

# Place Based Giving

## The Potential for a Sustainability Fund in County Mayo

Summary report:  
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Community  
Foundation  
Ireland





## Background and approach

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Community Foundation Ireland together with The Sunflower Charitable Foundation commissioned the UCD School of Geography to undertake a scoping study to investigate how philanthropic Place Based Giving (PBG) could potentially add value to existing sustainability/climate initiatives or galvanise climate action at county level in Ireland. Place Based Giving (PBG) may be defined as a partnership between communities, philanthropists, corporate donors, and local organisations (e.g. businesses, civil society organisations), local authorities, and national funders that bring together resources in a collaborative way to benefit the community in a defined geographic location<sup>1</sup>.

The research was undertaken from March-August 2023 and the focus of the study was county Mayo, Ireland. The research team mapped out sustainability and climate action projects in the county, examined their existing focus and operations, assessed the potential role of a Sustainability Fund in the county, and explored the potential role that private philanthropy could play in supporting existing or new initiatives. The research also examined the mechanisms and governance structures that need to be in place for these projects and activities to be operationalised.

Drawing on previous work by the research team, a place-based approach was adopted<sup>2</sup>. In summary, this involved drawing on census data to inform collaborative, engaged listening with people in the county to develop specific recommendations. The study was undertaken in three phases:

- Mapping data to understand the broader socio-demographic and environmental context of Mayo, alongside the sustainability/climate action ecosystem;
- Listening to communities and stakeholders currently engaged in sustainability/climate action initiatives;
- Re-grounding the work by deriving specific recommendations on the potential for place-based giving for climate action in county Mayo.

This re-grounding was particularly important given the strong history of environmental activism in the county. A number of ideas for projects emerged from the focus groups and groups welcomed the opportunity to consolidate their thinking and visioning for their projects in particular places. Many viewed this research as helpful for conversations around future climate work within the county and beyond.

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1 As defined by the Charities Aid Foundation UK (CAF) in their report Growing Place Based Giving (August, 2020).

2 Moore Cherry, N., Clavin, A., Krawchenko, T., Tomaney, J., 2022. Exploring Place-based Opportunities for Policy and Practice in Transition (No. 24). NESC.

# Key findings

A Geographic Information System (GIS) was used to map the socio-demographic profile of the county using the 2016 census data<sup>3</sup>, across a number of indicators to provide a context for sustainability. A consistent pattern emerged of comparatively low levels of development in the north-west and in some more remote areas of the county, contrasting with higher levels of affluence and development in the south and east of the county. For example, Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that the proportion of young people and household internet access are much lower in the north-west (red areas) than in other parts of the county.

Active climate and climate-related groups were then mapped (Figure 3). These maps show a clustering of sophisticated climate-related volunteer activity in the main towns (Castlebar, Ballina, Westport) and in some of the smaller villages such as Mulranny and Louisburgh. Outside of these larger urban settings, the Tidy Towns groups - demonstrating a more distributed pattern - are important actors in environmental work, although not necessarily identified as climate action.

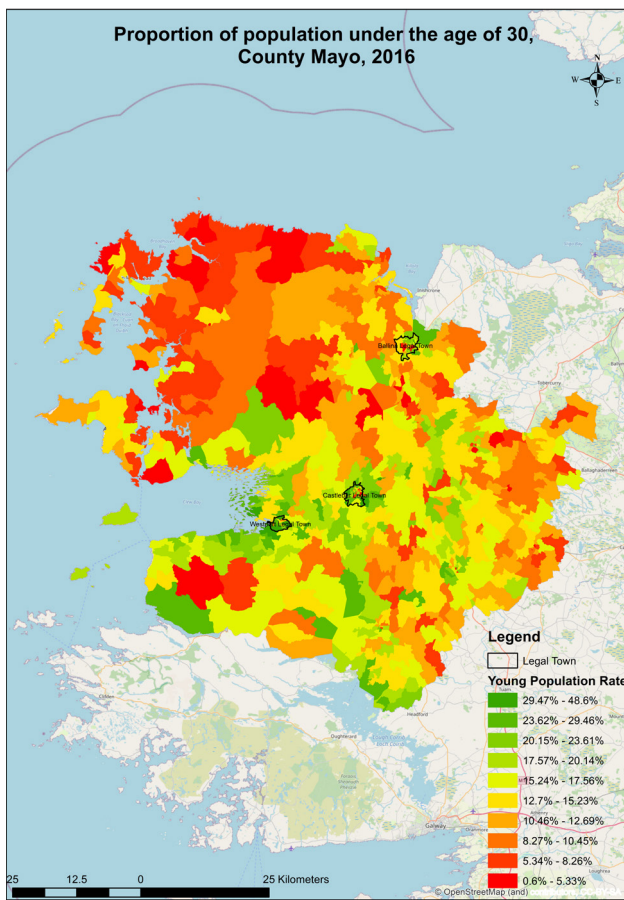


Fig.1: Proportion of population under the age of 30 in County Mayo, 2016 (Source: Census of Population)

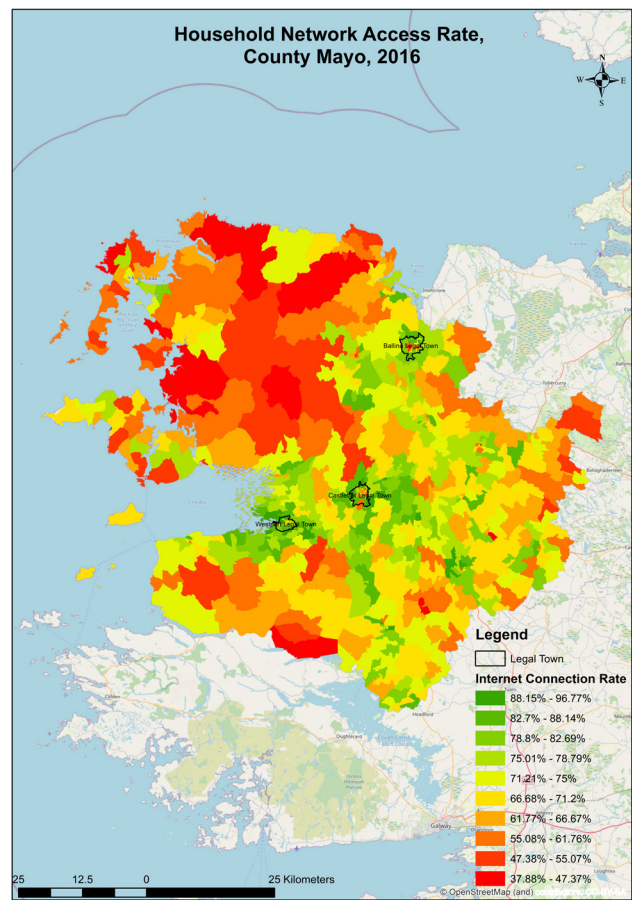


Fig.2: Household internet network access rate in County Mayo, 2016 (Source: Census of Population)

3 The updated 2022 data was unavailable at time of writing

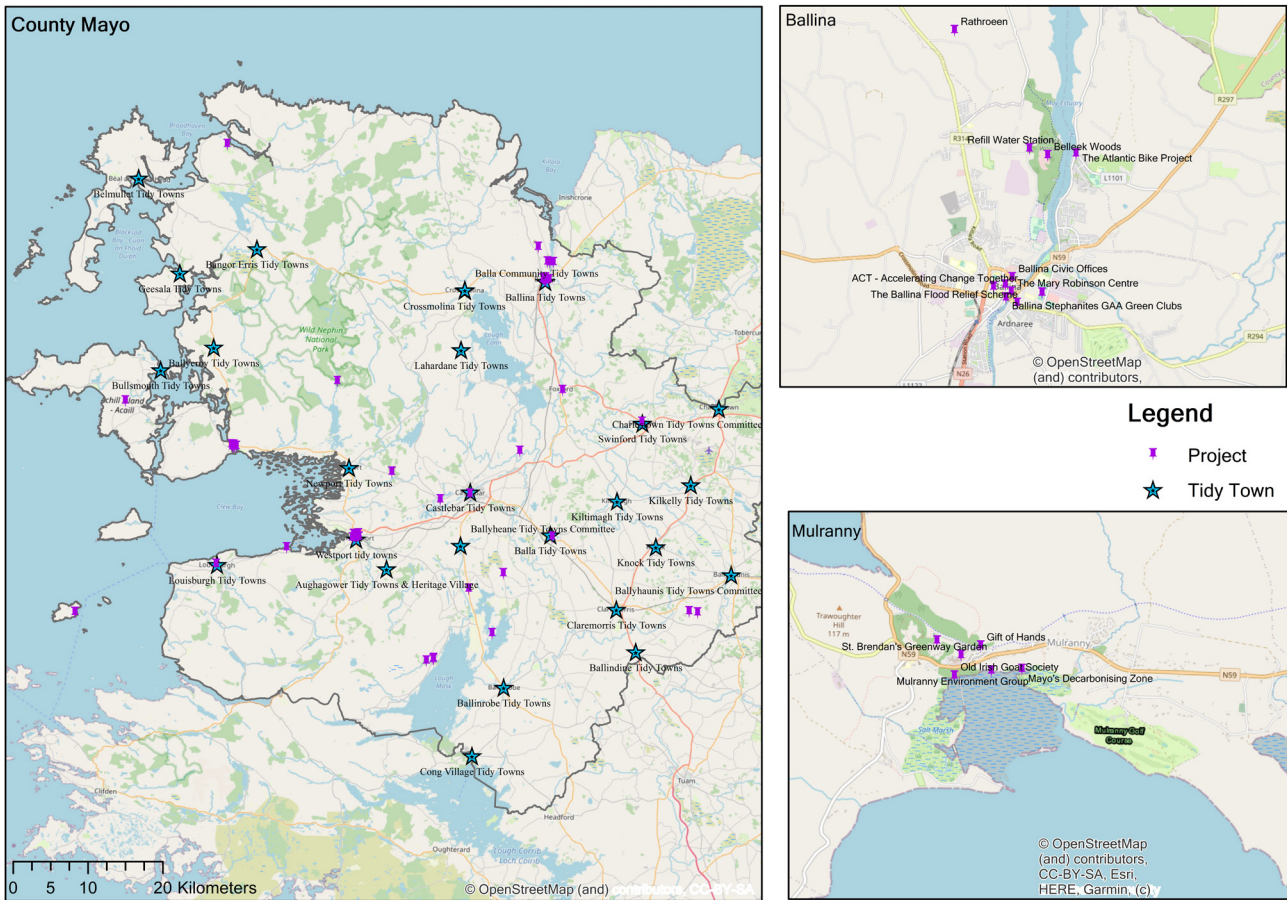


Fig 3: Climate action projects and tidy towns projects in County Mayo (July 2023)

Local Authorities are taking a leadership role in acting on climate and as part of the National Climate Action Plan are developing comprehensive Local Authority Climate Action Plans to address greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in their administrative areas. The unique geography and history of County Mayo presents challenges and opportunities due to the extensive coastline, dispersed settlement patterns, high level of natural heritage & conservation areas, as well as unique groundwater systems which present diverse exposure and vulnerability factors (Climate Adaptation Strategy, 2019 p. 41).

Significantly, Mayo’s community development programme ‘Community Futures’ has been building capacity for groups to work together for 15 years. Mayo Community Futures<sup>4</sup> is a bottom up, community led process that helps communities put together a 5-year Community Action Plan for their community. It gives everyone in the community a chance to feed into an Action Plan and to put forward their concerns and ideas for the development of their community. The programme has been running since 2007 and climate action projects have developed as a subset of these community futures plans in places. However, there is significant appetite now to scale up climate action.

4 <https://www.mayo.ie/community/participation/community-futures>



Through interviews, surveys and focus groups undertaken with key stakeholders, a series of **barriers** to funding for climate action in county Mayo were uncovered as follows:

- Restricted knowledge of what funding sources might be available and how to access them;
- Lack of flexibility and continuity of funding over the medium to long-term;
- Lack of time and resources to apply for funding, which is often complex;
- Sectoral and scalar issues such as inability to scale up, plus absence of sectoral leadership.

Participants acknowledged that while there is money 'out there' at local authority and EU level, it can feel inaccessible to local groups. Participants spoke of the need for more flexible funds with fewer restrictions and more continuity of funding, distributed geographically. Many activated groups have come to the point where they have plateaued in their voluntary efforts and require staff and a physical space to run projects and importantly, to have the necessary time available to apply for funding. Scalable, networked, place based approaches integrating all sectoral elements to enhance wellbeing and quality of life for all are required.

Specifically, in terms of **funding**, local authorities have been tasked with leading climate action at a county level. Participants acknowledged that the level of climate action required is well beyond the capacity of what voluntary groups can achieve alone. Funding is required for:

- Climate project staffing and hubs that are not project and time limited;
- Capital projects and planning to develop long term strategic visions;
- Network and capability-building through peer to peer learning within and beyond the county;
- Deep engagement in places, to ensure programmes and projects are place-based and contextually sensitive;
- Scaling up of projects and initiatives at county, region and national scale.



## The potential role of philanthropy in supporting a sustainability fund

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Participants were asked to consider how **philanthropy** might support sustainability and climate action initiatives and projects in county Mayo. Six key recommendations emerged that might inform the design and focus of a future Sustainability Fund for Mayo:

1. *Philanthropy and Capital Investment:* Philanthropic funding could be transformative in providing, for example, the capital investment needed for large scale flagship energy projects that require significant investment.
2. *Philanthropy and Social Enterprise:* Philanthropic funding should seek to identify and fund, sustainability-focused, social innovators, and enable them to deliver on their vision. Philanthropic funding could take the form of seed money to re-invest. Work is required more broadly to understand where philanthropy fits into the social enterprise model in Ireland.
3. *Philanthropy for state checks and balances:* There was clear agreement that while the local authority has a lead role in climate action, it is under-resourced for this purpose. Climate-related funding is precarious and the politics of decision-making brings uncertainty to long term vision-making. Philanthropic funding could incentivise brave and ambitious projects that target specific areas in the county.
4. *Philanthropy as a tool for democracy and enabler of change:* We need to imagine a new future but the horizon of vision is currently limited when it comes to climate action. If there is no continuity of funding then philanthropy causes passivity – the project ends and nothing happens. Philanthropy needs to auto-generate something that continues. A strong and clear funding pathway and mechanism could support the development of a much-needed strong and clear narrative arc for climate action.
5. *Philanthropy and the need for a broker/convenor at county level:* For effective philanthropic giving, a broker needs to be identified to convene and coordinate giving at county level. The role of the convenor could be to identify need; support groups in building capacity and administer funds - small seed funding, network funding and larger capital grants. The same metrics and language needs to be used for all but some groups will need more support than others. There is also a need for a metric of efficacy for how funding is impactful.
6. *Philanthropy and the media:* There is a role for philanthropy in supporting local media work and production and on a larger scale supporting contributions to national broadcasters focused on climate related issues. Developing programme and content ideas takes time and money and philanthropic funding could play a key role in supporting this kind of public communication by local groups.

Participants identify the potential for philanthropy to highlight and showcase the hopeful stories for climate action underway at a local level amongst activated individuals in Mayo. Given the strong community development culture in the county, there is huge potential in communities for local educators, artists, ecologists, engineers, maintenance workers, crafts people, carers, businesses and everyone to come together to work for a more resilient future. There are many groups doing excellent work but their scale of ambition and potential impact, as well as longer term sustainability, is at this moment, not matched by available human or financial resources.





## Key messages

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Meaningful climate action requires policy, regulation, communication, and taxation commitments, which are primarily the domain of central government. In the absence of radical national commitments, local groups in County Mayo have been activated to deliver sustainability and climate action in their communities. Although a focus on the local level is not without critique, it is a good starting point for creating change and overcoming sectoral challenges.

There is a distinct geography to climate action projects currently underway in County Mayo. Most active projects are located south and east of an imaginary line from Ballina to Westport. There is some correlation with the more affluent, younger, and connected parts of the county. Outside of this area, the most active environmental groups are Tidy Towns. While outside the scope of this study, there may be merit in further investigating this 'geography' of inactivity and understanding why Tidy Towns are so effective in what might be considered hard to reach areas. Might there be potential to support and harness local Tidy Town committees, as an organisation with everyday resonance, for climate action?

The stories and actions underway at a local level amongst activated individuals in Mayo are inspiring. Given the strong community development culture in the county, there is huge potential in communities for local educators, artists, ecologists, engineers, maintenance workers, crafts people, carers, businesses and others to come together to work

for a more resilient future. There are many groups doing excellent work but their scale of ambition and potential impact, as well as longer term sustainability, is at this moment, not matched by available human or other resources.

Philanthropy has a role to play in supporting climate action at many levels in a place-based giving model, from group activation and capacity building, to visioning and supporting staff to apply for funding within communities. Philanthropy will only benefit communities and achieve long-term impact if there is continuity of funding and a longer term, more strategic view is taken that would support capital and recurrent expenditure to create robust and resilient structures.

The funding required to scale up the most ambitious projects is large-scale and will require collaboration between philanthropists, foundations, local authority, private sector and local organisations. Finding the appropriate governance mechanisms that bring together new actor constellations in partnership frameworks with clearly defined responsibilities and ways of working is critical. A first step might be to establish a citizens assembly to deliberate the most appropriate governance form for climate action at county level.

Collaborating around climate in Mayo has deep roots in Meitheal and this is the essence of how a county such as Mayo culturally resonates so that people work together towards a collective goal – future resilience.





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