

Summary of submission to the International awards for liveable communities

Living on an island can be challenging. In this submission we have tried to capture how the community living on Inis Oirr, a small coastal island of the west coast of Ireland, have managed to survive and thrive on this rocky outcrop. To do this, the community have had to manage for themselves, organise things for themselves, while seeking support and resources from those on the mainland but leading the development of their island themselves.



Photo 1: The islanders sustain and foster their traditions for both themselves and for visitors to the island

We show how the islanders have shaped their island for generations in harmony with the natural landscape. How they preserve traditions and then showcase them for visitors who can only imagine how the island community has survived living on the edge of the harsh atlantic. We try to highlight the respect that the islanders have for their unique habitat and how the islanders are leading the way in showing how communities can organise themselves to live in a more sustainable manner adopting new technology and harnesses the renewable energy that surrounds them.

The Island is a heartland for the Irish Language. It is the functional language of the islanders, with English only being used to deal with visitors. The islanders have turned their native language into a resource that provides income and jobs through the hosting of Irish Language schools for young and old. These residential courses require students to stay on the island for periods of up to 3 weeks, providing a valuable source of income for the islanders.



Photo 2: Living on a small island has made the islanders think sustainably for generations. Fresh water is scarce on the island and this picture shows the traditional manner on how the islanders have practiced rain water harvesting to provide drinking water for livestock.

Living on an island forces people to be adaptable and in our full submission we have tried to show how creative and innovative the islanders have been in dealing with a changing world, be it working with Third level colleges to find ways to improve the return from Lobster fishing, or introducing energy efficiency initiatives to reduce the cost of living for the islanders or working with a broadband service provider to ensure that the islanders have access to broadband services that often exceed that on offer to those living on the mainland.

To be adaptable and innovative, a group needs to be organised and the islanders are very organised. To do this, they have established an Island Co-operative which is the vehicle that the islanders use to organise themselves and get things done. The Co-operative is organised in an equitable manner with all members having one vote. This Co-operative undertakes the strategic and annual planning for projects on the island be these the development of vital infrastructure or the provision of public services.

We have also listed the extensive range of services and infrastructure that the islanders have developed for themselves through their co-operative, which includes, school buildings, a public health centre, sports facilities, a playground, activities for older people, swimming and lifesaving classes, festivals and promotional initiatives to name but a few.



Photo 3: Living on an island is not always easy, even getting off the boat sometimes can be challenging, if impossible.

There is a pride amongst islanders that comes from their ability to live in such a remote area for so many generations. This life requires some sacrifices but offers great rewards. The pride of the islanders is shown in the festivals and events that they stage throughout the year which promote their beautiful environment, through walking festivals, their unique culture, through arts festivals and irish courses, their wonderful heritage, through wall building conferences and currach racing.



Photo 4 This is a spectacular place to live

Our full submission has tried to capture how a small community are thriving on a remote island in a sustainable manner. To be able to do this, the community have had to do things for themselves and identify what resources are available to them and harness these in a sustainable and often creative manner to derive maximum benefit from them. Bringing things to an island is often complicated. Being at least one boat trip away from everything presents a challenge and people who live on the mainland will not appreciate how this can complicate everything from getting medical attention to buying an outfit for a special occasion to buying a tractor for the farm. People on the island have to plan ahead. They have to make maximum use of their trips to the mainland and make these trips multipurpose as they are timeconsuming.



Photo 5: Working together is how things get done.

From our full submission we hope you get a greater understanding of island life. We have tried to provide an insight to the dynamic and self sustaining community that is found on Inis Oirr. Although isolated by water, this community is open, welcoming and developing. They manage their own affairs in an effective and inclusive manner but also engage with the wider world so that they can sustainably maintain their island way of living. There is no doubt that island life will continue on Inis Oirr for many generations to come.



Photo 6: The Islanders are very good at promoting the great resources that they have.