

SICAP 2021 Case Study



Comhar na nOileán CTR – Goal 1 Project

Target Group – People living in disadvantaged communities and low-income workers/households.

Support the habitability and sustainability of island communities



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One of the main aims of Comhar na nOileán is to promote the positive aspects of island life, whilst also highlighting the areas that need improvement. Our aim is to make the West Cork Islands an attractive place to live, and to encourage people from the mainland to make a home on the islands. For this to be achievable, it is necessary that existing island communities are given as much assistance as possible in their current and future development.

One of the main obstacles in attracting new arrivals to the West Cork Islands is the lack of suitable housing. In order to attract new residents, an island must be seen as being habitable, and with this action our aim was to promote islands and make them a more attractive place to live.

In partnership with UCC we applied to carry out a research/feasibility study across the West Cork Islands. The main aim of the research was to document the views of West Cork Island residents on housing, and to identify the policies and practices that will contribute to sustaining island life. The research involved a participatory mixed-methods approach with collaboration researchers, islanders and the local community groups.

As part of a Smart Islands co-operation project in conjunction with Codal several workshops were delivered for re-visioning and redesigning island communities. These workshops targeted islanders who are keen to vision and action alternative futures for the islands that are more sustainable, resilient and enterprising and deliver health and wellbeing in this new era triggered by COVID-19, and so can address the demographic and economic challenges that islanders face.

There was also a habitability course which was provided by the Åbo Akademi University in Finland. This was a distance learning course and had participants from several European islands, as well as seven individuals from the West Cork Islands who were supported by SICAP to attend the course. The aim of this course was to create new ideas and to provide a platform for change.

Habitability is a concept that can be used to measure and develop the attractiveness of an island. This case study will highlight the various actions that were undertaken by Comhar na nOileán throughout 2021 in our ongoing efforts to promote island living, and to make island life more attractive.

UCC Housing Study Collaboration



Irish Research Council through UCC is conducting a project with the West Cork Islands into the current housing situation.

The West Cork Islands Community Council are looking for Islanders to participate in this research.

This is vital research that the islands need to help build the foundations for making the case to improve the housing situation within our islands.

Please join us on zoom for this short information and Q&A session.

Wednesday 26th May 11:00 - 11.45

Please email before 10:30, for Zoom login details:
wcislandscommunitycouncil@gmail.com

Project Aims and Objectives

“Islanders have knowledge of both the problems and also the solutions on how to get on with a sustainable island life for the future” (West Cork Islands Strategy)

The aim of the UCC housing study is to examine the role of housing in sustaining communities from the perspective of islanders on the seven West Cork Islands. This study is a cooperation project and involved partnership with Bere Islands Projects Group and collaboration with West Cork Development Partnership, Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann, Sherkin Island Development Society, Comharchumann Chléire Teoranta, and Comhar na nOileán CTR and the SICAP Programme.

This project was begun in April 2021 and will conclude in April 2022. One of the main aims of the project is to document the views of West Cork Island residents on housing and identify the policies and practices that will contribute to sustaining island life. An information and Q&A session on the research was held with residents of the seven West Cork Islands on Wednesday 26th May and the recording is available [here](#).

In its 2015 submission to Government on the National Development Plan, Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann identified housing availability and affordability as being one of the main barriers to island sustainability. This issue was also raised by a Euroislands report and stated that housing issues can be a threat to the quality of life and natural and cultural assets of islands.

This project will:

- Review international literature, Irish and European policy, and housing practices for offshore and inshore islands.
- Document and analyse the perspectives of islanders on Oileán Chléire, Bere Island, Whiddy Island, Dursey Island, Sherkin Island, Long Island and Heir Island on the availability, affordability and quality of housing, and how these impact on the sustainability of island life.
- Provide an evidence-base and set of policy recommendations to inform housing policy for the islands and widely disseminate the research findings. (University College Cork)

This project also aims to highlight, that along with housing availability, there are many additional challenges to living on an island. These challenges include access to services, ageing populations, employment and the retention of youth. Coupled with housing, all these issues can have a negative impact on the long-term sustainability of islands. It is also vital that we recognise that mainland policy responses to housing issues are not always suitable to housing issues on the islands and that we must listen to the needs of islanders in order to come up with any suitable solutions.

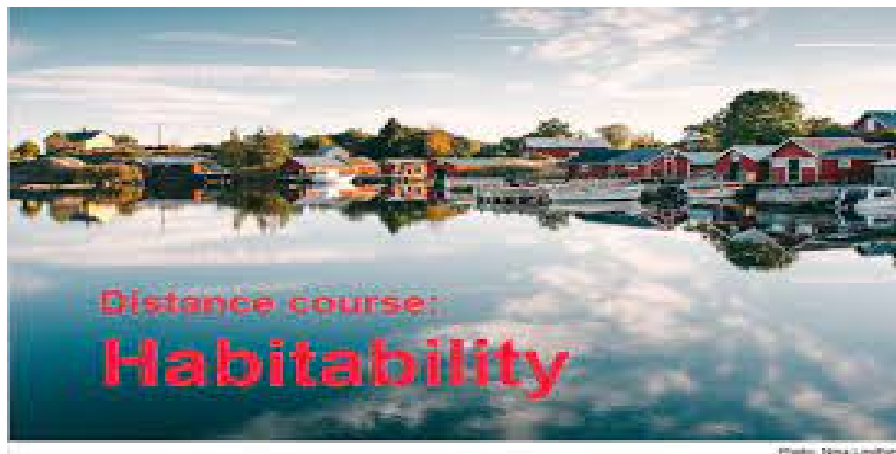
Project Methodology

The research for this project will involve a participatory mixed-methods approach that will bring together researchers, islanders and civil society organisations. In September 2021 a participatory research group of West Cork Island residents met to co-design an online survey and focus group questions. From November 2021 the project aims to distribute the survey and organise focus groups in order to gauge the opinions of local residents regarding the issue of housing on the West Cork Islands.



Åbo Akademi Habitability Course

The Åbo Akademi administrates training courses for Habitability facilitators. Habitability is a concept to measure and develop the attractiveness of an island. The process creates new ideas and practical possibilities, and it sets the stage of change. Being habitable is essential for an island to attract a resident population in a sustainable way.



Course Aims

The aim of the course is to train 12–20 facilitators on smaller islands, preferably two or more persons per island, or one plus one from islands working closely together.

The participants will:

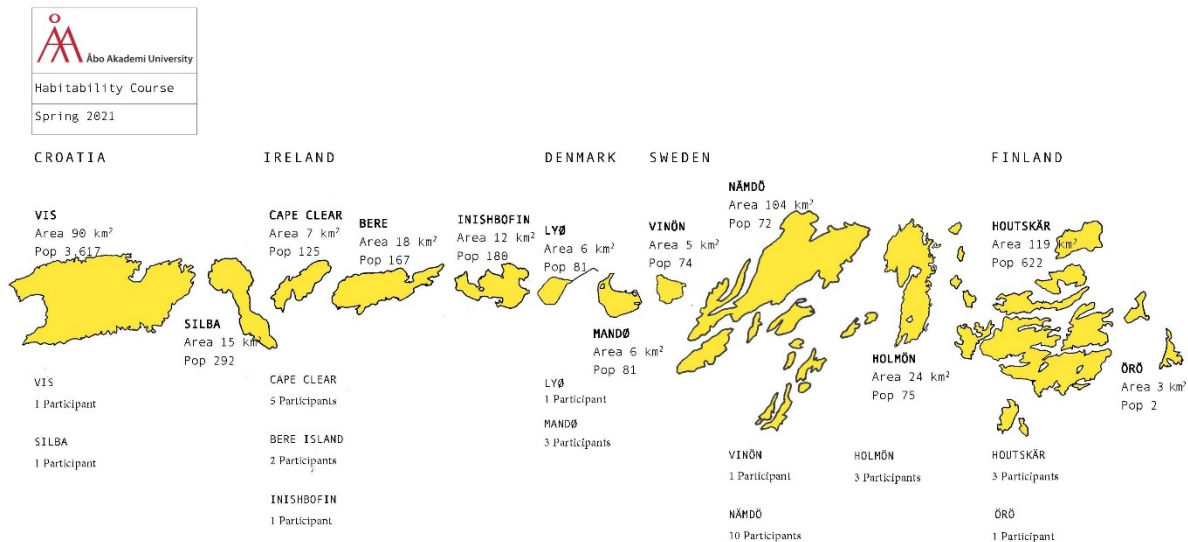
- Learn about the decisive characteristics of small island societies.
- Understand the importance of engaging their fellow islanders in the work, using both formal and informal processes.
- Be able to make a habitability analysis of their island, including setting up new indicators if needed.
- Know how to integrate the habitability index in a change process based on the methods for the Six Thinking Hats.

Course Participation

Between April and June 2021, a total of five online classes were held that included participants from several European islands. Seven individuals from the West Cork Islands

were supported to attend. These classes provided islanders from all over Europe with a unique opportunity to share their own individual experiences of island life and to suggest solutions to some of our shared problems.

Map - Åbo Akademi Habitability Course – Spring 2021 (Appendix 1 Full Size Map).



Course participants were also provided with a toolbox of habitability. The purpose of this toolbox is to help islanders access the overall habitability of their individual islands. It is not intended to make islands compare with each other, but to understand how they can compete with their mainland counterparts.

The toolbox makes it possible to organise diagnostic, descriptive and prescriptive inquiries about the habitability of their respective islands. Fifty indicators form seven different aspects, providing explanations to the different sides of habitability. The toolbox also includes examples on how the tools and the scorecards have been and can be used in specific island cases. When displayed on a dashboard, it is possible to show a cohesive image of the island's present condition as a human habitat. (Åbo Akademi, 2021) (**Appendix 2 – Habitability toolbox**).

After having managed a project and acquired experiences of their own, the participants will be invited to a feedback session to discuss and improve the index and their own ability in using it. This will hopefully take place in the spring of 2022.

Conclusion

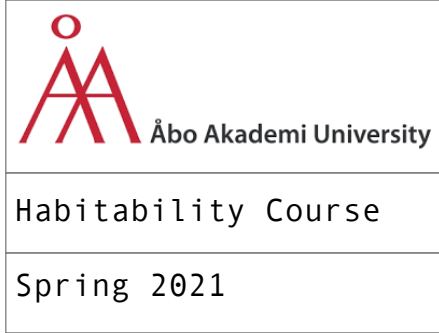
Comhar na nOileán are dedicated to improving the lives of individual islanders and to ensuring the long-term sustainability of island communities. As highlighted in this case study the issue of housing is crucial to the goal of not only maintaining island populations but to help increase them. So long as the availability of suitable housing on the West Cork islands remains an issue it is very hard to see how the habitability of these islands can improve.

As an organisation we recognise the importance of working with outside partners in order to address issues such as island sustainability. Our collaboration with UCC for the housing study on the West Cork Islands has provided us with a fantastic opportunity to get involved with a project that aims to address one of the main issues that is undermining the habitability of the West Cork Islands. By combining the research capabilities of an organisation such as UCC with our extensive local knowledge of the area we hope to provide a comprehensive overview of what needs to be done in order to help improve the habitability of the West Cork islands.

The habitability course that was provided by Åbo Akademi provided us with an opportunity to broaden our horizons by interacting with residents from different European islands. It is very important to look at other islands and some of the methods which they have employed in promoting the habitability of their own islands.

In moving forward, Comhar na nOileán will continue to work through SICAP and other organisations to improve the habitability of the West Cork Islands. As seen in this case study, this will not be an easy task as along with habitability, there are several different obstacles to be overcome in order to ensure the sustainability of the West Cork Island communities.

Appendix 1 Full Size Map - Åbo Akademi Habitability Course – Spring 2021.



CROATIA


IRELAND

DENMARK

SWEDEN

FINLAND

VIS
Area 90 km²
Pop 3,617



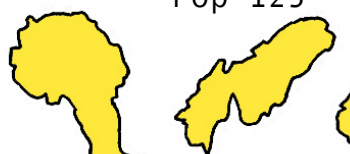
VIS
1 Participant

SILBA
1 Participant

SILBA
Area 15 km²
Pop 292



CAPE CLEAR
Area 7 km²
Pop 125



CAPE CLEAR
5 Participants

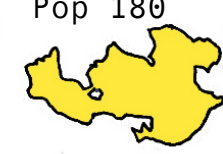
BERE ISLAND
2 Participants

INISHBOFIN
1 Participant

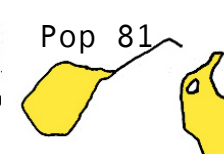
BERE
Area 18 km²
Pop 167



INISHBOFIN
Area 12 km²
Pop 180




LYØ
Area 6 km²
Pop 81



LYØ
1 Participant

MANDØ
3 Participants

MANDØ
Area 6 km²
Pop 81



VINÖN
Area 5 km²
Pop 74



NÄMDÖ
Area 104 km²
Pop 72



VINÖN
1 Participant

NÄMDÖ
10 Participants

HOLMÖN
Area 24 km²
Pop 75



HOLMÖN
3 Participants


HOUTSKÄR
Area 119 km²
Pop 622



HOUTSKÄR
3 Participants

ÖRÖ
1 Participant

ÖRÖ
Area 3 km²
Pop 2



Appendix 2 Habitability toolbox DRAFT Sept 20, 2021 - Åbo Akademi Habitability Course

Ecosystems	Freshwater	Energy	Place identity	Local economy	Municipal services	Prosperous people
1 Sea area	7 Rain and snow	12 Total energy use	19 Real distance	28 Local turnover	36 Governance	43 Resident population
2 Ecosystem services at sea	8 Water resources	13 Energy sources	20 Imagined distance	29 Spending leakage	37 Daycare	44 Summer residents
3 Land area	9 Water quality	14 Energy used for land transportation	21 Real / imagined distance ratio	30 Cost of living	38 School	45 Age distribution
4 Ecosystem services on land	10 Water use	15 Energy used for marine traffic	22 Accessibility at sea	31 Number of visitors	39 Elderly care	46 Population growth
5 Storms	11 Effluent and sewage	16 Renewable energy ratio	23 Accessibility on land	32 Visitors-to-locals ratio	40 Healthcare	47 Good health
6 Threats from climate change		17 Local energy ratio	24 Safety	33 Tourism based economy	41 Solid waste	48 Integration
		18 CO2 emissions	25 Population dynamics	34 Local labour market	42 Local tax	49 Voter turnout
			26 Island culture	35 Affordable housing		50 No poverty
			27 Image and brand			