

Chapter 2 The Donegal Community Audit - Approach and Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The new framework developed, through the Donegal Community Audit, to examine the accessibility to community and voluntary infrastructure explores the concept of accessibility at three different levels:

- Spatially - it was necessary to determine where community and voluntary infrastructure is located around the county and to determine how spatially accessible it is to concentrations of the populations in different towns and areas
- Sectorally - it was essential to examine how accessible this infrastructure is for a number of key sectors of the population and how well are their needs being met
- The community perspective – finally an audit of each piece of infrastructure was carried out to allow the community representative to identify the existing level of accessibility with regards to their group or facility and to highlight their strategic development needs now and in the future.

This chapter is divided into two sections that explain the multi-faceted approach, adopted in determining accessibility to community infrastructure:

Specifically section 2.2 explains the approach and methodology used to identify, validate and map all existing community infrastructure (including physical and human, community voluntary groups and activities) within the county. It also presents the techniques used to develop, administer and analyse the comprehensive audits of both community and voluntary groups and facilities. It specifically focuses on the capacity building, which took place when a number of newly trained community researchers assisted with the administration of the questionnaire surveys. Finally this section details the mechanisms that were developed in order to keep a number of community and voluntary directories up to date and in part constitutes an exit strategy.

Section 2.3 describes the comprehensive mapping exercise that was used in the development of the community audit and was used to analyse, underpin and inform the findings of this document.

2.2 Overall project methodology and approach

2.2.1 Identifying, validating and mapping community and voluntary infrastructure

What is community infrastructure?

'Community infrastructure comprises of the combined resources of facilities, skills, networks and capacity required in local areas to enable people to participate and engage collectively in self-determined positive action to address local need'.

(Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, May 2001)

For the purposes of this project, community infrastructure includes community groups¹, voluntary groups² and community facilities³.

Defining the population of community and voluntary groups

The original listing of community and voluntary groups was developed from a base listing compiled by the Donegal Community Workers Co-op and was then cross-referenced with a number of other databases⁴. The purpose was to gain as comprehensive a listing of community and voluntary groups in the County and to ensure a widespread coverage for the survey. Prior to this exercise, a number of listings existed on an area or organisational level, however none were truly representative of the level of activity taking place in the county.

This exercise resulted in a database of 1037 community and voluntary groups and this constituted the 'population' or the entire number of 'known groups', which would be audited. This database was categorised by Electoral Area and the subsequent audit was used to authenticate the group's existence, validate the townland to which the groups belonged and to remove any defunct community and voluntary groups.

The sample of community and voluntary groups captured

The survey was successful in capturing 242 responses. It is impossible to estimate with any degree of confidence the proportion of the population that was captured in the survey and this is primarily due to the problems encountered in defining a 'true' versus 'known' population. Some of the groups of the known population are time or issue specific (i.e.) they are set-up purely to organise an event or festival, others are lobby groups for environmental issues and once the issue has been resolved they become defunct. In addition, some groups may be in existence but do not appear or are captured on any listing and therefore are part of an 'unknown' population.

Therefore the sample captured does not purport to be a definitive listing of all community and voluntary groups in the county, but provides the essential framework and methodology as to how to work towards its development and this is the subject of section 2.2.3 below.

¹ A group similar to a voluntary group but mainly concerned with changing social, economic, or cultural conditions of a particular community or engaged in community development (www.wheel.ie).

² An independent not-for-profit, charitable group involved in activities of a public nature (e.g. service provision, advocacy, self-help or mutual aid; policy action; resource and co-ordination) that deals with a range of groups, people or communities from a particular geographic location or having a common interest (www.wheel.ie).

³ The term is broad, in that, it can include anywhere that a group of individuals can hold meetings (i.e.) community halls, backroom of local pubs or schools. In addition, a community facility can also be defined as a piece of infrastructure that will enable a community and voluntary group to engage in their sectoral focus (i.e.) a park, a walking trail, a library, a museum etc

⁴ Eolaire 2004, Taighde E-Consultation, Donegal Project Groups in receipt of grants, Listing of groups that received allocations in PEACE 11 since 2000, Listing of groups that received funding through the Community Development Fund, Administrative Officers in Community and Enterprise, Donegal County Council, Donegal Local Development Company Forum listings; Listings of County Childcare Groups on the Health Service Executive, Stranorlar Community and Voluntary Groups Listing, Websearch

Defining the population of community facilities

As outlined above, the definition of community facilities is broad. To make the task more manageable given the time and resources available, the audit of facilities was restricted to focussing on indoor community facilities. The listing was developed from a base listing supplied by the Donegal Local Sports and Recreation Partnership and crossed with facilities identified by the Donegal Workers Co-op and supplemented by desk research conducted by the Research and Policy Unit. This resulted in a master listing of 47 community facilities, which is defined as the 'known population'. Again similar problems exist in defining a true population of community facilities but none the less, the audit was successful in capturing and authenticating the location of 20 indoor community facilities.

2.2.2 An outline of procedures used in the questionnaire research

Stage 1: Recruiting and training the field researchers

For the purposes of undertaking a Community Audit, it was evident that the most appropriate persons to carry out the research (i.e.) the interviewers, should be chosen from the communities that they serve, as this would reduce the likelihood of any interview bias caused by the respondents perception of the interviewer⁵, or indeed the interviewer perception of the respondents. It was necessary then for the field research team to include community representatives from across all of the Electoral Areas and the Gaeltacht area. A call for willing participants was placed with a number of agencies including FÁS, The Donegal Workers Co-op etc. 11 were chosen to participate. However, due to the diversity of the participants' backgrounds and experiences, it was necessary to equip them with research skills required to administer the questionnaires.

A training course was developed and delivered by the Research and Policy Unit and was designed to enhance the personal development of a number of Community Based Researchers and equip them with the necessary skills, confidence and ability to administer the 'Audit of Community and Voluntary Infrastructure' and the 'Audit of Community Facilities' questionnaires.

This course covered a number of elementary research topics including '*An Overview of the Donegal Community Audit*'; '*Principles of Communication*'; '*Determining Social Styles*'; '*Consulting with Communities*'; '*Best Practice Stages for Carrying out a Research Project*'; '*Best Practice Guide for Carrying out Survey Interviews*'; '*Best Practice Guide for Constructing Written Questionnaires*' and the '*Art of Public Speaking*'.

Both questionnaires were developed by the Research and Policy Unit,⁶ in consultation with staff from the Community and Enterprise Directorate and the County Community Forum.

The training course incorporated a number of practical workshops to test both questionnaires. This stage was absolutely vital as it included both representatives from the communities and a number of the researchers who would be involved in the administration. This training course also included a number of exercises designed to enhance the confidence and personal development of the participants. This training course took place over a 4 day⁷ period and was attended by 11 Community Based Participants from a wide variety of backgrounds see figure 2.1 below.

⁵ See Rosenthal, 1966 and Gillham, 2000

⁶ Appendices 1A and 1B contains the English versions of both questionnaires and Appendices 2A and 2B contains the Irish versions

⁷ 24th, 25th, 26th and 28th January 2005.

Figure 2.1 – Participants in the Research Methods and Approaches training course



Stage 2: Pre Administration

Prior to administration, all of the field administrators were instructed by the Research and Policy on:

- The method and approach used when carrying out the survey (i.e.) ensuring all telephone interviews were conducted in a professional manner, in a standard format, how to provide assistance where required etc
- Standard procedures for tracking down respondents who could not easily be reached
- Possible mechanisms to increase the response rate (i.e.) repeated reminders or call back

Stage 3: Administration

Both of the questionnaires went live on the 9th March 2005, however to facilitate and ensure as many returns as possible the deadline was extended to 31st May 2005. Throughout this stage the field researchers were supervised and continuously monitored by the Research and Policy Unit in order to detect problems as soon as they appeared and to advise on an appropriate course of action.

Stage 4: Analysis of data

Two databases, with high level reporting capabilities, were designed for the purposes of inputting and analysing the information captured. Various queries were developed to explore different relationships in the data and to sort the responses geographically (i.e.) townland, Electoral Division and by the 23 sectors. These latter queries would eventually enable the

production of the 'Directory of Community and Voluntary Groups by Sectoral and by Geographical Remit'.

The data was then analysed to varying degrees, using a variety of summary statistics, comparative statistics and mapping techniques. As it was through the medium of maps that greater insights were gained into the accessibility of community infrastructure, it therefore warranted a separate explanation of the approach and methodology used. The reader's attention is directed to section 2.3 of this chapter for a full explanation.

Certain data was analysed spatially (i.e.) accessibility of different populations to community and voluntary infrastructure; other data was analysed sectorally (i.e.) the distribution of training grants across sectors and the types of training courses taken by sector; the remaining data used summary statistics to reflect the strategic development needs of the individual respondents (i.e.) the total strategic development needs of community and voluntary groups.

Accuracy was always paramount to the study and quality checks were performed on the data at various stages throughout the process.

2.2.3 Working towards a true population

The Common Registration Form

In due recognition of the dynamic nature of the community and voluntary sector in County Donegal, which constantly has new groups entering the sector as well as incumbent groups exiting the sector, meant that mechanisms were needed to continuously maintain and monitor the database. To this end an agreement⁸ was reached to use 'Part A' of the survey for the 'Common Registration Form'⁹ for new groups entering the sector. It was agreed that this would be an on-going function of Community, Culture and Enterprise directorate of Donegal County Council. A second batch was circulated in August 2006 and this resulted in an augmentation of the sample to 458 groups, from which two new community and voluntary directories by geographical and sectoral remit were developed.

⁸ With Research and Policy Unit, Administrative Officers of Community, Culture and Enterprise Unit and the County Community Forum

⁹ See Appendix 3

2.3 Overall mapping methodology and approach

2.3.1 The Mapping Exercise

Location, Location, Location - Why does Geography matter?

Most of the information, in our world today, contains a location reference, (i.e.) an address. It is estimated that more than 80% of all data and information has an element that is related to location or space and can therefore be mapped¹⁰.

It is possible to use location not just for referencing an address through a single point on a map, but also to link descriptive information to a location, as a way to show trends, define relationships and to support our decisions.

Using Geography¹¹ provides new insights into information, by adding value to static data and thus allowing for better understanding rather than viewing tables or databases in isolation. Therefore enabling people, organisations, industries and policy-makers to make informed and strategic decisions about the world in a more confident way.

Why use GIS as a tool for analysis?

In searching for a novel way to carry out the Donegal Community Audit, it was decided to establish a baseline at the smallest possible geographical unit and to aggregate this baseline right up to county level. In that case, it was essential to map community and voluntary infrastructure. The system used to link this geographical and descriptive information was GIS.

Geographical Information Systems (GIS) is essentially a software system that can be used for *'capturing, storing, checking, manipulating, analysing and displaying data, which are spatially referenced to the Earth'*.

GIS allows decisions to be made with confidence as:

- It is based on empirical research and acts as a tool to display or depict the real world;
- It analyses and uncovers geographical trends and patterns inherent in location-based information;
- It can assist with forecasting trends based on models of the real world
- It provides information through the production and interpretation of maps.

The GIS methodology and approach

The process began with capturing primary data through the community and voluntary questionnaires and the collation of secondary data, mainly Census data. These datasets were then summarised collectively into different layers.

A layer is essentially a collection of captured information specific to a particular place or area, for example, the mountains, rivers, lakes, the road network, urban areas, administration boundaries etc. The layering with regards to administrative boundaries merits further explanation and indeed can be used to illustrate how the layering process works.

For example, County Donegal comprises of a total area is 486,091 hectares¹² and had a population of 137,575 in 2002. The County's population is distributed across 6 Local Electoral Areas, 149 Electoral Divisions and approximately 2680 townlands. Therefore, each administrative boundary forms a spatial layer, in its own right each, and for the purpose of

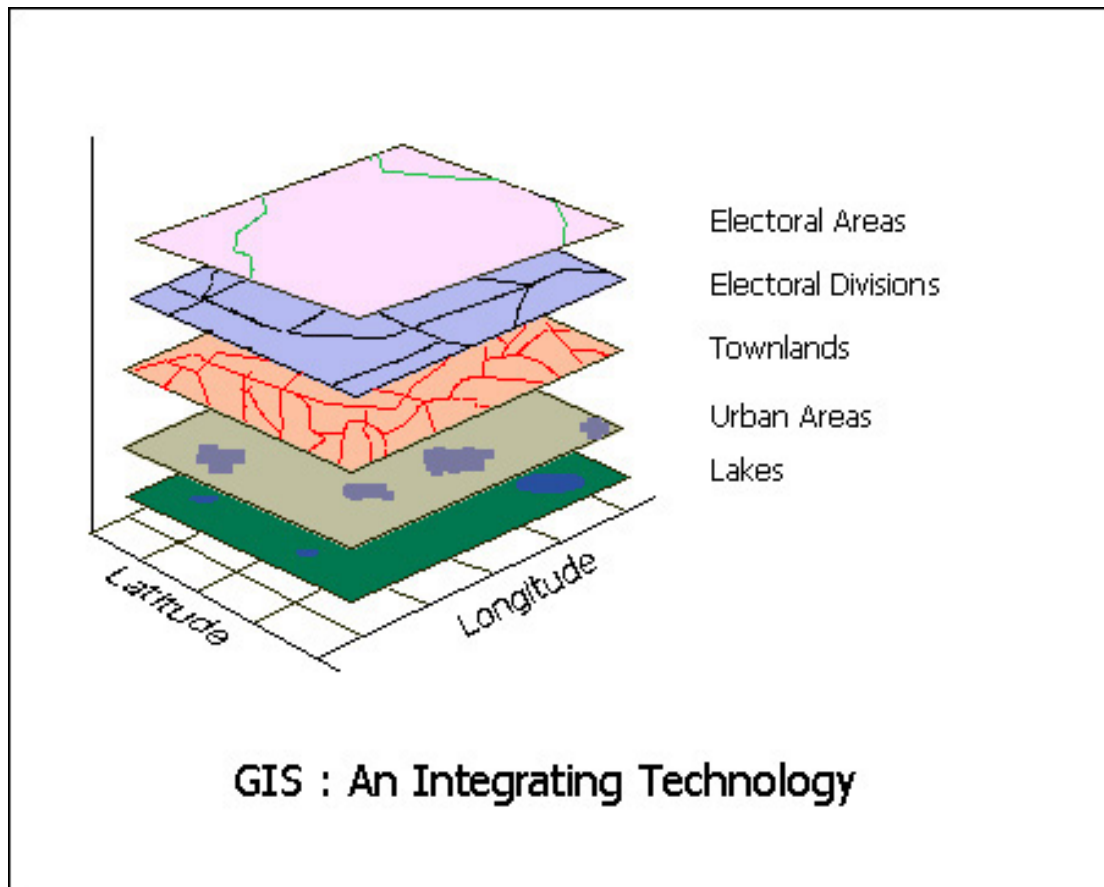
¹⁰ Oxford Centre for Cartography and GIS

¹¹ Defined as the location of people, places or events

¹² County Donegal Profile, 2002

the project is used to inform the spatial analysis at each specific scale. The process of layering is illustrated in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.2 The layering process using GIS



In summary, each spatial scale, be it townland or Electoral Area, can be selected as the platform for analysis, and matched with its respective community and voluntary groups or facilities layers and thus allows for the integration of various layers.

Stage 1 : Mapping the primary data

The primary information captured in the survey was geo-coded¹³, to permit the mapping of features for a particular area and to allow for a high level of accuracy during the spatial analysis. As each community group was asked to quote the townland to which they belonged or were based, a spatial layer was created, which consisted of the sample of community and voluntary infrastructure by townland.

In order to protect the anonymity of those groups, it was decided to use the centroid¹⁴ point of each individual townland to represent the location of that group and or facility. In instances where there was more than one group belonging to one particular townland, each point that represented additional groups, was dispersed in a random fashion within that townland.

¹³ The process of assigning geographical co-ordinates to a feature

¹⁴ The centre of a map object (i.e.) a townland, located at the middle of the object (the location halfway between the northern and southern extents and halfway between the eastern and western extents of the object)

A spatial join¹⁵ was then conducted to enable the information captured on the survey questionnaires to be attached to its corresponding location on the map and thus it was possible to select each group and or facility and view the attribute information (e.g.) contact details, sectoral information. Therefore, at that stage, all those who had responded to the survey were represented spatially; two layers were created entitled 'Community and Voluntary Groups' and 'Community Facilities'. This would permit further analysis to take place but would also act as an information source to the general public.

Stage 2: Attaching the secondary data

To examine the spatial and sectoral distribution of the community infrastructure and to reveal any gaps or overlaps in the current service provision, a number of key datasets were imported from the Central Statistics Office, including the population counts per Electoral Division and Electoral Area and other key datasets including the youth population, the elderly population and those with disabilities, all of which were mapped thematically to reveal their dispersion at various spatial scales.

Stage 3: Exploring accessibility and relationships

To explore the statistical, spatial and sectoral relationships between or within different datasets or layers specific to an area (i.e.) Electoral Division, the overlay¹⁶ function was then used.

The fundamental objective of the project is to enhance physical accessibility and accessibility from a social inclusion perspective to community infrastructure and to achieve this, a number of key relationships needed to be examined:

- The spatial distribution of community infrastructure relative to population concentrations in urban and rural areas
- The accessibility from community and voluntary groups to the main population centres, community and voluntary facilities and other community facilities, including Public Service Centres, primary and secondary schools, sport facilities etc
- The spatial distribution of sectoral specific Community Infrastructure, relative of population concentrations in key vulnerable sectors.

By defining those relationships, a series of community infrastructural maps were produced, using GIS, to uncover underlying trends and patterns. There were a number of other relationships that could have been explored, if time permitted or if data was spatial and could be mapped. To overcome this it was decided to generate these relationships through the databases.

In addition, enhancing accessibility, can be addressed, by providing the general public with the key attribute information collected through the surveys on a particular community groups or facility. This included information regarding the contact details of community and voluntary groups, sectors that they serve, timetabling of activities in community facilities.

¹⁵ A type of spatial analysis in which two different layers are joined together based on their relative location

¹⁶ The process of superimposing layers of geographic data which occupy the same space, in order to study the relationship between them

Stage 4: The new framework

The new spatial and sectoral datasets, which were created, manipulated, analysed are interspersed throughout this entire document and have greatly informed the findings of this entire project. In addition they constituted an integral document, in their own right, and have been published separately¹⁷ with a user guide to assist with improving 'map reading skills'.

¹⁷ The Donegal Community Audit, Mapping Community Infrastructure, 2006