Table of contents

List of figures

List of abbreviations

AO   Atlantic Organics

CEO   Chief Executive Officer

EU   European Union

GB   Green Box

IT   Information Technology

WDC   Western Development Commission

WDTP   Western Development Tourism Programme

WITW   Walking in the West

WON   Western Organic Network

WOSI   Western Organic Strategic Initiative

WTT   Walking Through Time

Foreword

The importance of working strategically in networks and partnerships has been advocated in many recent reports.[1] For example, the NESC has highlighted the important role that 'regional development coalitions' (enterprises, development agencies, third level institutions, local authorities and others) play in strengthening innovation and promoting regional development.[2]

The Western Development Commission, in line with its remit to foster and promote economic and social development in a predominantly rural region, has developed a proactive approach to rural development which involves such networking and partnership. This approach has been used to stimulate initiatives in the organic agri-food, rural tourism and renewable energy sectors.

The WDC approach to rural development involves working collaboratively with the private, state and community sectors to facilitate and implement innovative and strategic development projects. This entails bringing all the stakeholders together to develop a shared strategy for the development of a particular sector, supported by objective research and analysis. An action plan is then set out in a blueprint for development and the WDC facilitates its implementation, in partnership with the other stakeholders. As the sector's development progresses the WDC gradually disengages from its 'hands on' role. In parallel with this process the WDC also engages at national level to input the regional experience into national policy making.

In this report the WDC presents the approach, the critical success factors and key challenges faced throughout implementation of the model and the outputs (case studies of organic agri-food (Atlantic Organics) and rural tourism (Western Development Tourism Programme)).

This document is relevant to community groups, the private sector, local authorities and all government departments and state agencies. One of the reasons why we prepared this report was to document how this approach has worked and to share the experience and expertise built up.

With the preparation of Ireland's National Development Plan 2007-2013 and Ireland's Rural Development National Strategy Plan 2007-2013 ongoing, 2006 is an opportune time to document new ways of supporting the development of the rural economy. Through submissions to these Plans and meetings at national policy and agency level the WDC influences policy change that supports this type of proactive development of the rural economy. The WDC firmly believes that support for the development of the rural economy must be central to the remit of all departments and state agencies.

On behalf of the WDC, I wish to thank past and current WDC members and WDC Sector Councils and those stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors, regionally and nationally, who ensured the implementation of blueprint actions. I also wish to thank current and past WDC staff – each and every one of whom had a role to play in ensuring that the WDC Model of Rural Development was implemented successfully. The report was prepared for the WDC by Dr. Siobhan Carney. Dr Carney's professionalism and expertise is greatly appreciated. I also wish to thank Mr. Éamon O'Cuív, T.D., Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, other Ministers (current and previous) and our parent department, all of whom, who have been so supportive of all aspects of our rural development work.

Lisa McAllister
CEO, Western Development Commission

---

1   National Economic and Social Council (2005), NESC Strategy 2006: People, Productivity and Purpose; Enterprise Strategy Group (2004), Ahead of the Curve: Ireland's Place in the Global Economy; Border, Midland, West Regional Assembly (2005), New Challenges, New Opportunities: Report of the Border, Midland and Western Regional Foresight exercise 2005-2025
2   National Economic and Social Council (2005), NESC Strategy 2006: People, Productivity and Purpose; Enterprise Strategy Group (2004) (p.122)

Executive Summary

The Western Development Commission (WDC), established in 1998, is a statutory agency responsible for fostering economic and social development in the Western Region of Ireland.[3] The WDC works in cooperation with national, regional and local bodies to secure the development of the Western Region. The activities of the WDC involve policy analysis and development, undertaking key regional initiatives and managing the WDC Investment Fund (www.wdc.ie).

The WDC developed its Model of Rural Development in response to a need to discover, mobilise, improve and add value to the resources available in the Western Region. The Model represents an innovative approach to Rural Development which has been implemented successfully across a number of sectors in the Western Region of Ireland.

Many of the development initiatives which the WDC, and its partners, have implemented since 1998 are presently emerging as strategic rural development priorities for rural areas across Ireland and the European Union (EU). Thus, the WDC Model of Rural Development can be incorporated into the design and development of new rural development measures/programmes at national and EU level.

The WDC approach to rural development is achieved by acting as an 'honest broker' in the development process. In doing this the WDC works collaboratively with the private, state and community sectors to facilitate and implement successful, innovative and strategic development projects.

The WDC Model of Rural Development is distinguished by its commitment to a number of core elements including:

▲ establishing a partnership and consultation process
▲ developing trust between the partners
▲ fostering effective leadership and capacity building
▲ active participation in development projects
▲ strategic planning
▲ achieving 'buy in' at regional and national level
▲ identifying the right time to disengage from the more active 'hands on' role in the development process to a more support/advisory role.

There are seven steps to implementing the WDC Model of Rural Development. These are:

step one: bring together stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors for inclusion in a partnership and consultation process

step two: establish a shared framework for development by identifying a vision, objectives and strategies for the development of specific sectors of activity

step three: build a knowledge base by conducting sound research, analysis and consultation, to determine strategic priorities and recommendations for the development of a specific sector of activity

step four: produce a blueprint for a specific sector of activity which recommends policy changes and presents an action plan for development

step five: establish a multi-agency steering group and/or facilitate private sector led strategic projects for each sector of activity, to oversee and manage the implementation of the recommendations set out in a blueprint for development

step six: implement recommendations set out in a blueprint for development at regional level

step seven: ensure blueprint recommendations are taken into account in the preparation, development and ongoing implementation of national policy.

Although the WDC Model of Rural Development is described as a seven-step approach to development, seldom will development be achieved in such a linear fashion. During the implementation of each step in the development process, the development practitioner will encounter challenges which may require revisiting earlier steps in the Model prior to progressing along the development path.

---

3   The Western Region includes counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare.

A proactive and participatory Model of Rural Development

The WDC's role in the development process

- Foster the will to drive the development process
- Identify a suitable time to disengage from the 'hands on' role to support/advisory role
- Awareness of external environment constraints
- Participate on project management committees
- Provide administrative and technical support
- Build social capital
- Provide dedicated policy development and rural development personnel
- Bring stakeholders together
- Identify natural resources with potential for development

The core elements of the WDC Model of Rural Development

- Representation on regional and national committees to ensure blueprint recommendations complement national policy
- Disengagement from 'hands on' role to support/advisory role
- Strategic planning
- Facilitating conditions for strategic development
- Actively participating in projects
- Fostering effective leadership and capacity building
- Establishing trust and identifying the role of each partner
- Commitment to partnership and consultation

Step 7: national implementation

Step 6: Regional implementation

Step 5: Establish a steering group to drive development

Step 4: Produce a blueprint for development

Step 3: Build a knowledge base

Step 2: Establish a shared framework for development

Step 1: Partnership and consultation

During the design and implementation of the WDC Model of Rural Development, many lessons have been learned, and knowledge gained, which can provide guidance to other development practitioners and/or implementing agencies. The successful implementation of the WDC Model of Rural Development depends upon a number of critical factors which include: the establishment of a strong partnership to guide the development process, the importance of a participatory research and consultation process to determine local, regional and national priorities for development, the development of a solid knowledge base to inform the research process and the significance of achieving local and national commitment to the development process.

Many challenges will be encountered during the implementation of the WDC Model of Rural Development which may affect the development process. These include:

▲ the length of time it takes to implement a development process

▲ achieving local and national commitment to development proposals

▲ establishing a knowledge base in the absence of credible data

▲ developing positive inter-organisational relationships between partners

▲ limited human and financial resources for development

▲ unanticipated external environmental constraints such as national and EU level policy changes, economic downturns and so on

▲ identifying the right time to disengage from the more active 'hands on' role in the development process.

Despite these constraints the WDC has successfully implemented the Model of Rural Development across a number of sectors in the Western Region of Ireland, and, undoubtedly, this Model can be applied to other sectors and regions in Ireland, Europe and further afield. The key outputs of this work are included in the case studies in Section four of this document.

The WDC remains committed to implementing the Model across additional sectors in the Western Region, so that more vibrant, diversified, strategic and sustainable projects are developed in the Western Region of Ireland.

Section One:

Introduction

Section one: Introduction

Background to the Western Development Commission

The Irish government established the Western Development Commission (WDC) in 1998 to promote and foster economic and social development, and to give voice to the many issues, challenges and changes impacting the Western Region.[4] The impetus for the establishment of the WDC came from a groundswell of public concern about the persistent underdevelopment of the region. The Western Region is characterised by many socio-economic disadvantages relative to the more developed parts of Ireland. Population density is about half the national average and mainly rural, with 75 per cent living outside towns with populations of more than 5,000. There is a higher reliance on more traditional industry and the region has a significant deficit in basic infrastructure relative to other regions in Ireland.[5]

Engagement is an important part of the WDC approach. The organisation is connected to the economic and social development realities on the ground. This engagement is supported by the objectivity necessary for a state body. Therefore much of the WDC's work focuses on the preparation of detailed objective data and the implementation of new approaches to development practice. This demonstrates and underpins the case for major changes in policy and expenditure in key sectors. The WDC's engagement within the region, combined with its objectivity gives it a particular capacity to add value to government support for regional development. The WDC therefore acts as a link between regional players and government bodies at national level, by feeding back policy proposals and developments and ensuring that the Western Region's development priorities are considered in the design of national policy.

The WDC's vision for the Western Region is for:

"… a thriving and diverse region that meets the economic, social and cultural needs of individuals, enterprises and communities"

(WDC, 2004).

In order to achieve this vision the WDC has four strategic aims:[6]

strategic aim one:	to foster and promote job creation and the transfer of skills to the Western Region
strategic aim two:	to contribute to the creation of a quality economic and social environment by highlighting and supporting opportunities for improvements in the Western Region's transport, communications and energy infrastructure
strategic aim three:	to stimulate the creation of a quality business and community-based enterprise environment across the Western Region
strategic aim four:	to create vibrant and sustainable enterprise in the rural areas of the Western Region.

A commitment to rural development underlies the WDC's four strategic aims, in particular, strategic aim four.

---

4   The Western Region comprises counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare.
5   *Jobs for Towns* (2003); *Enterprise & Employment in the Western Region* (2004). These reports and other information on the Western Region are available at www.wdc.ie
6   The WDC Strategic Statement 2004-2006 lists the objectives, actions outputs and performance indicators for each strategic aim.

The organisation is structured into a number of working teams, including a rural development team. Policy analysts and development executives make up the rural development team, and as such, great synergy is achieved between policy analysis and practical development work. Policy work ensures that the WDC can establish a solid knowledge and research base, which is used to feed into and monitor policy developments at regional, national and EU level. Meanwhile by working in partnership with key stakeholders in the public, private and community sectors, the WDC's development executives can offer practical development experience and firsthand knowledge of development priorities for the Western Region.

Purpose of report

Since its establishment, the WDC has developed an effective Model of Rural Development, which embraces partnership, consultation, and sustainable regional development. This Model has emerged from a need to discover, mobilise, improve and add value to assets and resources available in the Western Region. In light of the worrying economic and social conditions present in the region, the WDC Model of Rural Development was a much needed innovative and strategic approach to development.

The WDC's objectives in producing this report outlining its Model of Rural Development are fourfold:

1. to disseminate the experience of designing, developing and implementing the WDC Model of Rural Development
2. to facilitate a transfer of knowledge and best practice
3. to highlight the successes and challenges encountered from this experience
4. to assist other implementing agencies, community organisations and development personnel to develop effective strategies for rural development.

Although the Western Region, and rural areas throughout Ireland, have experienced many changes in recent years, the WDC Model of Rural Development is neither location-specific nor time-specific, but can be transferred to other sectors and regions across Ireland and further afield. The critical success factors of the WDC Model of Rural Development include: establishment of a participatory Model of Rural Development, building strategic networks amongst key stakeholders in the public, private and community sectors, achieving critical mass and coordinating strategies for development, developing a solid knowledge base, achieving local ownership of the development process and securing 'buy in' and support for development proposals.

Successful implementation of the WDC Model of Rural Development will depend however on the specific regional/local context for development, access to resources, level of commitment and legitimacy at national and local level and, lastly, external environmental constraints which may hinder development and are often beyond the control of development practitioners.

It is hoped that this report will act as a practical reference guide for development practitioners, community groups and/or implementing agencies, who respect the principles of partnership, consultation and sustainable development and who wish to implement an innovative participatory and proactive Model of Rural Development. The WDC Model is presented as a seven-step approach to rural development. However, it must be kept in mind that a rural development process rarely follows such a linear path and practitioners implementing this Model may need to adapt it to their own specific circumstances.

Report outline

This report is structured as follows, Section two presents the core elements of the WDC Model of Rural Development and outlines a step-by-step guide to implementing the Model. The WDC's role in implementing the Model of Rural Development is discussed in Section three. Section four presents two case studies: the organic agri-food sector and the rural tourism sector, to demonstrate how the WDC has implemented its Model of Rural Development. Section five concludes the report by presenting lessons learned from designing, developing and implementing the WDC Model of Rural Development, how to achieve successful implementation, the critical success factors of the WDC approach and challenges encountered in the implementation process.
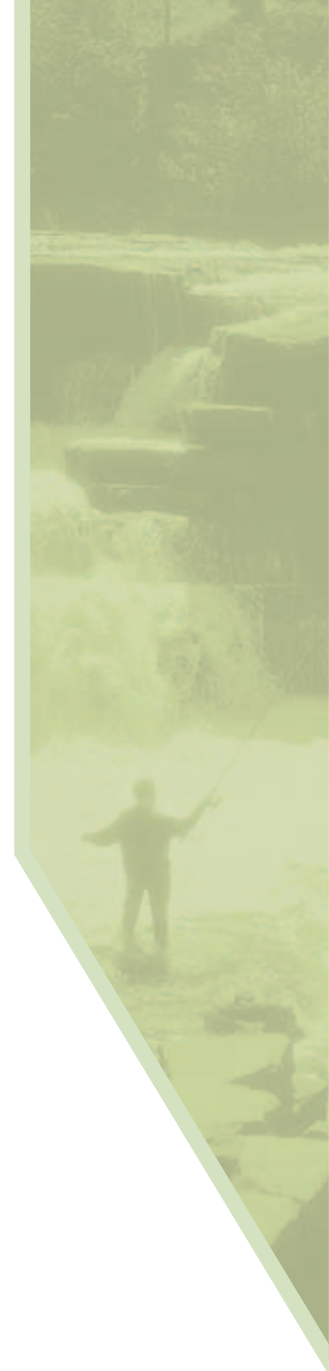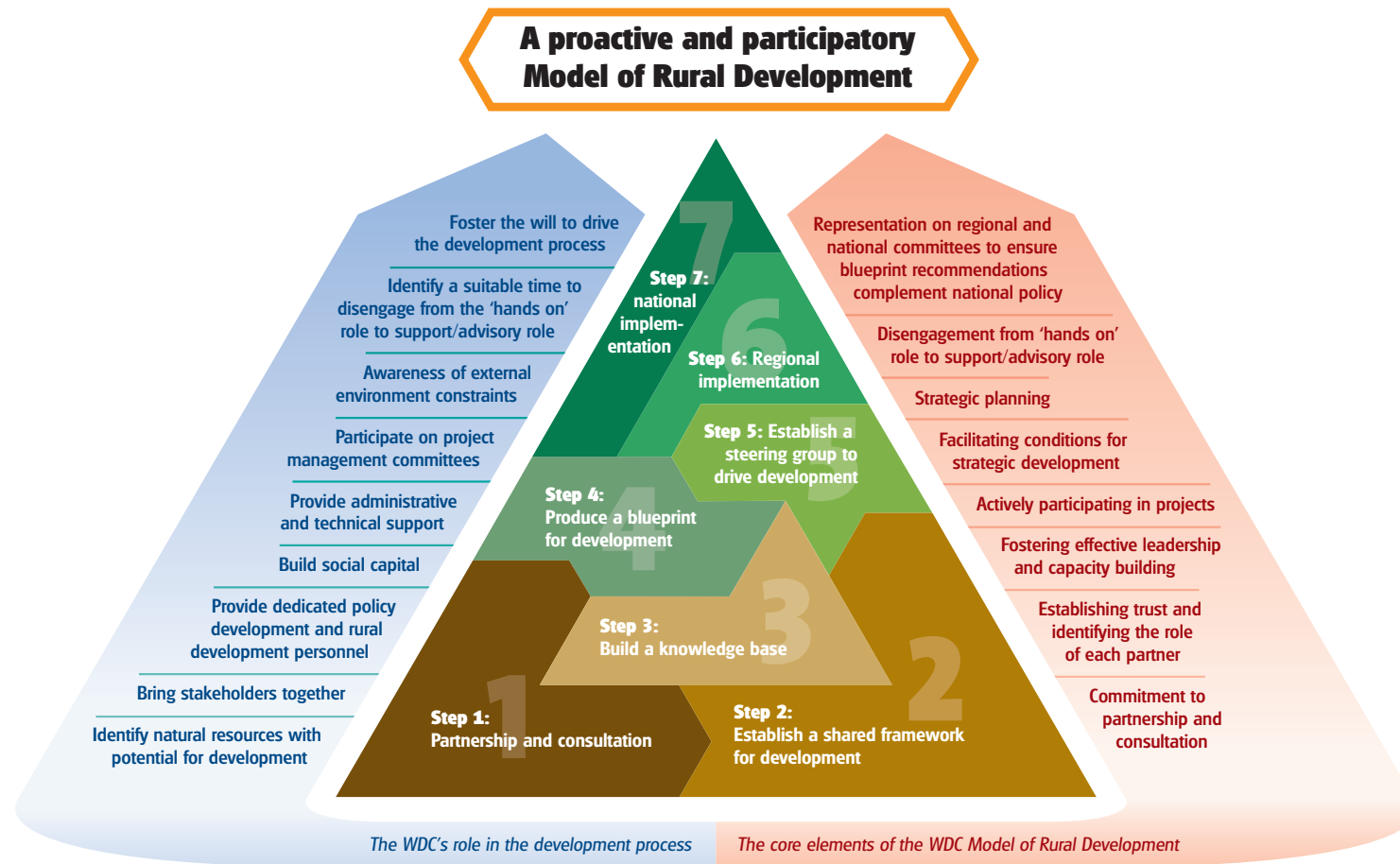
Section Two:

The WDC Model of Rural Development

Section two: The WDC Model of Rural Development

Introduction

This section presents a step-by-step guide to the design, implementation and outcome of the WDC Model of Rural Development. Although the WDC Model is presented as a seven-step linear development process, development will seldom follow a step-by-step implementation path. Many challenges will be encountered during the implementation of the Model which may involve revisiting earlier steps. Some examples of the challenges which the WDC has encountered are outlined in Section five. The seven steps to implementing the Model are illustrated in Figure 1. An outline of the core elements of the Model and a description of each step in the development process is given below.

Figure 1: The WDC Model of Rural Development

A proactive and participatory Model of Rural Development

The WDC's role in the development process:
- Foster the will to drive the development process
- Identify a suitable time to disengage from the 'hands on' role to support/advisory role
- Awareness of external environment constraints
- Participate on project management committees
- Provide administrative and technical support
- Build social capital
- Provide dedicated policy development and rural development personnel
- Bring stakeholders together
- Identify natural resources with potential for development

The core elements of the WDC Model of Rural Development:
- Representation on regional and national committees to ensure blueprint recommendations complement national policy
- Disengagement from 'hands on' role to support/advisory role
- Strategic planning
- Facilitating conditions for strategic development
- Actively participating in projects
- Fostering effective leadership and capacity building
- Establishing trust and identifying the role of each partner
- Commitment to partnership and consultation

Step 7: national implementation
Step 6: Regional implementation
Step 5: Establish a steering group to drive development
Step 4: Produce a blueprint for development
Step 3: Build a knowledge base
Step 1: Partnership and consultation
Step 2: Establish a shared framework for development

The core elements of the WDC Model of Rural Development

The core elements of the WDC Model of Rural Development include:

▲ a commitment to **partnership** and **consultation** between the public, private and community sectors

▲ establishing **trust** between the partners and identifying the **role** and function of each partner in the development process

▲ providing and **fostering effective leadership and capacity building** to the partners throughout the development process, e.g. having the training needs of personnel/boards assessed, allocating resources in budgets for training courses etc.

▲ **actively participating in projects** identified under strategic development programmes e.g. representation on boards and management committees, frequent communication with project personnel

▲ facilitating the conditions for **strategic development** e.g. identifying people who are willing to work together, achieving government and public endorsement for strategic development plans, identifying and allocating resources necessary to support partners and overseeing the implementation of strategic development projects

▲ **strategic planning** to ensure development projects are sustainable, innovative, achievable, do not duplicate other activities and/or projects in the region and result in an economic and social return for the Western Region

▲ being represented on regional and national bodies/organisations to ensure regional priorities are considered in the design of **national policy** e.g. the National Organic Steering Committee and the Rural/Agri-Tourism Advisory Group.

The WDC Model is distinguished by its commitment to strategic planning, partnership and sustainable development.

The WDC Model of Rural Development: main steps

There are seven steps to implementing the WDC Model of Rural Development (Figure 1). These include:

step one: bring together stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors for inclusion in a **partnership** and **consultation** process

step two: establish **trust** by facilitating the development of a shared framework for development and identifying a vision, objectives and strategies for the development of specific sectors of activity

step three: build a knowledge base by conducting sound research, analysis and consultation, to determine strategic priorities and recommendations for the development of a specific sector of activity

step four: produce a blueprint (Figure 3) for a specific sector of activity which recommends policy changes and presents an action plan for development

step five: foster effective leadership and capacity building by establishing a multi-agency steering group (Figure 4) and/or facilitate private sector led **strategic development** and **planning** for each sector of activity, to oversee and manage the implementation of the recommendations set out in a blueprint for development

step six: actively participate in projects, implement recommendations set out in a blueprint for development at regional level and identify a suitable stage in the development process in which to **disengage** from the more 'hands on' support offered to the steering groups to a more supportive role

step seven: ensure blueprint recommendations are taken into account in the preparation, development and ongoing implementation of **national policy.**

A step-by-step guide to implementing the WDC Model of Rural Development

Under the terms of the Western Development Commission (WDC) Act 1998, the purpose of the WDC is to promote, foster and encourage economic and social development in the Western Region. The WDC's Model of Rural Development was designed in response to a need to foster regional partnerships, develop strategic projects and achieve local, regional and national support for developing the Western Region.

Step one: establishing a partnership and consultation process

Partnership is essential to the achievement of rural development. The first step in the WDC Model involves identifying the main stakeholders in the public, private and community sectors in the Western Region and at national level, and inviting them to engage in a partnership and consultation process. Stakeholders should represent key experts in their field and/or development agency personnel who are willing to work in partnership with other stakeholders to achieve coordinated development.

In order to start the process, in consultation with experts and agency personnel in the region, a number of sectors with potential for development e.g. Manufacturing and Services, Natural Resources, Tourism, Information Technology (I.T.) and Marine were identified. The WDC recognised that although there was potential for development of each sector, a more coordinated approach was needed to design strategic development priorities and agree shared objectives for future development.

Stakeholders, representing particular sectors of activity, and agencies, which were involved in the development of specific sectors in the Western Region, were invited to come together to plan for future development. WDC personnel facilitated this process by encouraging partners to work together to achieve development. For a description of how the WDC established a partnership for the organic agri-food and rural tourism sectors, refer to the case studies.
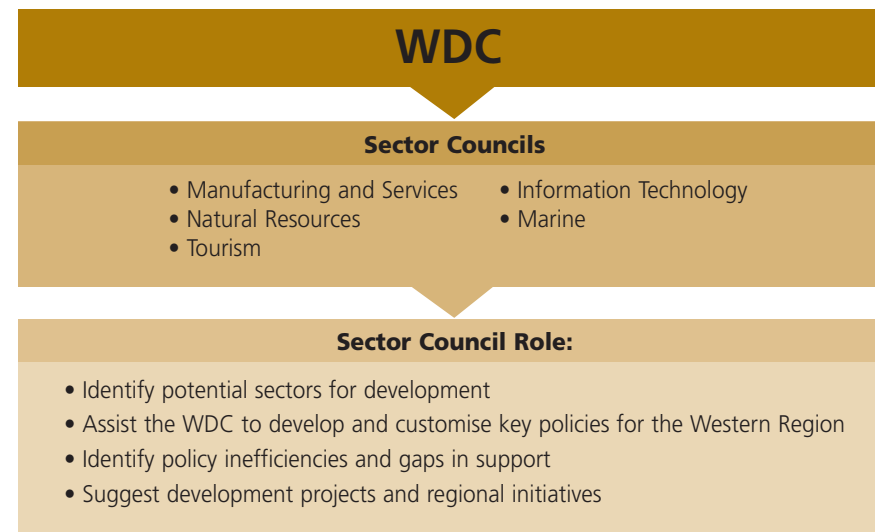
Step two: establishing a shared framework for development

The identified partners were then grouped into sector councils representing different sectors of activity. By identifying and agreeing a framework for development, the role and function of each sector council is established and strategic proposals are agreed for future development. This is achieved by determining: a vision for development, objectives for development, and how to achieve development.

This 'buy-in' (see Explanation of Terms page **?**) from the partners at the outset, reduces the chances of conflict arising at a later stage of the development process. The partners were organised into sector councils (Figure 2) in accordance with their sector of activity and area of expertise. A representative from the private sector chaired the sector councils. The sector councils were envisaged as consultative bodies on specialist sectors of activity and, were therefore, not designed as permanent structures or separate organisations for development.

For a description of how the WDC, in partnership with the rural tourism and organic agri-food sector councils, designed their framework for development refer to the case studies.

Figure 2: WDC sector councils: role

WDC

Sector Councils

- Manufacturing and Services
- Natural Resources
- Tourism
- Information Technology
- Marine

Sector Council Role:

- Identify potential sectors for development
- Assist the WDC to develop and customise key policies for the Western Region
- Identify policy inefficiencies and gaps in support
- Suggest development projects and regional initiatives

Step three: establishing a knowledge base to produce a blueprint for development

3

The next step in the development process involves establishing a knowledge base to determine the context and future development of each sector of activity and to produce a blueprint for development. This is achieved by initiating a participatory research and consultation process (see Explanation of terms, page 45).

For a description of how the WDC, the agencies and other stakeholders responsible for tourism development and the organic agri-food sector, began a process of building a knowledge base for the respective sectors refer to the case studies in Section four.

Step four: producing a blueprint for development

4

Following the participatory research and consultation process undertaken in Step three, a solid knowledge base is established for each sector of activity. Because of the participatory nature of this process, at this stage of the Model implementation, the partners have agreed a shared vision, objectives and strategies for development which are then incorporated into a blueprint document (Figure 3).

The success of the participatory process ensures 'buy in' from each partner involved in the development process, so that each partner contributes to, and agrees to implement, the recommendations set out in a blueprint.

Figure 3: A blueprint for development

A blueprint represents an action plan along with a timeframe for the implementation of achievable development strategies for a particular sector of activity. Typically, a blueprint outlines the rationale for focusing on a specific sector, its potential for development, the policy context, the consultation process, an action plan with recommendations for policy makers and an agreement from each agency/partner as to their role in implementing development proposals.

Consultants are employed to conduct the research and consultation process and to produce the blueprint. This ensures that the blueprint recommendations are accepted as objective and a realistic portrayal of regional priorities. Secondly, this facilitates the formation of, and commitment to, a successful partnership process.

The WDC have produced five blueprints for development since 1999. These include:

1. *Blueprint for Success: A Development Plan for the West 2000-2006* (WDC, 1999).
2. *Blueprint for Investing in the West: Promoting Foreign Direct Investment in the West* (WDC, 1999).
3. *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West: An Action Plan for Rural Areas* (WDC, 2000).
4. *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West* (WDC, 2001).
5. *To Catch the Wind: The Potential for Community Ownership of Wind Farms in Ireland* (WDC, 2004).

For a description of how a blueprint was prepared for the rural tourism and organic agri-food sectors, refer to the case studies, Section four.

Step five: establish a steering group to drive development

Step six: regional implementation

Once a blueprint is published, implementing the recommendations outlined in the report requires cooperation and commitment from a number of agencies and partners in the public, private and community sectors. The 'buy-in' received from the main stakeholders during the design, research and consultation phase, should ensure that when a blueprint is published, the main partners are already on board and the implementation process is ready to begin. Such was the case for the organics sector (see Section four: case studies).

The implementation process begins with the establishment of a steering group to drive the development process. The role and membership of the WDC's Steering Groups is outlined in Figure 4.

Figure 4: WDC steering groups: role and membership

A description of how the WDC established a steering group for the rural tourism and organic agri-food sectors is outlined in further detail in Section four: case studies.

One measure of the success of this approach to rural development is the successful implementation of innovative and sustainable development projects on the ground (e.g. The Green Box, see Figure 19). The implementation process begins with a number of prerequisites:

1. having dedicated WDC personnel to work in partnership with the steering groups and regional coordinators to manage and oversee the implementation process

2. identifying innovative partners and inviting them to participate in the design and implementation of development projects

3. adhering to the shared vision, objectives and strategies for development as set out in a blueprint for development

4. developing strong and effective managerial and leadership capacities and structures to implement change at regional level

5. identifying and securing resources needed for successful implementation of development strategies.

For a description of how the WDC and its partners have implemented successful regional development projects refer to the case studies in Section four.

Step seven: national implementation

7

The WDC is a statutory body with responsibility for feeding into national policy for rural development. One of the successful outcomes from adopting a partnership approach to development is that recommendations and actions for particular sectors of activity are formed from a participatory research and consultation process. This process is comprehensive, democratic and a realistic reflection of regional priorities and it is for these reasons that proposals are used to influence policy decisions. Many of the blueprint recommendations published by the WDC assist in formulating policy decisions at national level.

For a description of how the recommendations proposed for the organic agri-food and rural tourism sectors at regional level have influenced policy making at national level, refer to the case studies.

Conclusions

The WDC Model is a proactive and participatory Model of Rural Development. Underlying the WDC Model is a commitment to the principles of partnership, consultation and sustainable development. Implementing the WDC Model of Rural Development is possible across many sectors and regions in Ireland and further afield. A commitment, at the outset, to the core elements of the Model will ensure its successful implementation. This commitment must be accompanied however, with a very active and 'hands on' role by trained and dedicated development practitioners, combined with the establishment of a thorough research and knowledge base by policy personnel. This commitment helps to ensure that policy feeds into practice and practice feeds back into policy.

Each step in the development process requires a mix of knowledge, skills and resources to ensure a successful transition to the next stage in the implementation process. In the following section, the WDC's role in implementing each step of the Model of Rural Development is outlined, to bring to light the knowledge, skills, resources and partnership required during each stage of the implementation process.
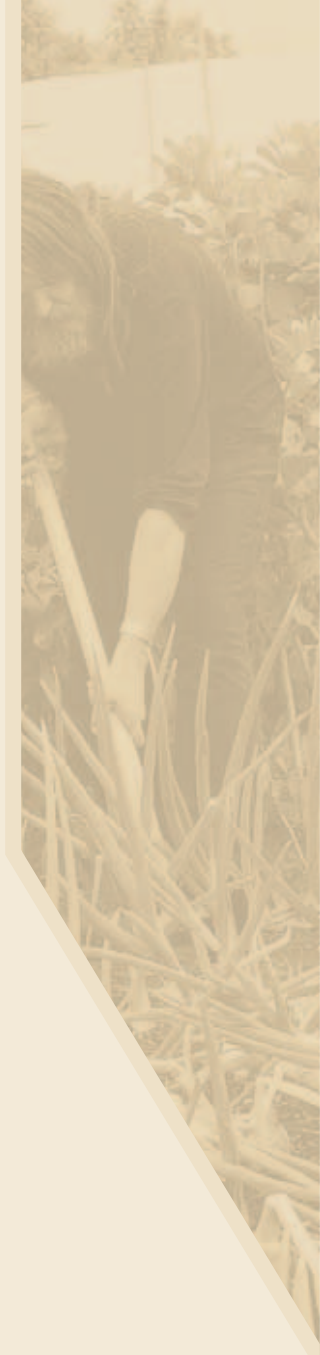
Section Three:

The WDC role
in implementing
the Model of
Rural Development

Section three: The WDC role in implementing the Model of Rural Development

Introduction

The WDC plays a very 'hands on' role at each stage of the development process. It works to ensure that a successful partnership and consultation process is established and that 'buy in' is achieved for development proposals. It also tries to ensure that steering groups have the necessary leadership and strategic vision and that there is sufficient private sector support and inclusion. Each step in the development process requires a unique mix of skills, knowledge and resources and this section outlines the WDC's role in ensuring successful implementation.

The WDC's role

The WDC's role in implementing the Model of Rural Development is outlined below under each step of the development process. However it should be noted that the development process does not follow a clear and easy path, consequently the WDC has to adapt its involvement in the process as necessary. Indeed the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and tackle unexpected challenges is key to the role of the WDC in rural development.

Step one: establishing a partnership and consultation process

The WDC's role in the initial stage of the development process involves:

▲ identifying stakeholders (key experts/agencies in particular sectors of activity) and inviting them to come together to design, implement and monitor strategic development programmes

▲ consulting with these stakeholders to identify sectors which the WDC could develop and add value to – sectors which can build on the strengths of the Western Region and can have an impact on future regional development

▲ facilitating the establishment of a sector council for each sector of activity and the design of clear terms of reference (this is facilitated by WDC regional development executives, see Figure 5)

▲ facilitating the partners to agree a shared vision, objectives and strategies for development

▲ establishing the WDC's own role in the partnership process i.e. to facilitate and support the development process and determine the role and function of each partner

▲ an awareness of external environmental constraints which may impact upon the development process e.g. national policy changes.

Figure 5: The WDC's regional development executive

The WDC's regional development executives play a very 'hands on' role in the development process. By engaging with the main stakeholders, who are involved in many development projects, the regional development executives ensure that strategic and sustainable development projects are implemented in the Western Region.

The WDC's regional development executives are responsible for:

▲ regular liaison with steering groups, and private sector led strategic partnerships, who are responsible for implementing development projects

▲ building a successful partnership approach to regional development between the WDC and various national, regional and local bodies

▲ conducting scoping, investigation and feasibility studies of sector opportunities in areas such as manufacturing, tourism, food and renewable energy

▲ proposing innovative and sustainable regional strategies within sectors that build on the strengths of the region, in partnership with other stakeholders

▲ offering support, encouragement and guidance to partners and projects e.g. building the capacity of project members, identifying and allocating resources in project budgets needed to successfully implement development projects, ensuring a strategic focus is maintained throughout the development process, facilitating recruitment processes etc.

Step two: establishing a shared framework for development

It is necessary to establish a common framework for development and the WDC assists in this by:

▲ researching rural development policy and regulations, Models of best practice, governance structures and successful institutional frameworks for rural development in order to provide the necessary background information
▲ identifying successful participatory methodologies for driving development
▲ designing and agreeing, in consultation with each sector council, a framework for development.

Step three: establishing a knowledge base to produce a blueprint for development

The WDC's role in establishing the necessary knowledge base is as follows:

▲ trying to ensure 'buy-in' from the members of the individual sector councils during the design, research and consultation phase
▲ providing up-to-date information to the sector councils on the current policy context and proposed developments at national level
▲ designing, in partnership with the sector councils, terms of reference for a blueprint for development and also for the consultant/s employed to produce the blueprint
▲ putting projects out to tender, selecting consultant/s and providing administrative and financial support to facilitate the research process
▲ liaising with the consultant/s and providing support during the consultation process e.g. helping to set up the regional and community workshops, acting as facilitators on the ground, issuing requests for submissions etc.
▲ offering effective guidance, facilitation and leadership support to the members of the sector councils.

Step four: producing a blueprint for development

Following the research and consultation phase a blueprint for development is produced. The WDC plays the following roles during this stage:

▲ ongoing public consultation to develop the strategy and action plan
▲ facilitating the partners to agree an action plan for development
▲ providing administrative and financial support for the publication of a blueprint
▲ personnel commitment throughout the research and consultation process to ensure that once a blueprint is published the implementation process is ready to begin.

Step five: establish a steering group to drive development

A structure is required to drive the implementation of the blueprint. The WDC's role in establishing such a structure is as follows:

▲ facilitating the establishment of the steering groups and preparing, in consultation with the partners, the terms of reference
▲ facilitating initial meetings of the steering groups
▲ applying for funding to implement blueprint actions e.g. to employ a regional coordinator for rural tourism
▲ facilitating recruitment processes and designing contracts of employment for regional programme/project personnel
▲ strengthening the leadership, management capacity and engagement of the steering groups, project boards and personnel.

Step six: regional implementation

The WDC's role in the implementation of the blueprint recommendations within the Western Region involves:

▲ playing a 'hands on' role to ensure successful implementation of development strategies e.g. by assisting with the design of work programmes and the identification of innovative development projects

▲ providing effective guidance, facilitation and leadership to the steering groups and regional programme coordinators to ensure ongoing commitment to the development process

▲ assisting partners to identify and apply for necessary funding to implement their development actions

▲ ensuring that development programmes, projects and proposals are strategic in nature and align with proposals outlined in the blueprint for development

▲ representation on the management committees for strategic projects such as Atlantic Organics, the Green Box, Walking in the West etc. (see Section four)

▲ assessing the individual strengths and weaknesses of projects and identifying and allocating resources to help overcome any project deficits

▲ identifying the right stage at which to disengage from the more 'hands on' role and adopt a more support/advisory role.

Step seven: national implementation

While national implementation is presented as the seventh and final step in the WDC's Model of Rural Development, in fact, the WDC is involved in activities in pursuit of this aim throughout the entire process. The WDC pursues this aim through:

▲ representation on national and regional committees for rural development e.g. the National Organic Steering Committee and the national Rural Agri-Tourism Advisory Group

▲ ensuring that partners are represented on national committees e.g. a member of Atlantic Organics is represented on the two sub-groups of the National Organic Steering Committee i.e. the Organic Market Development Group and the Partnership Expert Working Group (see Section four)

▲ making regular submissions to government ministers and consultation processes to ensure that the WDC's experience in regional development is considered in the design of national policy

▲ feeding back national policy proposals to regional partners

▲ promoting the value and success of private sector led development initiatives e.g. industry-led sector councils and steering groups

▲ creating a participatory Model of Rural Development and demonstrating the suitability of this approach for other sectors and regions

▲ achieving government endorsement for the WDC Model of Rural Development.

Conclusions

Implementing the WDC Model of Rural Development requires a particular mix of skills, knowledge and resources, combined with effective partnership. The WDC's role in implementing the Model requires both a 'hands on' and a support/advisory approach. This is achieved through the work of both policy analysts and trained regional development executives whose role it is to facilitate the development of a particular sector of activity in the Western Region and also to facilitate partners in identifying strategic projects for regional development. WDC regional development executives understand the importance of enabling others rather than 'doing for' others.

Essentially, the WDC's role in implementing the Model of Rural Development involves identifying natural resources with the potential for development and then bringing together appropriate stakeholders in a partnership and consultation process. To bring this forward, the WDC provides administrative and technical support as well as participating on project management committees. This can contribute towards building social capital amongst the other partners in the process. The WDC also provides a linkage with developments occurring at a national level, both in the form of keeping partners informed of national level developments and also inputting the regional experience into national debates.

In the following section, two case studies are presented to demonstrate how the WDC has implemented the Model of Rural Development.

Section Four:

Case studies:
organic agri-food
and **rural tourism**

Section four:

Case studies: organic agri-food and rural tourism

Introduction

In this section, two case studies: i) the organic agri-food sector, and ii) rural tourism are presented to illustrate the WDC approach to rural development and to demonstrate how the WDC and its partners have implemented strategic development initiatives for each sector. The case studies are presented within the framework of the WDC seven-step approach to development, although, implementation of each step is rarely achieved in succession, but, rather, involves revisiting earlier steps before progressing along the implementation path.

Case study one: organic agri-food

	Step one: establishing a partnership and consultation process
1	

In 1999, the WDC published *Blueprint for Success: A Development Plan for the West 2000-2006* (WDC, 1999). The blueprint proposed that niche sectors in the Western Region with potential for development should be examined. In response to this proposal, the WDC and members of the Natural Resources Sector Council (Figure 2) recognised the potential for development of the organic agri-food sector. The organic agri-food sector was considered an attractive opportunity for the farming community due to:

▲ increased interest amongst consumers and farmers for organic produce

▲ a higher market price for organic products

▲ less intensive use of land

▲ better protection of the environment

▲ the potential to create valuable rural employment opportunities in a niche diversification sector

▲ suitability of the Western Region for organic production

▲ a history of less intensive production methods in agriculture in the Western Region.

Although there were a number of organic producer co-ops and partnerships in the region at that time, there was an absence of coordinated strategic initiatives to develop the sector. Therefore, establishing a partnership between the WDC and the key players and experts in the organics sector was regarded as an essential first step in the development process.

In Figure 6 a description of how the WDC and the Natural Resources Sector Council established a partnership and consultation process for the organic agri-food sector is presented.

Figure 6: Establishing a partnership and consultation process: the organic agri-food sector

In 1999, the WDC and its Natural Resources Sector Council established a special organic agri-food advisory group (Figure 7) to help develop this niche sector in the Western Region. The WDCs Organic Agri-Food Advisory Group was made up of key experts in the organic sector who were willing to work in partnership with the WDC and the Natural Resources Sector Council, to propose and design future development priorities for the organics sector. Membership of the Organic Agri-Food Advisory Group included:

▲ An Bord Glas
▲ Bord Bia
▲ Organic Producer (chair)
▲ Enterprise Ireland
▲ Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association
▲ Demeter Ireland Ltd
▲ Leitrim Organic Forum
▲ Organic Trust

The WDC facilitated the design of a terms of reference for the Natural Resources Sector Council and the Organic Agri-Food Advisory Group and helped the partners to identify the role and function of each player in the development process.

Figure 7: The WDC Organic Agri-Food Advisory Group: role and partnership, 1999

WDC	Specialist Advisory Group Organic Agri-Food Advisory Group Role:
Sector Councils A consultative group **The Natural Resources Sector Council**	• Assist the WDC and the Natural Resources Sector Council to identify development priorities for the organic agri-food sector • Oversee the design of a blueprint for development.
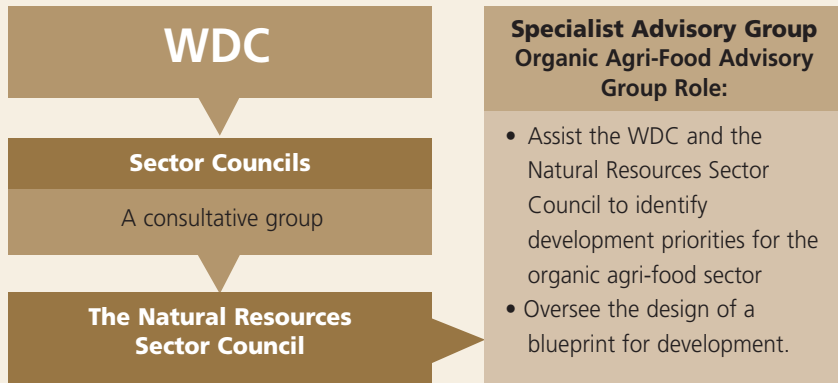
Step two: establishing a shared framework for development

Once the Organic Agri-Food Advisory Group was established, a framework for development was agreed amongst the partners. This was achieved by determining: a vision for the organic agri-food sector; the objectives for developing the sector; and strategies to achieve development. The framework was achieved by ensuring WDC personnel were on hand to mobilise participation and support for the development process and to offer assistance during each stage of the development process.

Step three: establishing a knowledge base to produce a blueprint for development

In 2000, there was a lack of comprehensive data on:

▲ the number of organic agri-food producers, co-ops and partnerships in the Western Region
▲ the potential for development
▲ suitability of the region for organic agri-food production.

One of the first tasks was to initiate a process of research and consultation to establish a knowledge base and determine the context and future development of the organic agri-food sector (Figure 8). WDC personnel were on hand to provide information on the current policy context, to encourage the partners to identify strategic development proposals for regional implementation and to propose developments for organic agri-food production at national level.

(Figure 8 overleaf)

Figure 8: Building a knowledge base: The organic agri-food sector

In 2000, the WDC, in partnership with the Organic Agri-Food Advisory Group, initiated a process of research, policy analysis and consultation, to establish a knowledge base for the organic agri-food sector and to produce a blueprint for development. This involved the following steps:

▲ the WDC, in partnership with the Organic Agri-Food Advisory Group, designed and agreed a terms of reference for the development of a strategy for the organic agri-food sector in the Western Region:

'to review organic farming and food production in Ireland and Europe and to prepare an action plan for the development of the sector in the Western Region' (WDC, 2001)

▲ terms of reference were designed for the consultants, the project was put to tender and consultants were selected to produce the blueprint

▲ two consultancy groups: the National Food Centre, Teagasc, and Cera, were employed to undertake two separate research projects and to engage with stakeholders in the public, private and community sectors.

Step four: producing a blueprint for development

4

A comprehensive research and consultation process ensured that a solid knowledge base for the organic agri-food sector was established and a comprehensive blueprint was delivered. The resulting *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West*[7] (WDC, 2001) represented the first systematic analysis of organic agri-food production in Ireland (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Producing a blueprint: Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West (WDC, 2001)

Following a process of research and consultation, the main priorities for the future development of the organic agri-food sector were established and documented in *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West* (2001). This was achieved by:

▲ ensuring a continued successful partnership between the WDC, the Natural Resources Sector Council and the Organic Agri-Food Advisory Group

▲ regular monitoring of the research and consultation process by the WDC and the Organic Agri-Food Advisory Group

▲ involving stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors in designing the blueprint for the organic agri-food sector

▲ representations on regional and national bodies to ensure that regional priorities and blueprint actions were considered in the design of national policy for the organic sector

▲ determining the strategies for development and action plan from the results of the consultation process.

The blueprint presented a number of recommendations under the following headings:

▲ national framework

▲ regional framework

▲ development of organic agri-food production

▲ domestic and overseas market development

▲ expansion of added value processing and development of distribution channels

▲ research and development

▲ education and training

▲ information technology and the development of organic agri-food production.

During the preparation of the blueprint, WDC regional development executives were involved in development work at ground level to establish a private sector led strategic partnership for the organic agri-food sector.

---

7   The background research carried out for the blueprint, containing detailed research findings, is available as a separate background document to *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West* (WDC, 2001).

5 Step five: establish a steering group to drive development

The establishment of a regional organic steering group was essential to implement the regional framework actions proposed in the blueprint. Therefore, the WDC actively facilitated the establishment of a private sector led strategic partnership for the sector, during the preparation of the blueprint, to ensure that once the blueprint was published, the implementation process was ready to begin (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Establishing a steering group to drive development:
the Western Organic Strategic Initiative**

Prior to the publication of the blueprint, the WDC's regional development executives were facilitating a private sector-led strategic partnership at regional level, to help implement the regional organic framework proposals in the blueprint. Thus, in 2000, the Western Organic Strategic Initiative (WOSI, now Atlantic Organics) was established, to implement the regional framework contained in the *Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West* (WDC, 2001). It was envisaged that this regional framework for action could be used by the state and private sector as a 'testing ground' for organic agri-food policy and a Model for application at national level.

WOSI was facilitated by the WDC and was a strategic industry-led partnership representing the following four groups:

1. North West Organic Co-op, Muff, Co. Donegal
2. Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-op, Drumkeeran, Co. Leitrim
3. The Organic Centre, Rossinver, Co. Leitrim
4. Western Organic Group

On establishment, terms of reference for the group were designed and the partners agreed the following vision:

> *"To promote and develop a sustainable farming and food production system, built on a common value and ethical system, coupled with sound environmental practices, amongst farmers, suppliers, processors, retailers, consumers and the general public. Together we can share our knowledge and resources, thereby offering value, quality and health food options to society and offering an example of sustainable development and a positive return on investment to our investors, while at the same time reducing the total economic costs to society"* (WOSI, 2003).

The following objectives were agreed:

▲ to significantly increase the level of production and improve the quality of organic agri-food produce to meet market demand
▲ to develop links with the marketplace through contracts to ensure dispersal of organic production
▲ to improve and develop supply base linkages
▲ to increase the level of information, training and advice to the organics sector.

During this stage of the development process, WDC personnel were involved in strengthening the leadership and management capacities of the WOSI and assisting with the design of an annual budget and the identification of funding opportunities.

6 Step six: regional implementation

When the blueprint for organic agri-food production was published some of the recommendations had already begun to be implemented through the WOSI (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Achieving regional implementation: the organic agri-food sector

Implementation began with an identification of resources needed to drive the development process. In 2002, the WOSI secured funding to help them develop their strategic direction and implement blueprint actions. In 2003 applications for funding were made to Skillnets and the EU INTERREG IIIA programme. The four key results of this work include:

1. Formation of Atlantic Organics Ltd

In 2004, the WOSI formed a company called Atlantic Organics Ltd, a strategic private sector led partnership initiative. Atlantic Organics Ltd represents 234 organic producers in counties Roscommon, Donegal, Leitrim, Fermanagh and Derry. The Board of Directors for Atlantic Organics Ltd includes:

▲ North West Organic Co-operative
▲ The Organic Centre
▲ Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-operative
▲ A retailer
▲ The Western Organic Network (as observer) (see point 4 below)
▲ WDC (as observer)

2. Atlantic Organics Ltd Marketing and Communications Project

The Marketing and Communications Project has specific aims in relation to consumer awareness, networking and development, and the raising of finance and funding. The project compliments and supports the Added Value Organic Food Project. The purpose of the project is to proactively support the development of the organic food sector in the region through marketing, business development, and fundraising.

The project is funded by the EU INTERREG IIIA programme, has an office in Rossinver, Co. Leitrim and employs a full-time manager (see Figure 12) and part-time administrator.

3. Atlantic Organics Ltd Added Value Organic Food Project

The Added Value Organic Food Project is a two-year project established in 2004 to explore the market opportunities for the development of added value organic food products by utilising organic farm produce sourced regionally. The project will fulfil the following objectives:

▲ identify and develop a number of added value organic food products
▲ carry out test marketing followed by product launches
▲ put a strategy in place to set up local processing facilities for the production of the food products
▲ provide a stable market outlet for organic produce produced by organic farmers in the region
▲ design a full marketing and business plan that will chart the way towards a sustainable cross border producer-owned organic food business.

The project will assist in the overall development and expansion of the organic agri-food industry on a cross-border basis and contribute to the recognition of the whole North and West as a quality food-producing region. Loughry College, Co. Tyrone has been engaged to assist the food product development process. This project has an office in Co. Derry and Rossinver, Co. Leitrim and employs a full-time project coordinator and part-time administrator. The project is funded by the EU INTERREG IIIA programme.

4. Regional Organic Training Programme

The Western Organic Network (WON) was established by WOSI in 2003. Currently, there are 73 members participating on the Western Organic Network and four local sub-networks have been established: two in North and South Donegal, and one in Sligo, Leitrim and Roscommon.

The WON is now separate from Atlantic Organics Ltd and operates under its own management committee. A 12-member Steering Group has been established to oversee the programme. Outputs include:

▲ needs-based training for network members as a new mechanism to build capacity amongst producers in the sector

- a website: http://www.westernorganicnetwork.com and discussion forum: http://www.irishorganicforum.com
- inter-regional networking activities e.g. seminars, member directory and the establishment of working groups.

The programme is funded by member companies and the Training Networks Programme, which is an initiative of Skillnets Ltd.

Figure 12: Atlantic Organics Ltd:
Marketing and Communications and Food Development Managers

Atlantic Organics Ltd: Marketing and Communications Manager

The Marketing and Communications Manager is responsible for the management and delivery of a business plan for Atlantic Organics Ltd. Specific roles and responsibilities include:

- creation of greater consumer and public awareness
- stimulating interest and progress in the sector via a marketing and PR strategy
- targeted networking activities and initiation of linkages where appropriate
- fundraising and generation of finance

Atlantic Organics Ltd: Food Development Manager

The Food Development Manager is responsible for the identification of new added value organic food products developed by utilising locally produced organic food products. The specific roles and responsibilities of the Food Development Manager include:

- working with a selected Food Product Development Centre to ensure that the project proceeds to plan and budget
- conducting market research to determine the most appropriate products to develop
- sourcing suitable staff, premises and equipment for a processing facility
- liaising with relevant state agencies and other interested groups to develop the profile of the organic sector and the added value business

Step seven: national implementation

In March 2000 the Agri-Food 2010 Committee made a number of recommendations about the organic agri-food sector, one of which was the setting up of a national Organic Development Committee to draw up a coherent strategy for the development of the sector. The members of the committee were drawn from 22 organisations including the WDC. Throughout 2000 and 2001, the WDC was involved in a partnership process of research and consultation at regional level, to determine strategic priorities and recommendations for the organic agri-food sector (see Steps 2 and 3 above). This participatory approach was recognised at national level, as being comprehensive, 'bottom-up' and a realistic portrayal of priorities for the development of the organics sector. This helped the WDC to feed into decision-making at national level and to form strategic recommendations for the organic agri-food sector.

The Organic Development Committee used the research and recommendations arising from the WDC research and consultation process to form many of its final recommendations. In April 2002 the report of the Organic Development Committee was published and its key recommendation included the establishment of the following:

- the National Organic Steering Committee to act as a driving force for the development of the organic sector
- a Partnership Expert Working Group to coordinate, facilitate and monitor the provision of training, education, advice and research
- an Organic Market Development Group to develop a national marketing strategy for organic food.

A description of how the WDC, in partnership with the WOSI, contributed to work in the sector at national level is presented in Figure 13.

> **Figure 13: Achieving national implementation:**
> **the organic agri-food sector**
>
> The WDC and its partners at regional and national level have achieved the following at national level:
>
> ▲ the WDC is represented on the National Organic Steering Committee and the Partnership Expert Working Group, and Atlantic Organics Ltd are represented on the National Organic Market Development Group and the Partnership Expert Working Group
>
> ▲ the first national Organic Conference *Present Challenges – Future Opportunities*, representing a partnership between the WDC, Bord Bia and the Department of Agriculture and Food, was held in Portumna, Co. Galway, in 2003
>
> ▲ the first Census of Irish Organic Production was published in 2003
>
> ▲ changes have been made to the scheme for grant aid for the organic sector making it more open-ended and accessible for small-scale organic horticulture producers
>
> ▲ seven organic demonstration farms have been established.
>
> The WDC and its partners have proposed a number of recommendations for the organic agri-food sector at national level, which include:
>
> ▲ having a dedicated seed fund for the development of commercial organic co-ops, organisations and producer groups
>
> ▲ offering needs-driven training, education and advice for latent or actual organic producers
>
> ▲ coordination of organic promotional initiatives at regional and local level
>
> ▲ focused market development
>
> ▲ increased information and awareness of the organic sector in Ireland.

Conclusions

The WDC and its partners have implemented the seven-step Model of Rural Development to achieve development of the organic agri-food sector. To date, implementation has resulted in the establishment of a strategic and sustainable vision for the organic agri-food sector and the successful implementation of development initiatives at regional and national level. The success of this process has depended, at the outset, on a commitment to partnership, consultation and sustainable development. This has ensured that a solid knowledge base for the sector has been established and that each partner is committed to the development process. The availability of dedicated WDC personnel to facilitate and oversee development has ensured a successful partnership and implementation process. Following the establishment of Atlantic Organics Ltd, the WDC has disengaged from the 'hands on' role offered to the steering group and are currently participating on the management committee and offering support and advice to the partners. The partners are, at present, involved in implementing step six and seven of the Model of Rural Development i.e. regional and national implementation of development proposals.

Case study two: rural tourism

In 1999, the WDC produced *Blueprint for Success: A Development Plan for the West 2000-2006* (WDC, 1999). It proposed the support, expansion and competitiveness of the indigenous sectors in the region, and in particular rural tourism. Consequently, in 1999, the WDC recognised that developing the rural tourism sector was an important sector for regional development. A central concern at that time was the growth of more established 'honey pot' tourist areas in the Western Region with little growth in other areas. Therefore, achieving balanced rural tourism development by dispersing tourism to more rural areas became one of the WDCs development priorities.

A process of development for the rural tourism sector was initiated by adopting the seven-step WDC Model of Rural Development. This section describes how the WDC and its partners have implemented many successful development initiatives in the rural tourism sector.

Step one: establishing a partnership and consultation process

The first step in developing the rural tourism sector involved establishing a partnership and consultation process between the agencies responsible for tourism development in the Western Region and at national level. Unlike the organic agri-food sector, many agencies were involved in driving tourism development, and the WDC saw that by creating an opportunity to bring the agencies together, pool expertise, and share knowledge of innovative rural tourism development strategies, an integrated framework for development could be achieved. In Figure 14 a description of how the WDC established a multi-agency partnership for the rural tourism sector is presented.

Figure 14: Establishing partnership as a framework for development: the rural tourism sector

In 1999, the WDC established a Tourism Sector Council to suggest development projects, address the unbalanced tourism development in the Western Region, identify barriers to the growth of tourism and assist the WDC in developing priorities for the rural tourism sector. Membership of the Tourism Sector Council included:

▲ Private sector (chair)
▲ Private and community representatives from the tourism sector (x 5)
▲ Shannon Development
▲ County Enterprise Board
▲ LEADER
▲ Teagasc
▲ Regional Tourism Authorities (x 1)

One of the proposals put forward by the Tourism Sector Council at that time was to oversee the preparation of a blueprint for rural tourism development in the West.

Step two: establishing a shared framework for development

Once a multi-agency partnership was formed, the second step in the process involved establishing a shared vision and framework for rural tourism development. This was achieved by determining: a vision for rural tourism, the objectives for developing the rural tourism sector, and strategies to achieve development. The WDC facilitated this process by encouraging partners to establish a holistic and innovative vision for rural tourism which embraced quality, community, culture and a unique rural tourism product which the Western Region could offer.

Step three: establishing a knowledge base to produce a blueprint for development

Although there was no scarcity of documentation on the tourism sector in Ireland, it was difficult to find research which applied to rural tourism in the Western Region. Therefore, the next step in the development process involved establishing a knowledge base to determine the context and future development of the rural tourism sector (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Building a knowledge base: the rural tourism sector

In 2000, the WDC, in partnership with its Tourism Sector Council, initiated a process of research, policy analysis and consultation to build a knowledge base for rural tourism in the Western Region. This involved the following steps:

▲ the WDC, in partnership with the Tourism Sector Council, agreed to prepare a blueprint for rural tourism development

▲ terms of reference for the publication of a blueprint for rural tourism development in the Western Region were designed

▲ consultants were employed to engage with stakeholders in the public, private and community sectors, to identify and document the role of rural tourism in the Western Region, barriers to growth, future priorities, targets for growth, and actions to achieve development

▲ a methodology for consultation was designed, which involved interviews, questionnaire surveys, workshops, written submissions, and consultations with consumers, community groups, producer groups and industries

▲ WDC policy personnel provided specialist knowledge of rural development and rural tourism, to assist partners in identifying barriers to growth and innovative development proposals for tourism in the Western Region

▲ partners were encouraged to formulate a long-term shared development plan for rural tourism.

Step four: producing a blueprint for development

A comprehensive research and consultation process ensured that a solid knowledge base for the rural tourism sector was established and a blueprint was delivered. A description of how a blueprint was produced for the rural tourism sector is outlined in Figure 16.

Figure 16: Producing a blueprint: Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West (WDC, 2000)

Following a process of research and consultation, the main priorities for the future development of the rural tourism sector were established and documented in a *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West* (WDC, 2000). This was achieved by:

▲ ensuring a continued successful partnership between the WDC and the Tourism Sector Council

▲ regular monitoring of the research and consultation process

▲ involving stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors, to contribute to designing an action plan for the future development of the rural tourism sector.

The following methodologies were employed to produce the blueprint:

▲ desk research and a literature review of material pertaining to tourism and rural tourism in the Western Region

▲ consultations with stakeholders from the public, private and community sectors

▲ organising community tourism workshops to determine future opportunities for rural tourism

▲ inviting written submissions from members of the public through regional press advertising

▲ helping partners to prioritise development proposals and to establish a long-term vision for regional rural tourism development

▲ conducting a product audit of tourism facilities in the Western Region

▲ designing and disseminating a travel trade survey and a survey of rural tourism customers

▲ researching and presenting case studies of best practice in rural tourism.

Following this process of research and consultation, the following vision for rural tourism development in the Western Region was agreed:

"The Western Region will offer an authentic, quality rural experience in an increasingly over-commercialised, urban world. The essential elements of this experience will be the quality landscape, cultural enrichment and interaction with friendly people. The region will be positioned as that part of Ireland where this experience is genuinely offered and can genuinely be found" (WDC, 2000).

The following strategic priorities for rural tourism development were outlined in the blueprint:

▲ **strategy one:** the creation of a driving force for change which can give a clear strategic direction and integrate support and foster partnership between the various tourism interests

▲ **strategy two:** a commitment to destination management, quality infrastructure provision, sustainability and the maximisation of the product strengths of rural areas while ensuring environmental and heritage conservation

▲ **strategy three:** the implementation of a well-financed, coordinated marketing strategy encompassing the Western Region as a rural destination and the development of creative product packaging to meet customer needs

▲ **strategy four:** creating the capacity to coordinate and deliver a quality product and excellent customer care through appropriate support

▲ **strategy five:** a concerted effort to improve access to the West (WDC, 2000).

Step five: establish a steering group to drive development

Once a blueprint was published the next step in the development process involved establishing a steering group to implement the proposals. By establishing a multi-agency partnership, the WDC hoped to:

▲ connect tourism development agencies and facilitate partners to design coordinated development strategies for rural tourism

▲ utilise each agency's resources and skills to create the critical mass necessary to drive development

▲ create more targeted opportunities for rural tourism and develop a long-term perspective for rural tourism development

▲ pilot and test new ideas for rural tourism.

In Figure 17 a description of how a steering group for the rural tourism sector was established is presented.

Figure 17: Establishing a multi-agency steering group to drive development: Western Development Tourism Programme (WDTP) Steering Group

One of the recommendations in the *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West* (WDC, 2000) identified that no new body needed to be established to drive development, but that development could be achieved by coordinated intervention from a wide range of existing agencies in the Western Region. Therefore, the Western Development Tourism Programme (WDTP) Steering Group, a 12-member multi-agency steering group, was established to oversee the implementation of the blueprint. The WDTP was envisaged as a three-year pilot programme of innovative development activity.

The WDTP Steering Group: membership and responsibilities
1. The WDTP is chaired by Fáilte Ireland and supported by eleven representatives from the public, private and community sectors, including:
    ▲ Fáilte Ireland (chair)
    ▲ WDC
    ▲ Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
    ▲ Comhar LEADER na hEireann (x 1)

- ▲ LEADER (x 1)
- ▲ North West Regional Tourism Authority Ltd. (North West Tourism)
- ▲ Western Regional Tourism Authority Ltd. (Ireland West Tourism)
- ▲ Shannon Development
- ▲ Institute of Technology, Sligo
- ▲ Irish Tourist Industry Confederation
- ▲ Údarás na Gaeltachta
- ▲ Office of Public Works

2. Upon establishment, the following terms of reference for the group were designed:

- ▲ develop, oversee and monitor the implementation of a new strategic approach to tourism initiatives in the Western Region

- ▲ promote the adoption of a coherent and coordinated approach between the responsible public authorities and other interested parties to tourism product development and marketing within the Western Region

- ▲ ensure that each of the public and other bodies working at local, county and regional level are actively working together to an agreed agenda and a common set of goals in relation to tourism dispersal in the Western Region

- ▲ establish working rural tourism partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors in each of the tourism areas in the Western Region in order to stimulate area based tourism packages and establish strong links with tourism product development providers

- ▲ develop a collective approach to key strategic issues for tourism development such as access to the regions, environmental sustainability, human resource development and related matters

- ▲ publish, distribute and arrange for the publishing and distribution of information on the Western Region

- ▲ provide funding or assist in the preparation of applications to other bodies for funding necessary for the above objects and to support such applications.

3. A programme manager was employed in 2002 to coordinate development actions (the type of work carried out by the programme manager is presented in Figure 18).

4. The steering group and programme manager work to achieve regional implementation of the blueprint recommendations.

Figure 18: The WDTP Programme Manager

The role of the WDTP Programme Manager is to facilitate and drive strategic rural tourism actions in the Western Region on behalf of the WDTP. The WDTP Programme Manager's main responsibilities include:

- ▲ facilitating, preparing and driving regional rural tourism economic and social development strategies, through liaison with the public, private and community sectors

- ▲ building a partnership approach to strategic rural tourism development

- ▲ assisting in presenting and negotiating regionally based rural tourism initiatives with relevant government agencies and policy makers

- ▲ meeting agreed objectives as set out in the Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West (WDC, 2000) and/or annual work programme

- ▲ directing the operations of the WDTP and being responsible for overall management of the initiative including management of its personnel, financial and other resources

- ▲ participating and informing on issues relating to the WDTP at local, regional and national level

- ▲ preparing and presenting position papers and briefings on current issues which impact rural tourism regeneration within the region.

Step six: regional implementation

6

The WDTP are responsible for implementing the proposals put forward in the blueprint for rural tourism development. In Figure 19 a description of how regional implementation of the blueprint recommendations is being achieved for the rural tourism sector is presented.

**Figure 19: Achieving regional implementation:
the rural tourism sector**

The WDTP is responsible for achieving regional implementation of the strategies proposed in the *Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West* (WDC, 2000). Regional implementation is being achieved by:

▲ fostering a partnership between the main stakeholders in the tourism sector to build a strategic rural tourism development process

▲ facilitating, preparing and driving rural tourism economic and social development strategies, through liaison with the public, private and community sectors

▲ assisting in presenting and negotiating regionally based rural tourism initiatives with relevant government agencies and policy makers.

The WDTP is hosted in the offices of the Business Innovation Centre, Institute of Technology, Sligo. The WDTP have identified, facilitated and developed 15 rural tourism development projects, since its establishment. These are:

▲ New West Tourism Plan 2002 – 2004
▲ Green Box
▲ Ireland's Western Regions Brochure
▲ Walking Through Time
▲ Walking in the West
▲ WDTP Training
▲ www.trueireland.com
▲ Islands Festival Network

▲ Killary Adventure and Leisure Capital
▲ Leitrim Presents
▲ Irish Centre for Sustainable Tourism at IT Sligo
▲ Western Food Trail
▲ "Tourism Matters" Radio Broadcasts
▲ Heritage Attraction Review
▲ Conference – Sustainable Tourism Development in the West

In turn, WDTP work stimulates private sector development by signalling confidence in the tourism sector and encouraging private sector enterprise initiatives. The following are examples of strategic tourism projects initiated by the WDTP.

The Green Box – Realising the Ecotourism Potential of the West

To date, Ireland has not realised the potential of the green or ecotourism market, particularly in continental Europe and Scandinavia, to any great extent. Given the 'green' reputation of the West of Ireland this represents a significant opportunity to develop a niche tourism product. Accordingly, the cross-border Green Box project was initiated in 2002 and represented Ireland's first integrated ecotourism project.

The Green Box aims to deliver environmentally sustainable tourism products, accommodation and attractions. Such tourism activity will have minimal impact on the ecology of the area, be of maximum benefit to the local communities and meet the needs of the environmentally-conscious visitor. The Green Box encompasses an area covering all of Leitrim and Fermanagh and parts of Donegal, Sligo and Cavan.

The Green Box project was initiated by the Western Development Tourism Programme (WDTP), a multi-agency steering group established to implement the recommendations of the WDC's Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West.[8] The WDTP played a key facilitation role between the public, private and community sectors in the development of the initial plan, the co-ordination of funding applications and the establishment of the Green Box Board. Two members of the WDTP are members of the Green Box Board representing Fáilte Ireland and the WDC.

---

8   WDC (2000), Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West.

The Green Box has evolved into an independent project with a CEO and six full-time staff based in Manorhamilton, Co Leitrim. Funding of €3.1 million has been secured for the project for the period to early 2008.[9] The Green Box project is focused on product development and supports all stages in the tourism development process from training, through product development, certification and marketing.

Training: A new National Certificate in Ecotourism has been developed by IT Sligo in conjunction with the WDTP and been delivered to 20 providers within the Green Box area. The providers were supported to participate on this course by the local Leader organisations.

Product Development: The Green Box project administers a capital development programme of €1,162,500 which provides grant aid to private or community-owned tourism related businesses in the area. Businesses that can access funding under this programme include eco-friendly accommodation, organic or specialist food producers, restaurants, activity holiday providers, specialist tour operators, craft businesses and others. The programme will also fund two flagship capital investment projects utilising eco-friendly building practices that could serve as models of good practice.

Networking and Certification: The Green Box Network aims to assist product providers within the Green Box to meet 'green' standards through training sessions and mentoring for network members. Training is currently underway to allow accommodation providers to meet the European eco-label – the EU Flower. Twenty-two providers in the Green Box will receive this label in 2006, the first on the island of Ireland. The Green Box is also developing a green certification scheme for restaurants and visitor attractions within the area.

Marketing: The Green Box is also involved in marketing of the area. This includes a website www.greenbox.ie as well as direct advertising of packages within the area.

Since 2001 the WDTP has received core funding and support from Fáilte Ireland, Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Western Development Commission and Institute of Technology, Sligo. LEADER, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Shannon Development and the Regional Tourism Authorities have contributed to the various WDTP projects outlined above.

---

9   All funding was received from cross-border programmes INTERREG and PEACE II.

Step seven: national implementation

Achieving national implementation of rural tourism development strategies represents one of the WDC's development objectives. The WDC continues to represent the Western Region at national level and to advocate the success of its Model of rural tourism development. A description of how the WDC is achieving national implementation of rural tourism development strategies is presented in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Achieving national implementation: the rural tourism sector

As a result of its successful regional implementation of strategic rural tourism development projects in the Western Region, the WDC and WDTP have achieved the following progress at national level:

▲ the WDTP made a submission to the Tourism Policy Review Group in 2003, stressing the potential of underdeveloped tourism areas and the need for continued support for development of niche tourism products. The subsequent report of the Tourism Policy Review Group *New Horizons for Irish Tourism: An Agenda for Action* (Government of Ireland, 2003) outlined priorities for tourism development, a number of which were and are being implemented by the WDTP at regional level. These included: nurturing the tourism business environment; product development and innovation; coordinating marketing and promotion activities; promoting environmental best practice; developing regional clusters of excellence and increasing activity in non-traditional tourism areas. Some of the recommendations proposed by the group are currently being delivered by the WDTP in the Western Region. Despite the welcome development of an all-Ireland action plan for tourism development, the WDC and WDTP expressed concerns at national level about the lack of actions to assist development in under-performing tourist areas

▲ the establishment of the WDTP has helped to drive rural tourism in the Western Region and design innovative and diversified development strategies for under-performing rural areas. Accordingly, the WDTP Model can be duplicated in other under-performing tourist areas of Ireland. The WDC have made submissions to policy makers to highlight the success of the WDTP initiative, and to outline the potential for the WDTP Model to be transferred to other parts of Ireland

▲ The approach that has been employed by the WDTP, referred to as the role of the 'honest broker', has facilitated inter-agency partnership for all agencies involved in tourism in the region. Stakeholders believe that this approach has been complimentary and added value to the work of other tourism agenices. Specific examples which demonstrate the value-added effectiveness of the approach include:

  ◇ inter-agency partnership across thinking, funding and planning
  ◇ a regional dimension to agency thinking and activities and the provision of tourism expertise and knowledge to stakeholders
  ◇ capacity building for the trade
  ◇ delivery of new strategic innovative tourism development initiatives that may not have happened otherwise
  ◇ reduced duplication of effort across toruism initiatives in the region, i.e. WDTP established best practice which in turn can be replicated within the region
  ◇ all tourism agencies in the region were brought together to focus on sustainable rural tourism.

The achievement of 17 core projects, at an annual exchequer cost in the region of €100,000 has positioned the WDTP as excellent value for money in the minds of many stakeholders. The WDTP approach has also uniquely focused private, public and community effort on grossly underdeveloped areas.

▲ The WDTP are also involved in making presentations to the Rural/Agri-Tourism Advisory Committee, Fáilte Ireland, the Countryside Recreation Network and the National Tourism Policy Review Group. The WDC participate on the national Rural Agri-Tourism Advisory Group.

▲ The success of the WDTP initiative is also assured by having an innovative and dynamic programme manager, with practical development experience, foresight and an ability to plan strategically and develop holistic plans for tourism development.

By having an initiative like the WDTP, the WDC can articulate the need for more balanced tourism development and more coordinated development efforts amongst tourism agencies.

Conclusions

The rural tourism sector in the Western Region has benefited from the implementation of the WDC Model of Rural Development. Since the publication of a blueprint for development and the establishment of a multi-agency partnership (WDTP), many successful rural tourism development projects have been implemented. At this stage of the development process, WDC personnel have a 'hands on' role in the implementation process. Overtime, this role is expected to change to a support/advisory role for the WDTP. The success of this approach to rural tourism development lies in a commitment to the principles of partnership, consultation and sustainable rural tourism development.

Section Five:
Lessons learned

Section five: Lessons learned

Introduction

This section concludes the report by presenting an outline of how to achieve successful implementation of the Model, the merits gained from implementation and some challenges which may be encountered during the implementation process.

Achieving successful implementation of the WDC Model of Rural Development

In keeping with the WDC's strategic aims for the Western Region, successful implementation of the WDC Model of Rural Development works to achieve:

▲ private enterprise development, stimulation and confidence

▲ job creation and skill transfer

▲ a quality economic and social environment

▲ vibrant and sustainable enterprise in the rural areas of the Western Region.

Successful implementation of the WDC Model of Rural Development is achieved by:

▲ identifying resources in the Western Region with potential for development

▲ inviting key experts, across a number of sectors in the region, to become involved in a partnership and consultation process

▲ having dedicated policy analysts and rural development personnel, to monitor policy and facilitate partners in implementing development proposals

▲ building social capital by creating a supportive and trusting work environment, agreeing the role and the responsibility of the WDC and each partner in the development process, identifying partner concerns, and creating an open forum for planning and discussion

▲ participation on management committees for development programmes and projects, to assist partners in implementing development proposals

▲ providing administrative and technical support to the management committees for development projects e.g. assistance with a recruitment process, development of work programmes and ensuring projects are strategic in direction and design

▲ awareness of external constraints which impact on the participatory process e.g. restructuring of agencies, changes in legislation and policy context etc.

▲ identifying a suitable time to disengage from the more active and 'hands on' role, to a more support/advisory role

▲ maintaining strong linkages with policy makers to ensure that blueprint recommendations are taken into account in the preparation, development and implementation of national policy.

Critical success factors of the WDC Model of Rural Development

The WDC Model of Rural Development has proven very effective for the following reasons:

▲ the WDCs role as an 'honest broker' (see page 45) and equal partner in the participation process helps to establish a participatory Model of Rural Development

▲ the co-ordination approach adopted represents value for money and value added sustainability

▲ it provides an opportunity for building strategic networks amongst the main stakeholders in the public, private and community sectors

▲ critical mass is achieved by coordinating strategies for development and identifying future regional priorities for development

▲ creating blueprints for development which are practical, realistic, achievable and operational at regional level

▲ clear guidance, support and effective leadership has helped to sustain projects, create local ownership, governance, professional steering groups and managerial capacity to drive future regional development

▲ the WDC and its partners have received 'buy in' and support for development proposals at regional and national level.

Many of the development initiatives which the WDC, and its partners, have implemented since 1998, are presently emerging as strategic rural development priorities for rural areas across Ireland and the European Union. Thus, the WDC Model of Rural Development can be incorporated into the design and development of new rural development measures at national levels in the following ways:

1. engaging stakeholders in a process of partnership and consultation to determine development priorities

2. identifying natural resources in a region and designing long-term and sustainable strategies for development

3. diversifying rural economies by developing sectors, encouraging private sector led strategic development and designing strategic action plans for future rural development

4. recognising assets in the region which can be capitalised on e.g. the presence of close-knit communities, a good quality of life in rural areas, strong local governance, improved entrepreneurial environments and emerging community identities etc.

5. designing an integrated framework for development which embraces social, economic and environmental objectives and develops strategic and sustainable priorities for rural development

6. retaining local ownership of resources and the development process

7. facilitating leadership, animation, management and capacity building amongst regional players

8. promoting private sector led strategic development projects.

The key challenges in adopting the WDC Model of Rural Development

There are a number of key challenges in adopting the WDC Model of Rural Development. These include:

1. Development takes time

Development takes time, and often there are no immediate results or implementation of development strategies. Implementing the WDC Model of Rural Development may involve revisiting earlier steps before progressing along the seven-step development path. Secondly, it takes time for a new organisation, such as the WDC, to establish its legitimacy and role in regional development. These challenges may be overcome by establishing a partnership and consultation process, achieving successful 'buy in' from the partners, recognising that the development process is critically important for success and sustainability and having dedicated facilitators to support the partners throughout the development process.

2. Achieving local and national commitment to the development process

A challenge may arise in achieving local and national commitment to the development process. This may be overcome by:

▲ establishing a solid knowledge base to inform policy makers and regional actors, and to win support for development proposals

▲ ensuring that the research and consultation process is democratic and participatory

▲ proposing development strategies which are realistic, achievable and reflect rural development priorities

▲ winning support at local and national level during each step of the development process.

3. Establishing a knowledge base

A commitment to establishing a sound knowledge base can be challenging because of the availability of credible data for particular sectors of activity and the length of time it can take to gather and interpret relevant research. The WDC has established a knowledge base for many sectors of activity, by having a dedicated team of policy analysts who work alongside a team of development practitioners. This commitment to a sound knowledge base ensures that data is collected which can be used to inform public debate, opinion and proposals for rural development.

4. Establishing positive inter-organisational relationships

A commitment to partnership ensures that many agencies, often with differing remits in the same sector, are involved in the research, design and implementation of development proposals. The involvement of many stakeholders in the partnership process can be challenging as:

▲ there may be no tradition of working in partnership to achieve development

▲ each partner has to operate within the guidelines of their respective agencies

▲ some partners may be uncertain of the role and function of each partner in the development process.

These challenges can be overcome by one agency acting as an 'honest broker' in the development process, facilitating each partner to commit to the partnership process and identify their role and function in development, and to propose, manage and oversee the implementation of development proposals.

5. Having limited resources for development

Having limited resources to achieve development can be challenging. Undoubtedly, this will delay the development process. This challenge may be overcome by: ensuring that each agency commits their respective resources to the development process, and that national and regional endorsement is achieved at an early stage of the development process.

6. External environmental constraints

A key challenge is the influence of external environmental constraints on the development process. Difficulties encountered may include: the restructuring of agencies involved in the development process; changes in local and national government, legislative changes or an economic downturn. These challenges may be overcome by ensuring that during the planning and consultation process, development proposals are strategic, realistic and achievable and reflect the current context and long-term regional development priorities.

7. Identifying the right time to disengage from the development process

Identifying the right time for the facilitating agency to disengage from the development process can be challenging. Once successful management committees have been established to implement development proposals the facilitating organisation should take a step back from the more 'hands on' and active role, to a more supportive and advisory role in the development process.

Conclusions

The WDC Model of Rural Development has succeeded in building a proactive and partnership approach to rural development. Given the importance of achieving growth, increased competitiveness, employment creation and the sustainable development of rural areas over the coming years, it is important that Models of rural development are innovative, participatory and reflect sustainable rural development practices.

Many of the development initiatives which the WDC, and its partners, have implemented since 1998, reflect national and EU policy proposals by helping to diversify rural economies, encouraging partnership and promoting private sector led strategic development projects. It also aids the design of long-term and sustainable strategies for natural resources, improves the local entrepreneurial environment, and produces an integrated framework for regional development. Therefore, it is recommended that participatory and integrated Models, such as the WDC Model of Rural Development, should be used to inform new rural development proposals.

The WDC Model of Rural Development can be implemented across many sectors of activity, and across many regions in Ireland and further afield. Therefore, it is hoped that this report will act as a practical reference guide for development practitioners, community groups and/or implementing agencies who wish to implement a participatory and proactive Model of Rural Development. The Model clearly demonstrates, through its seven steps, the effectiveness of putting policy into practice and practice into policy. Whether the state sector, private or community sector implement the Model this cyclical approach ensures lessons learned are incorporated into new developments tools for future policy makers and development practitioners.

Explanation of terms as used in the WDC Model of Rural Development

'Buy in': the term 'buy in' is used to describe a stage in the development process when partners agree a shared framework for development, propose strategic development projects and commit to contributing their resources to the development process. 'Buy in' can also be achieved from external players, such as the government and wider community. In such instances 'buy in' is used to describe support and commitment to the development process. 'Buy in' is fostered by facilitation and capacity building and can be achieved through partnership, consensus building and a commitment to the development process.

Capacity building: capacity building involves building human skills and institutional capacities which are necessary to develop a partnership process and implement development proposals. Capacity building may also include developing technical, financial, management and leadership skills amongst individuals responsible for managing and implementing development projects.

Consultation: this involves seeking information and opinions from individuals who affect, or who are affected by, proposals for regional development. Consultation is achieved by conducting public meetings and interviews, sending letters and questionnaire surveys, inviting written submissions, organising community workshops/seminars etc. to obtain feedback prior to establishing regional priorities and finalising an action plan for regional development.

Facilitation: facilitation involves guiding, coordinating and encouraging participation in a decision-making process. A facilitator ensures that each partner has an input into decisions and proposals made for regional development, so that a bottom-up and participatory approach to development is achieved.

'Honest broker': the WDC acts as an 'honest broker' by working collaboratively with many stakeholders in a development process. The value of having an 'honest broker' in a development process is that an 'honest broker' is objective, does not take sides and does not stand to gain any direct economic benefit from the development process or outcomes. Instead, an 'honest broker' facilitates a participatory research and consultation process for the benefit of a wider community and to achieve development. An 'honest broker' may also act as a mediator between local, regional and national groups/interests.

Partnership: partnership involves pooling knowledge, skills, abilities and resources amongst individuals and organisations to achieve regional development. Partners represent stakeholders who affect, or are affected by, plans for regional development. The partners agree to cooperate in a development process and to share responsibilities for achieving regional development. Each partner has an identified role in the development process, and this role is agreed under a terms of reference for the planning process and the publication of an action plan for development. The WDC has facilitated the establishment of many partnerships to ensure a bottom-up and participatory approach to rural development.

Stakeholders: stakeholders represent individuals, groups or organisations that affect, are affected by, and/or have an interest in a particular regional development issue. Stakeholders include members from the public, private and community sectors.

Strategic planning: strategic planning involves establishing long-term and achievable objectives for regional development. The objectives are set out in an action plan for development. The WDC publishes its strategic plans for sectors of activity in the form of a blueprint for development.

List of references

Commission of the European Communities (CEC) (2005) Proposal for a Council Decision on Community strategic guidelines for Rural Development (2007-2013). COM(2005), 304 final, Luxembourg.

Government of Ireland (2002) Report of the National Organic Development Committee, report written for the Department of Agriculture and Food. Brunswick Press Ltd, Dublin.

Government of Ireland (2003) New Horizons for Irish Tourism: An Agenda for Action. Report written by the Tourism Policy Review Group for the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. Government Publications Office, Dublin.

Western Development Commission (1999) Blueprint for Success: A Development Plan for the West, 2000-2006. Prepared by Indecon International Economic Consultants for the Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Commission (1999) Blueprint for Investing in the West: Promoting Foreign Direct Investment in the West. Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Commission (2000) Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West: An Action Plan for Rural Areas. Prepared by Tourism Development International for the Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Commission (2000) Annual Report: 2000. Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Commission (2001) Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West. Prepared by Cera and the National Food Centre, Teagasc, for the Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Commission (2001) Blueprint for Organic Agri-Food Production in the West: Background Document. Prepared by Cera and the National Food Centre, Teagasc, for the Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Commission (2001) Annual Report: 2001. Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Commission (2002) Annual Report: 2002. Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Commission (2003) Annual Report: 2003. Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Commission (2004) Strategic Statement, 2004-2006. Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Commission (2004) To Catch the Wind: The Potential for Community Ownership of Wind Farms in Ireland. Prepared by the CSA Group, for the Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Tourism Programme (2002) The Green Box: Ireland's First Area-Based Integrated Ecotourism Plan. Report prepared by the Organic Centre, Rossinver and the Western Development Commission, Roscommon.

Western Development Tourism Programme (2005) Walking in the West: a step-by-step guide. Western Development Tourism Programme, Sligo.

List of websites consulted

Bord Bia: http://www.bordbia.ie

Comhar LEADER na hEireann: http://irishleadernetwork.org

County Enterprise Board: http://www.entemp.ie

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs: http://www.pobail.ie

Enterprise Ireland: http://www.enterprise-ireland.com

EU INTERREG programme: http://www.csfinfo.com

Fáilte Ireland: http://www.failteireland.ie

Gaeltacht: http://www.gaelsaoire.ie

Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association: http://www.irishorganic.ie

Irish Organic Forum: http://www.irishorganicforum.com

Irish Tourist Industry Confederation (ITIC): http://www.itic.ie

Institute of Technology, Sligo: http://www.itsligo.ie

LEADER: http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/index_en.htm

Leitrim Organic Forum: http://www.iol.ie/~leitrimorganic/page2.html

North West Regional Tourism Authority: http://www.irelandnorthwest.ie

Office of Public Works: http://www.opw.ie

Shannon Development: http://www.shannon-dev.ie

Skillnets Ltd: http://www.skillnets.com

Teagasc: http://www.teagasc.ie

The Organic Centre: http://www.theorganiccentre.ie

The Western Organic Network: http://www.westernorganicnetwork.com

Tourism Policy Review Group: http://www.tourismreview.ie

Western Development Commission: http://www.wdc.ie

Western Regional Tourism Authority: http://www.irelandwest.ie

Western Development Tourism Programme: http://www.trueireland.com

Appendices

Appendix I: Agencies explained

Bord Glas: the former horticultural development board whose responsibility has now been given to Bord Bia.

Bord Bia: the agency responsible for market development and the promotion of Irish food and drink. For more information visit: http://www.bordbia.ie

Comhar LEADER na hEireann: The Irish LEADER network comprises 38 Local Action Group's which implement the National Rural Development Programme and the EU LEADER+ Programme. For more information visit: http://www.irishleadernetwork.org

County Enterprise Board: The County Enterprise Boards represent a nationwide network of City and County Enterprise Boards, established in 1993, to support indigenous micro-enterprise creation and development. For more information visit: http://www.entemp.ie

Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs: The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is a government department responsible for promoting and supporting the sustainable and inclusive development of communities across Ireland. For more information visit: http://www.pobail.ie

Enterprise Ireland: Enterprise Ireland is an Irish state development agency which supports the start up and development of Irish companies. Enterprise Ireland focuses on export sales, investing in research and innovation, improving productivity, enhancing competitiveness and driving regional development. For more information visit: http://www.enterprise-ireland.com

EU INTERREG programme: The EU INTERREG programme promotes cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation within the EU. The INTERREG programme is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). For more information visit: http://www.csfinfo.com

Fáilte Ireland: Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority which strives to develop and sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourist destination. For more information visit: http://www.failteireland.ie

Gaeltacht: Gaeltacht is the term used to refer to those parts of Ireland in which the Irish language is spoken and its culture and traditions still exist. For more information visit: http://www.gaelsaoire.ie

Irish Tourist Industry Confederation (ITIC): ITIC is a representative body for the tourism industry which focuses on the economic development of the tourism industry at national and regional level. ITIC works with the Irish government on issues relating to tourism policy, funding priorities and investment strategies. For more information visit: http://www.itic.ie

Institute of Technology, Sligo: IT Sligo is one of the Higher Institutes of Technology in Ireland which deliver third level education to national and international students. For more information visit: http://www.itsligo.ie

Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association: The Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association is an Irish organic association with over 1,000 subscribed members. The association organises conferences, publishes a bi-monthly magazine, compiles resources and develops an Irish organic group network. For more information visit: http://www.irishorganic.ie

LEADER: LEADER (Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale i.e. Links between actions for the development of the rural economy) is an EU programme for rural development. For more information visit: http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/rur/leaderplus/index_en.htm

Leitrim Organic Cooperative: Leitrim Organic Cooperative is a farmer owned organic cooperative established in 1998. For more information visit: http://www.iol.ie/~leitrimorganic/page2.html

North West Regional Tourism Authority Ltd (North West Tourism): North West Tourism is a member based tourism organisation which covers Counties Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo. For more information visit: http://www.irelandnorthwest.ie

Office of Public Works: The Office of Public Works is an Irish government engineering agency responsible for town planning, restoration, conservation etc. For more information visit: http://www.opw.ie

Shannon Development: Shannon Development is a regional development agency which works in partnership with many agencies, to support regional development, business and tourism development in the Shannon region of Ireland. For more information visit: http://www.shannon-dev.ie

Skillnets Ltd: Skillnets is an enterprise-led, partnership-based initiative which supports, promotes and facilitates learning to sustain Ireland's national competitiveness. For more information visit: http://www.skillnets.com

Teagasc: Teagasc is a semi-state organisation responsible for research, advisory and training services for the agriculture and food industry in Ireland. For more information visit: http://www.teagasc.ie

The Organic Centre: The Organic Centre was established in 1995 as a non profit making company which aims to provide training, information and demonstrations of organic gardening, growing and farming to members of the public. For more information visit: http://www.theorganiccentre.ie

Tourism Policy Review Group: The Tourism Policy Review Group was appointed by the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism to identify a strategy for sustainable tourism development in Ireland and to give recommendations and actions on future sustainable tourism development. For more information visit: http://www.tourismreview.ie

Údarás na Gaeltachta: Údarás na Gaeltachta is responsible for maintaining and strengthening the Gaeltacht regions in Ireland by attracting inward investment, supporting cultural and language development activities and working in partnership with local communities and organisations. For more information visit: http://www.udaras.ie

Western Regional Tourism Authority Ltd (Ireland West Tourism): Ireland West Tourism is a member based tourism organisation which covers Counties Mayo, Roscommon and Galway. For more information visit: http://www.irelandwest.ie

Appendix II: List of interviewees

Those consulted during the writing up of this document include:

Lisa McAllister, Chief Executive Officer, WDC

Dr Patricia O'Hara, Policy Manager, WDC

Fiona Candon, Development Manager, WDC

Bernadette Phelan, Regional Development Executive, WDC

Caríosa Lynch, (former) Regional Development Executive, WDC

Helen McHenry, Policy Analyst, WDC

Pauline White, Policy Analyst, WDC

Liam Scollan, Managing Director, Ireland West Airport, Knock (former CEO of the WDC)

Donal Guilfoyle, Head of Regional Development, Fáilte Ireland

Patsy Daly, Mid-South Roscommon LEADER Company

Alan Hill, (former) Programme Manager, WDTP

Sr Maureen Lally, Tochar Valley Way

John O'Neill, The Organic Centre