

Future West Cork

A Vision for the Future



Future WestCork

let's talk!

VISION REPORT

A vision for the future created by the people of West Cork

This report provides a summary of visioning work as part of the Future West Cork initiative.

June, 2012

Future West Cork is an initiative of the West Cork Development Partnership.



Comhshool, Pobal agus Rialtas Aitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government



WestCork
DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

future*iq*
PARTNERS

Future IQ Partners worked with the West Cork Development Partnership to design and implement the Future West Cork initiative.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Future West Cork was an initiative designed to bring the communities of the West Cork Region together to discuss their ideas about how the region could develop into the future, and to create a shared regional vision.

The project had its genesis in 2010 when a group of regional stakeholders and representatives came together for a 2-day workshop to develop future plausible scenarios for the region, extending to 2030. In 2011, and into early 2012, a substantial number of community and industry engagement sessions were held across the West Cork Region. At these sessions, people explored the draft scenarios developed and thought about their potential impact and consequences over the longer term. They explored the implications and consequences for the region's economy, landscape and communities. People considered which scenario represented their preferred future, and which they thought was most likely to occur.

Detailed input and surveys were collected, analysed and a draft vision statement was prepared that reflected the preferred scenario along with additional information and input collected. People also discussed the existing regional capacity for 'future-building', their ideas for action and the critical next steps.

Community Engagement Process

The Future West Cork initiative was built around an ambitious community engagement and training process to collect people's views, and to deepen the understanding of the scenarios and their implications. Key metrics of the engagement process included:

- During the two-year process, some 800 local residents participated and shared their views and desires for the future.
- Over 30 workshop sessions were held right across the region including industry focus groups, school sessions and open community meetings.
- Results and activities were shared and promoted through a unique website, www.futurewestcork.com.
- Detailed survey data were collected from nearly 400 residents, then compiled and analysed to create the regional vision, and identify priority actions.

Unique tools and processes developed

A series of unique tools and approaches to facilitate engagement, discussion and data collection were developed during the course of this initiative. This included:

- **Social Network Analysis** – unique social network maps were produced for the region, to better understand how the regional networks function.
- **The Future Game Ireland** – A customized version of The Future Game was developed, using the West Cork scenarios to inform the game design.
- **Attributes of successful regions** – research work from the USA was adapted using European studies to prepare the '10 Attributes of Successful Regional Communities'.



- **Local Facilitators** – a group of local facilitators were trained in using the Future Game and in facilitating ‘future-thinking’ workshops.
- **Unique Branding** – The Future West Cork initiative had unique branding elements produced, including logo, brand guides, images and various promotional materials.
- **Website components** – a number of novel website components were developed to help tell the Future West Cork story.
- **National RTE television coverage** – coverage of the Future West Cork initiative on national television (Nationwide) helped build the profile of the initiative.

Future West Cork

Participant's Perspectives

Valuable survey information was collected, that helped define what people desired for the future of the regions. Some key information collected included:

- People in West Cork believe that having a shared regional vision is important, with approximately **60% of survey respondents** saying it was highly important to have a shared vision, and **approximately 90%** saying it was important to highly important
- There is a strong foundation of pride, and a culture of self-reliance and being motivated towards action, with these attributes typically being rated as a regional strength.
- **Over 60% of people** thought the region has done a good job to creatively build new economic opportunities.
- **98% of people** thought the region is weak at having a deliberate transition of power to new leaders.
- **96% of people** thought the region is weak at having a participatory approach to decision making.
- Generally, people do not think West Cork is well connected as region, with **83% of people** saying there is a weakness in regional networks and connections.
- **Only 25% of people** thought that the regional community has an optimistic and future focused culture.

As a region, there are strengths and weaknesses. However, there is a good foundation to build on, but it is important for the regional leaders (such as Policymakers, local authorities, and public representatives) to take heed of areas that need to improve. There is an important role for the existing regional leaders and leadership groups to work to enhance the connectivity of the region, to deliberately engage more people, and to build an optimistic mindset. There is an overwhelming view that the region needs to develop a greater depth of leadership, which can assist in the building of a stronger regional fabric and to help align future strategies and actions with the preferred vision for the future.

Key Outcomes

While the primary focus has been defining a future vision, the initiative has also built the foundation for important region building work into the future. This process, and the analysis of public input allowed for four primary outcomes:

- **Vision** - Formulation of an overarching and encompassing vision for the future of the region. This vision captures the aspirations and desires of a representative group of citizens about the future nature of the region, and points to important social, economic and environmental aspects.
- **Systemic Capacity** – The process identified key capacity building and systemic needs for the region to come together as an integrated and mobilised society. Priority areas include the development systems for:
 - Leadership transition and development
 - Spurring innovation and future thinking
 - Connecting the region with new networks
 - Building a robust new social fabric

- **Action** – Key focus action areas have been identified, that are connected to achieving the preferred future. At the level of broad focus areas, the public input has identified several key action areas, including:
 - Renewable energy and energy efficiency initiatives
 - Local food systems
 - Eco and nature-based tourism
 - Community building and leadership
 - Building innovative businesses
 - Youth and education
 - Technology
 - Agriculture and fishing sectors
 - Community-led local development
 - ‘Future proofing’ strategies of sustainability and local control

Further work is required by the Future West Cork initiative and the local leadership groups to understand exactly what is required in each action area, and how this might be achieved in the region.

- **West Cork Development Partnership (WCDP)** - There is a very strong mandate for the WCDP to provide regional support for the following themes:
 - **Co-ordination and leadership role** – people are seeing the need for a central co-coordinating role, and the need to continue with the engagement and future thinking process.
 - **Building innovative business** – key roles were identified around building future business, business retention and support to targeted sectors and industries (tourism, renewable energy, agriculture).

The WCDP has access to important LEADER and other programmes to support this process. The LEADER funding places a high importance on the multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approaches. The proposed EU cohesion policy post 2013 has a strong focus on Community Led Local Development, which aims to support programmes and initiatives that demonstrate strong foundations in community engagement and local identification of key priority actions.

The outcome of the visioning process creates the foundation for a robust and widely supported regional plan. It paints the ‘broad brush strokes’ of an emerging picture of the future, with indication of priority action areas. This has been a dynamic process, and while more details need to be ‘filled-in’, the overarching framework has been created.

Next steps

The visioning process is merely the beginning of the Future West Cork initiative. Key long-term strategic action areas have now been identified in this process. These provide a useful starting point to begin working to steer the West Cork region towards the preferred future. During the Future West Cork Initiative, many residents and organisations said they wanted to continue to be part of the conversation, and to be actively involved in taking steps to make the vision a reality. Importantly, there is already evidence that a wide variety of projects are already being developed through WCDP support, and other key groups, that directly link to the future vision, providing tangible evidence that the vision is indeed feasible and attainable. The movement towards the preferred future is an incremental process that is progressively built upon over the longer term.

Future West Cork Initiative Project Team

West Cork Development Partnership (WCDP), as part of its commitment to develop a prosperous and vibrant region, has initiated and hosted the Future West Cork initiative. Staff members at WCDP, and many community volunteers and stakeholders have been instrumental in implementing and managing the initiative. Future iQ Partners, an international consultancy firm, worked with the West Cork Development Partnership to design and implement the Future West Cork initiative between 2010 and 2012.



SUMMARY OF ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the Future West Cork initiative outcomes, and drawing from the detailed survey data, a series of high-level recommendations have been developed. These are aimed at defining the recommended action steps that will help the region move systematically towards the preferred vision.

Role of the West Cork Development Partnership

- The West Cork Development Partnership assumes the mandate of being the initial convener within the region to bring strategic partners and community leaders together to shape a detailed action plan. WCDP has access to important LEADER programme resources post 2013 that will provide considerable support to community led development efforts on a local and regional scale.
- Key entities within the region, including public sector and local government engage in the process, and align their responses to support the emerging regional vision
- West Cork Development Partnership continues to focus on the areas of key expertise it has, such as capacity building and entrepreneurial innovation work. It has an unrivalled ability for direct resourcing of a range of innovative community and enterprise actions.

Capacity Building and Leadership Development

- Continue to develop regional leadership and capacity building programmes, which can start to build the skills and capacity in collaborative leadership. This should aim to better equip existing leaders and also create a new cohort of grass-roots leadership across the region.
- Create new networks and alliances at both community and enterprise level across the region, by using the network maps to identify and build focus groups that can begin to work collaboratively on new initiatives connected to the future vision.
- Continue the process of building regional confidence and a future focus. Aside from a range of community and enterprise development initiatives that will continue to be supported by the WCDP over the medium term linked to the Future West Cork initiative, ideas such as awards programmes, study tours and community-building programmes can help build the knowledge and inspiration needed to empower community groups to think more creatively and enact new initiatives.

Economic Innovation

- The continued development and expansion of The Fuchsia Brand to capture and represent key shared values for the region. The tag line 'A place apart' has great appeal, and the brand must evolve to become the primary signifier and identifier for the region.
- Funding programs in the region, from the WCDP and other entities should seek to connect grant programmes and calls for proposals to directly link to the future vision.
- Cluster groups or working groups, drawing on key partners and stakeholders, should be formed around each of the key identified broad areas of opportunity. For example, cluster groups around renewable energy and nature-based tourism could help facilitate 'joined up thinking' in these promising areas of economic activity.

1. Introduction

Future West Cork is an innovative initiative designed to bring West Cork Communities together to discuss their ideas about how the region could develop into the future, and to create a shared regional vision. This project had its genesis in 2008, when the global financial crisis prompted the West Cork Development Partnership to begin to consider what might be the implications and consequences on a region such as West Cork and also to consider the obvious consequences that had arisen due to deficits in national and regional policymaking. It also sought to demonstrate that properly structured futures thinking, based on partnership could mitigate similar occurrences in the future.

As the world adjusts from a period of economic volatility, increasingly the effects are being borne at a regional level. As Government funding is cut, more and more responsibility for the future is being passed down to the local and regional level. It is unlikely that small communities will have the structures, capacity or resources to effect the adjustments that are required. In most cases, coming together into regional communities offers the ideal first step. This offers the chance of combining efforts and resources to plan for the future and begin to take the actions that will create future prosperity and build vibrant communities. Many of the important issues facing the region, such as new industry development, landscape protection and systemic cultural change, will require regional scale thinking and action.

The Future West Cork initiative, and the regional visioning and planning approach it embodies, is also set within the context of a paucity of effective long term planning and thinking within Ireland. For example, there appears to be few, if any, examples of projects of a similar nature to the Future West Cork initiative. In this way, it represents an innovative and ambitious attempt to draw a large community into a 'future-thinking' conversation and process. It should be noted that this initiative is also set against a backdrop of scepticism, distrust, anger and 'social alienation' being experienced by the Irish population. Much has been written on this topic in the popular press in recent times, and most of the commentary points to the failure of the established institutional leadership in the country; including the political leadership, the financial institutions, and the Church, amongst others. This is also reflected at the local scale in West Cork, where there is an established mistrust and suspicion of some of the institutional authorities, which might typically be expected to provide meaningful leadership.

With this in mind, beginning in 2009, West Cork Development Partnership (WCDDP) began working with Future iQ Partners to explore a regional visioning process. This led to the West Cork scenario planning work in 2010 (refer to 'View of the Future: West Cork in 2030 - Report on the Regional Scenario Workshop', May 2010) that explored plausible futures; and, was then followed by the creation of the Future West Cork initiative in 2011. This initiative, which was hosted in the region by the WCDDP, offered a framework for the regional population to actively and constructively discuss the future, explore new possibilities and define an ambitious regional future vision.



2. Community Engagement Process

The vision formulation process for West Cork encompassed a two-year period.

It began with a detailed scenario-planning workshop in May 2010, and was then followed by an extensive community engagement in 2011, into early 2012.

2.1 Engagement framework and principles

The overarching method for the engagement and visioning work was a ‘scenario-thinking’ approach. Scenario planning has been gaining popularity in recent years within the industry environment, especially as a way to think creatively about the future and future options. In addition, it is now being viewed as a powerful community engagement and future-thinking tool in regional and provincial planning efforts, notably in the USA. In particular, it is well established as a valid planning tool in the corporate, organisational and military settings. The use of scenario planning, as a regional visioning tool, is a more recent phenomenon and its application in this way still represents a novel approach. The decision to use a scenario-thinking framework in the Future West Cork initiative was because it offers choice. That is, it does not just explore one ‘ideal’ future, but allows a thoughtful examination of a range of futures and their possible consequences. This range of futures can then be presented to a community for structured engagement, dissection and evaluation. Practical experience has shown this ability to ‘choose’ a future, and engage in the discussion, increases the participants ‘ownership’ of process and outcome.

The community engagement work, as part of Future West Cork, aimed to take the scenario framework and the ‘scenario thinking’ approach out to the broader community to engage the residents and industry sectors in a meaningful discussion about the future. The purpose was to use this framework to examine what might be a preferred vision or scenario for the future of the region. In addition, it was sought to widen and deepen the scenario descriptions, and to better understand their potential implications and relative appeal.

Careful thought was given to the principles used in designing the engagement process, and the various elements. The principles, which the engagement process focused on, included:

- **Meaningful and exploratory** – it was intended that the conversations and material associated with the engagement, would be substantive and provoke thoughtful debate about the future. There was a commitment to have it be ‘an important’ conversation, that allowed people to get new insights into the future of the region.
- **Available and accessible** – given the size of the region, it was determined to ensure that people across the region had the opportunity to participate and shape the process. This particularly included face-to-face sessions in diverse locations and at a range of times of day.
- **Youth inclusive** – young people were identified as an important target group. Particular attention was given to including school and youth in the process. In particular, transition year students were the primary focus youth group.
- **Objective data** – collecting comprehensive and objective data was critical, to both shape the vision, but also determine the collective regional desires. The data needed to be consistent to allow meaningful comparisons and analysis, and had to be based on a robust scientific and analytical framework.
- **Use of the ‘triple bottom-line’ approach** – it was considered critical to shape a vision and process that was ‘holistic’ in nature; that is, it took into account the multiple important dimensions in the regional future. The use of the triple bottom-line approach is now well accepted, as it considers economic, environmental and societal consequences of actions and future trajectories.
- **Challenging and engaging** – workshop sessions and tools had to be designed to deal with complex issues in relatively easy ways, and to focus conversation in order to build regional alignment. It was also considered important that the sessions were engaging, discursive, challenging and enjoyable and provided the opportunity for deep thinking and discussion in a style conducive to open exploration of ideas and challenges.
- **Contemporary and innovative approaches** – given the unique nature of this initiative, it was desired to use contemporary and best-practice tools and approaches to support community engagement. It was considered that there was an opportunity to develop and test an approach to community engagement that may have broader application to the Irish context.

In developing the principles for the engagement phase, considerable time was spent examining local approaches and experience in order to best understand what would work most effectively within the West Cork context. In addition, comparable projects around the world were examined for potential strengths and pitfalls.

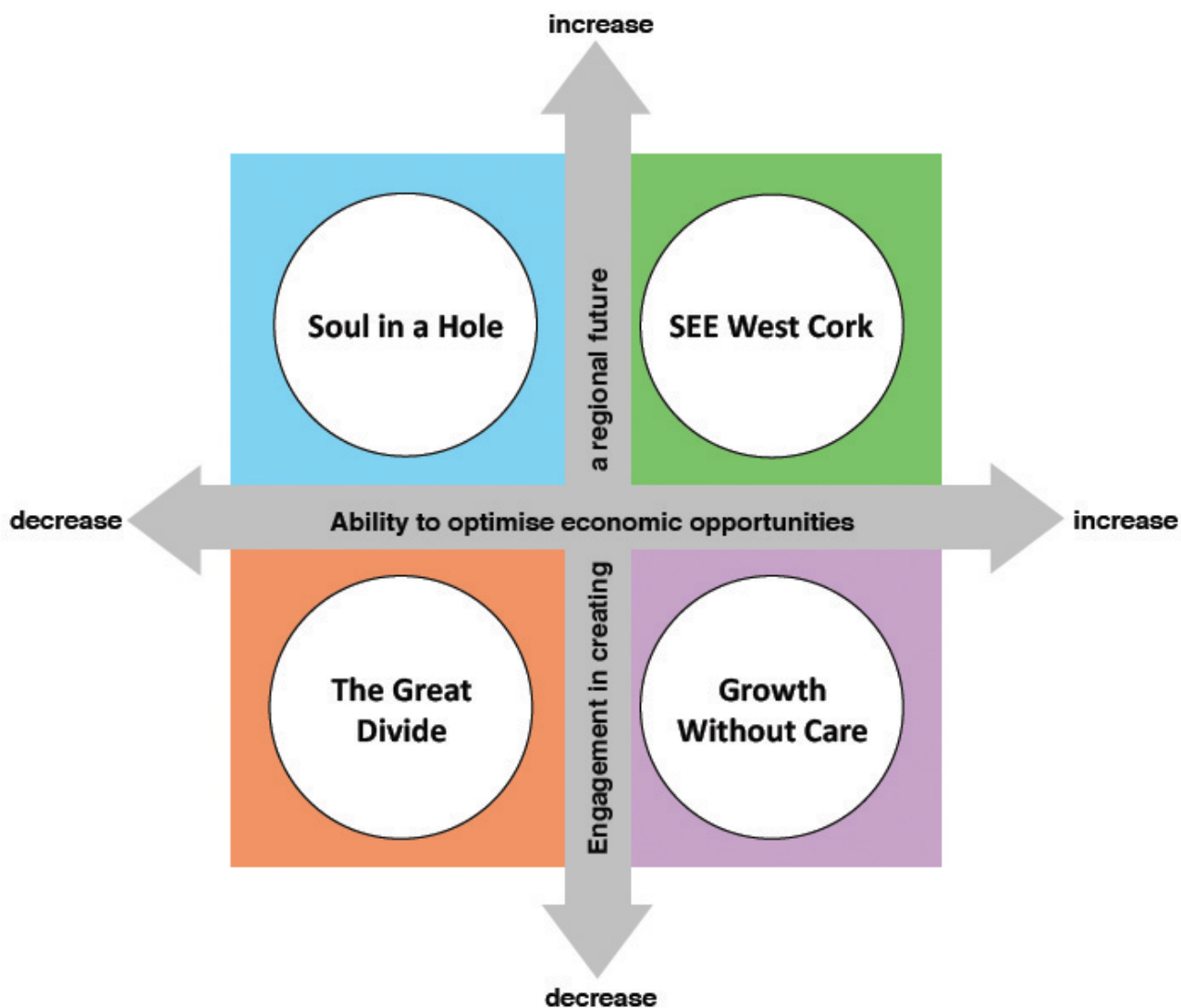
2.2 Scenario planning - summary

In May 2010, a regional scenario-planning workshop was held in West Cork. This involved approximately 80 stakeholders from across the region to explore possible futures for the region. This 2-day event produced a summary report that articulates four plausible futures for the region in 2030. (View of the Future: West Cork in 2030- Report on the Regional Scenario Workshop, May 2010).

These scenarios were defined by examining key drivers, trends and influences shaping the future of the region. Using standard scenario planning techniques, these drivers were then ranked and clustered based on participant’s determinations of their relative ‘importance’ and ‘uncertainty’ of each driver, in relationship to their impact on the future. These clusters were then labelled to reflect their thematic nature and placed on intersecting axes.

These axes ultimately create four ‘scenario spaces’. In West Cork, the two major axes were labelled ‘Ability to optimise on economic opportunities’, and ‘Engagement in creating a regional future’. The macro issue in each axis was considered to have the potential to increase or decrease over time, hence creating four possible scenario outcomes. The workshop participants then developed detailed narratives for each scenario, including a potential name for that scenario. A summary of the scenario grid is shown below.

Figure 1. ‘Scenario spaces’ and axis for West Cork scenario development



For more information on the scenario planning report for West Cork, visit www.futurewestcork.com

Summary Scenario Descriptions

These summary descriptions are adapted from 'View of the Future: West Cork in 2030- Report on the Regional Scenario Workshop', May 2010)

Scenario A - Soul in a Hole



The Soul in a Hole scenario pictures a region with positives and negatives with a vision for the future that continually falls down economically. In 2030, the soul of West Cork seems to be shining through. Local community groups are well organised and are connected across the region. There is a strong community spirit to make major changes to manage the environment and to foster civic, cultural and community action. However, the region is in a hole economically.

The spirit is strong, but economic development is weak. The region has never really recovered from the debilitating “global financial crisis” of the early 2000s. For the last three decades growth across the region has been patchy, resulting in a two-level economy. There is well-developed eco-tourism, which has driven development around the coast and is supported by co-ordinated landscape management. It is a different story in the interior, with high unemployment, outward migration among young people and vacant towns. There are fewer

commercial farmers and a lack of strong indigenous industry. In 2028, the “State of West Cork” report helped to galvanise the community to action. This report highlighted the two-level economy, mental health issues and potential pressure on the environment from coastal development.

Scenario B - SEE West Cork



The SEE West Cork (Social, Economic and Environmental West Cork) scenario pictures a prosperous, vibrant region. The year 2030 sees the region as an inspiring example worldwide. This has occurred over the past twenty years thanks to cohesive vision, community action, investment in infrastructure and education, co-operation across all sectors of the community, a lot of hard work and probably just a little luck.

The region has a vibrant, resilient economy, well-managed environment, excellent infrastructure and strong social capital. The economy is based on a diverse mix of agriculture, food production, sustainable forestry, timber products, eco-tourism, IT based international services and green energy and now boasts its’ greatest population growth in recent history. West Cork has an internationally recognized ‘brand’ promoting all that the region has to offer. The community is inclusive of all of its diverse groups, with a voice for all and a positive outlook.

Many of regions’ young people choose to remain in the area benefitting from economic and social opportunities while living in a beautiful environment. It is a desirable region in which to live and this brings its own pressures on land use and other resources.

Scenario C - Growth Without Care



The Growth Without Care scenario pictures a mixed region with economic development but a lack of public engagement, resulting in polarised outcomes. In 2030, West Cork has a two-level society. Some people are in high paying work, working long hours, while the majority are in lower paid jobs. Development is focussed on the coastal areas, while much of the interior is missing the boom times. Everywhere one looks there are positives and negatives.

In this future, the economy is booming. New and traditional industries are being developed in the region including tourism, renewable energy, health and care, food and building. Multinational companies that were encouraged to invest in Ireland own most of these. Sustainable energy, owned and operated by an overseas consortium, is now a reality. The region boasts full employment, although two-thirds of all jobs are in low wage, production and service positions. There is high immigration encouraged by prospects for work. The regions once noted civic spirit

continues to decline amidst the economic prosperity. There are serious social issues, less time for social engagement, marginalised groups and little local engagement in planning. It feels like a return to the Celtic Tiger years.

Scenario D - The Great Divide



The Great Divide scenario sees a region with some winners and many losers. In 2030, the region is in a state of flux, in all senses of the word. The landscape has changed, due to environmental degradation, flooding and inappropriate development. The social landscape has been reshaped around larger towns and rural holdings, with 'ghost villages' in rural areas largely unoccupied and an economy that concentrates around food and energy parks.

In this future, the economy is based on agriculture, food and energy. The region is largely a service area providing food and energy to Cork City with milk and dairy products exported further afield. Development in the region has been on a 'nodal' basis around a previously existing infrastructure. Tourism has declined due to an ageing infrastructure and the threat of flooding. Most tourism is now limited to isolated exclusive retreats for wealthy visitors. The majority of the population is located in towns, while the wealthier have moved to the countryside

for a comfortable life away from troubled urban areas where the poverty gap leads to social issues. The young move to urban areas for employment, while older people move to other locations with a lower cost of living.

These scenario narratives, and the detailed characteristics (refer View of the Future: West Cork in 2030, Report on the Regional Scenario Workshop, May 2010), provide a useful insight into the plausible futures and their associated implications and consequences.

2.3 Engagement Tools

During the initial part of 2011, it was necessary to develop the various engagement tools, approaches and branding for the Future West Cork initiative. A number of unique and customized tools and approaches were developed as part of this initiative.

- **Social Network Analysis** – unique social network maps were produced for the region, using a pool of some 250 people. These maps were completed to help inform the building of partnerships across the region, and provide a valuable resource to better understand how the regional networks function.
- **The Future Game – Ireland** – A customized version of The Future Game was developed, using the West Cork scenarios to inform the game design. This game has potential wide application in West Cork and Ireland as a community decision-making simulation tool.
- **Attributes of successful regions** – research work from the USA was adapted using European studies to prepare the '10 Attributes of Successful Regional Communities' – making it more applicable to the European context.
- **Local Facilitators** – a group of local facilitators were trained in using the Future Game and in conducting 'future-thinking' workshops. This embeds the skills and resources into the region, in order to continue this work.
- **Unique Branding** – The Future West Cork initiative had unique branding elements produced, including logo, brand guides, images and various promotional materials. This branding aimed to incorporate the 'look and feel' of West Cork, yet gave an engaging and contemporary feel to the initiative.
- **Website components** – a number of novel website components were developed to help tell the Future West Cork story – this included the introductory video series for the initiative, the Future West Cork 'Prezi', and other visual display approaches to assemble data and tell the story.
- **National RTE television coverage** – coverage of the Future West Cork initiative and The Future Game on national television (Nationwide) helped build the profile and image of the initiative.

Overall, the package of tools and approaches represents a 'best-practice' approach to the engagement part of this initiative. It coupled together 'tried and tested' approaches with new and innovative elements. Several of the elements were unique to the initiative and had never before been applied in the European or Irish context. In this way, the Future West Cork initiative aimed to build on existing tools and approaches, and develop new approaches and applications.

2.4 Community engagement sessions

From May 2011 until March 2012, more than 20 major public, industry and community events were held across the region. In all cases, staff and consultants from the project team, or the trained local facilitators, ran these events.

The overall community engagement approach somewhat evolved over the course of the engagement period, as did the design of the workshops. This was partially in response to interest and demand, and partially as a result of learning and adapting to create the most effective workshop experience and outcome. The series of locally based workshops included the following events.

Sub-regional workshops in four major locations

(May 2011)

Open public meetings were held in four centres spaced across the region. On average, some 50 -70 people attended each three hour event. At these workshops, participants played The Future Game – Ireland; engaged in scenario thinking sessions, and completed surveys. The game was developed for this project as it has been found to be a very useful simulation learning tool to help community groups and participants examine the consequences of decisions made, understand trade-offs, and stimulate forward thinking. The game design allows people to 'play-out' decisions and examine the impacts over time. This way, it provides an ideal connection between defining a preferred future, and exploring what might be required to achieve that future. These workshops were held in

Macroom, Bantry, Rosscarbery and Kinsale. In essence, this series of workshop represented a 'launch' of the initiative into the public realm. The workshops also began to examine the complexity of the challenges facing the region and the role that each community can play in achieving a shared regional outcome.

Industry Sector Workshops

(June 2011)

Part of the engagement was to deliberately seek input from key industry sectors. Workshops were designed and run with focus groups from the following industry sectors: Agriculture, Craft, Creative Sector, Fishing, Tourism, Energy, and Food.

On average each workshop was 2-3 hours, and included a group of 10-20 industry representatives. These workshops were held at locations across the region, often to best accommodate the industry location for needs. Each workshop included a discussion about the four scenarios and attempted to examine the implications on that industry sector. Workshop reports were prepared and material from the reports was posted to the Future West Cork website.

Future West Cork Week

(October 2011)

Following the summer hiatus, it was decided to re-focus engagement efforts around 'Future West Cork Week'. This was promoted widely and advertised in local media. The week was built around a launch event on the Monday evening, and was then followed with a series of community events through the course of the week. The three-hour launch event on Monday evening, 10 October attracted approximate 100 local residents, many of whom had not previously participated in Future West Cork events. The programme included:

- A Presentation from University County Cork (UCC) that examined changes in the West Cork population as revealed in the 2011 census;
- UCC presentations on Regional Resilience research that explored a theoretical framework for regional success and recovery from economic downturns;
- An outline and briefing on the Future West Cork initiative;
- An 'Attributes of Successful Regions' exercise and discussion.
- Introduction to and the promotion of Local Facilitators

This event also aimed to promote the opportunity for individual or groups of communities to host events to participate in the regional vision discussion.



Specific Community Sessions

During and following the Future West Cork Week, a series of customized workshops were held in a range of communities. The locations and months are as follows:

- Adrigole, Bandon, Bantry, Kinsale (Oct 11);
- Bandon, Ballinascarthy (Nov 11);
- Balleylickey / Ouvane Fall (Dec 11);
- Oysterhaven / Nohoval (Feb 12);
- Schull (Dec 11 and Mar 12).

The purpose and design of these workshops varied. Most included playing the Futures Game, discussion of the scenario and their implications, and completion of surveys. On average, some 15-40 people attended each event. These events aimed to take the Future West Cork initiative directly into local communities and locations across the region. This reflected the commitment to make the initiative relevant and available to people within the region, irrespective of their geographic location or existing role within regional organizations. It represented an attempt to secure 'grass-roots' input at all levels.

Targeted Youth Events

Youth in the regions were identified as a key target group for engagement, particularly as they are often a neglected segment in community engagement and visioning work. In total, four events were held, ranging from a handful of participants to 40-60 students. At these events, the youth played The Future Game – Ireland, engaged in the 'scenario-thinking' work and completed surveys. The following lists the youth events:

- Bantry – 'Coffeeshop Forum' – Jun 2012
- St Michaels, Rosscarbery – Oct 2011
- Scared Heart Secondary School Clonakilty – Feb 2012
- Schull Community School – Feb 2012

General Presentations

In addition to the formal workshops and engagement events listed, there were numerous presentations and less formal discussion sessions held across the region. Often these were linked to other events, such as information evenings being held by the West Cork Development Partnership. While these discussions did not collect specific input data, they did serve an important role in helping promote the initiative and increase local awareness.

Future West Cork Website

A unique website www.futurewestcork.com was created to share the information and gather additional input into the discussion about a vision for the region. This website served as an important way to assemble information and keep the public informed. While there was a great deal of useful information and graphics loaded onto the website, it was not an overly successful engagement approach. A small number of people did complete surveys online, and over a seven month period of 2011 – some 1,160 people visited the website. By today's standards, this would reflect a relatively low level of 'visitor traffic'. Why this is case is open to conjecture, but could reflect lack of awareness of the website a lack of interest in this medium or a lack of effectiveness of the content and utility of the site.

However, there were quite distinct peaks in website traffic following the May and June workshops, and then again around the time of the Future West Cork week, and the ensuing community sessions.

Summary – community engagement process

Any regional visioning process, by its nature is complex, extensive and time consuming. Sufficient time has to be allowed for meaningful consideration and input by interested people. In total, nearly 800 people attended community events, industry sector discussion groups and general workshops. In addition, numerous people visited the website. At some of the longer workshop events, people were invited to complete survey questionnaires to gather their input and data. These workshops included a detailed review and discussion of the scenario planning process and outcomes.

People also had the opportunity to review the material and complete online surveys. In total, almost 400 survey responses were collected from across the region. Data collected during the engagement phase was then analysed using text and word analysis to examine key words and themes, which were then used to craft the regional vision statement.

A large amount of qualitative and quantitative data was collected from regional residents throughout the engagement process. In addition to detailed surveys, and in some case workshop notes, there was considerable opportunity for local people to voice their concerns and thoughts. The threads, themes and ideals expressed by people, both formally or informally, has provided the content for the regional vision, and associated narrative. The data collected and priority issues raised continues to inform the work of the WCDP across all its principle development programmes.

While the metrics of participation may appear impressive, they were not achieved without considerable effort. The engagement phase of the initiative was resource intensive, and required numerous creative ways to attract people's attention and build a momentum about the conversation within the region. Promoting a conversation about a regional vision proved to be more difficult than originally anticipated. It could be argued, that such a conversation, though complex, is an imperative for a region like West Cork, which is at a crossroads in its future development. High unemployment, emigration, and the loss of economic and social vitality, represent a range of critical issues impacting on the regional future. However, these same issues appear to have also created a mood of despondency within the region, and a sense of futility about shaping the future. In addition, the external environment during the engagement process included larger concerns of Euro-zone crisis, political uncertainty (and elections) and national economic stagnation. It is difficult to judge the overall impact of these influences, but suffice to say that the engagement phase, while producing a robust and workable outcome, was not without its challenges in terms of gathering people's interest and attention. It is also worthy of note that the process yielded a clear desire for change but an uncertainty as to how and by whom it might be achieved.

One of the overall objectives of the community engagement phase was to 'deepen and broaden' the scenario narratives and the understanding of the impact of these plausible futures on the fabric of the regions' economy, environment and communities. While this was accomplished to some degree, most of the engagement sessions and survey results tended to reiterate and reinforce the narratives previously created. On one hand this validates the quality of the work done in the scenario planning sessions; and, on the other hand it reflects the challenge of engaging the regional population in a creative thinking approach about the future. There were difficulties associated with the complexity of the information, and the time taken by workshop participants to understand the scenario framework. Coupled with relatively short workshop sessions (typically 2-3 hours), this meant limited time and ability to explore the much deeper implications on individual sectors and communities. However, there were additional insights and perspectives on the various scenarios collected at most sessions, and these were reflected in the survey results. In particular, valuable information was recorded about what activities people saw would steer the region towards the preferred scenario.

Community engagement work on regional or community visioning is much more a 'process', than an outcome. The engagement process during Future West Cork achieved a significant expansion in the regional community's understanding and appreciation of the plausible futures before the region. The conversations were rich and insightful, and participants largely regarded the sessions and valuable and productive. Overall, the engagement produced a solid outcome in terms of building interest in a regional vision, and moving people towards a shared regional future. In addition, important information was collected that identifies the more tangible aspects of a preferred future, and to help to identify critical next steps and roles.

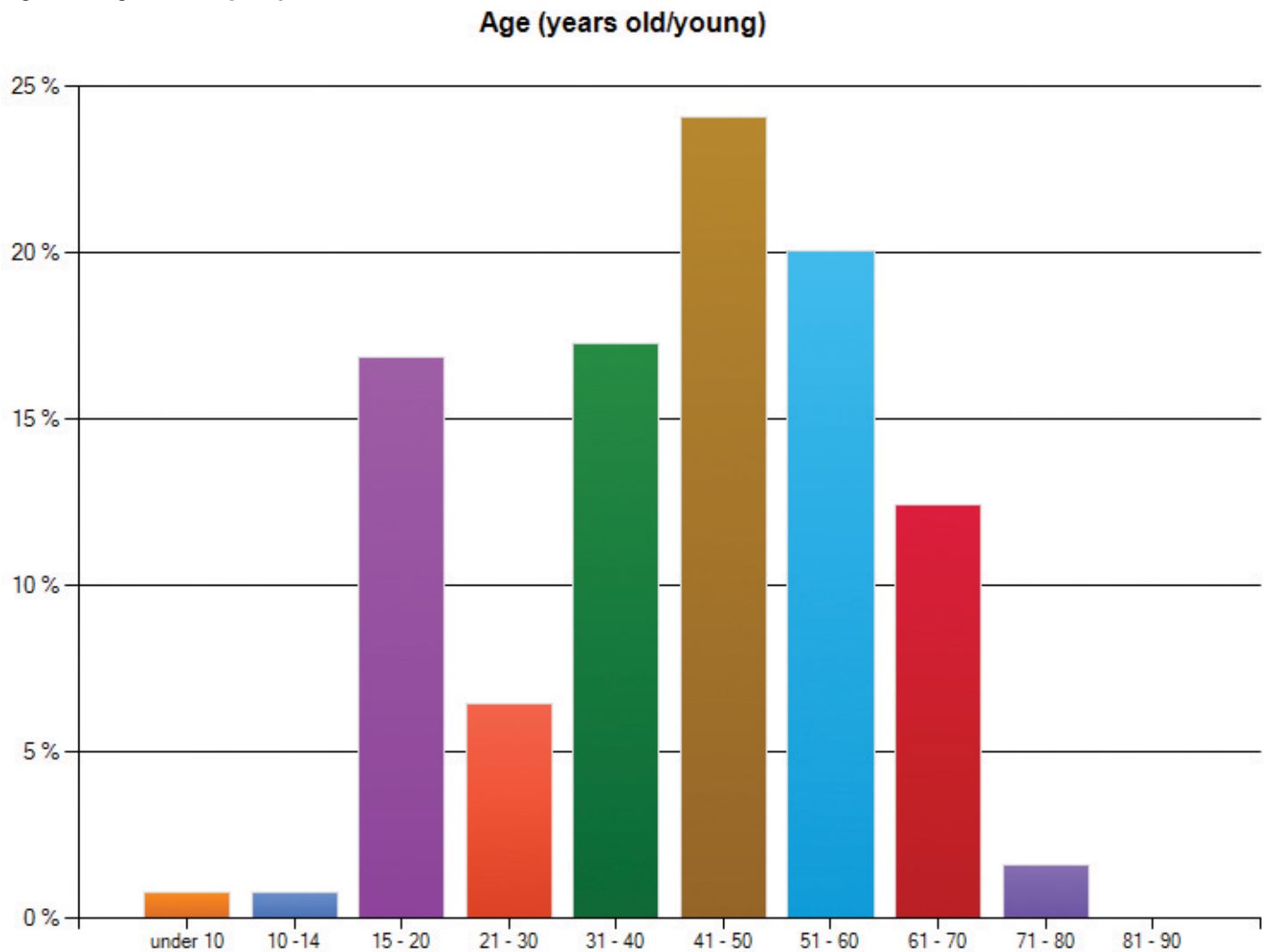
3. Representativeness of the engagement process

The validity and ultimate acceptance of a visioning process, and the resulting vision statement and action plans, requires that the input will be accepted by the local people as being fair and representative. The Future West Cork visioning process went to great lengths to ensure that the process was open, transparent and participatory. Profile and participant data from the workshop and survey respondents is presented in this report.

3.1 Age distribution

The challenge in many regional engagement and visioning efforts is to reach a broad cross section of a community. The following Figure 2 shows the age profile of respondents. It is worthy of note that this is a broader cross section of ages than is normally associated with a regional process. In particular, it is typically more difficult to engage the younger population, but because of the intentional outreach into the youth settings, the age distribution in this project is quite robust.

Figure 2. Age of survey respondents



3.2 Geographic Distribution

The Future West Cork project had an objective to take the conversation to the various corners and parts of the region. The workshops were offered as sub-regional events, covering the broad swathes of the region, and allowing relatively easy access for most of the population. Survey respondents recorded their particular community (town / village) and electoral district.

Figure 3. Where do you live? – by Electoral Areas

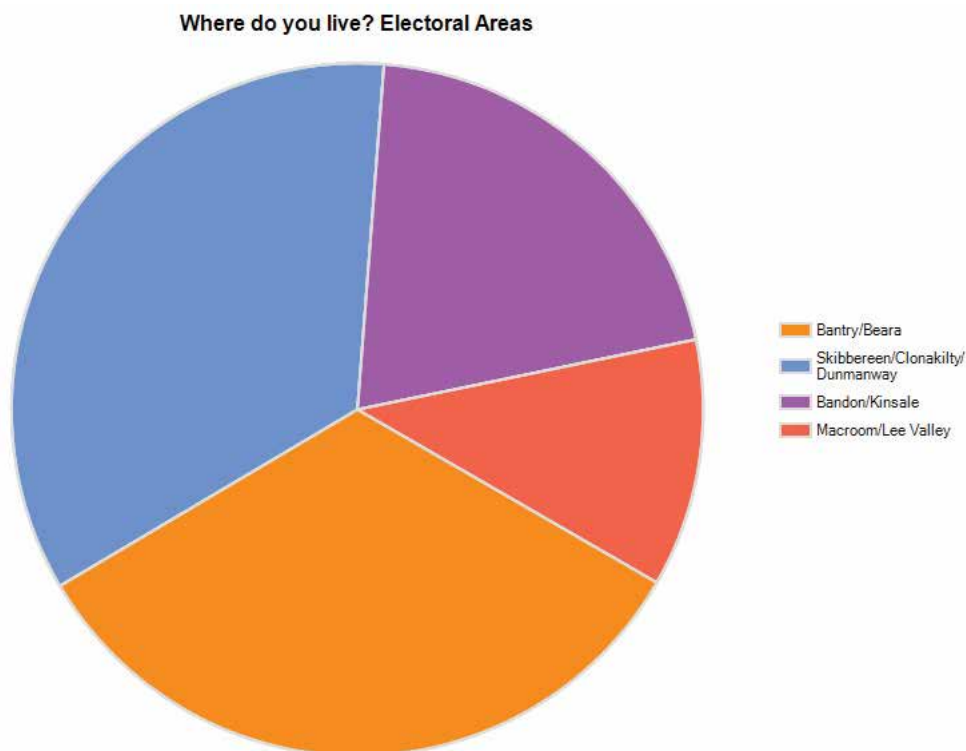
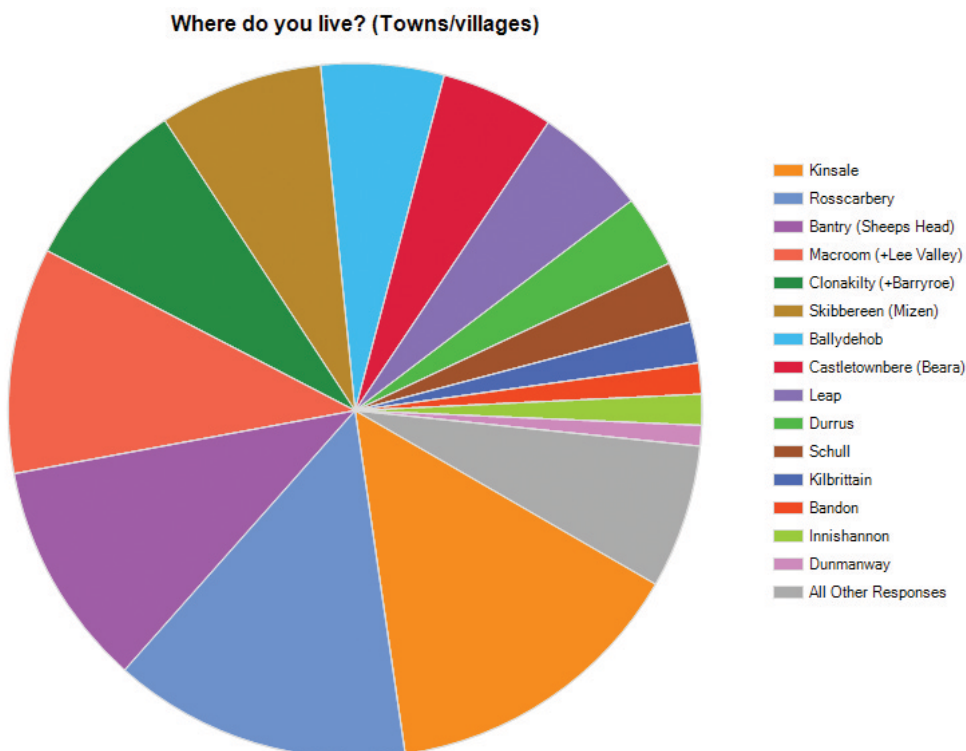


Figure 4. Where do you live? (Town/villages)

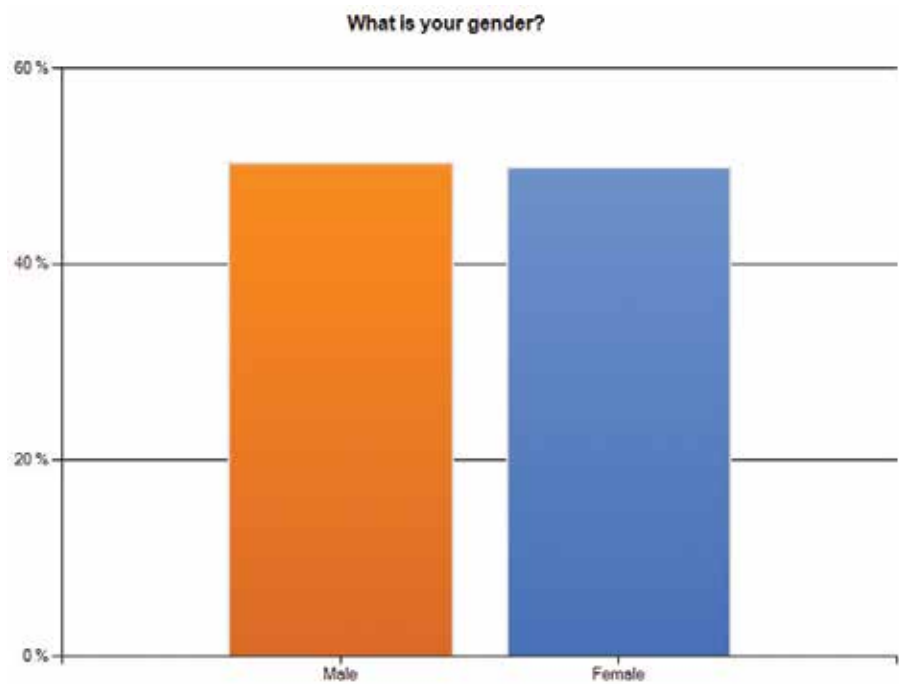


These figures suggest that an adequate geographic distribution of participations was achieved.

3.3 Gender mix

Achieving a balanced gender mix is often seen as a key test of representativeness. The data in Figure 5 shows that the mix was almost perfectly split (**50.2% male; 48.2% female**).

Figure 5. Gender mix



3.4 Gaps in representation

Overall – there is a good case to be made that the initiative achieved a good level of representative participation in the vision creation process. The issue of representativeness is important as it builds credibility that the process and outputs represents the view of the people, and is not a fabricated result by a group of ‘insiders’.

It is worth noting that there was a significant lack of public sector engagement in the process. Based on workshop attendance, there was a proportionally poor representation from public sector officials and representatives. Why this is the case is open to speculation, however the lack of public sector engagement may lead to difficulties in advancing the vision and may influence the delivery and implementation of key actions steps. For example, significant local resources are embedded in the public sector organisations, and if well coordinated, these resources could have a major impact on funding and resourcing implementation and action steps. In addition, a lack of participation from such entities will slow the process of building a cohesive regional conversation. It may also be the case that some public sector representatives and agencies did not wish to address policy and planning deficits in an open and public forum.

4. Creating the Regional Vision Statement

The regional vision statement and its elements have been crafted from the extensive community workshops and public survey results from the Future West Cork initiative. It aims to provide the statements for the preferred vision in 2030, and the underpinning rationale as to the viability of the vision.

4.1 Process and framework for creating the vision

The vision elements have been crafted using detailed analysis of key words drawn from the major scenario shaping axis, community surveys (via text analysis) and data summary (via category formulations), and input at community workshops. In particular, the overall structure of the vision is based on repeated themes that have appeared through the context and content of the work done as part of the Future West Cork project.

4.2 Theoretical Framework: Incorporation of language

Language is a complex labyrinth of signs, codes and meaning. It creates the possibility of a continuous, synchronized and reciprocal access to another person's subjectivity. It is a system of vocal signs, which have originated over time, within a society/community, which represent a shared meaning between the inhabitants of that society/community. Language is a system with rules and it can shape society or it can paradoxically be shaped by society.

Sociolinguistics embraces the notion that language is shaped by society, and indeed would rely on concepts such as Speech Community and Social Network, as their fundamental principles. Speech Community refers to a group of people who use language in a unique and mutually accepted way amongst their group. To further understand the use of language in a society, it is crucial to understand the social networks in which that rich language is deeply embedded. A social network is made up of actors (individuals) and the fundamental ties between these actors in the forms of signs, codes, cues and meanings which are common to those actors and understood by all involved.

The meanings and values embedded in the words that people in a society use, can either be 'caused' by society or be a direct influence on that society. Kenneth Burke, who pioneered the term 'Terministic Screens', referred to the political and social power of these symbols (words/sentences) as he claimed that the rhetorical function of language is the "symbolic means of inducing co-operation in beings, that by nature, respond to symbols".

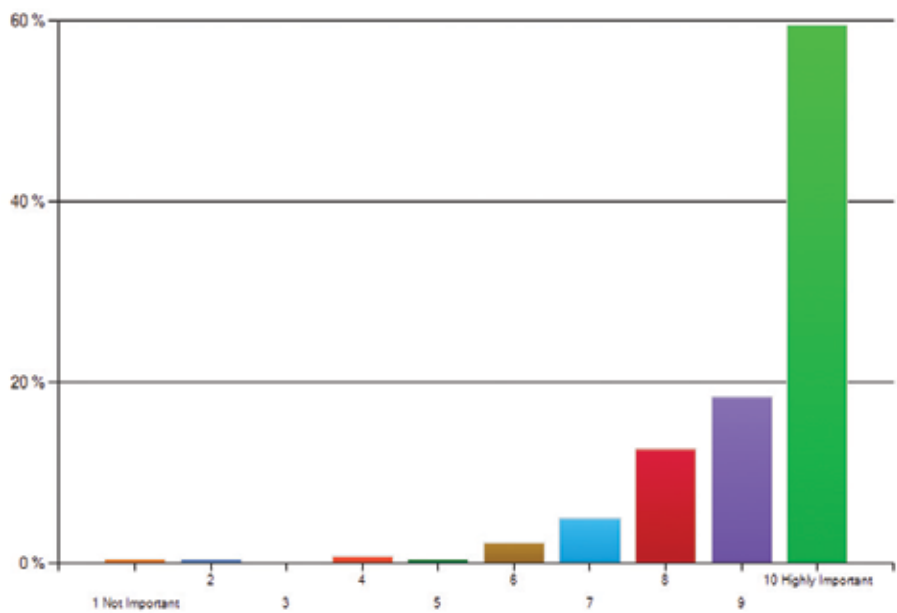
In terms of this report, it is essential to look at the theoretical framework of language in order to carry out the vision formulation process. Survey responses were analysed and key words and phrases were used to create the categories for the analysis of answers to questions. While there is subjectivity involved in this process, it is impossible not to be completely objective in allocating categories to the common parlance and phrases of a Region.

Overall, the process used in the Future West Cork initiative attempts to capture and reflect the language used by the society of West Cork. The creation of a vision statement also has the potential to shape and cause new thinking and actions by the society of West Cork. In this way, the process itself can be powerful in bring forth a new framework for thinking and acting about the future.

4.3 Perceived importance of having a vision

During the workshop and survey process, a series of key questions were asked. A critical question was in relationship to people's perception of how important it is to have a vision for the region.

Figure 6. How important is it to have a shared vision for social, community and economic development in West Cork?

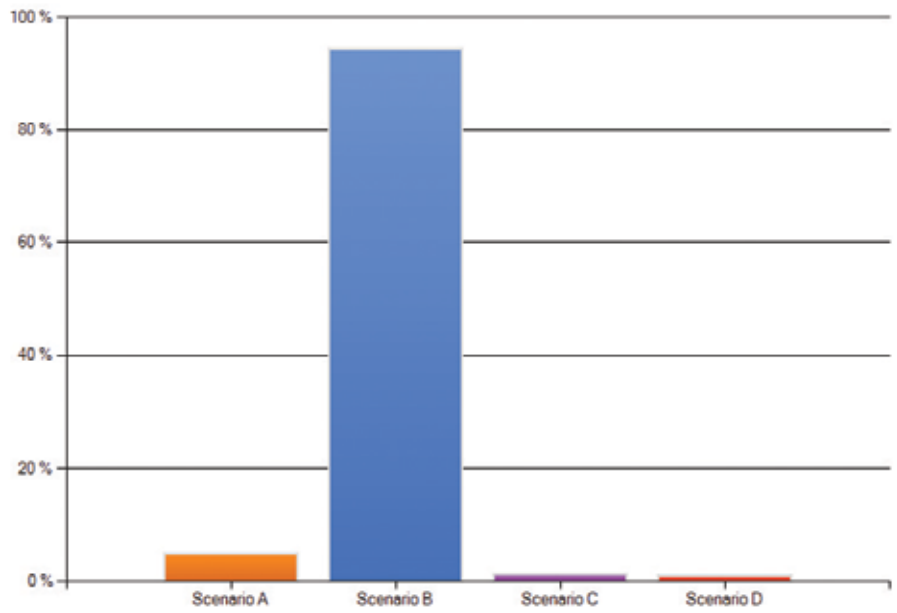


The graph in Figure 6 clearly demonstrates that people shared a deep understanding and appreciation of the importance of creating a shared vision for the future. This points to a very strong motivation people have to see the region coalesce around a common set of priorities for the future.

4.4 Survey responses – preferred scenario

In addition, people were given the opportunity to comment on, and select, the scenario they preferred for the future of the region.

Figure 7. Which one of the scenarios closely reflects what you would choose as the preferred scenario for West Cork?



Scenario B was the ‘SEE West Cork’ Scenario, and was obviously the highly preferred scenario for the future, with approximately **95% of survey responses** nominating that scenario. This represents a high level of alignment around a preferred scenario for the future.

There were approximately **4% of survey responses** that selected Scenario A - ‘Soul in a hole’ as the preferred scenario. This scenario shares many of the characteristics of Scenario B, except that it has a stronger emphasis on maintaining local culture and heritage and accepts a declining economic prosperity

These results suggest a very strong regional agreement around a single identified future scenario. This substantially assists the process of focusing interest and action to realize this shared future vision.

4.5 Foundation to the vision – the preferred scenario

The following is the scenario description and future history for SEE West Cork, which is the preferred scenario. This description, plus the various qualitative and quantitative responses from the engagement phase, provides the material used in articulating the future vision statement.

SEE West Cork – Scenario Description and Characteristics

(Adapted from: View of the Future: West Cork in 2030- Report on the Regional Scenario Workshop, May 2010)

The SEE West Cork (Social, Economic and Environmental West Cork) scenario pictures a prosperous, vibrant region. The year 2030 sees the region as an inspiring example worldwide. This has occurred over the past twenty years thanks to cohesive vision, community action, investment in infrastructure and education, co-operation across all sectors of the community, a lot of hard work and probably just a little luck.

The region has a vibrant, resilient economy, well-managed environment, excellent infrastructure and strong social capital. The economy is based on a diverse mix of agriculture, food production, sustainable forestry, timber products, eco-tourism, IT based international services and green energy and now boasts its' greatest population growth in recent history. West Cork has an internationally recognized 'brand' promoting all that the region has to offer. The community is inclusive of all of its diverse groups, with a voice for all and a positive outlook. Many of regions' young people choose to remain in the area benefitting from economic and social opportunities while living in a beautiful environment. It is a desirable region in which to live and this brings its own pressures on land use and other resources.

SEE West Cork - Ability to optimise economic opportunities and collaborate

In the scenario 'space' for SEE West Cork, the region has an increasing ability to optimise economic opportunities and increasing engagement in creating a regional future. The scenario pictures a prosperous, positive region without being a fairytale land. Some characteristics of this scenario are as follows:

Social

- Lower density with a desirable living environment
- Retention of youth, in-migration and immigration sees population West Cork reach historic high of 130 000
- Consolidation of services and improved infrastructure

Economic

- Self-sustaining, vibrant economy with a good quality of life
- Infrastructure for eco-tourism in place; third-level education
- Establishment of a recognised business 'centre' for West Cork.
- Innovation in West Cork promoted across Europe and globally under a West Cork 'brand'

Environmental

- Eco-recreation nature reserves
- Environmental policy specific to the region
- Model farms, allotments and permaculture
- Sophisticated recycling and green energy established

Future History of SEE West Cork

Fifteen years ago: 2015

By 2013 the West Cork region was addressing land-use planning on a regional basis with effective local area plans, based on a shared, community vision. These plans identified targets for eco-tourism, the development of sustainable, renewable energy, sustainable agricultural practices and the requirements for key, enabling infrastructure. One such local area plan resulted from co-operation between local businesses and the local community. This specified transport links, management plan for marine services and marketing of marine tourism and led to an increase in tourism. Non-political regional representation achieved some important breakthroughs and successfully leveraged funding from the EU and the exchequer. In 2014, wider ranges of third-level courses were delivered directly at a number of locations in West Cork, many for the first time. Enhanced Infrastructure for high-speed IT and communications was in place by the end of that year.

Ten years ago: 2020

By 2020, the transformation of the region was well underway. The region had become recognised for its quality and competitiveness in terms of eco-tourism and sustainable agriculture. Best practice farms integrating sustainable practices and protected environments were dotted across the region. Renewable energy was beginning to produce more of the base-load power due to wind, hydro and biomass energy. These were developed to fit with the other environmental, commercial and community land-uses. Infrastructure was also developed to support the goals of the community vision. This included better, energy efficient buildings. Housing for the ageing population was a particular focus, combined with more services for the elderly. There was also increased retention of youth in the region. The third-level courses, which commenced in 2014, had been developed specifically for West Cork needs. The availability of these educational and training opportunities saw an increase in the proportion of the region's youth remaining in the region.

Today: 2030

Today West Cork is a self-sustaining, vibrant economy with a good quality of life for all its citizens. The West Cork 'brand' is well established internationally as a single brand for the entire region; largely following the vision devised in 2012. The transformation of the region is a global model for environmental management combined with socially and environmentally responsible development (tourism, agriculture, fisheries, sustainable energy, traditional industries). The level of community cohesion and co-operation is a fine example for similar regions worldwide. Now, as the population has reached 130 000, the region faces new challenges. There is now increased pressure on hospitals and aged-care services. Extra childcare facilities and facilities and services for youth are needed to support the expanding population. Development is well underway on the next stage of eco-recreation nature reserves; new sustainable farming systems based; and sophisticated local energy production and recycling systems. The region is at the cutting edge of sustainable management and is an example of global best practice.

The Future History of SEE West Cork provides an interesting timeline of how this scenario could occur. Given the vision for the region is based on the future in the year 2030, it is worth considering how progress towards that future point-in-time might occur. Sometimes a vision is deemed unrealistic or unattainable at first glance, because the outcome looks too bold or audacious. This view may often fails to take account the timeframe, and what might reasonably be accomplished over a 20-year time horizon particularly where strategic planning is embedded and changes are incremental. The future history approach allows a way to see how large outcomes can be achieved by incremental progress over many years.

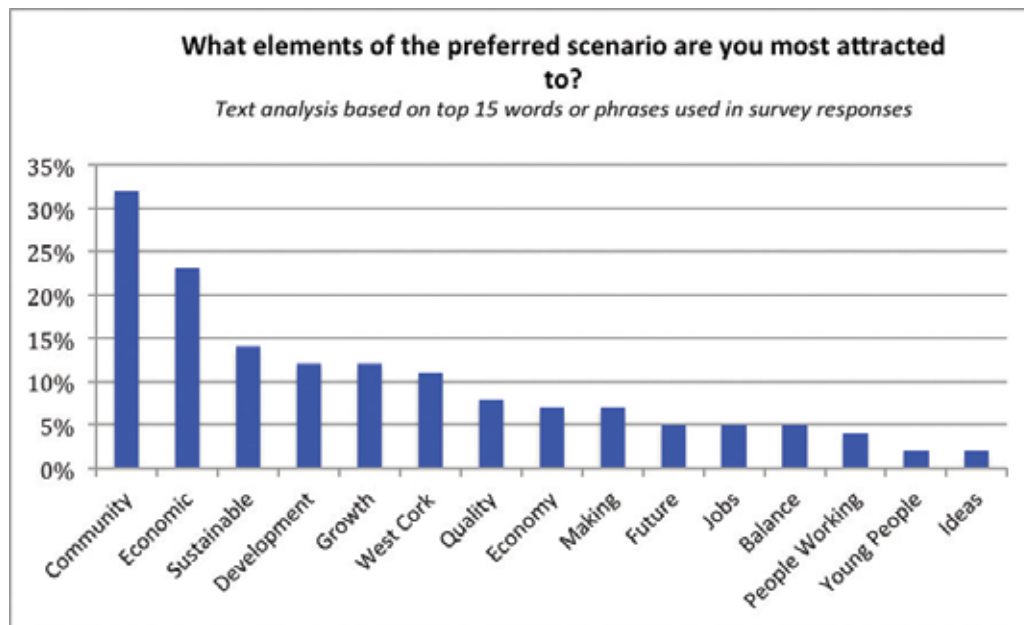
4.6 Text analysis and categories

In addition to the more quantitative survey questions, people were given the opportunity to record additional comments and thoughts, and therefore additional qualitative data was collected.

These survey questions were subjected to some relatively simple additional analysis including text analysis and category allocations. The text analysis extracted the most frequently used words or phrases in the open-ended survey questions, and the responses were allocated to categories to clearly define the intention and focus of what was expressed in the written responses.

Given that there was a very large percentage of people who chose the Scenario B, 'SEE West Cork', it can be concluded that almost all of the narrative was referencing aspects of that scenario.

Figure 8.

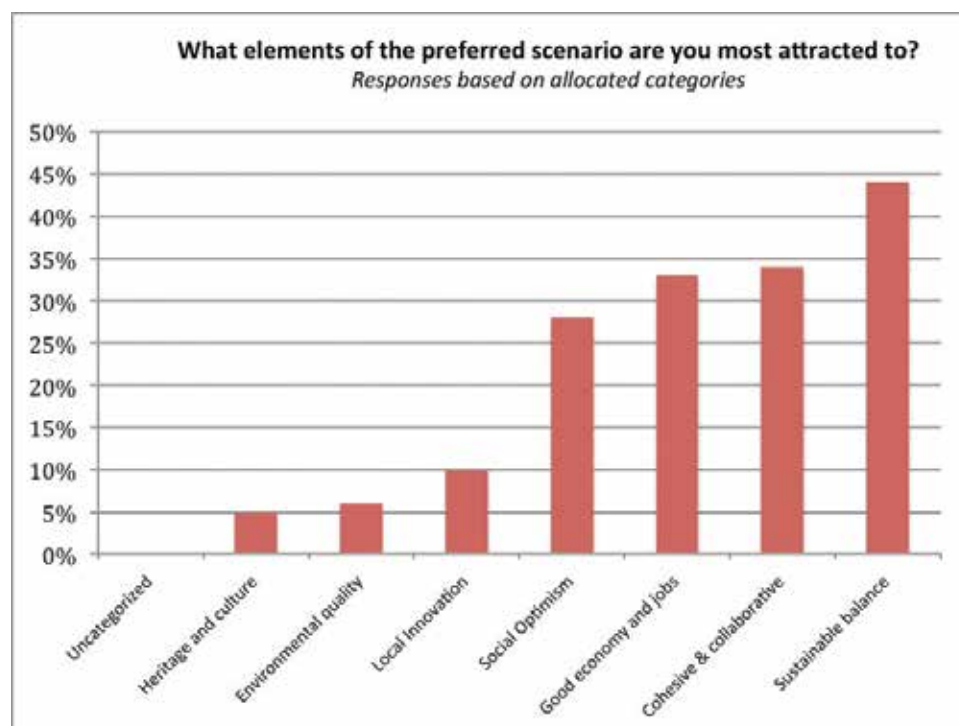


The notable aspect of this data is the very high level of reference to 'Community'. In the context of the answers, 'Sustainable' was referring in most cases to social and environmental, so it is interesting to note that Community was referenced well ahead of Economic and Environmental considerations at the basic word count level. However, if we combine the words and phrases Economic, Economy, Jobs, People Working – then it increases the relative emphasis of economic matters to be roughly equal to Community.

In addition to the straight text analysis of words and phrases, responses were coded into categories. The categories were constructed to capture the broad theme people were indicating in their narrative response. Each response could be coded to one or multiple categories, depending on the content of their response. The category titles were developed to reflect the repeated words and themes being used in the responses.

It is worth noting the words or phrases that were not included. The emphasis was generally more on tangible outcomes rather than on systemic outcomes and concepts such as leadership, innovation and creativity. This would indicate that people are not identifying the behaviours or cultural practices that would make the preferred outcome feasible.

Figure 9.



This analysis uses the same basic data as in Figure 8, but aims to look for more structured thematic phrases and ideals. In this way it cuts across individual language and responses and looks for the broad themes and desires being expressed in the responses.

There were many responses that generally talked about the importance of a sustainable approach based on triple bottom line principles (Economy, Society, Environment). Where these elements were not separated, the response was categorized under 'Sustainable balance', which in itself was a repeated phrase that was used. What is very clear is that this notion of a balanced approach to the future is very important in people's minds. There was an oft-expressed desire to avoid the perceived imbalance that occurred during the 'Celtic Tiger' years, when perhaps economic considerations were put ahead of community and environmental ideals.

The 'Social Optimism' was a category that included comments about what might be call a 'can-do' attitude, and included narrative on 'Quality of Life' issues. The 'Good economy and jobs' included comments about economic development, but also referenced the nature of the future economic opportunities, such as food and eco-tourism.

4.7 Key high-level words and phrases

The following high-level key words are drawn from the major scenario shaping axis, surveys (via text analysis) and data summary (via category formulations). They represent the repeated themes that have appeared through the context and content of the work done as part of the Future West Cork project.

- Sustainable
- Community
- Innovation
- Economic
- Environment
- Cohesion
- Balanced
- Engaged
- Optimise
- Future

This is not an exhaustive list, however it does reflect the very high desirability attributed to having a sustainable and balanced approach to the future development of the region. Overwhelmingly people expressed the desire to see a future that balanced the aspects of the triple bottom line, including the economy, environment and community / society.



4.8 Using the results to formulate the vision statement

Perhaps not surprisingly, the categories and text analysis reflect in many ways the two major axes, which shape the 'scenario space' of the preferred scenario (SEE West Cork). This can give comfort that people related to, and endorsed, the framework defined by the preferred scenario. In addition, language and phrases go a long way to helping articulate a local vision, which directly reflects and speaks to the language and themes repeatedly used by participants in the workshop discussions.

Given that there was such a high level endorsement of the preferred scenario, and the consistency of the importance of the key themes and words used by survey respondents, it is reasonable to use the scenario description as the basis for a detailed vision statement. Clearly, this resonated with people, and appeared to reflect aspirations of the local population.

In terms of the summary vision statement, this extracts a summary statement that attempts to encapsulate the essence or heart of the more detailed vision narrative. In crafting the summary statement, the unique features of the results from the public engagement process were integrated. This should in principle, provide a robust basis for defining an enduring and reflective vision statement that reflects the aspirations and ideals of the local population.

The West Cork Regional Vision statement, outlined in the following section, is based on the preferred scenario description and the additional qualitative and quantitative input received in the engagement phase.

4.9 West Cork Region – 2030 – Vision Statement

West Cork Region - Our Future Vision – 2030

Working together, we have created a progressive and renowned rural region of cohesive and engaged communities. Guided by the principles of balanced sustainability, our social, cultural, natural and economic assets are optimised through innovation and creativity, to achieve a vibrant future and improved quality of life for us all.

Economy and Industries

We have a vibrant, self-sufficient economy built on our highly regarded landscape and well-managed natural resources. There is a diverse mix of innovative businesses building on our established artisan food, agriculture, marine, sustainable forestry, and renewable energy industries. Our eco-tourism industry has grown, and our region is now a world-class destination for people wanting an authentic recreation and local food experience. We have built our creative economy, and our business culture encourages new entrepreneurs. This culture, and our local infrastructure, drives the technology sector that now provides many diverse, quality jobs and career paths for our people.

Community and Society

We have mastered the art of 'joined up thinking'. Our proud, engaged and vibrant villages and communities form the basis of our tight-knit social fabric and our cohesive region. Our leaders ensure the region is at the forefront of innovation and meaningful community engagement. We have a forward looking and optimistic culture that helps us deal powerfully with the many challenges in a changing world. Many of our region's young people choose to remain in the area. Our education system is producing fine students, who now have local access to third-level education, skills development and vocational training. We have retained the enviable 'West Cork feel' to our towns, villages and lifestyle.

Environment and Landscape

Because we have long cared about where we live, our region has adapted well to the increasing global concerns about landscape protection. Through our careful planning, the landscape has retained its intrinsic beauty and appeal. We know our future depends on what we do now, so we have created sophisticated systems to manage recycling, waste, flooding and emissions. Our renewable energy sector is our pride, and ensures our self-sufficiency. We have become masterful at carefully balancing development and growth with protection and preservation. This has allowed an easy marriage of economic prosperity and sustainability principles.

Heritage and Culture

We have always had a fierce pride of our region; now we have reason to smile. We have found our way out of the 'great recession' that followed the Celtic Tiger years. Our history and culture has been preserved, and we are finding new ways to tell our story and fulfil on our vision. We are once again regarded as 'the place to be' for aspiring musicians, artists and writers. Newfound optimism in our region draws back home our people from around the world. We have something to offer – hope in the future and a good life. Our schools are full, our villages are bustling, and our culture is intact.

5. Regional readiness for the future

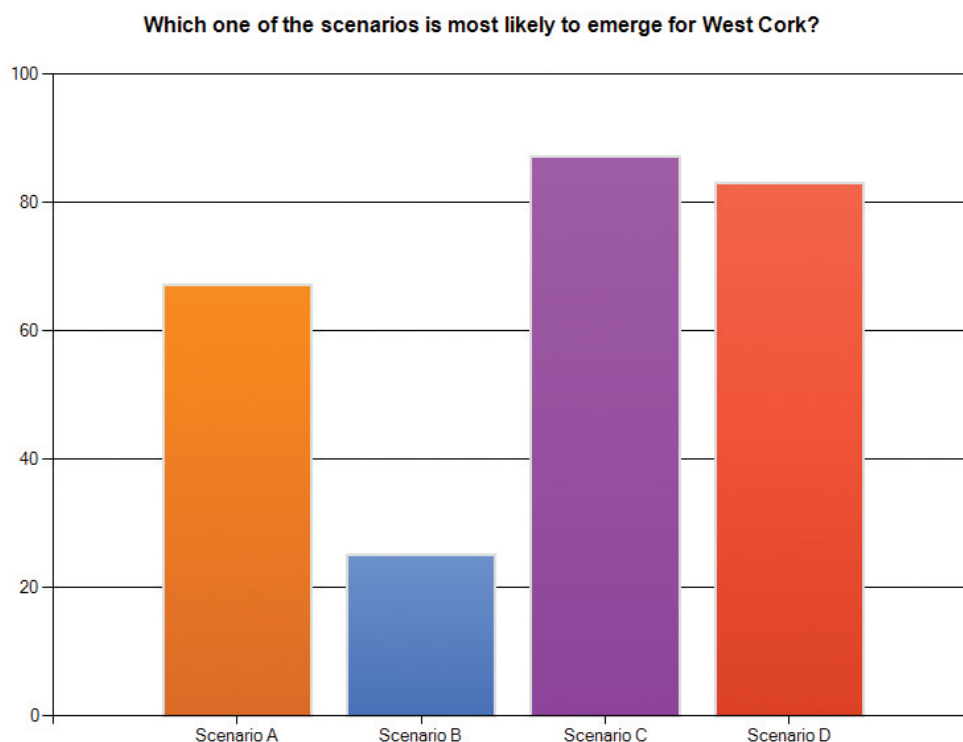
In the 'Future West Cork' initiative, the development of the vision is an important part, but perhaps even more important is the implementation of actions that begin to move the region towards the desired future. In this regard, some consideration of the existing or current capacity and interest to engage around the action planning and implementation phase is important.

The key issues to examine are the need, desire and capacity to take new actions. The results from the surveys and workshop exercises are reviewed here to explore these issues.

5.1 Likelihood of preferred future being achieved

During the workshops, participants were asked which scenario they preferred, and which scenario they thought was most likely to emerge or become reality, without significant interventions. In Figure 10, it can be seen that while Scenario B 'SEE West Cork' was the preferred scenario, it was considered the most unlikely scenario to eventuate. This represents a significant breakdown in 'future desire', and obviously the consequences of the preferred scenario not being achieved are significant. This disconnect can arguably be rooted in the social alienation experienced by the population, and a sense of resignation about the future. In order to overcome this disconnect, it will be important to demonstrate incremental success and progress, in order to build confidence that a new future is in fact possible for the region. This data can be used to create a compelling case for new action, and for new thinking in the region

Figure 10.



Scenarios C and D are both shaped by future decrease in the ability to 'Engage in shaping a regional future'. This is of important consideration when beginning to define key action steps. It would suggest that people consider the fundamental regional systems; especially around the theme of 'engagement in shaping a regional future', need to be re-assessed and perhaps strengthened.

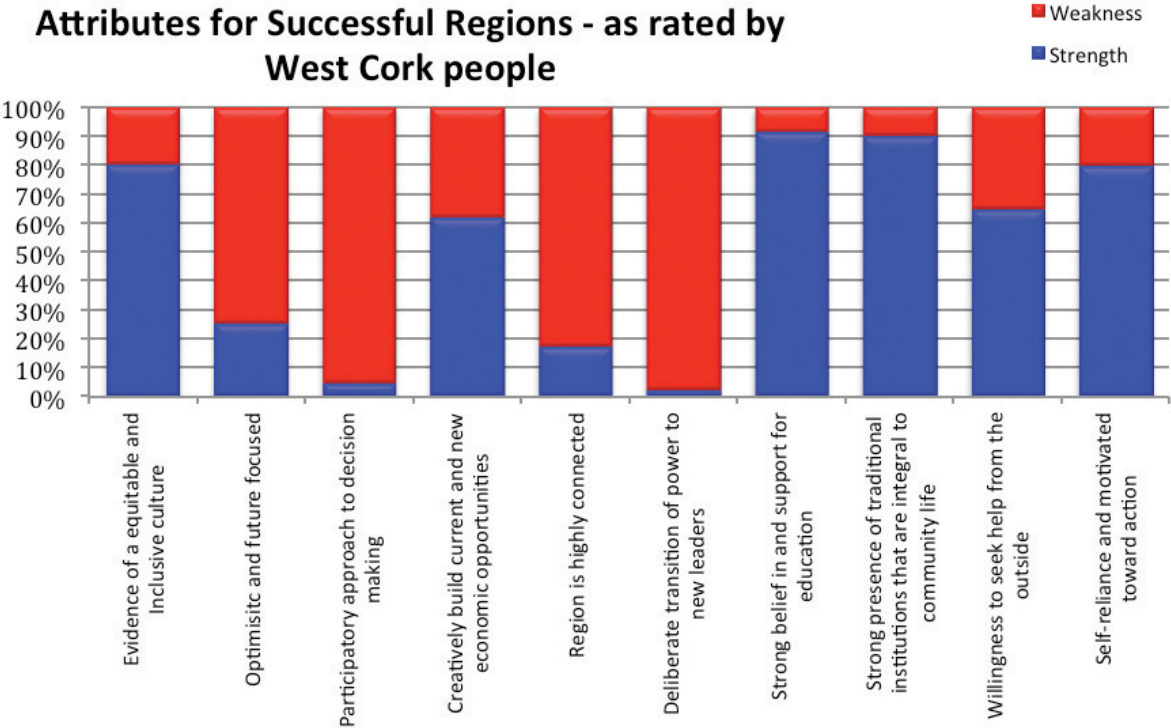
5.2 Regional community attributes

In terms of galvanizing a region towards a common future, it is important to consider the inherent capacity of the community to be able to work collectively on key issues. Considering and understanding the underlying systems in the region; that is, how people organize, collaborate and act, becomes an important metric to understand.

In the Future West Cork initiative, an analysis of the community against ‘Attributes of Successful Regional Communities’ was undertaken. These attributes were drawn from research and practitioner work in the USA and Europe, that looks at attributes that appear to have communities and regions be successful, compared to other similar regions.

Figure 11 summarizes the data collected from approximately 100 local regional stakeholders at the 10 October 2012 launch event for the Future West Cork week. People were given the opportunity to rate the region on each attribute as being ‘Strong’ or ‘Weak’ at that attribute.

Figure 11.



Understanding where the underlying strengths and weaknesses are can be of great assistance in designing capacity building programs. They can also help shape realistic action plans that have a high probability of success.

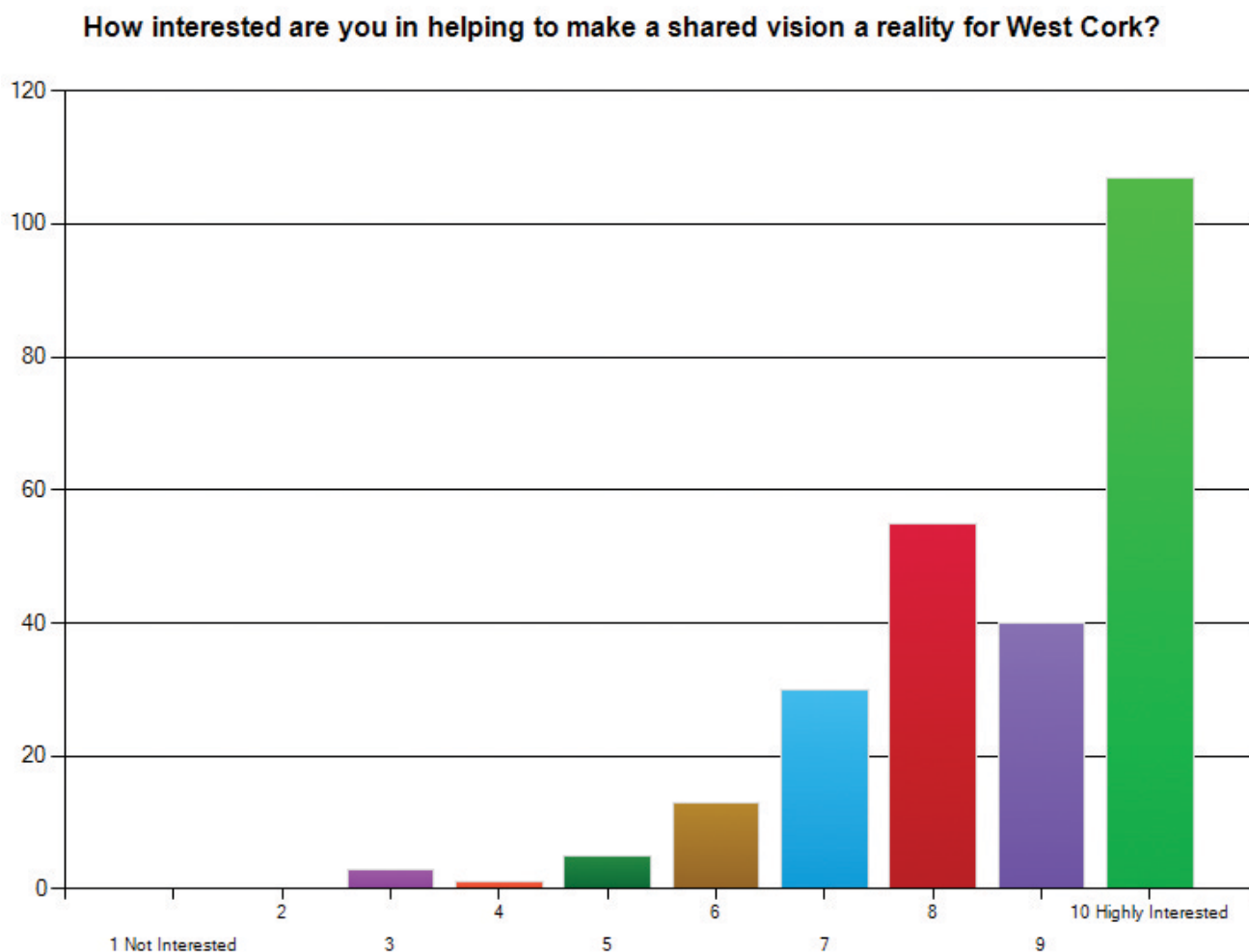
Key information from this data included:

- There are some good areas of strength in the region, specifically around traditional systems of education, institutions and a self-reliant attitude.
- There is a significant weakness in some attributes; all of which tend to be more future-focused. These were an attitude of being ‘Optimistic and future focused’; ‘Participatory approach to community decision making’ and ‘Region is highly connected’. These three elements are linked, in that they are largely about the capacity for engagement and collaboration.
- There is a notable weakness in the ‘Deliberate transition of power to new leaders’. This is a critical attribute, and points to an underlying need to build new leadership capacity and systems across the region.

5.3 Interest in making vision a reality

The survey results showed that there was a high level of interest expressed in being part of making the regional vision a reality. The level of interest is relatively high for such a regional initiative, and indicates that people are willing to step forward and be part of the process to convert vision to action. Harnessing this interest into sustained action will be the probable the challenge.

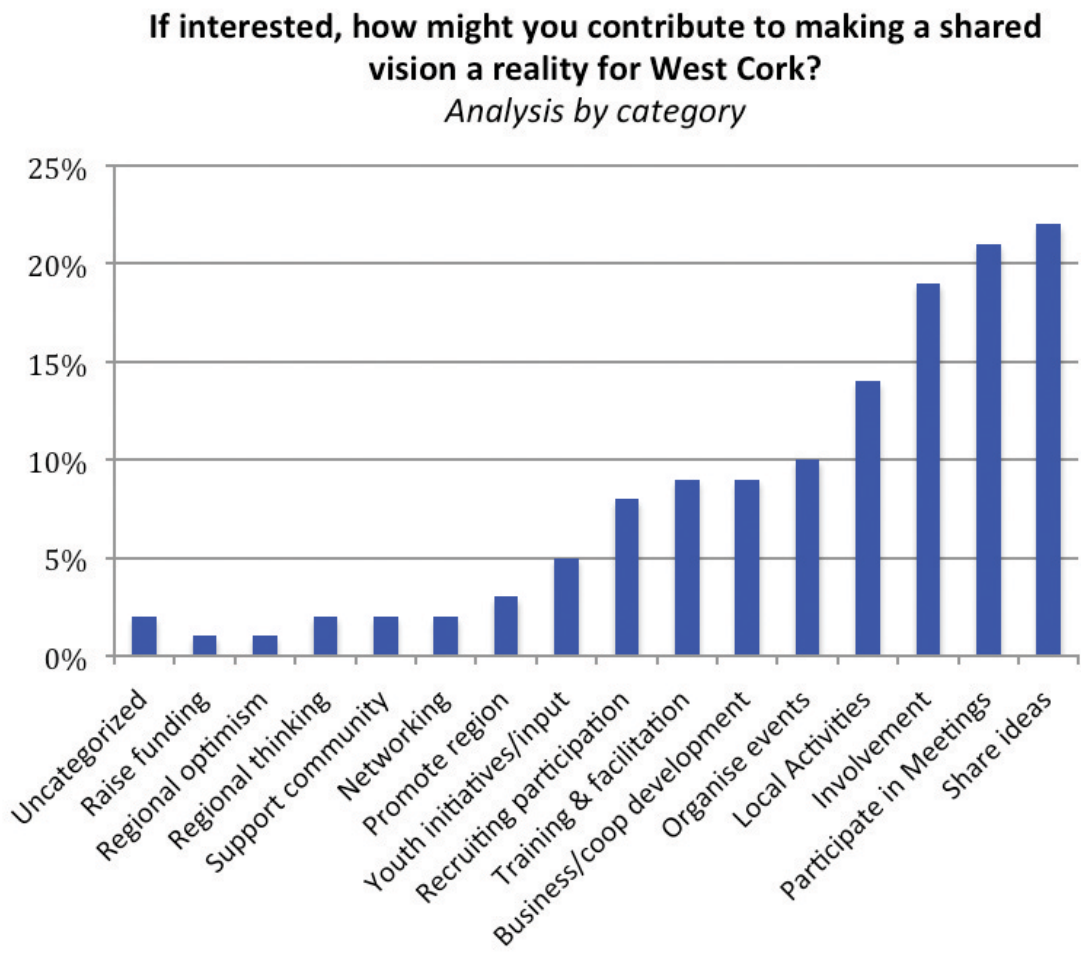
Figure 12.



5.4 How people want to contribute

Analysis was carried out of the written responses to examine where people saw they might be able to contribute to making a shared vision a reality. Figure 13 summarizes the responses as allocated to categories that reflect the themes within the responses.

Figure 13.



It is worthy to note that majority of responses were largely in the realm of participation and sharing in the discussion and ideas. There was less information on specific actions and initiatives that people saw they could contribute. This may reflect that people are willing and keen to be part of an on-going process, but may not actually know what to do. There is a clear challenge to connect people to key planning processes and to existing and emerging projects and efforts to initiate new actions. It can also reflect the view that this will be a community wide process, which will require the input and participation of many people.

It does reflect a great willingness, and the challenge will be to create meaningful avenues for people to participate and group together to take action, especially locally. This figure suggests that there is still an important role for the Future West Cork project to convene and guide people and groups into achievable actions steps.

5.5 Challenges in achieving the preferred future

To make this vision a reality will require hard work, resources and collective action. There will be a need to make trade-offs, and set priorities. Some of the challenges in creating this future a reality will likely include:

- Managing the tension between development and preservation
- Engaging people, leaders and organisations to share the vision
- Competition between parts of the region and between communities

- Changes in National Government and EU policies
- Reversing current high unemployment levels
- Creating opportunities so that young people stay in the region
- Finding the resources and enthusiasm to work on the long-term future
- Creating a positive, future focused mindset
- Multi-agency co-ordination and alignment of mutually supportive strategies

Some of the key areas to address, and questions to examine, include:

- **Building a Regional Community** - While the individual communities are close-knit, there is not yet a strong regional network between key people, organisations and agencies within the region. How does the region come together as a true regional community and share resources and ideas? How does the region create a culture of learning from each other's successes and ideas?
- **Preserving local heritage, culture and traditions in a globalised world** – The region has a proud history and strong heritage. How do the region further enhance and protect its heritage, when the world is becoming more globalised and immigration changes the cultural and population? How does the region keep young people connected to the region and their homeland? There is considerable scope to leverage and build on the proud national heritage, as is being done in 'The Gathering' concept being promoted for 2013 by Fáilte Ireland. In addition, the local culture and heritage is an important draw card to the tourism in the West Cork Region, and this has the potential to be further enhanced and expanded.
- **Keeping farming and fishing stay competitive** - The farming and fishing sectors are part of the social and landscape fabric. Increasing regulations and competition challenge these industries. How will these industries adapt, and what might they look like in the future? How do they keep adding value to the regions food-based industries?
- **Harnessing renewable energy capacity** – The region has an abundance of natural energy sources, including wind, water, tides and biomass. Oil based energy is expensive and challenges the future. Global trends are moving to renewable energy. How can the regions become energy independent, and even an energy exporter helping create new jobs?
- **Being optimistic about the future** - With high unemployment, large national debt and poor economic growth, it is hard to be optimistic. To create the future, the region will need to be future-focused and have an optimistic mindset. How do the regional leaders stay enthusiastic, and keep people engaged and working for the long haul?
- **Create strong local leadership** - Leadership and vision will be important to keep the region working together towards the future vision. How can we build our next generation of leaders? How do we best connect our region to the world to and harness new ideas and resources?
- **Create new jobs and businesses** - Innovation and new businesses drive the future regional economy. How does the region do this in a period of greater economic challenge? How can it create the jobs and industries that will give people a meaningful future, and fit into the vision?

5.6 Viability of the future vision

It is interesting to note that significant commentary was received during the engagement process about the viability of the preferred scenario 'SEE West Cork' and the future this depicts for the region. In playing The Future Game, people often commented that version that depicted this scenario was 'unrealistic', and that the preferred scenario was appealing, but 'would never happen'. This is also reflected in that only **10% of survey respondents** thought the SEE West Cork scenario was likely to eventuate, although **95% of people** said it was the preferred future.

In considering the viability of the future vision, it is important to consider the question 'Could this really happen?' This question was posed at the May 2010 scenario planning workshop, and the participants at that event concluded that the four scenarios developed were in fact plausible; that is, they could actually happen with a reasonable degree of realism.

To focus on the current articulation of the regional vision (presented previously in this report), it is useful to ask what tangible outcomes might reflect the vision in reality. Some of the tangible outcomes that actually have transpired, or might be happening could include the following; which are either directly or implicitly stated in that vision for the future.

Things that might be happening in 2030 – reflecting the vision

- Energy self sufficiency
- Local food systems
- Global reputation and brand
- Connected to the world
- Destination for adventure and recreation
- Third level education provision
- Engaged regional community
- Innovative new businesses
- Engaged young people
- Strong agriculture and fishing
- Exporting new products
- Optimum use of natural resources
- Vibrant socio-cultural activities
- Community responsibility and engagement in local development

It is worth noting that there is already a strong foundation within the region for the further development of these sectors and themes. The vision points to an economic future that is built largely on the natural resource based industries, such as agriculture, fishing, forestry, eco and food tourism and renewable energy. It is worth noting that these industries have currently endured a severe global financial crisis, and their current and future competitiveness is underpinned by long-term global trends. Some of these trends include:

- Global population growth, access to emerging BRIC markets, and the increasingly important need for food production and security. This will impact food-producing areas in a positive manner, and inflationary pressures on food are forecast to continue for the foreseeable future.
- Shifts to renewable energy sources, driven by needs for energy security, increasing oil-fuel costs, and policy changes in the European Union zone. These trends are likely to continue or intensify, and any region that has access to renewable energy sources of hydro, wave, solar, wind and biomass it likely to benefit.
- Emerging environmental consciousness worldwide is helping drive local food systems, eco-tourism and sustainability principles. Already, there are market premiums for 'green-food', renewable energy and sustainable industries.
- Global connectivity continues to increase at exponential rates, with developed countries expanding their fibre optic networks and high-speed connectivity. The advent of wireless broadband networks is allowing rapid deployment of new networks, especially in densely populated rural areas.

From an objective standpoint, it would appear that the foundations fundamental to make this vision a reality are largely in place, or are currently being developed. Some of current regional strengths include:

- There is an emerging recognition of the importance of 'joined-up thinking' within the region. This phrase was repeatedly heard through the engagement process, and represents an understanding of the need for collective action at a regional and sub-regional scale.
- The Fuchsia Brand has a long history, and has given a regional identity to the food and tourism industry.

This branding effort is regarded by many as one of the most successful attempts of its kind in the world. There is considerable potential to further develop this brand and promote the recognition and appeal of the region in important tourism markets. Trends that support nature-based and eco-tourism are well established and play to important competitive advantages in the region.

- The West Cork environment is clean and there are abundant natural resources and renewable energy potential. Advances in technology for wind energy, mini-hydro power generation plants, and bio-fuels and biomass energy production hold great potential for the region.
- Innovative businesses already exist and are growing. The region has been successful with technology parks, high value foods, unique tourism offerings and mainstream natural resource based industries.
- West Cork people have a history of being proud of their communities, heritage and culture. This provides a basis to create the sense of a regional community, and to connect people to an ambitious future vision.
- Broadband services are expanding across the region, closing the 'digital divide'. The region is rapidly becoming more connected to the world, and this is supported with a high quality airport and port infrastructure in the nearby Cork City.

Importantly, there is evidence that projects are already being developed and initiated that directly link to the future vision, providing tangible evidence that the vision is indeed feasible and attainable. A small sample of these include:

- Walking trails – there are a number of individual projects which are linking existing routes together, creating a larger regional network that could further stimulate interest in eco and food trails.
- Farmer groups are looking to supply energy to food and tourism industry using renewable energy such as biomass.
- The advent of a Third Level Horticulture Course now being offered at Liss Ard Estate via University County Cork (UCC) is a very tangible demonstration of an element of the future vision.
- There are many new community projects and local events that exist or are being started, that create a rich social fabric and enhanced quality of life.
- Regional thinking is emerging, as demonstrated by the regional approach to provision of Rapid Response Emergency Services.
- West Cork has been identified as one of ten key tourism destinations in Ireland. Currently projects are being developed on regional heritage trails, again demonstrating 'joined-up thinking'. This approach, under the working title 'Rebel Trail' connects events such as the Michael Collins festival and documentary, and the regional connection to the War of Independence.
- Current research being commissioned on future skills and vocational training needs for the local economy.

This rationale should give comfort to a view that the future vision is both plausible and attainable. Key long-term strategic action areas have been identified in this process. These provide a useful starting point to begin working to steer the region towards the preferred future. However, the scepticism expressed by some that the future vision 'would never happen' will need to be addressed. Providing tangible evidence of progress, and how this links to the vision, will be critical.

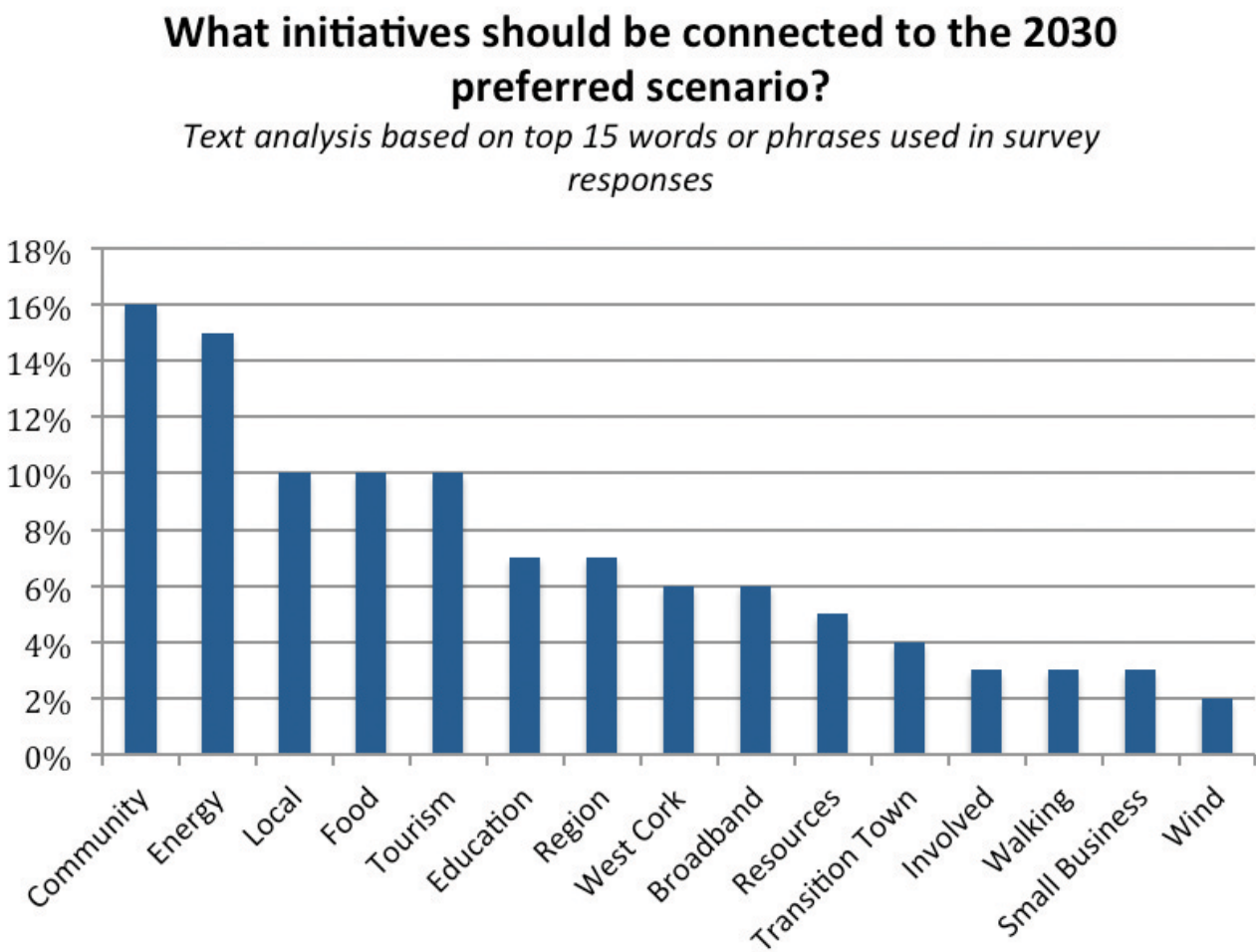
6. Strategic Action Planning

An important following step to the visioning stage of the Future West Cork initiative is action planning. West Cork Development Partnership, and other key organizations have indicated a desire to align funding and programme support to key action areas emerging from the visioning process. Indeed this focus on future thinking prompted the Regional Visioning project. Some analysis has been done on the data from survey responses to understand how the community views action being connected to the vision, either to support the vision or to ‘fill gaps’.

6.1 Initiatives to support the vision

Survey respondents were asked what initiatives they believed should be connected to the 2030 preferred scenario. This question explores what are the practical actions and projects that would be seen to support the vision, and begin to drive the region towards the preferred vision.

Figure 14.



In terms of the text analysis based on most repeated words and phrases, it can be seen that ‘Community’ is highly rated. This was often in the context of local community projects and points to the understanding of the advantage of connecting local projects to larger regional initiatives. Also, this analysis begins to point to very specific initiative areas that people see consistent with building the desired future. There is a strong focus on local energy and renewable energy production, and building local food and tourism economies.

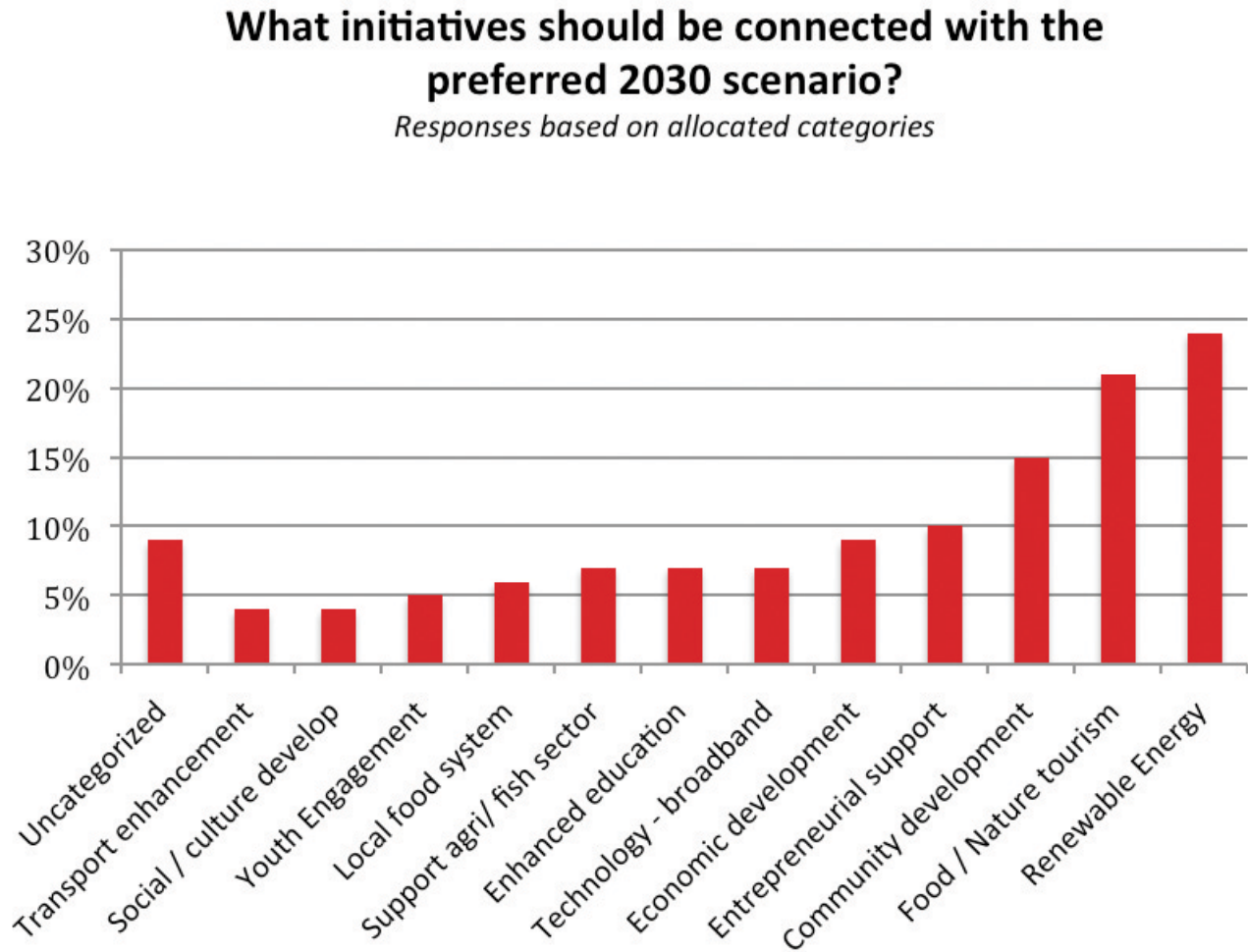
Apart from building on established and emerging local strengths, the process has thus far not yielded “game changers” or particularly new thinking in identifying “new” possibilities for the regional economy. In some ways, this is not unexpected, as an environment of economic hardship and restraint will typically temper ‘future-thinking’. However, it might also suggest there is a need to engage in some way in additional future thinking and explore ideas and approaches not yet being considered by the broader regional community.

In addition to the text analysis, all of the responses were categorized to examine recurring themes. Again, some very specific themes emerged that indicate where people believe effort should be directed towards in order to help achieve the preferred scenario and vision. The specific areas identified connect well with the broad scenario axis, but also point to high reward or high leverage areas. It also highlights the recurring themes of:

- Renewable and sustainable energy
- Food and local food systems
- Eco or nature-based tourism
- Community development
- Entrepreneurial support
- Economic development

In addition these analysis help deepen the understanding of what people want to see in a vision and future, with quite specific themes such as Youth engagement and Technology/Broadband infrastructure.

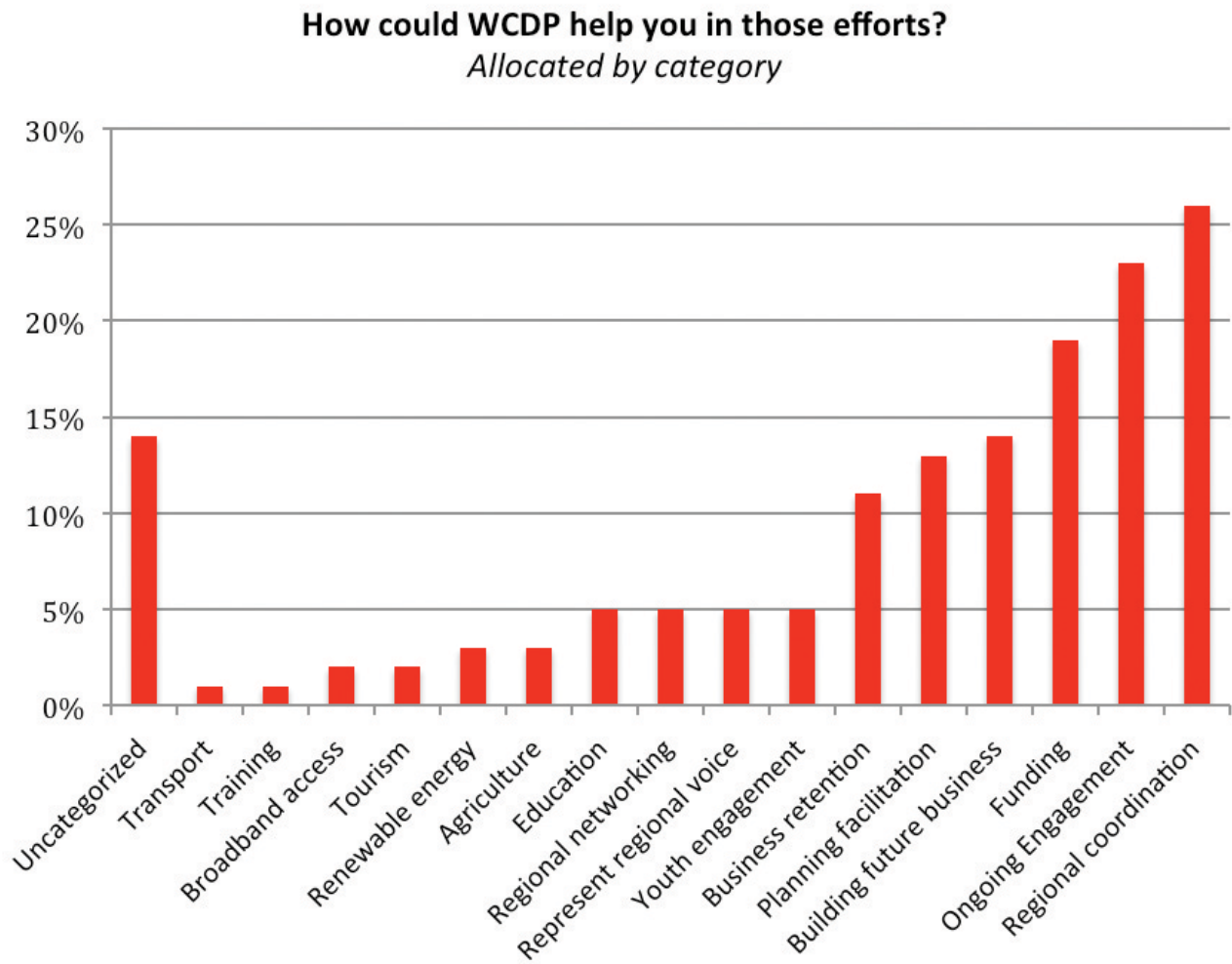
Figure 15.



6.2 Support suggested from West Cork Development Partnership (WCDP)

Survey respondents were also asked what support from WCDP would be useful in assisting the region, and their own individual or community efforts. This question was asked as WCDP has aligned its development programmes to assist the region continue with the development of the Future West Cork initiative over the medium term. Figure 16 lists the responses as allocated by category.

Figure 16.



Note: Uncategorized responses largely consisted of neutral answers such as “don’t know”.

It is worth noting that the word ‘leadership’ was seldom stated in the responses, even though it is implicit, and in fact one of the noteworthy attribute weaknesses in the region was the transition of power to new leaders (see Figure 11.). It may be a cultural aversion to the term ‘leadership’, or a lack of recognition of what grass-roots leadership reflects. It would however be important to continue to develop leadership capacity building in any regional action plan, in addition to the more obvious actions as identified in the survey analysis.

7. Recommendations for Action

7.1 Role of West Cork Development Partnership

In examining the responses by category, it is evident there is a very strong mandate for the WCDP to provide development support for the following themes:

Co-ordination and leadership role – key identified roles include regional co-ordination, on-going engagement, planning facilitation, youth engagement and the representation of a coherent and unified regional voice. Clearly people are seeing the need for a central co-coordinating role, and the need to continue with the engagement and future thinking process.

Building innovative business – key roles were identified around building future business, business retention and support to targeted sectors and industries (tourism, food, renewable energy, technology, agriculture, innovative services, etc)

The WCDP has access to important LEADER and other programmes to support this process. The LEADER funding places a high importance on the multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approaches. The proposed EU cohesion policy post 2013 has a strong focus on Community Led Local Development, which aims to support programmes and initiatives that demonstrate strong foundations in community engagement and local identification of key priority actions.

Given that the WCDP was the initiator and host entity for the Future West Cork initiative; it is in some ways not surprising they were seen as having a key regional leadership role. However, it is worth noting that no other alternative leadership vehicle or entity was referenced during the process. This may reflect that WCDP is seen as the only viable leadership group to lead a region building process. The WCDP is seen as having the resources, expertise and mandate to lead a region-building programme for the future of the region. There are some observations that should be considered:

- The acknowledgement of the WCDP role reflects its current and future effectiveness and remit, and the financial and non-financial resources it can bring to such an endeavour.
- Over-dependence on one entity is likely to limit the capacity for progress. An undertaking such as large-scale region building requires the active participation and focus of many organisations, especially public entities.
- Systemic change within the region requires that the responsibility for necessary incremental long-term actions be shared. It is unlikely, and unreasonable to expect, that only one organisation would have the remit, resources, capacity or ability to be able execute such a plan at a regional scale.
- Implicit in this mandate is a lack of confidence amongst the broader community in the willingness or ability of long established public agencies, development bodies and local authorities to engage in and support such an initiative

Recommendations

- **The West Cork Development Partnership assumes the mandate of being the initial convener within the region to bring strategic partners and community leaders together to shape a detailed action plan. WCDP has access to important LEADER programme resources post 2013 that will provide considerable support to Community led development efforts on a local and regional scale.**
- **Key entities within the region, including public sector and local government engage in the process, and align their responses to support the emerging regional vision**
- **West Cork Development Partnership continues to focus on the areas of key expertise it has, such as capacity building and entrepreneurial innovation work. It has an unrivalled ability for direct resourcing of a range of innovative community and enterprise actions.**

7.2 Capacity Building and Leadership Development

A key thematic driver to achieve the preferred vision is 'Engagement in Creating a Regional Future'. This implies having the leadership and social capacity within the region to bring people together and build the cohesive coalitions toward a true regional community and identify.

The project and the data analysis revealed a very tangible gap in this type of leadership capacity within the region. This has been highlighted by community surveys and in workshop commentary. This is reflected in the way many communities do not immediately see themselves as part of the region, and their first focus is to look after themselves. Regional connectivity is currently weak within West Cork. The social network analysis element of the Future West Cork project identified an over reliance on the WCDP, its staff and development initiatives, and as well as a general lack of a highly developed network of people collaborating on initiatives or sharing information. However, there are some effective networks forming around specific issues, such as recreation tourism, food tourism and sustainability efforts. It is also reflected in the weakness identified in being able to be 'future-focused'; that is, looking to the future in an optimistic manner. This is a cultural issue, and needs to be considered. Much has been written about the experience of 'social alienation' that is endemic within the current Irish culture. This phenomenon is expressed, as widespread discontentment amongst the population that they have been 'let down' by the leadership, and in fact are powerless to act or change the system. This is reflected in the survey data, which shows a disparity between the clarity of identifying a preferred vision, but believing that it is extremely unlikely to be achieved.

The data also reveals that people generally struggle to identify specific actions or innovations that can be undertaken to contribute to the vision being fulfilled over time. They can identify the vision they want, but lack the knowledge and experience or understanding as to their role in making it a reality. This is a capacity gap and the survey data further indicated people are more than willing to be part of a process to build a regional future and strive towards the vision.



Recommendations

- **Continue to develop regional leadership and capacity building programmes, which can start to build the skills and capacity in collaborative leadership. This should aim to better equip existing leaders and also create a new cohort of grass-roots leadership across the region.**
- **Create new networks and alliances at both community and enterprise level across the region, by using the network maps to identify and build focus groups that can begin to work collaboratively on new initiatives connected to the future vision.**
- **Continue the process of building regional confidence and a future focus. Aside from a range of community and enterprise development initiatives that will continue to be supported by the WCDP over the medium term linked to the Future West Cork initiative, ideas such as awards programmes, study tours and community-building programmes can help build the knowledge and inspiration needed to empower community groups to think more creatively and enact new initiatives.**

7.3 Economic Innovation

A key thematic driver to achieve the preferred vision is 'Ability to Optimise Economic Opportunities'. This implies being able to identify new economic opportunities and business ventures that are sympathetic with the overall tenor and the embedded values of the preferred vision.

There were a number of economic development areas identified from the survey data collected during the Future West Cork initiative. These included:

- Renewable Energy
- Food and local food systems
- Nature based tourism
- Technology
- Innovative services
- Value adding in food and fishing industries

There is considerable potential to see new or renewed economic innovation in all these areas. These areas all build on the historic strengths and economic innovation capacity already embedded in the region. Initiatives, such as the Fuchsia Brand, have built an existing capacity and examples for how to build entrepreneurial new ventures, and how to connect economic innovation across sectors. In addition, the Fuchsia Brand has significant market penetration and recognition. This can continue to be a catalyst for significant future development.

In particular, the very strong focus on renewable energy in survey responses is to be noted. This would indicate a high degree of public interest and acceptance. Experience elsewhere in the world suggests that significant economic activity and advantage could be achieved by building the regions renewable energy capacity and expertise. The West Cork Development Partnership has a long and successful history in providing support and resources for economic innovation. This is complemented by new proposals already being funded, which support projects consistent with this element of the future vision.

Recommendations

- **The continued development and expansion of The Fuchsia Brand to capture and represent key shared values for the region. The tagline 'A place apart' has great appeal, and the brand must evolve to become the primary signifier and identifier for the region.**
- **Funding programs in the region, from the WCDP and other entities should seek to connect grant programmes and calls for proposals to directly link to the future vision.**
- **Cluster groups or working groups, drawing on key partners and stakeholders, should be formed around each of the key identified broad areas of opportunity. For example, cluster groups around renewable energy and nature-based tourism could help facilitate 'joined up thinking' in these promising areas of economic activity.**

8. CONCLUSION

The Future West Cork initiative represented an ambitious attempt to draw together the regional population to define a shared future vision. Whist the initiative was not without its challenges, it has successfully built a solid foundation for the region to move forward with the important work of ‘future-building’. It has been successful at engaging the regional population, and articulating a shared vision. This creates the foundation for a robust and widely supported regional plan. It paints the ‘broad brush strokes’ of an emerging picture of the future, with indication of priority action areas. This has been a dynamic process, and while more details need to be ‘filled-in’, the overarching framework has been created. Important actions have been defined, and together with the recommendations; provide the basis for meaningful next steps.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many people across the West Cork region gave generously of their time during the planning and engagement phases of the Future West Cork initiative. To those people, we acknowledge their desire for a better future for the region. The staff at the West Cork Development Partnership undertook much of the hard work of convening and coordinating this initiative. In particular, we acknowledge the leadership and work by Ian Dempsey, Ivan McCutcheon, Lisa Cashman and David Tuohy.





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West Cork
DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP



Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government



Future iQ Partners worked with the West Cork Development Partnership to design and implement the Future West Cork initiative. For more information see www.future-iq.com.

Future WestCork

let's talk!

THE FUTURE IS OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Future West Cork is an initiative designed to bring West Cork communities together to discuss their ideas about how the region will develop into the future, and to create a shared regional vision.

As the world changes, more and more responsibility for the future is being passed down to a local and regional level. Many of our small communities and businesses are unlikely to have the capacity or resources to deal with the challenges of the future alone. By coming together as a regional community, and creating our shared vision, we can build the critical mass of thinking and resources to take charge of our own future. This will help us take the collective actions to create future prosperity across the region, and build the vibrant communities we all want.



FUTURE WEST CORK - NEXT STEPS

Key long-term strategic action areas have now been identified. These provide a useful starting point to begin working to steer our region towards the preferred future.

Public input has identified a number of key priority action areas, including:

- Renewable energy
- Food sector and local food systems
- Eco and nature-based tourism
- Community building and leadership
- Building innovative businesses
- Youth and education
- Technology
- Agriculture and fishing sectors

HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF OUR REGION

During the Future West Cork Initiative, many residents and organisations said they wanted to continue to be part of the conversation, and be actively involved in making the vision a reality. Already, we are seeing new projects and ideas coming forward that are connected to the emerging regional vision.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED

For more information on the Future West Cork initiative, or to get more background on the regional visioning process please visit our website www.futurewestcork.com or contact:

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