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# UISCE Tourism

## *Usage of Irish Seas and Coastal Ecosystems for Tourism Development*

Work package 3, Deliverable D3.3

### *Development Guidelines for Heritage Tourism Products*

Mary Cawley, John Deely, Stephen Hynes  
SEMUR (Socio-Economic Marine Research Unit)  
College of Business, Public Policy and Law  
University of Galway

*The UISCE project (Grant-Aid Agreement No. PDOC/19/07/01) is carried out with the support of the Marine Institute, funded under the Marine Research Programme by the Irish Government.*



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Socio-Economic Marine  
Research Unit

## **Abstract**

Development of heritage tourism products can be resource intensive. They often require strong networks and networking skills, financial and informational support and good local engagement. In light of these needs, this guideline document discusses six themes in relation to the development of the Transatlantic Cable Station, a site in Valentia Island seeking World Heritage status. Through data collected from thirty semi-structured interviews and one focus group, each theme outlines a significant element of the development process and on-going needs of the project. This document gives further guidance for those who may be considering developing their own heritage tourism product by describing the key aspects of each theme that contribute to success.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, communities are becoming involved in the development of built, natural or cultural heritage resources for tourism purposes. This is rarely an easy task. It often requires the creation of strong networks or relationships between both community members and others towards an agreed goal, good stakeholder engagement and a lot of persistence. This can be further complicated by the sustainability needs of the area in which the envisaged product or experience is to be developed. Often these needs not only include environmental sustainability but also economic and socio-cultural sustainability. In light of the complexities of meeting the goals of the project along with meeting the needs of the local area, this guideline document aims to provide direction to communities and local managers in their development of heritage-based tourism projects that are expected to have a substantial impact on the communities where they are based. The document places a particular focus on the early development stages of projects that require the ability to create links, networking and networks<sup>1</sup> between a variety of local and non-local stakeholder groups.

The guidelines contained within this document are developed from qualitative research conducted on the Transatlantic Cable Project (TCP) which is an ongoing bid aiming to gain UNESCO World Heritage (WH) status for the Cable Station and the related sites associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century submarine telegraph cable installed between Valentia Island and Heart's Content, Newfoundland, Canada, in 1858. Data collection included 30 extensive interviews with five different stakeholder groups each with different views and connections to the project. Following the interviews and in-depth analysis of the texts, a focus group was held with representatives of the previous interviewees to present the main findings and seek feedback.

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<sup>1</sup> A network is, "a specific type of relation linking defined sets of persons, objects or events" (Scott, 2008: 2). Networking relates to communication between members of a network and with external entities to achieve the aims of the network.

Whilst the case study relates to a WH bid, many of the findings have pertinence to other community heritage tourism initiatives that require substantial funding and promotional support.

Before discussing the guidelines offered, context is provided for WH bids, followed by a brief description of the Valentia Island and the TCP case study . Then, six topics are discussed under the headline of Guidelines: (i) community development groups and local networks; (ii) external links; (iii) stakeholder engagement; (iv) business collaboration; (v) sustainability; and (vi) additional benefits. Each of these topics represents a key theme in the development of the TCP and tourism in Valentia more generally. It is hoped, that the discussion of these topics and the guidelines offered will allow for a smoother and more efficient development process for those striving to create their own heritage tourism product.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### ***What is a World Heritage site?***

Every year the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designates several sites across the globe as UNESCO WH sites. In doing so, the site is deemed to be of "Outstanding Universal Value"<sup>2</sup>. Gaining this designation tends to serve a dual purpose: protection of the site and increasing tourist activity. Internationally, WH sites include such iconic sites as the Great Wall of China, the Pyramids of Giza and the Taj Mahal. In the Republic of Ireland, there are currently two WH sites, Brú na Bóinne in county Meath and Sceilg Mhichíl, in county Kerry. In Northern Ireland, there is one UNESCO site, the Giant's

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<sup>2</sup> Marshall, D. (2011). Preparing WH nominations. Paris: UNESCO. Outstanding Universal Value means cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity.

Causeway in county Antrim. It is worth noting that UNESCO also grants other designations such as Global Geopark, awarded to the Burren and Cliffs of Moher in county Clare, and Biospheres which include the Dublin Bay Biosphere Reserve. These too have their own initiation process.

The process of gaining WH status has two stages. The first is at the national level. It must be demonstrated to the appropriate department of the national government that the site is deserving of the designation of UNESCO WH status. To demonstrate this a dossier for the site is drawn up. The dossier will demonstrate the characteristics of the site that make it worthy of “Outstanding Universal Value” status. The dossier is then presented to a national expert advisory group for adjudication. If successful, the site is placed on the national tentative list of UNESCO sites. The current Irish tentative list holds three sites, The Royal Sites of Ireland in various counties, The Passage Tomb Landscape, county Sligo, and the Transatlantic Cable Ensemble with sites in county Kerry and Heart’s Content in Newfoundland, Canada.

Once included on the national tentative list, the site can move on to the second stage of the nomination process. In this stage, a second dossier is prepared. This dossier will again demonstrate that the site is of “Outstanding Universal Value”; however, this time UNESCO will adjudicate. Additionally, this second dossier must include plans that will ensure the conservation, protection, management and monitoring of the site. In the case of the Transatlantic Cable Ensemble, an extra layer of management and administration is required as it is a “serial transnational bid” meaning that the Valentia Transatlantic Cable Station and its sister site in Heart’s Content in Newfoundland are submitting a joint bid for WH status.

### ***Case Study – Valentia Island***

Valentia Island, located in the Iveragh Peninsula, in county Kerry, is Ireland's fifth largest island (11km long by just over 2km wide) (Figure 1). It is connected to the mainland by a bridge in the southwest and with additional ferry access in the northeast between April and October currently. Valentia is well known for its geographical and historical points of interest, which include: some of the oldest fossilised markings of a tetrapod (four-toed) vertebrate walking on land; Ireland's only underground stone quarry, which has supplied Valentia's famous slate<sup>3</sup> to landmark buildings such as Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral; and Valentia Island Lighthouse and Light Keeper's cottage (referred to here together as the Lighthouse Station) which have recently been refurbished, with funding of €90,000 from Fáilte Ireland, to include an immersive visitor experience, a marine wildlife exhibit and a cafe. Valentia is also a departure point to access Sceilg Mhichíl.



Figure 1. Valentia Island, County Kerry

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<sup>3</sup> Valentia Slate secured World Heritage Stone status in June 2024: <https://www.gsi.ie/en-ie/events-and-news/news/Pages/ValentiaSlatesecuresWorldHeritageStonestatus.aspx>

However, Valentia, by some metrics, has been declining over the last two decades. The population has stagnated, with the 2011 census reporting 665 people living on the island and the 2022 census placing this figure at 658. The effects of a stagnating population have been further exacerbated by an ageing demographic, which, over recent years, has meant a decline in the number of school-going children. The tourist season also remains short, lasting only 8 weeks in July and August, while nearby areas like Dingle and Killarney have tourist seasons which run from June to early September. However, the community in Valentia has been extremely active in their goals of rejuvenating the island through a multi-pronged redevelopment strategy which includes the development of offshore hydrogen energy, support of local businesses and community groups as well as a comprehensive all-island tourism strategy. Here we focus on the tourism element and specifically the WH bid.

### ***Historical Context - The Transatlantic Cable Ensemble***

In 1858, one of the most significant achievements in early globalisation took place on Valentia Island. A message was sent across 3000km of telegraph cable, connecting Valentia to Heart's Content, in Newfoundland, Canada and connecting Europe to North America<sup>4</sup>. This achievement was the culmination of more than a decade of work undertaken by American entrepreneur, Cyrus Field, and the then Knight of Kerry, Sir Peter Fitzgerald. That first message read "Europe and America are united by telegraphic communication: Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men". Unfortunately, the cable lasted just under three weeks before burning out due to the usage of higher voltage for transmission purposes than the cable was capable of bearing.

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<sup>4</sup> Further information on the Cable Station and the WH bid can be found at <https://www.valentiacable.com/transatlantic-cable-story/>

It took another eight years and several failed attempts before Valentia and Heart's Content could be reunited. The cable operated from 1866 to 1868 from what is today known as the Telegraph Field at Foilhommerum Bay in the southwest of the island before the specially built Valentia Island Cable Station in Knightstown, the main settlement on the island, began operation in 1868. The Cable Station remained in operation for 98 years, until 1966. The Transatlantic Cable Ensemble WH bid aims to memorialize this historical achievement and provide a visitor attraction of international status on Valentia. At the same time, WH status will offer legal protection to the ensemble.

The Transatlantic Cable Ensemble is comprised of four parts: the Slate Yard (where slate mined in Valentia was prepared for export through the harbour), where the first message was sent from in 1858, the Valentia Island Cable Station, the Heart's Content Cable Station and the nearby shoreline where six original cables came ashore. As the ensemble contains sites held in two countries this bid is a relatively rare "serial transnational bid". In 2024, only 48 of all 1,199 WH sites are transnational sites.

To date, the progress of the bid has been extremely successful. Both the Irish and the Canadian components of the ensemble have made it onto their respective national tentative lists. The Valentia Island Cable Station was included in July 2022 and the Heart's Content Cable Station in December 2017. As such, the Transatlantic Cable Ensemble is embarking on the second stage of its UNESCO bid as a joint endeavour. A single dossier will be submitted to UNESCO by the Irish and Canadian governments and WH status will be granted to both or neither.

In addition to the WH bid, substantial work has been done on the Valentia Island Cable Station building with plans for more improvements whilst protecting the integrity of the original structure. A museum has been installed on the lower floor of the building, with funding of €161,437 from Fáilte Ireland, and has been operating since 2022. The upper floor is to be



developed into an innovation hub aided by a Rural Regeneration and Development grant in excess of €1 million. This will enable 30 to 50 people to work remotely from the Cable Station. Other projects involving the Transatlantic Cable Ensemble are ongoing such as the renovation of the Slate Yard, which was purchased by VIDCo in 2023.

### ***Developing the World Heritage Bid***

The Irish element of the bid can be said to have been developed by two volunteer organisations working in association with Kerry County Council. The first is the Valentia Island Development Company (VIDCo). VIDCo is a not-for-profit company whose directors are residents and business people on the Island. VIDCo was set up in 2010 as a direct response to the 2008 recession and its effects on the Island's population and economy. Although VIDCo began with a focus on tourism, it has since expanded beyond tourism. Their projects include an innovation hub, an offshore hydrogen energy facility, and a proposal for housing development on the island.

The second voluntary organisation is the Transatlantic Cable Foundation, known as the Foundation. The Foundation was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee in 2016 to raise the national and international profile of the WH bid in order to generate funding and support for the bid and has gained charitable status. The Foundation's board includes residents of Valentia as well as non-residents, thereby providing both local and external expertise and experience and facilitating the exchange of information.



Figure 2: Aerial photograph of the Valentia Island Cable Station taken in the 1970s  
Credit: Muckross House Research Library, Courtesy Trustees of Muckross House (Killarney) CLG.

### **3. GUIDELINES**

The following section presents six key topics that should be considered during the development stages of a heritage tourism project as a community endeavour. Each section begins with a presentation of the topic of interest and how it relates to the development process. This is followed by a description of the importance of the topic, not only in relation to tourism and heritage projects but also as it relates to the wider community. Findings from qualitative interviews and a focus group in relation to the TCP are presented. Finally, guidelines are presented that summarise the steps a project development team should take in preparing a WH bid or other substantial community tourism project.

### 3. (i) Community development groups and local networks



Figure 3: Valentia Lighthouse at Cromwell Point

#### *What are community development groups and local networks?*

Almost all geographically and economically marginal locations like Valentia are influenced by both universal and region- or local-specific challenges. It is sometimes the case that residents, those most impacted, may not only wish to tackle these problems but may also feel they, with some help, are best equipped to do so. In these cases, a group of individuals may organise into a community development group. A community development group can be described as a self-organised body that has assembled to achieve a goal or set of goals that relate to the improvement, development or preservation of the economic, social and/or environmental viability of a community and its surrounds.

Members of community development groups usually have strong local ties, live in the region of concern and have an emotional bond with the area<sup>5</sup>. As such, these groups tend to use local links to form a network and engage in networking to reach their goals. A local network and associated networking between two or more people within the same region, enables the sharing of knowledge, various forms of capital (e.g. educational, social and political) and tangible resources. Consequently, community development groups which use local links to create a critical mass may be better able to achieve their goals than individuals working independently.

### ***Why are community development groups and local networks useful?***

One of the most important attributes of a community development group is their local knowledge. As such, they have a comprehensive understanding of the problems their community faces, the impacts of those problems and an understanding of the local resources at their disposal to tackle these issues. As a consequence, local community development groups may have the capacity to use creative strategies to reach their goals that utilise all the resources at their disposal. Sometimes, innovation and creativity require imported knowledge from outsiders, immigrants or returned emigrants from the local area who have accumulated experience elsewhere. It should be noted that a willingness to accept such knowledge is necessary and is based on trust in the source.

Local networks often play a fundamental role in the ability of a community development group to enact their strategies. The strong bonds in a local network can be utilised in a more effective manner than the weak ties of external linkages. These local networks can hold a sizeable amount of goodwill that can be leveraged to great effect. Of course, local networks can also

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<sup>5</sup> Dragouni, M., & Fouseki, K. (2018). Drivers of community participation in heritage tourism planning: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 13(3), 237-256.

allow for greater knowledge sharing, a wider base of expertise and, on a more fundamental level, community development groups may be more likely to persevere than an individual working alone. In turn, these attributes may make a community development group a better partner for certain projects and therefore more likely to get assistance from an external entity that may be deemed useful to their objectives.

### ***Community development groups, local networks and Valentia***

Valentia has a strong history of development driven through community organised activity. For example, the development of a bridge connecting Valentia to the mainland, the retention of the Valentia Island coast guard station, the conversion of a former cottage hospital to a nursing home and the development of a residential centre for people with intellectual disabilities were all initiatives started by or strongly influenced by the local community. VIDCo, then, follows in this long line of community led development.

Formed in 2010, VIDCo was created to tackle the effects of the recession on Valentia. In recognition of the difficulty of this task, VIDCo, throughout its life, has selectively invited individuals to become members who have skills, knowledge, experience and relationships that matched the ambitions of the organisation. This recruitment strategy has proven vital to the achievements of VIDCo. However, even though the ambitions of VIDCo and its members were grand, the organisation's first steps were modest.

It was noted that although many tourists who arrived by car on the ferry (as distinct from those who used accommodation) in Knightstown were unaware of what Valentia had to offer and would consequently drive through the island to join the Ring of Kerry scenic routeway, without stopping in Valentia. To address this a tourist office was opened at the pier near the ferry terminal. Through the sale of advertising space and rental income from the apartment above

the tourist office, this initial venture by VIDCo was able to provide a service to visitors and generate a small income. This income was subsequently used to assist in the development of other projects such as the refurbishment of the Lighthouse Station that also received its main funding from Fáilte Ireland. Importantly, VIDCo understood the need for good communication and a good working relationship with their local county council (something that continues today) which helped in leasing the Lighthouse Station from the owners, Irish Lights. Today, the Lighthouse Station is one of the most prominent attractions on Valentia containing an immersive experience depicting the life of the lighthouse keepers who lived there from 1841 to 1947, a marine wildlife exhibit and a cafe. This tourism offering hosts nearly 20,000 tourists annually and generates income some of which helped to fund the earliest work needed to start the TCP.

Although everyone on the island is aware of its history of the Cable Station and many local people worked there in the past, the idea of the Cable Station as a WH site did not originate within the community. The idea came through a member of the faculty of Munster Technological University from a visiting rapporteur for UNESCO sites, in 2012. Fortunately, because of being well established and generating an income from visitors to the Lighthouse Station, VIDCo was able to act upon the opportunity afforded to prepare a WH bid much more readily than if a community development group had not already been active.

Today, a strong relationship exists in relation to the TCP, between Irish government departments, the county council, international governing bodies and the local community development group, VIDCo. Additionally, many projects, even those beyond tourism, have been instigated by VIDCo. All this can be said, in some sense, to have started from local concern and dedication, a community development group and a tourist office. In 2019, a manager was appointed who has responsibility for VIDCo projects.



### ***Guidelines for community development groups:***

- Aim to create a group with individuals that have useful and distinct skills, knowledge, expertise as well as personal and professional links.
- Have a good understanding of the needs of the community and the resources that could be utilised to answer these needs.
- Realise that initial aims can be modest but, where possible, build on successes.
- Develop good relationships with potentially useful partners.
- Aim to provide a conduit for other potential community projects.
- If the scale of the activity exceeds voluntary capacity, consider sourcing funds to employ a manager.
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### **3. (ii) External Links**



Figure 4: Cable Station marker, connecting Valentia Island and Heart's Content from 1868 to 1966

### ***What are external links?***

External links are connections established with individuals or organisations outside of the local community in relation to the project of interest. These connections can include links to local and national government bodies, representative organisations, business owners and individuals with expert knowledge. The links tend to be dependent on the type of project being developed. For example, heritage projects may need to connect to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, people who have expert knowledge on the heritage site being developed and may include those with experience in restoration or preservation of heritage sites. By contrast, external connections for a tourism activity centre may include organisations that relate to the activities they will offer, e.g., Irish Surfing, Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism (IAAT) and individual activity membership groups. However, some external contacts can be useful to most types of projects: county councils are a primary example of this because of their planning function and supporting role for local tourism.

### ***What are external links useful for?***

External links can be essential to the success of tourism projects, particularly those in rural areas<sup>6</sup>. In many cases, these external links serve a variety of functions; for example, local government and national government can assist in the sourcing of grants, staffing (under social employment schemes through Local Partnerships and Leader companies) and training, as well as further network development. Likewise, businesses may help through donations. Organisations like Fáilte Ireland may help in relation to strategy, training, linking with other tourist products and promotion. Additionally, people with expert knowledge may be able to

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<sup>6</sup> Dodds, R., Ali, A., & Galaski, K. (2018). Mobilizing knowledge: Determining key elements for success and pitfalls in developing community-based tourism. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 21(13), 1547-1568.



contribute to many elements of the projects and in some cases, particularly for heritage projects, will be amongst a small number of people with the requisite knowledge needed for certain aspects of the project. Expertise may also come in the form of previous experience in heritage and tourism projects, knowledge in relation to garnering funding and, indeed, in the ability to network and create further linkages, all of which can be vitally important to heritage projects.

Another useful function of external links is the ability to create networks. In the case of many locally developed projects, particularly those in rural areas, existing external links may be limited. This can have a negative impact on the project as a whole as it can limit access to funds that may require application by a community group and narrows the pool of knowledge that the project can draw on. Consequently, the development of strong initial links can lead to a wider and deeper array of networks to engage with throughout the lifecycle of the project.

### ***External Links and the Transatlantic Cable Project***

The need for strong external links for the development of the TCP was identified early in the life cycle of the project. A strategic decision was made by the founding chair of VIDCo to develop an organisation to facilitate, amongst other functions, the external networking and expertise needed for a WH bid. To do so, he used his pre-existing ties in Ireland's IT sector to approach a potential candidate for the position of director of the Foundation (see above). The person who would become the chair of the Foundation, as it would so happen, had a pre-existing connection to the history of the cable station which influenced his decision to accept the role. Other appointees were approached based on a variety of factors which include, and may be a combination of, their expertise concerning the TCP and similar projects, their professional experience, their ability to create other useful links, their local knowledge and community engagement.

As the TCP WH bid is a transnational bid, the project also aimed to create strong links between Ireland and Canada. Several approaches were utilised to create such links. First, a Kerry County Council employee contacted a counterpart in the regional government of Labrador and Newfoundland, which owns the cable station in Heart's Content, to elicit interest in a joint bid for WH status for the two stations. In this case, the position of the Kerry County Council representative gave extra weight to a cold email illustrating the importance of involving individuals who are appropriate to the project in question. Other potential appointees to the Foundation were approached with the story of the Cable Station. These potential appointees included representatives of business organisations who understood the significance of the cable in globalisation and the prestige of a WH bid.

The Foundation also employed other means of creating awareness of the WH bid and developing links. An annual lecture series and a Gala event have been held since 2017. This serves the dual purpose of promoting the project and allowing networking that benefits both attendees and the project as a whole. It is important to highlight that events and, maybe more importantly, projects that offer benefits to people or entities who are potentially beneficial to a project may be viewed more favourably than those that do not. A good example of this is the soft political capital that the TCP offers to the Irish government. WH bids in general and this transnational bid in particular offer the government an opportunity to network with other nations. As such, both the TCP and the Irish government benefit from this reciprocal relationship.

***Guidelines for the development of beneficial external links through networking:***

- Have a good understanding of the external stakeholders or individuals that may be useful to your project. This may evolve with the project and could include overseas stakeholders where mutual promotion could be beneficial.

- Consider their role or potential role in your project.
- Consider your/your community's current connection to these stakeholders.
- Leverage pre-existing connections either to the community or to the project.
- Have a good knowledge of what benefits your project brings to these stakeholders - reciprocal relationships may be easier to build.
- Design events that help to generate these and other links.
- Recognise that good networks can help to build further links.

### **3. (iii) Stakeholder engagement**

#### ***What is stakeholder engagement?***

A project's stakeholders are all the individuals that are affected by or can affect the project. Stakeholders include but are not limited to local community members, members of the county or city council, tourists, holiday homeowners and all of the individuals and organisations accessed through the project's external links. Stakeholder engagement, in this context, is then the process by which the project development team informs, listens to and collaborates with these various stakeholders.

The process of stakeholder engagement may be employed for a variety of reasons which may differ between stakeholder groups. For example, at the local level, residents need to be informed of what the project is, and how they will be affected by it. At the same time, the project development team will need to know what local residents' opinions of the project are. This will require an ongoing dialogue between the project development team and local residents. On the other hand, engagement with tourists and potential customers, for example, may be much more unidirectional. These stakeholders, for the purposes of product

development, may be a valuable source of information about how the product could be created but do not require continuous communication.

As such, effective stakeholder engagement considers the needs and wants of the stakeholder group and the project development team and how to best address both of these sets of needs. An important element of this process is how communication will take place between the project development team and the stakeholder group. Although there are several means of communication available which include open public meetings, emails, mail shots, events and newsletters, choosing the correct one or ones can be difficult. Thought must be given to what message is to be delivered, who should receive it and what feedback is needed. At the same time, it is important to recognise that stakeholder groups may have their own needs that may only be addressed by particular modes of communication (e.g., people who may not use social media sites or even the Internet). Other considerations include the stage of the project at which stakeholders should be engaged with, how frequently engagement is needed, the level of information that is required at a given time and logistical aspects such as cost and availability of stakeholders. Due to these myriad considerations, it is often the case that multiple modes of communication will be required for effective stakeholder engagement.

### ***Why is stakeholder engagement important?***

Stakeholder engagement is one of the most important aspects in the development of any project, particularly those in rural areas<sup>7</sup>. It allows for effective communication on all aspects of the project that are pertinent to each stakeholder group. This in turn can make the project run more efficiently and may help to alleviate issues that may arise between stakeholder groups.

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<sup>7</sup> Anderson, E., Bakir, A., & Wickens, E. (2015). Rural tourism development in Connemara, Ireland. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 12(1), 73-86.

Likewise, stakeholder engagement allows those with expert opinion or local knowledge to offer their support to the project. Stakeholder engagement also creates a more enriched set of perspectives. This can lead to a more rounded and well-informed development process.

Another important aspect of stakeholder engagement is developing support and goodwill with the project's stakeholders. Stakeholders, by definition, have the power to and/or will be affected by the project. Therefore, good stakeholder engagement can create powerful allies. This in turn can lead to individuals who become goodwill ambassadors, sources of information or funding and indeed can lead to the generation of other useful links.

### ***Stakeholder Engagement and the Transatlantic Cable Station Project***

The TCP, being an international project with local and national government interests, has a varied range of stakeholders. Each stakeholder group has a different set of needs, often live in different locations and have different expectations for the style and level of engagement that they would prefer. As such, the TCP has employed a variety of techniques to satisfy these needs.

Video communication software was utilised for engagement with a number of stakeholder groups. Zoom, was used for meetings between the Foundation and Canadian officials, with owners of homes on the grounds of the Cable Station and for meetings amongst the members of the Foundation, all to great effect. This type of technology allowed for frequent, in some cases, fortnightly meetings that ensured an effective flow of communication and organisation. However, video communication is not always an appropriate means of communication.

The TCP invited an expert on matters related to UNESCO WH status to speak to the local residents. As this was in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the speaker was invited to communicate over Zoom. However, some residents, after attending the meeting, felt that this

was not the most appropriate means of communication. They would have wished to be able to ask questions of the speaker. It would seem that this was not feasible in this Zoom meeting. As such, it is worth recognising, as the TCP team have, that all stakeholder groups will not respond equally to a single mode of communication. Many forms of communication need to be trialled but ultimately stakeholder engagement, particularly community engagement, needs to be tailored to each stakeholder group. Consequently, there may be a learning process in selecting and indeed developing the correct form of stakeholder engagement.

During interviewing and again in the focus group, local residents showed a preference for a particular means of communication, namely, open public meetings. Residents indicated that open public meetings give them the ability to ask questions. This, it would seem from discussions, is a fundamental element of good community engagement. It was also noted that local residents sought assurances from individuals who have influence over the elements of the project that would affect them personally. It may not be possible to provide such assurance, for example, relating to long-term planning for land use.

Residents also showed a preference for timely communication. It would seem that residents like to be fully informed about the project as early as possible. However, this can be difficult, particularly for a UNESCO WH project, like the TCP, that can span up to two decades before receiving WH status. It is also important to note, as the TCP team have, that community engagement must be an ongoing process, as it is in Valentia with the recent hiring of a project co-ordinator whose role includes community engagement.

***Guidelines for good stakeholder engagement:***

- Draw up a list of current and future stakeholders.
- Consider how these groups differ from one another in their potential interest in the project.

- Consider how these stakeholder groups are affected by the project.
- What are their information needs - what type of information do they need, how often do they need to be updated and what type of information may they want to share?
- Consider their communication needs - what is the best mode of communication for each stakeholder group, given who they are and their information needs? If their information needs require a dialogue of some sort then the mode of communication should reflect this.
- Tailor community engagement to stakeholder groups.
- Recognise that community engagement is an ongoing process that requires learning the method that best serves the community.

### **3. (iv) Business Collaboration**



Figure 5: Heritage Centre in Knightstown, Valentia

### ***What is business collaboration?***

Business collaboration, in the context of tourism, refers to the ability of businesses to work together in a manner that makes an area more appealing to tourists. This could include simple measures such as referrals, knowledge sharing and use of physical resources. It may also take a more holistic approach, considering the types of tourists that come or will come to a region, existing niches and how current tourism businesses could operate together to cater to these opportunities. For example, a heritage tourism product like a WH site may draw in tourists that prefer “slow tourism” activities, which include visiting museums, guided walks and boat tours. This may be capitalised on by offering slow tourism products. Likewise, activity centres may encourage more active tourists who are interested in outdoor pursuits like surfing, kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding. As such, additional provisioning of these types of activities and supporting services like specialist equipment shops may help to take advantage of an increase in these types of consumers. At the same time, the types of tourists that currently visit a region may influence the type of project that should be developed. This may be particularly true of areas that have geographical advantages that allow them to offer particular types of outdoor activities.

### ***Why is business collaboration important?***

The primary goal of business collaboration in a tourist area is to make effective and efficient use of tourism resources by increasing tourism spend, tourist length of stay or, indeed, increasing the numbers of tourists visiting the region (in such a way that does not threaten environmental, social and cultural sustainability). In simple terms, it aims to make the economic pie larger rather than increasing the share of any individual business. In turn, this should make both the area and individual businesses better off. It also allows for a better



working environment, shared knowledge and a greater capacity to capitalise on business opportunities, ensuring a more productive local tourism industry. This makes it easier to capitalise on the benefits that can be derived from a new tourism product.

However, creating good business collaboration is rarely an easy task. As the name suggests, business collaboration requires a holistic approach to tourism development. As tourism is not centrally planned, there must be a willingness from business owners to collaborate with each other. Without this willingness business collaboration is, by definition, impossible.

### ***Business Collaboration and the TCP***

A variety of elements of the tourism product in Valentia show good business collaboration. There are tourism offerings that form a cohesive tourism brand. The Lighthouse experience, the Cable Station museum, the Heritage Centre and boat tours offering historically informed tours, drawing on local history and culture, all target tourists with similar tastes. Cross-selling can also be seen between events and tourism businesses. The local hotel, the Royal Valentia Hotel, offers packages that tie in with local events such as ‘The Dark Nights Festival’ (Valentia is located in one of three internationally recognised Gold Tier Dark Skies Reserves). Likewise, promotional initiatives are also apparent in Valentia. An example of this is an event that required tourists to take pictures at designated tourist destinations and businesses and post them to social media. This drew tourists to many of the businesses on the island and the surrounding area as well as acting as promotion for the businesses involved in the event. There has also been discussion around an island ticket. The ticket would allow the holder to access a number of different tourist products on the island. However, logistical components of this idea have proved challenging such as what percentage of the ticket price would go to each business, who would collect monies generated from the island ticket and how it would be sold.

A further consideration made by tourism business owners in Valentia is the area in which they wish to collaborate. Valentia is part of one of Ireland's best known tourism destinations, the Iveragh Peninsula. The Iveragh Peninsula is home to the Ring of Kerry touring route and Killarney, one of the most visited tourist towns in Ireland. As such, business operators on Valentia attend events and are part of tourism groups that include the entire Iveragh Peninsula. Equally, those charged with tourism creation and tourism promotion, like Kerry County Council and Fáilte Ireland, focus on tourism in the larger Iveragh Peninsula and how products work together more generally. For businesses in Valentia this means they need to consider what the scope of their tourism network is and how to take advantage of opportunities in the larger area.

***Guidelines for good business collaboration:***

- Consider what businesses should be included in the business tourism network.
- Identify the existing network/s that can be joined.
- Create a network of appropriate businesses.
- Facilitate collaboration between existing businesses through referrals, knowledge sharing and packaging of products.
- Develop events that promote businesses collaboratively.
- Consider the development of a brand that can be used for joint promotional purposes.

### 3. (v) Sustainability



Figure 6: Tetrapod Trackway circa 385 million years old

#### ***What is sustainability?***

Commonly, sustainability is taken to mean developments or activities that do not have a negative or deleterious impact on the natural environment. However, a wider view of sustainability can be considered. The ‘three pillars of sustainability’<sup>8</sup> concept includes the environment, the economy and the socio-cultural. This perspective allows for a more holistic approach to development within a given region.

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<sup>8</sup> Purvis, B., Mao, Y., & Robinson, D. (2019). Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins. *Sustainability Science*, 14, 681-695. See also the UN 17 Goals of Sustainable Development: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

The environmental pillar refers to the ability to maintain or regenerate the natural environment. Economic sustainability, particularly in terms of rural tourism, refers not only to the sustainability of a business but also to its ability to give back to the local community. This can be through direct job creation as well as through spending on local goods and services. Socio-cultural sustainability looks at the ability to preserve the social and cultural fabric of an area. This could include the maintenance or increase of a population, the preservation of language and culture or even the ability for future generations to live in an area if they so wish. The three pillars concept would imply that for a project to be developed sustainably it must consider not only how the physical environment will be impacted but also how residents will be affected by the project.

### ***Why is sustainability important?***

Sustainability and the use of sustainable practices are vital for the preservation of the environment, the economy and society-culture. Without the use of sustainable practices businesses or tourism products can become extractive, taking more than they give back. The environment can become more and more damaged year after year, other local businesses or local people may not be able to live in a comfortable manner and social and cultural aspects of a region can be lost forever.

### ***Sustainability and the Transatlantic Cable Project***

A number of the key elements of the TCP aim to actively support the three pillars of sustainability with a focus being placed most heavily on economic and socio-cultural sustainability. It could even be argued that the economic and social practices are sustainable growth practices rather than simple sustainability. This can be seen in VIDCo and the TCP's

goals of redevelopment of the island after job losses, stagnating population and the effects of the housing crisis which have impacted the community since the recession in 2008.

From a social and cultural sustainability perspective, the TCP and indeed most WH bids have an inherent level of sustainability embedded in them. The project makes great use of local resources, in a manner that allows for the preservation of a local and national site of great importance in the context of global communication. Furthermore, the Transatlantic Cable Station and the Slate Yard are locally owned. Local ownership, either of the physical elements of the project or a sense of local ownership of the project as a concept can play an important role in the community's view of the project. Local ownership of the project can enable people to feel they have control over its direction. This can ensure that a project perpetuates the social norms of a region, keeping the project socially and culturally sustainable. This local ownership can be seen in the make-up of the Foundation where three of its members are local residents.

From an economic sustainability perspective, the project aims to increase tourist numbers and offer high quality employment. What may be more important in terms of economic sustainability is that the TCP offers a product to tourists in what could be termed Valentia's shoulder months. As noted earlier, Valentia has a short tourist season of approximately eight weeks in July and August. A short tourist season by its very nature can make a viable economy very difficult to maintain. Consequently, having products like the Cable Station Museum and the Valentia Island Lighthouse experience that can offer tourists activities in the shoulder months may add to economic sustainability on the island through employment, visitor fees and expenditure on hospitality. Likewise, the project as a whole, not just the WH bid, has included in its renovation plans the installation of an innovation hub on the upper floor of the Cable Station. This will afford 30 to 50 people the opportunity to work remotely from Valentia.

The TCP also has several environmentally sustainable practices worth noting. The scale of the project is in keeping with the local community and the natural environment. As such, the project does not aim to create tourism beyond the environmental capacity of the island to absorb. Ensuring manageable levels of tourism should also help to maintain the social fabric of Valentia. Discussions have begun on the use of sustainable transport around the island, with the idea of an electric bus being mooted. Similarly, the restoration plans for the Cable Station building will have a negligible impact on the local natural environment as the footprint of the building will remain unchanged. It is also worth noting that other initiatives being developed by VIDCo are distinctly “green”, such as their hydrogen energy project, or have environmentally sensitive elements such as the Valentia Island Lighthouse’s reed bed waste water treatment system.

Sustainability in general has been well thought out for the TCP. From interviews with members of VIDCo, it has been indicated that the TCP is a key part of an integrated plan for the island that could be thought of as creating economic and social sustainability for Valentia.

***Guidelines for Sustainable Development Practices within a Project:***

- Consider the needs of the area with respect to the local economy, environment, society and local culture.
- Consider the potential impacts of the project.
- Consider where job creation and spending take place, locally or externally and how local spend can be increased.
- Aim to create a sense of local ownership.
- Determine if the project is making the best use of local resources.
- Assess the effect on the natural environment.

- Determine if the scale of the project is appropriate for the area.
- Consider whether the project will exacerbate or reduce existing problematic issues.
- Determine how negative impacts can be reduced and how positive impacts can be enhanced.
- In the context of pursuing sustainable practices, apply evaluative criteria such as *The European Tourism Indicator System* to monitor sustainability.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. (vi) Additional benefits



Figure 7: Knightstown, Valentia

#### *What are additional benefits?*

Additional benefits are the indirect consequences of a project which may be beneficial to an area or community. These could include recognition, promotion, county council support, knowledge acquisition and the creation of useful external networks. Some of these benefits may be quite obvious like WH status offering a site legally enforced protection as well as

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<sup>9</sup> EU European Commission (2016). *The European Tourism Indicator System*. Luxembourg: EC. ETIS toolkit 2016 150316(1).pdf.

promotion as a tourism site. Others may be less obvious and may take more work or innovation to capitalise on. In any case, these additional benefits may be as useful to a community as the direct consequences of the project.

### ***Why are additional benefits important?***

It can often be the case that the development of a tourism or heritage product is not solely to increase tourism numbers or preserve a site. Rather, the product developers may be focused on the direct benefits an increase in tourism can provide such as job creation, a more sustainable working environment through a longer tourist season or greater spending in the community, while also creating spaces for residents to use. However, the indirect benefits a product offers can be as beneficial if not more beneficial to the local community because they can improve residents' day-to-day lives through improved local services, for example. As such, a big-picture perspective of what the project can offer should always be considered in order to gain as much as possible from a heritage or other tourism product.

### ***Additional Benefits and the TCP***

The TCP is a good example of the additional benefits that can be gained from a project like this. Due, in part, to the WH bid, Valentia has gained additional focus from Kerry County Council and Fáilte Ireland, as well as national government departments such as the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This recognition has had some notable impacts. A socio-economic plan for Valentia has been developed that looks at the needs and wants of residents and how they can be addressed. Although socio-economic plans have been devised for other areas in the Iveragh Peninsula region, it was the WH bid that prompted one specifically for Valentia Island. Fáilte Ireland has also placed a much greater focus on Valentia



in their recent tourism strategies. There are also events held in Valentia in association with the TCP that bring extra tourists to the island. Events like this can be further exploited by offering attendees the opportunity to purchase a ticket to other tourist activities within the region creating a greater level of business collaboration.

There have also been some additional benefits that are less quantifiable. Valentia and Heart's Content were reconnected for the first time in over fifty years. Additionally, external links to State and county bodies, international bodies and various individuals with expertise have been created to and from Valentia which could be extremely useful in the coming years. There is also the expectation that receiving WH status would mean more investment in Valentia more generally. This can be seen in the infrastructural improvements that have recently been made to the island, such as road widening and the development of a new car park. In general, it is hoped that through the direct and indirect consequences of this WH bid, the economic life of the community of Valentia could be improved considerably. To paraphrase one of our interviewees, "World Heritage status could be the rising tide that lifts all boats".

***Guidelines to create additional benefits:***

- Utilise the external links and network/s created for the development of the project.
- Determine if events held can lead to more tourism through good collaboration with other businesses.
- Identify if there are other opportunities created by the project that existing businesses can cater to.
- Leverage the expected increase in tourism created to improve services or infrastructure for the community.

#### **4. Conclusions**

This Guideline document traced the experience of a heritage tourism project in Valentia Island which has the objective of attaining UNESCO WH status. The bid, after being accepted onto the national list, has completed the first stage of the journey to enter the list of WH sites. It will take several years before the eventual outcome is known. The first stage of the bid provides lessons for local community groups that seek to attain WH status for a site but also for any community group that seeks to develop a locally based tourism project in a sustainable way, particularly those that require internal collaboration and a capacity to gain external support.

The example of the TCP illustrates that developing a heritage tourism product with the capacity to have a substantial impact on a community is a complex process. It requires the development of strong supportive networks of relations both within the community and externally. Good communication between the individuals and groups in these networks can strengthen bonds, increase knowledge sharing and be used to create assistance in the provisioning of funds. Likewise, to maximise on the potential benefits of a heritage or other tourism product there must be a set of tourism businesses that work well together. These attributes of strong networks, good stakeholder engagement and businesses that collaborate can play a substantial role in developing not only products but can also contribute to regions helping them to become economically and socially sustainable. They may also play a role in the ability to generate and execute environmentally sustainable practices.

It is also important to highlight that many of the topics discussed are, in some sense, interlinked. Good stakeholder engagement across external networks has the ability to create further links. Stakeholder engagement with the local community permits them to see the benefits of a project and capitalise on these benefits, which will require collaboration. The generation of networks

through networking will also enable a project to create benefits for the community as a whole. As such, the process of developing a community heritage or other tourism product should not be seen as means to an end, rather it can be a journey where many new paths are opened to the development team and the location.