a significant number of these are teenagers.

Overseas Nationals

During the establishment of this service point, a population of Lithuanian nationals was also identified in the area. Meetings with this group to ascertain their service requirements underlined a need for foreign-language materials. This was in contrast with the anticipated requirement for English-language-learning materials. Lithuanian-language materials are now being provided, in cooperation with the employer of the foreign nationals.

Arranmore and Tory Islands

Arranmore has two active co-operative organisations. Both provide common services, sustaining the community and generating employment. A location for a Taobh Tíre service point was identified in the island's community centre. This had the significant advantage of wireless broadband Internet access from a large mast on the mainland. The partner organisation is the Arranmore Development and Employment Co-operative, supported by Leabharlann na Rosa.

The establishment of a service point on Arranmore was greatly facilitated by the availability of Internet infrastructure. Lack of such an infrastructure would have severely limited the services which the point could deliver, particularly in terms of access to the library catalogue, which is accessed over the Internet.

Arranmore and Tory Islands



Arranmore and Tory lie off the west and north-west coasts of Donegal and are two of the most isolated communities in the country. Tory, in particular, is regularly cut off from all but large-helicopter traffic.

Both islands have viable communities with long histories, but face the same challenges from limited services and greater opportunities elsewhere in Ireland and abroad. Arranmore traditionally supplies tunneling personnel to projects such as the London Tube and the Dublin Port Tunnel.

Existing Organisations

Arranmore and Tory both have co-operatives dedicated to the provision of services and the development of their island community. Services range from the selling of diesel to the provision of business development incubator units. The North-Western Health Board also has a presence on Arranmore and on Tory.

New Partners

The Taobh Tíre project has established partnerships with the Arranmore Development & Employment Co-op, with the North-Western Health Board and with the Tory Co-op. On Arranmore, the Community Centre hosts the Taobh Tíre service point. On Tory, the service point is in the Co-op.

The Arranmore service point was launched in July 2004. A significant proportion (142) of the island's 543 inhabitants are now library members and the service point is in regular use.

Tory Island (population: 133) has an active co-operative which focuses on community and service development. This organisation plays an important role in maintaining the viability of this remote community.

A partnership agreement was established with the co-op and a location for the taster collection and Internet PC agreed in the community centre on the island. There are now 46 members of the library on Tory as a result of the Taobh Tíre initiative. Delivery of books is by post, using the Tory Island ferry service.



Equipment delivered to Tory Island using the Tory Island ferry service

Árainn Mhór agus Toraigh

Tá dhá Chomharchumann gníomhach ar Árainn Mhór. Cuireann an bheirt acu seirbhísí ar fáil, ag cothú an phobail áitiúil agus ag cruthú fostaíochta. Aimsíodh ionad seirbhíse fá choinne Taobh Tíre san Ionad Pobail ar an oileán. Bhí sé de mhórbhuntaiste ag an ionad seo go raibh leathanbhanda gan sreangú ar fáil ó chrann mór ar tír mór. Is é Comharchumann Forbartha agus Fostaíochta Árainn Mhóir an eagraíocht chompháirtíochta, agus Leabharlann na Rosann ag tacú leis.



Tory Island

Chuidigh an t-infrastruchtúr idirlín go mór le hionad seirbhíse a bhunú ar Árainn Mhór. Dá mba rud é nach raibh a leithéid d'infrastruchtúr ar fáil, bheadh na seirbhísí a d'fhéadfadh an t-ionad a chur ar fáil an-teoranta, go háirithe maidir le deis a bheith ag an phobal teacht ar an chatalóg leabharlainne ar an idirlíon.

Summary

In the first phase of the project, five target regions were identified and a total of **ten service points installed**. In each case, the availability of a suitable location was critical, as was the existence of a suitable partner organisation. New services like those provided by Taobh Tíre cannot be introduced into a vacuum; the environment must be suitable for their establishment.

Active community development groups were the key to 80% of installations to date. This is encouraging for the national replication of the Taobh Tíre concept, since community development groups are a common feature of rural society in Ireland.

However, the remaining two installations were also important – they illustrate the potential for other types of partnership and demonstrate certain advantages of their own. Shops and post offices naturally have a good deal of daily traffic; the provision of a service point in such commercial premises means that the service is particularly in the public eye. Additionally, shops are more widespread than community centres; a partnership with a shop will allow service delivery in all but the tiniest villages.

The partnership with the rural transport initiative also shows great promise. A mobile service such as this one can deliver service to the most remote corners of the country, on a house-by-house basis. Clearly, there are limitations in terms of carrying large collections of books, but for collection and book delivery the possibilities are very promising.

The establishment of a taster collection within a local employer is also of note. While this is not a full service point (there is no PC or library catalogue access), it does represent an interesting library outreach initiative with significant potential as a promotional avenue for the local service points and for the library as a whole.

Marketing and Promotion

The success of the project in the medium and longer term is predicated on how many members of the community use its services and for how long, as well as on the degree to which the popularity of the service spreads.

The project undertook (and continues to undertake) promotional activities in order to ensure that potential users are aware of the facilities on offer. These activities are briefly reviewed here.

Consultation

The consultation phase involved a large number of potential users of the services from the target communities. Those involved in the consultation phase often took part in focus groups and became involved in the specification of what the project would do and how it would achieve its objectives. Such focus group members are well positioned to act as local champions for the project, both by using its services and encouraging others to do so.

Launches

The launches of the individual service points provided excellent opportunities to raise the profile of the project, particularly within the host communities. In general the launches involved a number of local elected representatives as well as voluntary and community groups. The most recent launches have been notable for the number of elected representatives who have asked to be involved. This demonstrates the perceived value of the Taobh Tíre services to the constituents of these representatives.

While the launches have established the Taobh Tíre service points in the collective consciousness of their communities, their impact is limited in duration. The project team is aware that if the project is to remain prominent and to attract both new and existing users, it must continue to deliver a service that is valued by the community. Fortunately, this is indeed the case to date and the popularity of the service, as shown by its use and by requests for new service points, is growing.

Online Promotion and Updates

The project management team has published a periodic update of the project's activities on the Donegal County Council website at www.donegalibrary.ie/findit/taobh/default.htm. These updates, at approximately quarterly intervals, described the work of the project as it happened.

Media Advertising

The project took a certain amount of advertising space with local print and radio media. While these raised consciousness over the short term, the medium-term impact was less than was hoped for. This led the team to conclude that other forms of promotion may be more appropriate for a service of this nature.

Local Promotion

The Taobh Tíre service is promoted throughout the Donegal branch library network. Posters, brochures and fliers are distributed throughout the communities served by the project. These inform the public about the new service, the facilities available and the opening times of their local service point.

Monitoring and Evaluation

It is important that an independent and impartial monitoring and evaluation process be an integral part of the project. Such a process helps to ensure that the project stays on track and focused, as well as allowing an independent viewpoint on the project from an early date. It further allows the project to establish the degree to which it is meeting its objectives.

A monitoring and evaluation framework has been established, with the assistance of the Research and Policy Unit of Donegal County Council. This framework includes the key criteria to be used in any external monitoring and evaluation of the project.

Current Taobh Tíre membership stands at 492. New reporting software will be put in place in Phase II to allow detailed management information to be compiled. This will provide further information which will support the independent evaluation of each service point including patterns of use. This will help determine which of the outcomes best serve the aims of the project.

An external (UK-based) company of consultants has been appointed to evaluate the project following an open tender process. Their terms of reference include the use of questionnaires to establish the impact of the project, procedures for the collection of feedback from partner groups and measurement of agreed evaluation yardsticks. The consultants have delivered a draft pre-implementation report; subsequent reports are to be delivered in the near and medium-term future, tracking the results of the project.

Project Management

The project is run on a day to day basis by a project coordinator, seconded from Donegal County Library, which is part of Donegal County Council. The County Librarian acts as project manager. The project coordinator is supported by part time resources from the Community Development & Enterprise Division, Donegal County Council and the Information Systems Division, Donegal County Council. The project management receives further support from a team based in An Chomhairle Leabharlanna in Dublin.

The project coordinator reports to the Taobh Tíre Steering Committee, which includes representatives of Donegal County Council and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and which is responsible for supervising the overall progress of the project.

The key objective of the project management team is to ensure that the project meets its objectives in a timely and efficient manner. This objective has been achieved and exceeded – the interim results of Taobh Tíre are impressive for a small project with a short timescale, particularly in terms of concrete installations and services delivered to new users in remote communities.

The key lessons learnt from a project management point of view are as follows:

- A focused, enthusiastic team working at a local level to establish partnerships and sell the project is essential
- A clear process for IT and logistics support greatly simplifies the delivery of the project
- Relationships with other parts of the local authority, such as the Information Services and Community Development Departments, should be established and responsibilities agreed by all, as early as possible in the lifetime of the project
- External expertise for project overview, evaluation and monitoring is valuable, by enabling input from experts who are more detached from the project than the project team itself.

The project management structure put in place for Taobh Tíre, with its focus on the local authority backed up by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and an external evaluator, works well and is suitable for replication in similar projects elsewhere.

Taobh Tíre Achievements

This section looks at the results achieved by the project in the time covered by this report (February 2003 to November 2004). It is important to note that these results reflect the progress of the project over only eighteen months. While the results to date are excellent, the project team expects considerable further success in the next year to year and a half.

The project has **met all its objectives for this first phase**.

- The project team has been established and funding has been secured for the project.
- Background research has been carried out, to establish best practice on a national and international level.
- New and innovative ways of delivering library services have been implemented. The combination of partnership with local organisations, extensive use of ICT and the option to work with transport and distribution companies has been a successful one. Ten service points have been established and are in regular use.
- A process for identifying and contacting partner organisations in remote communities has been worked out and put in place.
- This process has been proven in ten pilot service points, which are up and running, providing new services where none was available before, working with local organisations and using existing local infrastructure.
- Project management has been smooth and successful.
- External evaluation and monitoring is ongoing.
- Plans for the next phase have been drawn up.

In addition, the project has **exceeded** its objectives in some important areas:

- Communities without Taobh Tíre service points have contacted the project, requesting that a service point be established in their town or village
- Two spin-off initiatives have been set up, in cooperation with Northern Ireland's Western Education and Library Board, with significant funding from the Peace II programme.

Project Methodology

The Taobh Tíre project has established a replicable methodology for the delivery of new and innovative library services. This methodology is outlined here. While presented in terms of County Donegal, it can be applied by any library authority which serves remote and isolated communities.

1. **Service Definition:** Donegal County Council carried out research and established a definition of what a service point is and what service it delivers. It also identified service point requirements in terms of local infrastructure and voluntary personnel.
2. **Community Profiling:** Donegal County Council personnel profiled the most remote and disadvantaged communities in Donegal in terms of their suitability for the project. Key criteria included population, remoteness, existing community development groups, local facilities, education and unemployment.
3. **Selection of Target Regions:** the project team selected a number of the profiled communities and pursued the establishment of service points therein.

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4. **Identification of Potential Partners:** the project team identified possible partner organisations in the target regions. These included community development groups, business people, service providers and others. Criteria for partner selection included the availability of a suitable venue for a service point, the level of enthusiasm, interest and activity in the partner organisation, the prospects for staffing of an eventual service point.
5. **Local Consultation:** the project team met with potential partners and established the level of need for and interest in a library service point. The project team outlined the project and its benefits to the potential partners and ascertained whether or not a new service would be taken up.
6. **Recruitment of Partners:** based on the results of the consultation, the project team concluded partnership agreements with the local organisations or companies.
7. **Service Establishment:** service points were established in community facilities such as parish halls and enterprise centres, as well as in commercial premises. Training was delivered as necessary and procedures put in place to support the service points. Taster collections were installed and ICT resources tested.
8. **Marketing:** The project services were promoted at launches, via media advertising, in the libraries, etc. This marketing was particularly important at a local level, in order to stimulate demand for the new service.
9. **Management:** the project was managed by Donegal County Council under the direction of the project management team.

The methodology outlined here is flexible and can be adapted to meet the individual circumstances of the library authority (or other cultural services provider) and the community concerned.

Benefits of Taobh Tíre

Benefits to the Community

The Taobh Tíre project delivers a range of benefits to the remote communities which it serves. These include

- *Access to library books:* the availability of taster collections and access to the wider online library catalogue (OPAC) is a core benefit. These services improve the quality of life of residents in remote locations and help to address the inequality of services which is suffered by such locations.
- *Access to the Internet:* the Taobh Tíre service point offers free public Internet access, supported by PC hardware provided by the Information Society Fund. The Internet PCs can be reserved in advance in blocks of one hour. There is no charge for Internet access. Use of the Internet opens a range of new opportunities for education and training, personal development, commercial operations and leisure to the population of remote communities.
- *Wider library services:* Taobh Tíre goes beyond the issuing and returning of books. Wider library services such as reference queries, business information services, Ask-a-Librarian, book requests and inter-library loan are available.
- *Increased community involvement and activity:* The Taobh Tíre service points act as an attraction and focal point for community facilities and groups. They are a clear and concrete example of the additional services and value that local community groups provide to their constituents. This encourages local people to engage with community groups and so contributes to their activities.
- *A sense of connection:* the availability of new services via the Taobh Tíre service points reinforces the fact that, even though they are remote or isolated, the communities being served remain part of the wider (county and national) community. By making available services which would otherwise be accessible only by traveling to a centre of population, Taobh Tíre helps to address the sense of isolation of remote communities.

- *Potential:* Taobh Tíre is one of the first high-value remote-access services for many of the communities being served. As an application of the Internet it delivers tangible benefits to the community. However, there is clear potential for other services to be rolled out using the Internet infrastructure, both within and beyond the library sector. The availability of the Internet means that the facilities it offers in many areas of life, from healthcare to retirement to travel and investment, are almost now as available in remote communities as they are in the sitting-rooms of suburbia.

Benefits to the Library Service

The Taobh Tíre project provides an important benefit to the library service of Donegal County Council. It highlights the same potential benefit for other local authorities considering a similar approach to service provision. This benefit is **greatly improved outreach** and greater penetration within the community being served by the library authority. By establishing service points like those being set up by Taobh Tíre, the local authority is able to deliver services in new locations which would otherwise not be large enough to support a library presence. This is achieved by cooperation with the local community and by utilizing existing infrastructure. This is both **very efficient and very effective** – cooperation with the local community establishes a sense of ownership and involvement within the community which in turn bodes well for the uptake and ongoing use of the services being delivered.

Benefits to other local authorities

Taobh Tíre has established a methodology, for establishing and delivering cultural and online services to remote locations. This methodology is based on the principles of partnership with the local population and re-use of existing infrastructure. It can be effectively applied in any remote or isolated community, in any county.

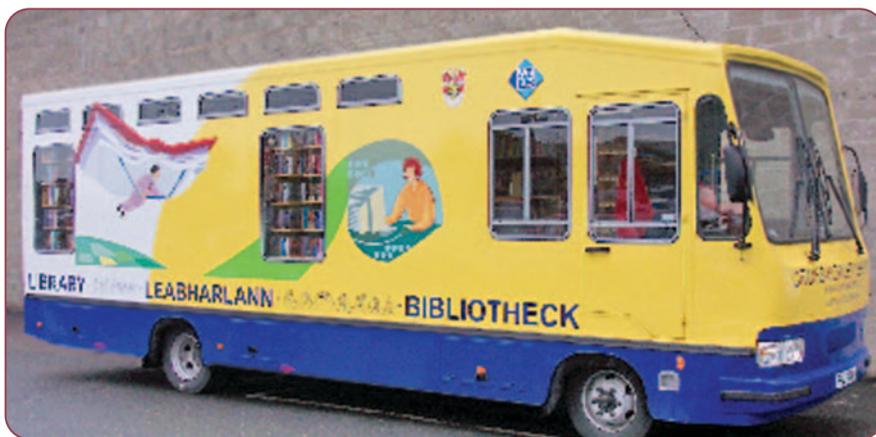
New Initiatives

The Taobh Tíre project led to the involvement of Donegal County Council in a number of other successful initiatives. Two of these were cross-border initiatives in cooperation with the Western Education and Library Board (WELB – Northern Ireland): the **Cross-Border Mobile Library** service and the **Inspiring Readers** project. In addition, the project has created focus on **reader development** and delivered training in this area within the library workforce.

Cross-Border Mobile Library Service

Involvement in Taobh Tíre opened the opportunity for Donegal County Council Library Service to engage with the WELB in proposing the setting up of a cross-border mobile library service. Such a service makes a good deal of sense in the border region, where the norm has been back to back services, rather than a service without borders approach. A proposal to the Peace II initiative of the EU was funded and a new mobile library is now in place serving the East Donegal and Western Tyrone/Derry regions.

A better library service for rural areas



Cross-Border Mobile Library

The new mobile library provides Internet access, ICT training, life-long learning, general literacy and personal development opportunities to the often-deprived communities of the border corridor. It has a particular focus on community information, local studies and includes a small museum facility. This cultural information is planned to have an impact

in explaining the border communities to one another. The new cross-border mobile service will be mainstreamed when the *Peace II* funding comes to an end. The long-term impact of the new service is expected to be considerable.

This new service is a valuable spin-off from Donegal County Council's involvement in the Taobh Tíre project. It underlines the potential for other new projects as a result of this initiative.

Inspiring Readers

An important result of the Taobh Tíre initiative to date is the awareness that reader development and the stimulation of demand for services is as important as providing the services themselves. This awareness led Donegal County Council to work with the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) in Northern Ireland to put in place a reader development initiative. This initiative will have an important impact on literacy, life-long learning and overall quality of life in the border corridor region.

Inspiring Readers will have a major verbal arts element, with training provided to library personnel in story-telling, user workshop facilitation, book club leadership, etc. It will lay the foundations for the provision of a range of new library services which focus on the member of the public and what he or she may have to say or contribute. Examples of project activity will include the following:

- Reading clubs
- Focusing on conflict resolution and reconciliation
- Work with children and youth groups
- Reader recommendation procedures
- Library staff training



Inside the Cross-Border Mobile Library

The Inspiring Readers project will complement the new mobile library service by building new layers and types of service on the infrastructure.

Inspiring Readers is a second exciting spin-off from Taobh Tíre. Other opportunities for new projects and new ways to derive additional value from the Taobh Tíre initiative are being explored and the project team anticipates further spin-offs during the next year of the project.

Reader Development

Taobh Tíre offers library services to remote communities. However, it is important to note that the mere availability of library services will not create demand for such services, particularly in communities where, up to now, no such service was available, or where services have been very limited. There is a requirement for reader development, encouraging the public to make use of the library service by (re)introducing reading as a day to day activity, encouraging social discussion centered around books (e.g. using book chains and book clubs), by running library events such as story-telling sessions and by promoting other library services such as Ask-a-Librarian and business information.

In order to address this need, the project management team organized a training day for library personnel, provided by the *Open the Book* organisation. This day was a great success and has pointed the way to excellent avenues for reader development such as the book chains and book clubs mentioned above.

Taobh Tíre Project Findings

The Taobh Tíre project has established a number of important research findings in its first phase. These findings have validity and longer-term value both for future Taobh Tíre phases and in the wider national context. The core lessons learnt to date are as follows:

- An **enthusiasm** for cultural and library services exists in remote communities, however small and isolated. Physical or social isolation does not imply that there is no demand for services; on the contrary, small communities in many cases demonstrate an unusually strong demand for cultural services.
- It is both **feasible** and financially viable to provide a high level of library service to remote communities, regardless of their location
- Local community groups exist in almost every community. **Cooperation with local groups is essential**. A new service which is not promoted by local champions and which does not address local priorities is of little value. Working with local partners adds value both to the project and to the partners.
- Community development **infrastructure** such as parish halls, cultural centres and co-operatives is very widespread in rural Ireland. Such infrastructure should be utilised as much as possible. This both simplifies the provision of cultural services and underlines the value of the existing infrastructure.
- The availability of new library or other cultural services is not enough – a demand for the services must be established and maintained, or the project risks delivering a service for which there is no requirement. End **user development** (reader development, for library services) is an important part of projects like Taobh Tíre. Follow-on aspects of the service, such as training, setting up book clubs and discussion groups, etc. must not be neglected once the installation itself has been completed.
- **Marketing** of the service is important. While an initial launch of the service will generate a certain level of consciousness, an ongoing promotional activity will continue to bring new and repeat users to the service. Activities such as reader development will play a central role in such marketing.
- The value of **word-of-mouth** promotion must not be underestimated. This in turn depends on a consistently high quality of service.
- Projects which (like Taobh Tíre) involve significant use of **ICT** require an agreed level of technical support. This can typically be delivered through the IT department of the relevant local authority; however, it should be made clear to all parties from an early stage that such support will be required and should be scheduled/budgeted for.
- Where a wide network of service locations is anticipated, the project should include a **network or federation** of established support centres. For the library sector, this means that remote service points should be supported by the branch libraries, rather than from a single central headquarters. Such distribution removes bottlenecks from support and increases the flexibility and scalability of the solution. For Taobh Tíre, this means that (for example) taster collections may be taken from the holdings of the nearest branch libraries, while requests and reservations should also use the nearest branch wherever feasible.

- The need for distributed support from the branch library personnel highlights a requirement for **training** for these personnel. If a service is to be delivered which differs from the day to day running of the branch, then personnel will need to be trained to deliver it. This training requirement may be ongoing or periodic; again, such training should be scheduled and budgeted for.
- If the project, like Taobh Tíre, relies on the cooperation of non-library personnel from the community development sector, training will be required for such personnel. This training may be delivered by the library staff (provided, of course, they have been trained for this).
- The success of a project of this nature is measured in its take-up and its **sustained value** to the community. The service must remain valuable and attractive over time. This means that any pilot exercises which are carried out to assess a project like this one must have significant duration if they are to provide useful information about the project. In the case of Taobh Tíre, extended pilots are certainly needed to confirm the initial very positive results of the project. Such extended pilots are an important part of the need for a second phase of the project.
- **Continuity** is critical. The personnel involved in a project of this nature should change as rarely as possible, so that the domain expertise built up is not lost. This applies both to the library personnel and the members of community development organisations who partner with the library. However, it must be recognised that staff turnover is a fact of life – knowledge management and a handover and support process can help to deal with this.
- **Every community is different.** The level of community development expertise, infrastructure and enthusiasm varies widely from town to town and from region to region. It is essential to tailor the project approach for each new service point, if the result is to be viable and sustainable over time.

The Future for Taobh Tíre

This report covers the first eighteen months of Taobh Tíre. While the project has been very successful to date, there is significant scope for more work and considerable benefit to be derived from it.

This section outlines the project team's vision for the next twelve months. It identifies important issues which need to be dealt with as well as opportunities for building on the project's success. Finally, it presents the recommendations of the project team for the future.

New Opportunities

The first phase of the project has validated the overall project vision. Delivery of library services to isolated communities is now a reality in ten new locations, using a partnership model. New possibilities now exist for building on this. These include the following:

- **New locations** – A number of rural communities where there is as yet no Taobh Tíre presence have contacted the project and requested that a service point be established. The existence of a proactive community development group in these locations is already a good sign for the viability of such new service points.

In addition, the project team has identified some potential new service point locations where have not yet been fully explored. These include a post office in Glencolumcille, one of the most remote villages in south-west Donegal.

- **New services** – the services provided by Taobh Tíre are popular and successful. However, there is a need for reader development and training services that will both stimulate demand for the service points and also enable the public to derive the maximum benefit from the presence of Taobh Tíre in their communities. The library personnel who have been trained in verbal arts and reader development are acutely aware of the potential here.

Some branch library services are not yet available in Taobh Tíre service points. These include business information and reference services. An online Ask-a-Librarian service has been envisaged since the early days of the project but has not yet been implemented. When in place, it will add significantly to the value of Taobh Tíre, particularly for the business sector and those involved in life-long learning.

- **New partnerships** – the Taobh Tíre project has already established partnerships with a range of organisations and organisation types. These include community development groups, commercial businesses, voluntary groups, the Vocational Education Committee, a Rural Transport Initiative and others. Potential remains to establish new partnerships, leveraging the successful model developed in this first phase of the project. The project team sees particular potential in working with, for example, the following:
 - An Post – for book delivery services.
 - The County Enterprise Board – there is excellent synergy between the goals of Taobh Tíre and that of CEBs in cities and counties across Ireland.

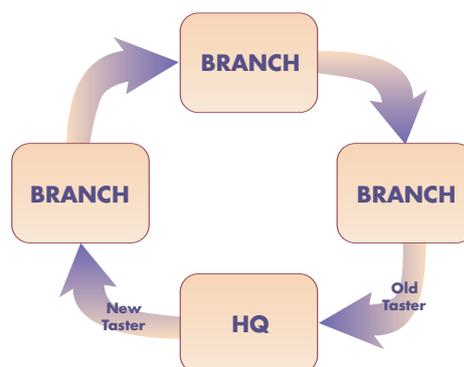
Ongoing Issues

The project has encountered a number of issues which remain open and which need to be taken into account during the next phase. In some cases a solution has been identified and this is reflected in the project recommendations. In others, awareness of the issue is more important than seeking a final solution. The most important issues for the network of Taobh Tíre service points include maintaining the **freshness** of **taster collections**, the **delivery** of taster collections and of book requests, the need for **marketing**, dealing with the **workload** caused by the project and **financial sustainability**.

Freshness of Taster Collections

An important issue for the various taster collections in the service points around the county is the regularity with which these collections are refreshed (have their books replaced with different titles). The value of the taster collections to the public depends to quite a large degree on their freshness, particularly since a small collection can only hope to contain a small number of books on any topic.

Keeping the taster collections fresh has a number of aspects – new collections need to be formed in the branch libraries, these must be delivered to the service points, old taster collections must be returned to the branch library network, a record must be kept of what books have been sent to which locations, etc. There are implications here for personnel effort in the branch libraries, as well as for delivery personnel moving the collections from place to place, that are ongoing in nature. One possible approach to mitigate the extra work at HQ or branch level is the rotation of taster collections from one service point to another, with only one or two such collections being issued by (and returned to) the branch library network in any given period.



Delivery

While Taobh Tíre installs a taster collection of books at each service point, a more powerful and flexible service is also delivered by enabling access to the online catalogue of the complete Donegal County Library. Users may request books from the catalogue and have them delivered to their service point. The books can then be returned to the service point, for subsequent return to the branch library network.

At present, the majority of Taobh Tíre delivery uses the postal system. This reflects the unavailability of a reliable and regular alternative. However, this is rather costly and not particularly rapid.

In the next phase of the project, the Taobh Tíre team have identified that a **delivery van**, partly or fully dedicated to the project, would be very beneficial. The van would both rotate taster collections between service points and also deliver and collect requested and reserved books. Since a driver for such a van is already available and would be no additional drain on the project's resources, the cost of such a major improvement in the project's facilities would be relatively low.

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Marketing

Like any other service, there is a requirement to inform the public about the Taobh Tíre service. Users must be attracted to the service points and must be stimulated and encouraged to experiment with the service. The project team firmly believes that, once tried, the Taobh Tíre services will be popular and will remain so. However, a concerted marketing exercise remains an important requirement in the short to medium term.

Results to date indicate that local marketing, by word of mouth, by service champions and using launches and other events is the most successful approach. The project team envisages that Taobh Tíre could invite representatives of target groups, such as teenagers, farmers, fishermen, women working in the home, etc. to events and mini-launches aimed at their specific requirements. Such events could be hosted in the Taobh Tíre service point building and include a brief overview of the service and how it delivers benefits of particular relevance to the target group.

Workload

The Taobh Tíre initiative places a certain additional workload on the public library service. The preparation of taster collections, the dispatch and receipt of requested books by post and the interactions with the various partner organisations all take time. The project has enjoyed the involvement of a fully dedicated project coordinator up to now. However, in the coming years the Taobh Tíre services will need to be included in the day to day remit of the library service. A model for this must be established, validated and agreed, with buy-in from all stakeholders, including library personnel. A promising avenue is the federalisation of the service, such that the tasks outlined above are carried out at a branch level, rather than at HQ. This would spread the load as well as making the service more scalable and less sensitive to changes in personnel. While this avenue appears promising, the project team envisages that a full solution will need to be worked out in the coming phase of the project.

Sustainability

The Taobh Tíre initiative has cost a significant sum of money to set up and run. While some of these costs are one-off in nature, others are recurring and must be resourced if the service is to be sustained over time. As part of the library service, the Taobh Tíre initiative must be funded into the future from local authority funds. However, it should be noted that the Taobh Tíre initiative services a significant population – more than many branch libraries – and its user base is growing. The Taobh Tíre service may be viewed as a virtual library branch, and be resourced appropriately, both financially and in terms of personnel. This level of funding will allow the initiative to continue to grow and deliver services to isolated communities into the future.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This final section of the interim report reviews the key conclusions to date and makes some recommendations for the next phase of the project.

Conclusions

The first phase of the Taobh Tíre project has been **very successful**. Ten new service points are in operation and the residents of remote communities are enjoying new services and exploring new opportunities for a better life.

A hunger for cultural services exists in rural Ireland. Small peripheral communities are **keen to access services** which are typically found only in larger centres of population. The provision of such services helps to underpin the sustainability of marginal communities.

The project developed and used a **partnership model**, working hand in hand with community development organisations, commercial companies and other bodies already active in remote areas and isolated communities. This partnership approach was a great success, contributing both to the efficiency of the project and also to the value of the community partners. This approach shows great promise for replication across the country.

For the project to establish and deliver services, followed by a meaningful monitoring period to identify usage patterns and popularity, the project timescale was insufficient. More time is needed for high-quality pilots.

Recommendations

While the project has been very successful to date, it has not yet reached its full potential. A **second phase** of twelve months should be proposed by Donegal County Council and supported if at all possible by the Public Library Research Programme and the Information Society Fund.

Service delivery **pilots of at least twelve months duration** should be carried out in order to establish a realistic view of the long-term popularity and value of project services.

New Taobh Tíre sites should be established. Having proven the concept, the project should now seek to set up **new sites** in other isolated areas in Donegal.

The potential for **replicating** Taobh Tíre in isolated communities across the country is very great. Such communities may include any area where access to cultural services is not available in the vicinity; i.e. target communities can be both urban and rural. From a research point of view, an urban service point may be included in the next phase of the project.

The Taobh Tíre project should **promote** its results to other local authorities in Ireland and abroad, in order that the maximum value can be derived from this initiative. The possibility of an INTERREG or Peace II initiative where Taobh Tíre service points are established elsewhere in the border corridor region may be considered.

The project should promote its services at the **local level**, addressing community groups, schools and other centres. This will raise awareness of the Taobh Tíre services and the opportunities which they offer to the population as a whole.

The project should press ahead with the development and roll-out of an ICT-based **Ask a Librarian** service, whereby the full reference and business information services of a full Branch Library will be made available to Taobh Tíre users.

Library services involved in Taobh Tíre should consider the **use of ICT** to further support Taobh Tíre. For example, opening times and locations of Taobh Tíre service points should be available online, while online reading groups may be considered. The community server work in the Fintown service point may be of value to other cultural and community organisations.

