The ComMUniversity

A review of the Communiversity:

The University for All

2020

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Acknowledgements

The Communiversity could not exist without the hard work and good will of people from many organisations. As a partnership initiative it relies on relationships, many of which have endured and grown stronger over the years. There were people involved early on such as Norma MacDermott and Eva McEneaney, from the Library Council of Ireland, these were later joined by other library staff such as Aoife McSwiney, Paul Daly, Brendan Teeling, Margaret Hayes, Mairead Owens, Sheila Kelly, Una Gomez and other people from the Dublin City Council Public Library Section as well as Library services in Monaghan, Louth, Kildare. As the Communiversity has moved around the country we have met many Community based education and adult guidance workers without whom we would not be able to reach the cohort of people that we welcome into the libraries and into the course. Paul Hayes, Lucy Harrington, Paul Rogers, Jacqui Ward, Anne Daly, Declan Markey, Asia Rutkowska and all the staff of the different LEADER Partnership companies and Local Development companies that bring us to their area are of vital importance to this project. Thank you to all the members of the Communiversity Network who are advocating on our behalf. As an education initiative the Communiversity would not be possible without the tutors, facilitators, lecturers who give their expertise, share their passion and provide the wherewithal for a learning space that many have said has changed their lives for the better. To that end we would like to very sincerely thank Tony Weekes, Miriam Moffitt, Cathal Coleman, Deirdre Delaney, Frank Cullen, Susan Gottlöber, Brendan Scott, Donal Hall, Deirdre Quinn, Suzanne Pegley, Mike Powers, Tricia Doyle, Debbie O'Rourke, Huimin Yang, Lizzie Meade, Margaret Nugent, and Angela McGinn, who also proof read this document (apologies to anyone we have forgotten). A big thank you to all of the Heads of Departments in Maynooth University who have never been wanting when approached by me asking for lecturers to venture out of the ivory tower, to be honest it has been pushing at an open door.

Sinead and I would like to dedicate this report to the memory of one of the most genuine supporters of the Communiversity the late Claudia Vaulont. Still missed by everyone who was fortunate enough to have known her.

Foreword: Covid 19

The timing of this report could not be worse. It was meant to give a picture of the Communiversity as it now stands based upon the continuity of the programme from the time the research was carried out up until now. However, it now reads like a historical document. The Communiversity is all about people learning in their own local environment. It's about Community Development and about getting to know each other at a human level. Proximity has been key to its success, this and immediacy. I dropped into Lizzie Meade at a Communiversity session in around 2014 and during the coffee break (the social aspect cannot be overstated) she told me that she was teaching an Online Philosophy course to about 400 students for another university, "I know that some of them are not there. They are eating their dinner or watching Coronation Street. But this is real, this is the way Socrates did it with small groups talking about big ideas in Athens over two thousand years ago. This is what philosophy is about allowing people to ask questions of their life. To think about things."

Covid has meant that we are moving as much teaching as possible on line. Somethings won't work online. We were due to start module two of the 2020 Communiversity in Coolock on the evening of the 12 March 2020. We had thirty people chomping at the bit to get into their next module, Criminology with Dr Ian Marder. It was announced that morning by the Taoiseach that at 6.00pm all places of education were to close their doors until 29 March and would be advised in the meantime about reopening. Everyone knew that it would be after Easter at least before we could start up again. We were prepared for that. All of the lecturers/tutors agreed that once we had more certainty, they would try to move their commitments around and we should still have time to complete the programme before the Celebration of Learning day in Maynooth University at the end of June. Things changed and the lockdown happened. Now it was September before any return to university and meanwhile all university teaching went 'remote'. The lecturers approached me to see if we could deliver the modules through Zoom or TEAMS. Paul Hayes and Catalina Airinei canvassed the participants in Coolock and Walkinstown respectively but the lack of digital skills and the lack of equipment within the groups meant that we have had to put Communiversity 2020 on hold indefinitely. This speaks volumes as to the type of students we have on the Communiversity. Those with the least resources and knowledge to deal with the 'new normal'. People for whom MOOCS or Distance Learning would be unimaginable. And so we are waiting and planning. The virus is a killer but the Communiversity is not dead yet. If Socrates could sit in the Agora two thousand five hundred years ago and get people to think about life, justice, truth, beauty, politics and being then we can wait a few months to consider the same and other questions. The Pandemic has changed the world, so did the Black Death. The futures are unwritten and it is up to us to make them. With some luck we will get back into the Libraries and communities and will be able to meet and share and learn.

Dr Derek Barter, Co-ordinator of Continuing Education Dept. of Adult and Community Education Maynooth University and Director of the Communiversity.

Abstract

The Communiversity is a three-way partnership between Maynooth University (MU); community based organisations (in the form Local Development Companies (LDCs) and Local LEADER Partnership Companies[1] (LLPCs)); and the Public Library Service. At its inception each stakeholder approached their involvement with different aims and policy demands in mind but with a common objective. This objective then, as it remains to the present, is to engage people, for whom Higher Education appears distant, alien and unobtainable, in a university level course in a secure and familiar environment for personal development and capacity building at a community level. The aims for each partner then as now were for Maynooth University towards widening participation and engaging communities beyond the campus; for the Library Council and later individual County and City Librarians to develop the library as a focal point for learning and to try to attract non-library users. And finally, for the Community Partners as agents for Social Inclusion for disadvantaged groups and individuals in terms of employment, health and education it is an initiative that meets many of their needs in terms of adult educational provision. Within these varying aims there exists much overlap and scope for cooperation. This review is an attempt to describe the standing of the Communiversity as it was up to 12 March 2020. It will try to capture its origins within the context of the 'economic crash' in the years immediately following the Banking Crisis and the possibilities for its future development as a community based democratic educational initiative. In an era where loneliness and isolation in older aged people and knowledge of poor mental health and its associated problems are becoming more widespread among the general population the idea of social prescribing has taken hold. The Communiversity could be one element in this fight against these Western maladies by bringing people back together in a learning environment where curiosity and a willingness to participate at a level commensurate with the person's own needs and capabilities are the only requirements for success. Anything else that comes out of it is a bonus.

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[1] For the purposes of this report these will be referred to as 'Community Partners'

Executive Summary

This publication reviews the Communiversity – an outreach programme designed and co-ordinated by Dr Derek Barter in the Department of Adult and Community Education in Maynooth University (MU) which provides university education to participants in local library settings.

The Communiversity involves, organisationally, three partners.

- Maynooth University, which provides qualified lecturers, and tutors which adopts an 'adult education' approach to learning in an outreach setting.
- The Public Library Service which provides a venue and support in terms of books and material resources to the Communiversity participants.
- Community partners in the form of local community development companies who recruit participants and provide the funding for the programme from SICAP funding.

The report examines the Communiversity from the points of view of participants, tutors and co-ordinators.

Chapter 1 introduces the report and describes the design of the Communiversity. It also describes the history and context of its development since 2011. The aims and objectives of the programme are examined from 2012 when a *de facto* steering committee was established and the first Communiversities took place in Kildare town and Coolock with 49 participants.

Chapter 2 describes the rationale for the study, using information gained from participants, tutors and co-ordinators in light of the following five research questions:

1. How the Communiversity works to address MU policy on widening participation including the HEA's National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 and MU's own strategic plans from 2012.
2. How the Communiversity works to address public library stated strategy.
3. How the Communiversity works to address community partners strategic objectives in line with SICAP.
4. How the Communiversity can extend to provide suitable progression pathways for participants.
5. The potential for the Communiversity to provide an access gateway for mature students

The chapter also goes into detail as to how the Communiversity works including, teaching and learning in subjects provided and how it is funded. Finally, the chapter examines the 2012 report undertaken after the initial Libraries Initiative programme and highlights areas of agreement with the findings of this report.

Chapter 3 examines the policy context and history of the Communiversity and describes in detail how the programme fits with the goals and objectives of the partner organisations involved.

Chapter 4 explains the methodology in gathering data quantitatively and qualitatively with current and past participants, tutors and co-ordinators.

The findings from the data gathering are explained in Chapter 5. The demographic attributes of participants are described including when and where they participated in the Communiversity, their previous education, subject preferences and progress after the completion of the programme. Direct quotes from participants are used to allow their voice to be heard.

Chapter 6 contains a discussion of the findings which is not restricted to higher learning considerations of the participants but the effects of their participation on the wider community. It also discusses teaching and learning in the Communiversity using adult education principles which emphasise independent learning options. This leads to a discussion on the potential for the Communiversity to be an access gateway to higher education for mature students.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 7, shows how the Communiversity as an example of innovative practice including the design strengths of this strategic collaboration and the potential to develop progression pathways. It also discusses the need for the Communiversity to be funded sustainably for it to reach its potential to develop participants' potential.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

> o Oxford,…was a city of 950 houses when its university was founded. It met the need for educated priests, lawyers and teachers, but now that professional training is no longer enough to satisfy intelligent people, there is room for a new sort of university that is not a ghetto for the young, but a place where all generations can exchange experience, culture and hope.

Theodore Zeldin *An Intimate History of Humanity*.

The following evaluation gives a brief overview of a partnership initiative called the Communiversity. The partners are Maynooth University, Local Development Companies and the public library service. The key to the initiative so far and to unlocking its potential for expansion is this partnership arrangement. In the report that follows we hope to capture and illustrate the vibrancy of the Communiversity as a learning space for individuals that is imbued with the spirit of community development and informed by the ethos of adult education.

**Figure 1: Model of Communiversity Co-operation**
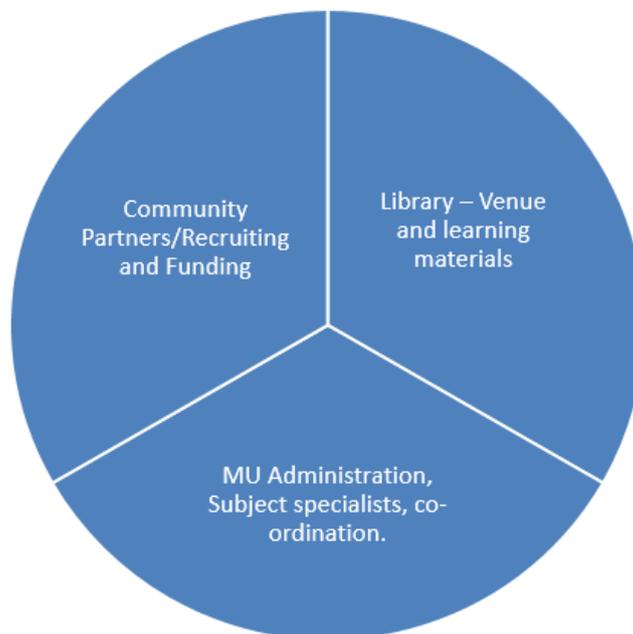
Figure 1. illustrates each partner's role in the operation of the Communiversity. The following should be noted in relation to how the Communiversity programme works:

- The venue (in a local library) is a familiar space which does not involve learning in an environment which would be seen as 'alien' to some.

- A prologue 'Taster Session' for the general public allows those interested to gain a better understanding of programme content and structure. It also allows the Community Partners to recruit from the attendees.

- The following week the programme starts with a Local History module. The intention here is to create the space for the participants to share their local knowledge. By the end of the four weeks of local history the dialogic nature of the course has been set and more abstract modules can be introduced e.g. psychology/ economics, politics/philosophy etc.

Since its inception, the Communiversity has responded to the needs of participants. Feedback is sought by Community Partners from participants at the end of each course and appropriate changes are made to the programme design and implementation to respond to issues raised.

History and Context:

The idea for the Communiversity developed out of necessity brought on by the economic downturn of 2008 and the ensuing years. The conditions that prevailed in the first number of years of the programme were those of severe austerity. The section of society hardest hit, the so called areas of disadvantage, were those where the services of Local Development Companies (LDC) were heavily relied upon. The LDCs implement community development programmes on behalf of the State for social inclusion, education and employment schemes. As public services were cut or curtailed the possibility of a community based lifelong learning initiative that went beyond labour market activation seemed remote. The agenda for lifelong learning was now being set by the Dept. of Education and 'Skills' as it had recently been re-designated. Job readiness and skills based training was to take precedence over all other forms of adult education. Springboard, the government's part-time education initiative, became the vehicle for unemployed adults to enable them to upskill with the emphasis on areas of potential growth for the economy based on the findings of the 'Expert Panel of Future Skills Needs' data by providing conversion courses in Information and Communications Technology; Data Analytics and Export led services. This was understandable in the context of the worst recession that the western world had experienced since the Great Depression of the 1930s and the idea of education for its own sake or learning for personal development was given scant consideration in the face of this harsh reality.

In 2010 a small piece of research into the interest in leisure courses had been carried out in a number of local libraries in county Kildare by Dr Fearga Kenny and commissioned by the then Head of DACE in NUIM (now MU), Josephine Finn. The data collected suggested that there was a genuine interest by library users in studying academic subjects at a level similar to that of first year university programmes. In early 2011 an attempt was made to deliver such courses in a community space in Maynooth but the overheads involved in the hiring of an off

campus room made the costs for individuals prohibitive. Therefore, the delivery of the programme reverted to the Department of Adult and Community Education wing of Education House as the 'NUI Maynooth Leisure Courses'. This seemed to defeat the purpose of providing these courses which was for community engagement and widening participation. Going beyond the confines of the campus has been a staple of DACE activities since the department's inception in the 1970s. Outreach into communities right across the country has been a normal and central part of the Department's remit during that time. Not to pursue this long standing commitment to community education at this particular time and in light of the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030*[2] more commonly called the Hunt Report recommendations for those very endeavours would have betrayed the department's values for social justice and equity for those most marginalised.

It was at this point that using local libraries as venues was conceived and an approach was made to the Director of the Library Council of Ireland, Norma MacDermott. She saw the merit in such a project and realised that it would fulfil certain policy requirements placed upon the Library Council and contained within the two *Branching Out* Reports.[3] These reports determine that the role of the library is to be open to all 'thus enabling everyone to learn new skills and make informed choices throughout their lifetime.' Furthermore, they recommend that the service should develop:

> Engagement and participation, including developing partnership approaches and furthering cooperation on educational issues both with the education sector and with agencies involved in lifelong learning in line with the life cycle approach identified in Towards 2016.[4]

This ambition resonated with that of DACE and when set within the contextual framework for engagement and partnership outlined in Hunt which states:

> Greater engagement and partnership between higher education institutions and community and voluntary groups offers significant potential to progress equality and community development and to further social innovation.[5]

At the same time the advice of Social Inclusion Co-ordinators in the Canal Communities Partnership was sought as to how best to move the project forward. It was suggested that particular significance ought to be given to Goal 2 of the Local Community Development Programme[6] which aims to 'Increase access to formal and informal educational, recreational and cultural activities and resources'. This enabled us to align the requirements for university

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[2] Higher Education Authority (2015). *National plan for equity of access 2015-2019*, HEA, Dublin.
[3] Department of Rural and Community Development *Branching Out: a New Public Library Service* (1998); *Branching Out: Future Directions* (2008) Dublin, Govt. Stationery Office.
[4] Department of An Taoiseach (2006) *Towards 2016 Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015*, (2006) Dublin, Govt. Stationery Office.
[5] Higher Education Authority (2015). *National plan for equity of access 2015-2019*, HEA, Dublin. pp 76-79.
[6] This later became the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme or SICAP.

community engagement from the Hunt report and the Library Council's *Branching Out* report for wider participation to the Strategic Goals for social inclusion as these then existed.

At this point a proposal inclusive of costs[7] was drawn up and sent to the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government and the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN). After rejecting the Department's initial offer of funding, which came with the stipulation that the programme would be delivered to 18-25 year old unemployed males on the grounds that this was not labour market activation but an educational programme the initiative was granted seed funding to carry out one pilot project. However, in discussion between the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN), MU and the Library Council it was proposed that we approach two Partnership companies, one rural and one urban to seek matching funding in order to run two projects simultaneously. Brian Carty of the ILDN undertook this aspect of the project. The two LDCs that showed interest were the County Kildare LEADER Partnership Company with whom DACE already had a burgeoning relationship in what would become the Kildare Learning Initiative with Pat Leogue and Anne Daly. The other LDC, the Northside Partnership, located in what is considered to have pockets of most disadvantage and one that contains the area where some of the highest levels of exclusion from HE in the country exists, Dublin 17[8]. The then CEO Marian Vickers and Lifelong Learning co-ordinator Paul Hayes were eager to pilot the venture.

On 13 January 2012 a meeting of all the interested parties was held in the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) offices. This became a *de facto* steering committee. In attendance were representatives of NUI Maynooth, the Library Council, Dublin City Council Public Libraries Service, Kildare County Council, Northside Partnership and Kildare Partnership and the director of the ILDN. At that meeting it was agreed that the pilot phase should begin in mid-February and would run for 20 weeks. It was also agreed that each of the partners would undertake specific tasks compatible with their own area of expertise. Each stakeholder had different aims but all shared the same objective. The following Aims and Objectives were agreed:

Aims:

- o For the Department of Adult and Community Education (DACE) National University of Ireland Maynooth the aim was that the project would deliver affordable off-campus community education.

- o The Library Council sought to develop the library as a focal point for learning and community engagement.

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[7] The nett cost to run a 20 week course for 25 people was calculated at €7,700 which was then broken down €7.70 per student per hour, costs have been revised downwards.
[8] https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/some-99-of-dublin-6-students-go-on-to-third-level-1.1901885 only 15% of students from Dublin 17 went on to third level education. [Accessed 17/08/2020]

o   The Partnerships wished to achieve social inclusion.

Objectives:

The objectives were:

o   To deliver a 20 week learning programme in two local libraries – one in an urban area and one in a rural area for up to 50 people.

o   To provide a programme that opened 3rd level education to the community that was accessible both in terms of transport issues and cost.

o   To recruit participants who were from hard to reach groups but that classes would form a non-homogenous group.

Staff from both Partnership companies, Kildare Library and Coolock Library began a very intensive advertising and recruitment campaign. Access was open to all but the Partnerships had the remit to target individuals who fall into the categories for social inclusion programmes in what are now called the SICAP Target Groups[9]. This recruitment strategy also met the objective to widen participation on behalf of the Library Council and coincided with the attempt by MU to reach people who might be furthest from accessing third level education.

The first taster sessions took place in Kildare and Coolock on 15th and 16th February 2012 respectively. These sessions outlined the academic content of the four five week modules for the programme which were: Local History, Community Development, Reading Enrichment and finally Sociology. The following week the programme proper began with five weeks of Local History. The course ran every Wednesday morning in Kildare Town Library for two years and every Thursday morning in Coolock Library where it has continued every year to date.

As 2012 drew to a close the review of the Maynooth Libraries Initiative in the Kildare Partnership Company premises in Naas considered what had worked and what had become evident as proving difficult. It was also agreed that we would continue with the programme the following year and to change the name to the Communiversity.

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[9] SICAP Target Groups include long term unemployed, single parents, migrants, people in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction, people from the Traveller community etc.

Chapter 2

Review Rationale

Having completed a review of the Communiversity in 2012, in 2018 it was considered timely to look at the programme again for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was obvious that the programme had developed from its original structure. It also became clear that a review of the current workings of the Communiversity would be useful in light of recent policy initiatives from the Higher Education Authority and the Department of Education and Skills regarding the Programme for Access to Higher Education Strand III.[10] Finally, a review could take into account the wider community education and population health context and to consider whether the Communiversity might be a useful vehicle for the current trend for social prescribing. The main objective of the research is to see how we can make the programme sustainable into the future.

The purposes of the review are to examine if and how the Communiversity:

- o Fulfils Maynooth University's policies on Widening Participation and Community Engagement in line with the National Strategy for Higher Education 2013-2030 (Hunt report) and MU Strategic Plans 2012-2022.

- o Fulfils the strategic objectives of *'Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities'.*

- o Satisfies the needs of the Community Partners in meeting their SICAP aims.

- o To establish what the outcomes have been for past participants of the Communiversity.

- o To understand the desire/needs of the participants who would like to progress from the Communiversity to accredited courses.

- o To consider the potential for developing a symbiotic Communiversity/Return to Learning programme that would act as an Access Gateway for mature students.

Locations and Structure

Communiversity programmes have been delivered in a number of locations since the first pilots in 2012. All of these areas are either designated as areas of deep social disadvantage with low participation rates in third level/higher education such as Coolock, Darndale and Kilbarrack on Dublin's Northside; Ballyfermot, Dolphin's Barn and Crumlin in Dublin's south

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[10] https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/path/

city or to contain pockets of disadvantage in towns such as Drogheda and Dundalk in county Louth and Clones in county Monaghan.

Since its inception the programme is structured as follows:

- o **Maynooth University** provides tutors, co-ordination and administration. It also hosts a 'Celebration of Learning' awards ceremony where each Communiversity run for that academic year is invited on campus on the last Thursday in June bringing all participants together.

- o **Libraries** provide a venue for learning in the Communiversity and provide refreshments during each session. Libraries also support the programme by supplying photocopying facilities and acquire books recommended by the tutors.

- o **Community Partners (CPs)** fund the Communiversity through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation (SICAP) programme. Most importantly they provide local connections through which they recruit participants for the programme. Education support workers from the CPs provide adult guidance to participants and are the main contact for the programme at local level.

Participants are selected by the Community Partners and are asked to commit to attending all the modules each week of the programme to facilitate the formation of a stable group. Currently, participants take part in weekly classes in their local libraries in either a 13 or 17 week programme. The programme structure has changed slightly since it was first run. Instead of 5 week modules of 2 hours each it is now divided into periods of 4 week modules where topics such as History, Politics, Philosophy, Economics, Psychology[11] are covered in sessions that last two and a half hours one morning per week. The emphasis in the learning methods is on discussion after input from the lecturers (usually in a MS PowerPoint presentation). Lecturers encourage reading selected texts, listening to podcasts, viewing Youtube videos to aid the discussion but this is not a requirement. Learning is not accredited and there are no assessments for any of the topics offered. Having no assignments was a conscious decision made early on as 'homework' not only has negative connotations evoking past painful educational experiences for some people in the target groups but would also act as an obstacle towards inclusivity. The Communiversity welcomes all comers and has attracted participants who admit to having literacy difficulties and who would not normally think of the library as a welcoming place for them.[12]

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[11] This list is indicative of the most commonly delivered subjects, however over the duration of the programmes modules in Chinese Studies, English, Geography, Community Development, Media Studies and Sociology have also been covered.

[12] One participant from the Dundalk Communiversity made this point at the 2015 Learning Celebration to the assembled audience.

An awards ceremony/celebration of learning is held in Maynooth University at the end of the course to acknowledge participants' input into the programme. At this ceremony, participants join other learning groups who have recently completed the Communiversity at a 'graduation' style ceremony. Here participants are given the opportunity to give their opinion on their experiences of the course. This is followed by a tour of Maynooth University and lunch.

Costs

The costs for each programme and the Learning Celebration day are covered through collective division of the added costs. The Department of Adult and Community Education (DACE), Maynooth University considers this initiative to be part of its remit for engagement, social inclusion and lifelong learning and therefore the costs of course development, co-ordination and administration have been greatly reduced and in some cases fully absorbed by Maynooth University. Similarly, the local library services absorb the venue and overhead costs. Costs for the Communiversity are, for the most part, covered by the Community Partners who utilise the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) fund.

In 2019 the nett cost to run a 17 week course for 25 people stands between €5500 and €6750 which breaks down to a nominal €7.50 per student per hour on average. There is no payment by either the library authorities or the students. Costs are kept as low as possible using human and physical resources already in place. Maynooth University pay the tutors (associate staff; post-graduates) the going rate plus travel, having received funds from the Community Partners. In this sense the Communiversity has been described as 'a model of best practice for Public Sector shared services' in terms of maximising use of resources.[13]

As has already been mentioned an evaluation of the Communiversity took place in 2012 once the pilot 'Libraries Initiative' was complete. Many of the themes found in this evaluation echoed the findings of this earlier report especially in relation to participants' positive learning experiences. The criticisms were that the course was not long enough and that there was no follow- on course in which to participate. These continue to be the most loudly voiced complaints. However, some LCDs and in the case of Ballyfermot and Chapelizod Partnership[14] the Communiversity group itself have taken the initiative and continued to meet and organise speakers and events under their own direction. This is testament to the potential for capacity building and community development that this type of educational intervention proffers.

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[13] Dublin City Deputy Librarian Brendan Teeling.
[14] In 2017 the Ballyfermot Adults Learning Together (BALT) emerged from the Communiversity. This is further explained below p. 25.

Chapter 3

Literature Review/Policy Context

The main concern for the purpose of this report is to view the Communiversity as an educational intervention.[15] In these terms what the Communiversity seeks to address is to emancipate the participant from the limits for educational achievement that people from the what is commonly understood to be 'hard to reach' target groups have internalised. Research from a range of sources such as the Higher Education Authority and the Economic and Social Research Institute indicates that people who have endured social disadvantage are risk-averse when it comes to accessing Higher Education.[16] The Communiversity offers a low threshold entry route with low risk to the participants. It uses a capabilities[17] approach for early engagement with learners. The capabilities approach can be understood as:

> … a theoretical framework that entails two core normative claims: first, the claim that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance, and second, that freedom to achieve well-being is to be understood in terms of people's capabilities, that is, their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value.[18]

As stated previously each partner in the programme has different but complimentary goals and objectives that underpin their involvement in the programme. As publicly funded bodies each has a responsibility to implement government policy in the areas of their expertise but early discussions made it clear that there was a convergence of purpose. Table 1 below describes the development of the policy contexts for each of the institutional actors involved in the Communiversity since 2012.

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[15] There are other secondary benefits that lend themselves to further research such as health benefits or community development.

[16] McCoy, S., Byrne, D., O'Connell, P.J., Kelly, E. & Doherty, C. (2010), *Hidden Disadvantage: a study of the low participation in Higher Education by the non manual group* (online)

[17] Walker, M & Unterhalter E, eds (2007) *Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education*; Nussbaum, M. (2000). *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*.

[18] Robeyns, I. "The Capability Approach", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N.Zalta (ed.),Capability Approach (online) [Accessed 18/08/2020]

	Policies documented in 2012	Policies developed since 2012
Libraries	Branching Out: a new public library service. 1998	Branching Out: Future directions' (2008 – 2013) Opportunities for All (2013-2017) Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities
Community Partners	Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP)[19]	The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2015-2017 (replaced the Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP)) Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018 – 2022
Maynooth University	National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (2010) Hunt Report National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-19.	MU Strategic plan 2012-2017* MU Strategic Plan 2018-2022

Table 1 The changing policy context for the partners in the Communiversity

Libraries

The recently published document entitled '*Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities'*[20] outlines current policy context for libraries involved in the Communiversity. The first library strategy document '*Branching Out: A new public library service'* was published in 1998 and focused on lifelong learning, supporting community led approach to the acquisition of basic skills as well as offering access to information. This strategy document was followed by '*Branching Out: Future directions'* in 2008. This phase of development saw significant investment in the library services and resulted in a growth in the use of library services by 15% to 2013. A subsequent phase of development, between 2013 and 2017, was guided by the 'Opportunities for All' strategy document. This strategy had to

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[19] http://ildn.ie/about-local-development-companies/programmes/lcdp/ .
[20] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/56d1d4-our-public-libraries-2022-inspiring-connecting-and-empowering-commun/

react to the economic downturn that was experienced at the time and investment was on a smaller scale to previous strategies. The main focus of this phase of development was to contribute to the country's economic recovery by supporting information, learning skills and creativity as well as supporting social development through individual self-worth and community cohesion. The development of the library service between 1998 and 2017 has meant that the libraries are in a position to provide a national service in terms of book borrowing and cataloguing. Spending on IT and physical infrastructure has meant that there are more libraries with suitable facilities in which to conduct lifelong learning programmes such as the Communiversity.

Community Partners

The Community Partners in the form of Local Leader Partnership Companies or Local Development Companies operate in a complex policy and funding environment perform two functions. Firstly, they manage programmes on behalf of government departments and their agencies. Secondly, also act as host organisations for collaborative non-governmental projects and specific projects with a social inclusion focus.[21] The policy and funding situation has gone through significant changes over the past decade since the 'cohesion' process that took place in the wake of the economic crash in 2008. These changes are outlined in Kelleher and O'Neill's *Report on the Systematic Destruction of the Community Development, Anti-Poverty and Equality Movement (2002-2015)*.[22] Central to the changes in relation to funding for Community Partners involved in the Communiversity is the movement from the Local Community Development Programme to the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in 2015. Kelleher and O'Neill state that 'this was the first time that a social inclusion programme was competitively tendered out on the market'.

The first phase of SICAP funding commenced in April 2015 and finished in December 2017. This phase of funding had three goals: strengthen communities (especially in disadvantaged areas and marginalised groups within them); support lifelong learning through the use of community development approaches; help people to become more job ready (including the development of 'social enterprises'). Eleven target groups were identified including lone parents, refugees and asylum seekers, children and families in disadvantaged areas and people with disabilities. One of three 'horizontal themes' was developing collaborative approaches with national and local actors.

Funding for SICAP, with certain changes to its implementation, has been extended from the beginning of 2018 until 2022. Currently SICAP has two goals; to support communities and; to support individuals (through lifelong learning and the provision of employment supports).

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[21] Thanks to Pat Leogue General/Social Inclusion Manager with the County Kildare LEADER Partnership for this information.
[22] Kelleher, P. & ONeill, C. (2018) *The Systematic Destruction of the Community Development, Anti-Poverty and Equality Movement (2002-2015)* online p.46.

Collaboration with relevant stakeholders remains a 'horizontal theme' of SICAP. [23] Local authorities have a major role in the administration of funding for SICAP. It is worth noting that local authorities also manage the library service.

Maynooth University

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (aka Hunt Report, 2011) guided the establishment of the Communiversity from the MU perspective when it stated '*greater engagement and partnership between higher education institutions and community and voluntary groups offers significant potential to progress equality and community development and to further social innovation*' .[24] The Hunt report continues to provide a policy context for the development of the Communiversity.

In 2013 the Higher Education Authority published 'Towards a Higher Education Landscape'[25] which promoted the establishment of regional collaborations of HEIs. Maynooth University's involvement in the Midlands, East and North Dublin (MEND) collaboration with Dublin City University, Dundalk IT and Athlone IT brought about the College Connect[26] programme under the aegis of PATH Strand III in 2018.

Since 2012 the Communiversity has also been guided by Maynooth University's Strategic plan 2012- 2017. Goal Number 4 in this plan is:

> *To strengthen engagement with all stakeholders through sustained partnerships with enterprises, communities, civil society and public bodies, to build support for the mission of the university, to serve the needs of society, and to open new opportunities for research and learning.'[27]*

Furthermore it aligns to the MU Strategic Plan Maynooth University 2018 – 2022 which states:

> *We will build on our experience and achievements in supporting access, participation and success for students from diverse backgrounds, continuing our current programme and extending our work to address other groups that face barriers to participation and success in higher education[28]* (see Figure 2 below).

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[23]https://www.pobal.ie/programmes/social-inclusion-and-community-activation-programme-sicap-2018-2022/

[24] https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Strategy-for-Higher-Education-2030.pdf (p.76)

[25] https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/04/Towards-a-Higher-Education-Landscape.pdf

[26] https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/access-office/college-connect

[27]https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/strategicplan20122017.pdf

[28] https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/about-us/university-strategic-plan

Figure 2: Equality, diversity and interculturalism (from MU Strategic Plan 2018- 2022, p. 21)

6. Equality, diversity, inclusion and interculturalism

6.1 We will—through our commitment to human rights, social justice and equality—strive to be a truly inclusive university, where scholarship and learning are enriched and excellence is enabled by the diversity of our staff and students.

6.2 We will build on our experience and achievements in supporting access, participation and success for students from diverse backgrounds, continuing our current programme and extending our work to address other groups that face barriers to participation and success in higher education.

6.3 We will support our staff in making curricula, teaching and learning more inclusive, international and intercultural, and will work to create an inclusive academic environment.

6.4 We will establish Maynooth University as a national leader in advancing equality and diversity amongst staff.

Conclusion

One of the strengths of the Communiversity has been its alignment with the strategic objectives of the partners involved in the programmes. From the above we see that the Communiversity continues to deliver in terms of policy for all the partners involved.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Work started on the research project in January 2018 when Dr Derek Barter stated the need for and purpose of a review of the Communiversity. Primary research for the evaluation was carried out by Sinéad Hyland (BA, HDip Adult and Community Education, MSc in Applied Social Research) between February and May 2018. There was also a discussion on the best methodologies to obtain information from past participants in the Communiversity. The project received ethical approval from MU in March 2018 for an analysis of existing data sources about participants, interviews with staff running the Communiversity and three focus groups. The distribution of surveys to past participants of the Communiversity went ahead soon after ethical approval was granted.

The following sources of data were used in the generation of this report:

- Data gathered by the Community Partners in administering the scheme which gave information on gender and numbers of enrolments in the Communiversity

- Data gathered by Community Partners at the end of Communiversity programmes (anonymised) describing the participants recent experiences of the Communiversity Programme

- Recorded conversations with professionals involved in running the Communiversity

- Focus groups with past-participants in Walkinstown, Coolock and Ballyfermot libraries.

- Survey distributed to 132 past-participants by email and completed by phone with those who had no email contact details (randomly selected).

- Email responses from tutors/lecturers.

Mixed methods (both qualitative and quantitative) were used to gather information from staff and a diverse group of participants.

These participants were contactable in different ways and most were contacted by email but many were only contactable by telephone. It was expected that the information obtained from past Communiversity participants in the surveys would validate and provide further insights to the information obtained in the focus groups. The use of two methods of data collection was an important means of triangulation for the information to ensure that there was consistency in responses from the questions asked face to face in group settings and online. It also gave participants the chance to reflect upon their experiences and respond both individually and in a group context.

Three focus groups were held in places where Communiversity programmes were being run. The help of the Community Partners was sought in organising these focus groups as they had access to the contact details of respondents. Transfer of personal data was kept to a minimum and the process was carried out fully in line with the new GDPR requirements that were coming into effect. Focus groups were held in Walkinstown Library with six women, Coolock with four women and four men, Ballyfermot with two women and six men.

An interview schedule was developed for the focus groups (see Appendix B) to prompt discussion on areas of interest and this was distributed to participants in advance of the focus group when seeking their consent. It was stated to participants that these were themes to be explored and they were encouraged to mention any other thoughts or impressions that they had on the Communiversity that were not covered by these themes.

Due to time constraints the material was not transcribed by the researcher but initially analysed aurally listening to the material multiple times to identify key themes, with transcriptions of quotations later completed.

The survey used the Online Surveys managed by Maynooth University. Where email addresses were available (132 valid email addresses were made available to the researcher) a link to the survey was sent to the participants directly. Where only a telephone number was available for the participant (41 telephone numbers were made available to the researcher) the researcher rang the participant and offered to send the survey to them if they gave an email address. Two respondents took up this offer. They were also offered the opportunity to dictate their survey answers to the researcher which five respondents took up. Not all the telephone numbers were current but, where available, the researcher left a message for the potential respondent to reply if they wished to. The online survey was sent directly from the Community Partners to participants who had undertaken the programme in Kildare Library in 2012 and five responses were received from Kildare. It was not possible to distribute the survey to participants who had undertaken the Communiversity in counties Monaghan and Louth however the end of module evaluations carried out by the Louth Partnership education co-ordinator Jackie Ward for both Dundalk and Drogheda were consulted to add context.

There were 47 responses to the survey of which 45 were valid responses (a response rate of 36 percent out of a total contact list of 132 valid email addresses).

Questions were asked which looked at the demographic details of respondents as well as questions which gathered information on their experiences of the Communiversity. A copy of the survey is available in Appendix C.

Experiences of the Communiversity will be reported using data gathered in the survey and in focus groups and, where appropriate, will be reported together in the following section of the report.

Chapter 5

Research Findings

This chapter will give some demographic information about the respondents such as age, gender and educational background but the main focus on the data collected to the survey and responses of past-participants who attended focus groups. Where appropriate, the comments of tutors/ lecturers will be included.

The research conducted found an overwhelmingly positive view of the Communiversity from all respondents including past- participants, tutors/lecturers and professionals from community partners across all means of data collection (face to face or in surveys/other written means of data collection).

Here are some of the comments given by past participants:

I found it to be a great experience. It was the highlight of my week while I did it. I would recommend it to anybody

I really enjoyed doing the course it was engaging - it was vibrant and alive.

I thought it was very good for people my age, especially those that left school early,

Gave me a lot of confidence to renew my interest in history

Communiversity coming into local areas gives everyone a wonderful opportunity to take part and enjoy a wide range of topics. I do hope it is continued into the future.

Communiversity is a marvellous tool to bring University type learning and discussion to the ordinary man or woman who might otherwise never have been given the chance. I include myself in this bracket.

It was an excellent project - bringing college based lecturers to community settings and bringing together students from a wide variety of backgrounds and life skills.

People of all ages from different backgrounds coming together as a group and discussing the subjects in a library setting was a great experience. From my observation it was possibly life changing for some of the younger participants.

The positive nature of these comments is echoed in responses from tutors/lecturers and from professionals from community partners who were involved with the Communiversity.

Demographic attributes of survey respondents

Gender

Respondents to the survey were mostly female (58%) but there was also a good representation of males at (42%). Demographic information was sought from the Community Partners which documented that there was a balance between male and female participants

enrolling for the Communiversity (43% male and 57% female). According to the *Sé Sí Gender in Irish Education* report, women are more likely to be involved in Community Education initiatives.[29] It is evident that the Communiversity bucks this trend with higher proportions of males participating in the programme.

Age

Forty five respondents indicated their approximate age by indicating the ten year age range they fell into. These findings are illustrated in Figure 3. There was a preponderance of older age groups (over 50 years of age) responding to the survey with twenty five 60 – 69 year olds and 8 respondents stating that they fell into the age range of 50 - 59. Four respondents were 30 years and under and four respondents were over 70. This indicates that the Communiversity is a popular educational option for people who may have retired.

Figure 3: Age of respondents
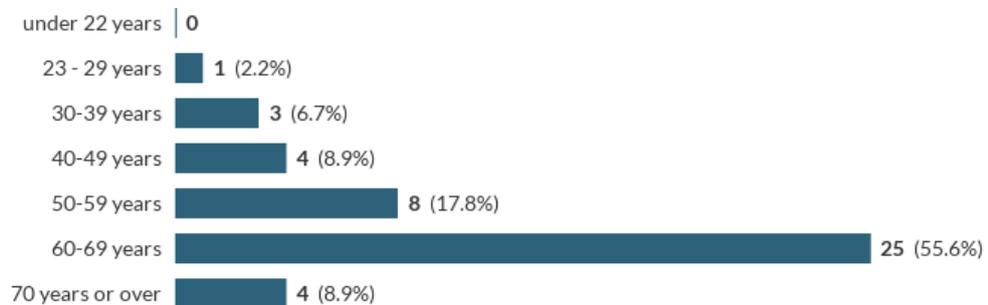
Year of attendance

Respondents were asked to state the year that they attended the Communiversity, 44 respondents gave this information. The majority of respondents were recent participants in the Communiversity; 17 had participated in 2017 and 14 respondents participated in 2016. The number of respondents attending in the respective years are 2012 (3), 2013 (4), 2014 (4) and 2015 (2). Participants who completed the Communiversity more recently may have had stronger ties with the course and may have been linked in with community partners and thus, been more motivated to respond to the survey.

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[29] O'Connor, M., (2007) *Sé Sí Gender in Irish Education* (online).

Location

Figure 4: In what location did you complete the Communiversity?

Location	Count
Ballyfermot Library	7 (14.9%)
Coolock Library	22 (46.8%)
Clones Library	0
Dolphins Barn Library	2 (4.3%)
Drogheda	0
Dundalk Library	0
Walkinstown Library	11 (23.4%)
Kildare Town Library	5 (10.6%)
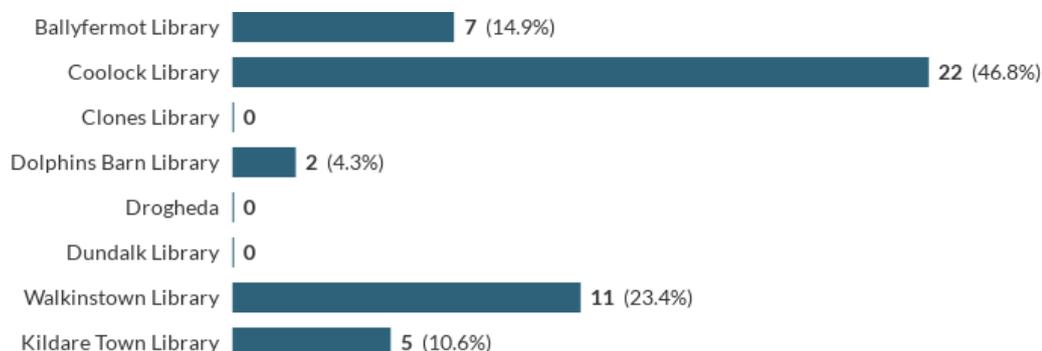
Most respondents to the survey had attended the Communiversity in Coolock Library. Coolock Library has hosted the Communiversity every year since 2012 and has had 144 participants who completed the programme over the seven years that the Communiversity has been established.[30] This is significantly more than in other locations.

It was not possible to contact the past-participants from Communiversity held in Clones as well as those held in Drogheda and Dundalk as the Community Partner did not retain contact details in line with data protection.

Previous education levels

This section focuses on the educational level attained by the respondents. In the survey 45 respondents gave information on their previous highest level of education The majority of those who responded to the survey had not attended higher education (only five respondents had a degree) which indicates that the Communiversity was an appropriate mechanism for people to engage with third level learning for the first time.

Figure 5: Previous Highest level of Education

Level	Count
Leaving certificate	16 (35.6%)
Fetac/QQI level 3-6	9 (20%)
Degree	5 (11.1%)
Primary education	4 (8.9%)
Junior/Inter certificate	4 (8.9%)
Other	4 (8.9%)
Trade/technical/vocational training	3 (6.7%)
No Formal Education	0

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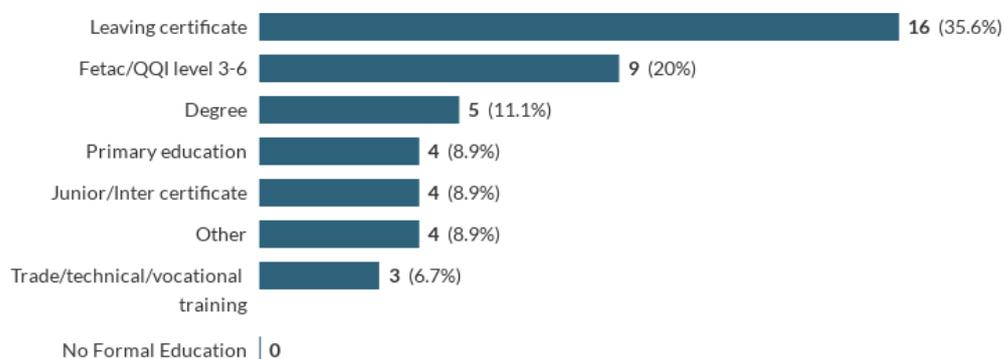
[30] As of May 2018 when the research was carried out.

In terms of the context for educational levels attained; some respondents spoke of their regret about not having attended higher education in their youth. This survey respondent who gave responses by telephone said:

I always had an interest in learning but never had an opportunity as a young one but I don't think it deprived me. I would have loved to have gone on to college.

A participant in the focus groups stated:

For all of us in this room – going to college wasn't an option – it just wouldn't occur to you - it just wasn't an option - the economics of things – we all worked from when we were very young even part-time jobs – I handed up money at home when I was 11 years of age to my mother.

He went on to say:

I never thought that I would be going to college at 63 –(laughs) I am 65 now so I started college at 63 which is two years ago. It was a great thing and even to go up to Maynooth.

There was agreement in this focus group that the Communiversity offered a chance at attending third level/higher education, albeit outside the formal setting of a higher education institution, which had not been offered to them before. We can see above that an interest in topics offered on the Communiversity was a motivational factor in participating in the Communiversity.

Choice of subjects on the Communiversity

As stated in the introduction participants are exposed to subjects which are not normally offered by Adult Education services run by the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). A focus group participant spoke about why the Communiversity was attractive to her as a fairly recent retiree:

I just felt that I was using my brain again – for the past 4 years all the classes that I have done have been art related – this was using the other side of your brain.

The above quote suggests that the Communiversity offers a different type of course which is more academic than creative courses which are available as Community Education programmes in the localities where the Communiversity takes place.

Respondents were asked about their preferences for topics. Of the 43 responses to this question on the respondents' favourite topics, 9 people mentioned that they loved all the topics equally, some could not select one over the others. This was taken into account when coding, where someone had written history and politics these were both counted separately. This was in part to avoid reporting on a significant amount of combination of answers but did not ignore the fact that respondents told of their subject preferences in no particular order.

- History – 20
- Politics – 9
- Philosophy – 8
- Economics – 6
- Psychology – 4
- Media studies – 1

One respondent stated that their favourite topic was '*Social aspect and discussion*' which relates more to the teaching method and learning process than the content. However, the import of this information should not be undervalued. Within the discipline of Adult Education, the dialogic process is central to all learning encounters. Learning is not merely about content acquisition but also about meaning making and creating and recreating new realities.[31]

Another respondent (who completed the survey by phone) stated that the reason that he liked economics so much was because:

> *It stirred me- it lit a fire underneath me - I understand consumerism - it made me want to become somebody in opposition - It gave me a place to vent about economics and it linked it to philosophy - I found them all really good the topics.*

A respondent who completed the survey online stated that he/she liked all topics especially philosophy because:

> *It opened up a new world for me - it made me want to read different books.*

Other reasons given for liking some topics more than others were because of either lifelong interest that the person had or a new found interest. In some cases the fact that this topic was new to them or they had not had the opportunity to learn about it before made the topic attractive. Others found the debates and discussion that the learning entailed to be what made them especially like a topic.

A strong theme for why respondents like particular topics was the quality of the lecturers who made the topics interesting:

> *[I] wasn't interested in economics but [lecturer name] simplified the subject and made it really interesting. [I] learned a lot from him.*

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[31] Peter Rule (2004), Dialogic spaces: adult education projects and social engagement *in Int. J. of Lifelong Education, Vol 23.* (4) (July/August 2004), p. 323, Taylor and Francis Group; Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). What is the 'dialogical method of teaching? *The Journal of Education, 169*(3), pp 11-31. Retrieved October 12, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/42741786

Lecturers/tutors involved in the course backed this up. One lecturer/tutor reported:

I have generally been overwhelmed by the kind words offered to me at the end of my four week contribution. 'What you told us was very interesting!'

Respondents were also asked about the topics that they enjoyed least. Forty two responses were received to this question and 16 of these responses stated that there was no topic that they could ascribe as their least favourite. As one respondent put it:

There were no least favourites because in every topic that you had there was always something that would grab your interest.

Participation in the Communiversity had the effect of changing people's minds about topics to which they might not have first been attracted. In one of the focus groups a participant explained how, initially, he was not interested in taking classes in Economics:

I was surprised how interesting Economics was because when I saw the list I said I'm not doing it – straight off the bat I said it doesn't interest me – I was surprised (by how much I liked it).

In terms of topics covered – one participant stated:

It exposed you to something that you ordinarily wouldn't be exposed to - so from that point of view you could make up your mind if you wanted to pursue it or if you definitely didn't want to pursue it…. It opened your mind to something that you might automatically think – oh no it's not for me and suddenly you think (differently)

A participant in a different focus group echoed these feelings:

I looked and I wanted to learn something about philosophy – so I set out to learn something and to meet people as well. I was interested in the subjects – I wasn't interested in politics and (now) I get the <u>Independent</u> delivered and I get to read about politics.

The Communiversity offers a unique combination of interesting topics (which are not normally available to learners outside of a university setting) which is attractive to a variety of potential participants from those who plan on continuing their learning in a higher education setting to those who simply wish to engage in education less formally.

Progress from the Communiversity

This section examines the data gathered from respondents about what they did since they completed the Communiversity programme. The topic of progress after the Communiversity is discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

Forty-nine responses received to the question 'What did you do upon completion of the course?' Some respondents indicated that they had done more than one of the options offered since they left the Communiversity

- o   Other   14
- o   Attended Part-time study   11
- o   Attended Full-time study   4
- o   Worked voluntarily   9

A number of respondents gave more details on what they did after they completed the Communiversity including:

- o   Involvement in Age-friendly University initiative
- o   Carer
- o   Involved in a TÚS scheme
- o   Will start study this September
- o   Involved in a DCC/Dublin Culture Connects (2)
- o   Commenced work in the Civil Service
- o   Continued studying with the group (2)
- o   Studied on QQI level 5 and 6 courses

One respondent gave details of the many courses that he/she had taken part in since finishing the Communiversity:

> *Dublin's culture connects, it takes a village project, an introduction to IMMA, and how to access the N.L.I. National Archives of Ireland and Trinity College's library.*

The group in one public library, having completed study in the Communiversity decided to continue learning with the group and were supported in this study by the Education Coordinator working with the Community Partner.

> *We started on History - we are compiling a book on our life and experiences of [locality] - Got some lectures from [DCC Historian]. We are also involved with the [local College of Further Education] art students and they are helping us with our book on the area where we live. **We just want to learn more and more.***

Two respondents listed that they had gone on to participate in degree programmes one in DCU and one who was doing undergraduate studies in Trinity College.[32]

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[32] Not captured in this data but three Communiversity participants from Coolock have gone to study degrees in MU.

One stated in a survey response:

> *The Communiversity programme is worthwhile and important as it gives a person who may be considering third level that experience of lectures and may assuage any fears that a person may have about returning to education.*

Respondents gave more information on the programmes that they progressed to – and these were coded as follows:

- o Equality Studies   3
- o History   2
- o Degree/undergrad   2
- o Group learning   2
- o QQI Level 5/6   2
- o Creative writing   1
- o Age friendly university   1
- o Building Management   1

One respondent showed how she fitted study in with a busy life

> *I progressed to part-time study and playing golf and minding grandchildren - I did a creative writing course but I always wrote and I have a big collection of poetry from the 70s and I won a competition in DCU for creative writing in 2016.*

Where respondents to the survey had not continued to further study they were asked to give their reasons. Twenty four responded to this question and the reasons given were diverse but were categorised as follows:

- o Engagement in voluntary work
- o Bad health
- o Looking at educational options at the moment
- o Home/family commitments
- o Economic reasons in that study 'doesn't pay the bills'.

The findings in this chapter will be discussed further in Chapter 6, however, to summarise, from the respondents we can glean that the Communiversity has an appeal to both men and women that is at different to the usual make up of a cohort in Adult Education/Community Education classes; it seems to be reaching a broad demographic including 88.9% of respondents new to HE; the range of academic subjects and the pedagogical methods

employed are providing people with unexpected learning experiences to which they are responding enthusiastically.

Chapter 6

Discussion of results

The positivity of respondents to the Communiversity is difficult to capture in a report such as this but, in conversations with participants and with those working as tutors and administering the programme there is universal good feeling about the programme and its outcomes. When the researcher attended Communiversity events and classes it was evident that this positive environment was enabling participants to develop as learners and as members of their community.

The beneficial outcomes for participants were not restricted to considerations of higher learning but they also reported increases in confidence and in their abilities to be active in their communities:

> *I liked that there was a good cross section of the community there. The course was all inclusive and the tutors at all times made sure that people understood and were able to keep up. There was also plenty of notes to reference whenever trying to do anything at home on our own. I personally feel that any form of education is invaluable as it builds confidence and proves what you are capable of. The setting of the course was also excellent and took the intimidation out of education as everyone was already familiar with the library.*

This chapter will discuss the outcomes for participants in terms of community development, teaching and learning, progression

Community development

In one focus group there was a conversation on how the learning in the Communiversity was not restricted to the participants but that the learning spreads to those around the participants:

> *People who organised this course – I doubt that they realised the ripple effect that it was going to have – I have a son who is a secondary school teacher and he talks about this course when he is teaching the kids in school and I think that this course definitely needs to go on – my wife wants to do it next year because I talk about it so much.*

In this survey response we see that this participant used his/her learning from the Communiversity to teach others

> *I gave a 'class' to my grandparents group about looking up family history and did up some notes as well as doing a slide show showing how to follow notes as some of the members would not be very familiar with computers.*

One focus group respondent spoke of how he was involved in setting up a Men's Shed in his locality. Because of his involvement with the Communiversity he was put in touch with the

Community Development professional in the partnership which he said provided valuable information and contacts in setting up the Men's Shed.

We can see from above that the Communiversity developed participants' confidence, developed skills in terms of critical thinking, discussion and debating. There was also the creation of lasting social networks:

> *I have built up a friendship and contact with many other like-minded community activists that I would not have done if I did not participate in the Communiversity program.*

There were a wide range of motivations for those who attend the Communiversity. Some were motivated by their interest in topics offered. There were participants who just wanted to pass the time while others were motivated by learning. Then again there were people who were prompted to attend by friends who were previous participants. The Communiversity can address these motivations but participation has, in some cases, allowed new insights for the learner about themselves and their understanding of the society in which they live.

The above are some of the many examples mentioned in focus groups and in survey responses of the effects of learning within the Communiversity that stretches beyond learners to their communities.

Teaching and learning in the Communiversity

As stated previously the Communiversity uses an 'adult education' approach to teaching and learning where lecturers/tutors facilitate discussion in the group after they had introduced topics using Powerpoint presentations.

In the programme design tutors can consider the learner's needs and are not tied to teaching a strict curriculum which might limit their ability to address the learners own defined learning interests. This is exploited in the Communiversity, so learning is a reflective process and gives learners opportunities for self-directed learning to explore areas of interest as identified by themselves. Many tutors/lecturers spoke of how the structure of the classes enabled guided discussion on topics that they had introduced in classes:

> *The lectures are in two parts. Part one for one hour, is used to lecture and provoke discussion on the author and theory at hand. Then in part two, I set a problem, say on corruption, bans on strikes by public service workers, bans on referendums, introduction of the principle of subsidiarity, and so on. Two groups consider the problem from opposite perspectives. A summarizer and speaker are appointed by both groups and at the end of their internal discussion, the speaker presents for 5 to 7 minutes. This is followed by questions from the floor, many 'hostile'. I then summarise the author's views and their relation to the discussion at hand.*

Another tutor/lecturer stated:

> *This course proved very lively as many of the people taking part had been directly and indirectly affected by the banking collapse and housing market crash. Again I was struck by the diversity of people taking part in the course, a former bank employee and a local politician attended that day, and a lively debate about what the future holds for Irish banking and housing followed the lecture.[33]*

This last quote is illustrative of how the Communiversity goes beyond academic study and into the lived experience of the participants. The learning engagement is deep because it has meaning or rather multiple meanings. Each tutor/lecturer encouraged open discussion in the group which enabled participants to develop their learning in terms of their own lifeworld/life-conditions.[34]

As well as this tutors/lecturers and libraries provided materials that could be accessed for independent learning outside of the classroom in the participants' own time which was optional.

Lecturers/tutors positive attitudes were important to participants and there was universal respect for the tutors on the course. Participants complimented the teachers on being 'accessible' 'approachable' and 'knowledgeable'.

This 'approachability' was in contrast to previous experiences of education:

> *I found that there was no class difference – when I was at school the teacher was up there and we were down there – and even when my kids went to school the teacher was up there but in this there was no class difference*

Memories of previous educational experiences may have been in this respondent's mind when she stated:

> *Lecturers were very nice and didn't put anyone down when they asked a question.*

There was also a very strong feeling that the lecturers/tutors were somehow benefitting from the exchanges that took place during the Communiversity. One participant reported:

> *We learnt a lot from the lecturers and the lecturers said that they learnt a lot from us. We all came back with a positive feeling that we would like to learn more. We were very happy with the four subjects and found the lecturers very down to earth and approachable.*

Another stated: *The lecturers love it when we teach them something*

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[34] Kraus,B (2015) ' The Life We Live and the Life We Experience: Introducing the Epistemological Difference between "Lifeworld" (Lebenswelt) and "Life Conditions" (Lebenslage)' in *Social Work and Society Vol 13, NO 2.*

At each of the taster sessions at the beginning of the programmes, some of the lecturers share their own experiences of school, school leaving and returning to education as adults, where this applies. This has the effect of establishing an egalitarian relationship whereby participants' own experiences are validated from the outset. This respondent spoke of the positive effects of his participation on the Communiversity programme:

> *It was so much more than just education- I had a lot of anxiety - so it was a great place to find out what a learning environment would be like. I felt so good about myself and I felt that I was a good influence on the class - he made me a leader. The whole thing was great - I actually feel good just talking about it and looking back. I was full of fears and they just gave me the confidence to go back to education.*

This is echoed in feedback received from tutors/lecturers:

> *There have been many memorable moments and each group is completely different. I have found my work with these groups to have been hugely rewarding and enjoyable…My work with Communiversity has enriched my life immensely.*

Pre-Access Gateway

The following quote from a focus group participant shows the benefits and the drawbacks of having a course where assignments are given:

> *I think that it would be intimidating going doing that (attending the Communiversity) then straight to Maynooth that would be worrying – like I think that – you have no assignments or anything like so it is nice in that way but it does make university seem a bit further on– you know it seems like a lot more work but if you are enjoying the learning then it seems more accessible at the same time.*

The Communiversity allows the space for dialogue between people who are engaged in the same pursuit, the fulfilment of a search for knowledge. It matters little who is the teacher and who is the learner as the dialogue is what is most important. It is a two way street that enriches both parties. For some, the absence of assignments and not being marked is a challenge, how else do we know that we have learned something unless some external person validates us.[35] For others this is the key to inclusion and to learning in an open ended environment. Achieving a balance for those who wish to continue to accredited learning at third level and for those who simply wish to continue learning informally will challenge the Communiversity programme to increase links with other available programmes within MU and other HEIs. The comment above indicates how the programme could act as a pre-Access Gateway for those who want it. As stated previously it was a deliberate decision not to have assignments or 'homework' in order to try to attract as wide an audience as possible and to

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[35] Illich, I (1970) *Deschooling Society*, London: Marion Boyers.

allow the person to partake in the course to the best of their ability without the added external pressure of success or failure.

The programme in Ballyfermot proves the value of this approach where learners from 2017 were empowered to direct their own learning when the course finished. The participants have created a learning group where they identified areas of possible study facilitated by the Education Coordinator with the Community Partner. The local library continued to support their learning beyond the initial Communiversity programme, but the university's role decreased as the group sourced their own academics to continue as the Ballyfermot Adults Learning Together (BALT) group.[36]

Progression

The participant who commented on the unpreparedness to go on to university straight from the library programme (although some have managed it) highlights the need for a follow-on programme that would give those people who wish to enter formal Higher Education the necessary academic skills to succeed. The most obvious course of action is to provide Return to Learning programmes at the end of each Communiversity in a local setting such as Libraries where possible. Basing these in the locality is crucial in making both the ideal of widening participation and community engagement a real possibility for people with limited funds or childminding/care giving duties which make attendance at a course on MU campus impractical[37]. A financial barrier is raised once registration and examination costs are included delivering such a certified course is beyond the budget of the Community Partners. However, it is important to remember that not all participants want to progress to formal third level education. One respondent stated:

> *Further formal qualifications were not of interest, but I did continue to pursue subjects of interest on an informal basis.*

This shows how the Communiversity can address the needs of people who wish to engage in lifelong learning but who do not necessarily wish to progress in a linear way to qualifications. In many cases people wanted to continue with the Communiversity but to take other modules in a second year. This would be possible but again the Community Partners budgets are limited and they are tasked with intervening with as many people as possible.

In conversations with the educational coordinators it seems that there were differences in what they wished as outcomes for the participants. In one case the Community Partner representative was focussed on an outcome for the Communiversity which would address the employment and training needs of the community so that participants would be able to

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[36] The relationship between the university and the Partnership morphed into something more applied when the request was made to deliver a number of one off lectures in Sociology and Psychology to a newly established Parental Support Group.
[37] Visits to the campus could be organised at regular intervals to familiarise anxious part-time students with university life.

join the labour force or return to learning. He felt that the Communiversity programme was not useful in terms of widening participation for younger people and school leavers.[38]

In one focus group there was a discussion on the progression pathways for participants interested in continuing in education. There was a lack of consensus on the follow up that was available to participants in terms of educational/career development. The participants involved in the discussion had attended the Communiversity in different years. One participant had gone on to take a third level degree course via participating in an access course and felt supported by the educational coordinator with the Community Partner. Another participant had an interest in developing a business idea but felt that he did not receive the support either from the Community Partner or Maynooth University that was necessary for him to achieve this. Another participant was interested in attending higher education but felt that the timing of the Communiversity (from January to May[39]) was not conducive to his admission to third level as CAO applications were made in February. When asked what changes he would make to the Communiversity he stated:

> *I would change the time of year you gave it because I can remember when we finished we finished in March or April but the CAO is due in February and I remember being all fired up when I finished and thinking I am going to pursue this but stuff happens in your life.*

He stated that he did not make an application to the CAO the next year as he had commenced employment in the meantime.

During this discussion a participant spoke of the Communiversity as being her first engagement with education as an adult which ended up with participation in a higher education degree programme:

> *It was like taking baby steps and the Communiversity for me was like the first step you know I didn't get an opportunity to go to college when I was younger so this was like the baby step then the next small step I actually did jobs club with [Educational Coordinator with the Community Partner] then in the summer then I did the access course –it was baby steps.*

The lack of links to further development was emphatically stated by a participant

> *I just felt that at the end you were brought up to here and it was fantastic but the link at the end it just didn't exist.*

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[38] In the 2019 offering modules with a more obvious appeal to a younger cohort such as Criminology were included, which did attract more younger participants.
[39] Timing of the Communiversity is determined by the Community Partner but these are negotiable. Some CPs have opted for September or October start dates. The university has been flexible and will try to accommodate the wishes of its partners where possible.

Some effort has been made by the programme organisers to provide advice on pathways for progression for participants in the Communiversity. This was one of the recommendations from the pilot report completed in 2012. Education coordinators/guidance counsellors working with the Community Partners maintain links with the participants and provide advice on courses and programmes available for them. As well as this, the Mature Student Officer (MSO) from Maynooth University Access Programme (MAP) gives an information session with the participants showing the courses that are available and the entry paths to them.

Looking at attendance at the Communiversity as part of a journey in terms of accessing education where the destination for this journey is third level education is tempting in that the outcome for this is definable and fits in with some of the desired outcomes that learners identified. It is also resonant with government strategy for Access in terms of PATH for target groups. However, not all of the participants of the Communiversity expressed their desire to attend higher education and while some were using the Communiversity to test whether they were suited to such learning. The progress of learners from the Communiversity onto 'higher' learning seemed to be an obvious choice as an indicator of success at the beginning of the review however when analysing the data that metric seemed to be too one dimensional and limiting in terms of an outcome. As one person put it in a discussion that a participant '*should feel that they can go for a jog without having to complete a marathon'*. A successful outcome has to take a number of possibilities and the person's own agency into account.

Some found that through the Communiversity they developed an interest in attending further learning:

> *Well I just wanted to learn more information and I found that it encouraged me to read more – it also gave me an interest to do Women's studies in ---- College which is every 2 years – so I would like to do the taster course for that.*

Another response to the survey showed how the Communiversity went some way to addressing educational deficits of participants but was ultimately not enough to prepare for third level engagement

> *The Communiversity could help us follow up certain subjects - but it stops there - I would have liked the classes to go on - to have more - we got a taste for it and a thirst for it and we were just left thirsty - it gave us a great thirst for knowledge. There were other people in the Communiversity and they left because they felt that it was great to have the university learning but if they wanted to take the courses - that they wouldn't have the academic writing skills to attend university.*

This and other evidence seems to suggest that the Communiversity is effective in getting (some) participants to think about attending higher education but that there are some steps that need to be taken to prepare a potential mature student for successful engagement in higher education. Engagement in the Return to Learning programmes operated by the

Department of Adult and Community Education and offered in Maynooth University would be an example of such a step.

Within the theories that inform the Recovery Movement particularly that branch concerning addiction recovery the concept of the Wheel of Change has proven useful, see Figure 6.

Figure 5: The Wheel of Change[40]
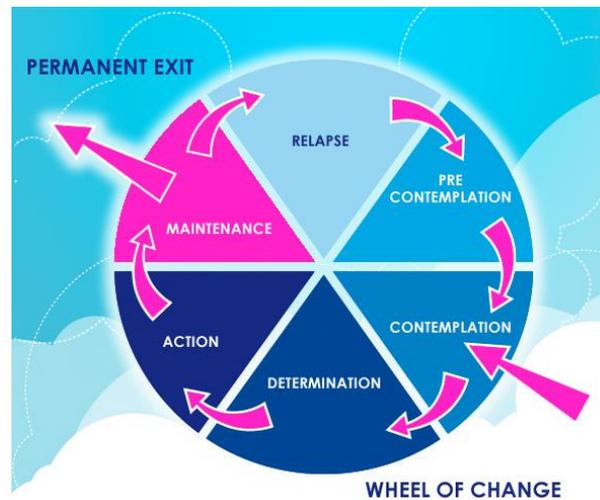
Addiction Recovery is similar to participation in Adult Education in terms of the process driven nature of the experience and its aim for transformation.[41] Its relevance to this review are in the Pre-contemplation and Contemplation stages of the process. Essential to have effective response with a person in recovery is the timing of an intervention. It can be heard in the voices of the informants above. The Communiversity has got them thinking about Higher Education. The piece that is missing to take them to the next stage and allow them to act on their determination.

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[40] National Family Support Network:
[41] Mezirow, J (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* Jossey-Bass San Francisco

Chapter 7

Conclusion and Recommendations

Since its inception Maynooth University has been committed to promoting the values of equality and inclusion. As a national leader in the Republic of Ireland in widening participation in university education: in 2017 15% of our new undergraduate students had a disability, 28% came from social groups under-represented in higher education, and 47% came from families where neither parent had a higher education qualification. This has made Maynooth University both a provider of educational opportunities, and an agent of social change.

This unique position may, in part, be attributed to long standing engagement policies for outreach into communities by the Access Office and academic departments such as Applied Social Studies and the Department of Adult and Community Education (DACE) who host the Communiversity on behalf of the University.

Through this engagement work we have built deep and enduring relationships with areas deemed to be of severe disadvantage and this has garnered for MU a reputation of trustworthiness in those communities. As a university committed to promoting human rights and social justice the Communiversity is another example of the work that this university does in partnership with the communities we serve.

Under the current Covid related restrictions the Communiversity exists in a mode of suspended animation. The air of uncertainty however, has not dampened enthusiasm for the programme as is evidenced in the Omeath Exchange4Change cross border, cross community version that has been delivered over the summer and early autumn 2020 wearing PPE, observing physical distancing guidelines, stopping and starting as the guidelines change. People's desire to be together, to share their fears and hopes is strong. Once the new normal has been established the Communiversity is ripe for expansion so that its positive effects on communities it works with, on participants and on tutors/lecturers can expand beyond its current limited reach.

Design strengths

The design of the Communiversity is a major strength and any development of the programme should maintain the template that has evolved over the past decade. Especially in relation to the following:

- The three-way partnership between the University, Community Partners and Local Libraries is a model of best practice for shared services by publicly funded bodies. The partnership relies on the mutual respect for the expertise of each partner to meet the shared objective of engaging individuals and communities remote from Higher Education in a meaningful learning activity aimed towards active participation and engaged citizenship.

- The value of the provision of learning using adult education practices as promoted by the Department of Adult and Community Education in MU is central to the running of the Communiversity. Participants and tutors/lecturers are positively affected by their participation on the programmes. The diversity of learners involved and the design of the Communiversity from recruitment of participants to the structure of classes allowed learning without curriculum constraints. This 'informal' way of facilitating learning in the Communiversity was a positive experience for tutors and lecturers as well as participants.

- Any development of the Communiversity should continue to offer subjects/topics that are not currently offered by Adult Education Services in Education and Training Boards. Such actions would avoid any conflict in being seen to be working with learners who would otherwise be involved with Adult Education Services. This could be worked out with Community Partners at programme initiation as it involves knowledge of what adult education opportunities are available in a locality.

Strategic alignment with partners

As described in the policy context chapter of this report the Communiversity continues to fulfil the strategic aims of the three partners involved in the delivery of the Communiversity. The Communiversity should avail of opportunities to bring this to the attention of those in charge of measuring progress towards the fulfilment of these strategies. For instance, in relation to the Libraries '*Our Public Libraries 2022*' is the current strategy governing the development of libraries in Ireland. This strategy builds on the developments under previous strategies. There are three strategic programmes in *'Our Public Libraries 2022'* as follows: reading and literacy development, learning and information and finally community and culture. Under the learning and information strategic programme libraries will: 'Provide opportunities for all users to engage in lifelong learning through the delivery of services developed in collaboration with national and local partners.' (p.25). Emphatically it goes on to say that libraries will '[W]ork with local and national partners to establish libraries as a central community, civic and cultural space within their local areas' under the community and culture strategic programme. These strategic objectives are fulfilled in its cooperation with the Communiversity. Up until the pandemic hit the Communiversity was earmarked for 4 and possibly 5 libraries in 2020.

A final ambition under *'Our Public Libraries 2022'* is to 'Collect, explore and celebrate the cultural memory of local people and communities, and develop and promote local studies collections and archives through a national programme for enhanced digital access.' As we can see from the Communiversity offshoot BALT group this is a realistic goal and it could be encouraged with other learning groups.

As outlined on p. 16 the Communiversity aligns itself with the recently published MU Strategic Plan 2018-2022 goal 6 in particular but it is also possible that goal 7 which focuses on teaching and learning could be brought into alignment and a panel of Doctoral and Post-Doctoral

students from across all faculties be drawn up. Community Partners are regularly seeking lecturers to give locally based classes either as part of the Communiversity or as one-off inputs in Psychology, Sociology, Media Studies etc. The role of the Communiversity could be expanded to support MU teaching staff in delivering courses to non-traditional students.

Developing progression pathways

Work needs to be done for students who wish to progress to higher education from the Communiversity. Examples of such work could include a better link with the Return to Learning Programme in Maynooth University. This would not preclude any participant from availing of other higher education preparatory or access courses available to them which are more local to them.

At the moment the profile of the Communiversity is quite low. The programme is not mentioned in any of the strategy documents examined despite it addressing many of the strategic goals mentioned in these publications. Increasing the profile of the Communiversity within MU for example, is likely to increase the pool of available tutors/lecturers to contribute to the programme as it develops. Other benefits would accrue if the profile of the Communiversity was raised in the library service and to other Community Partners.

Those working with Community Partners in their role of supporting Communiversity participation are generally positive about their involvement. However, further research is needed to see how the Communiversity can address their need to provide evidence of 'labour market activation' or increased potential for participation which will satisfy the need for Community Partners to report on outcomes for participants in the (somewhat narrow) terms defined by SICAP funding.

Developing sustainable funding mechanisms

Perhaps the greatest weakness is in the area of funding. Funding for the Communiversity is over reliant on the Community Partner and their SICAP budget. When reporting to the EU funders, key performance indicators for the LEADER Partnerships are heavily skewed in the area of NEETS and Labour Market Activation. It is only since late 2018 that people over the age of 64 have been counted in terms of interventions. Therefore, if the community partner needs to divert monies into other more pressing programmes one of the initiatives most as risk is the Communiversity. In the current climate funding for these types of programmes is more than likely going to be harder to come by. If that is the case it is a very short-sighted approach to long term and deeply entrenched societal age related problems such as loneliness, isolation and depression. It is becoming increasingly recognised that the best and most cost-effective ways to combat these ills is through local community engagement.[42]

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[42] Hertz, N (2020) *The Lonely Century: How Isolation Imperils our Future*; Collier, P. & Kay, J. (2020). *Greed is Dead: politics after individualism*.

While beyond the mere financial gain for funding such programmes the dividend for social cohesion should also be seen as a KPI.

However, the funding model, reliant as it is on the Community Partners, is vulnerable if the emphasis from the central funder shifts to other areas of perceived need. In order to make the Communiversity sustainable, alternative sources of funding should be pursued that will allow the initiative to develop organically and in response to the requirements of different cohorts of people who would benefit from this type of Higher Education intervention.

Communiversity as a flagship out-reach programme of MU

The Communiversity could be developed to be a 'flagship' outreach mechanism for MU which would increase MU's profile in communities and would provide a path for underrepresented groups to attend third level. Developing stronger links between the Communiversity and MU's Return to Learning access programme is an immediate response to some of the issues highlighted in this report.

As interest grows from other Libraries and Community Partners to come on board the capacity of the DACE to continue to meet the growing demands is becoming stretched. The programme is coordinated and administered on an *ad hoc* basis by the Continuing Education co-ordinator and the CE senior executive assistant.

The onus of funding cannot be left to the Community Partner as they are severely limited under SICAP as to how much they can allocate for programmes. This is where support in terms of financial backing to allow it to grow is needed. It is hoped that the Access Office with PATH 3 funding and through the Community Connectors would be better placed to roll the programme out to the wider public. The relationships have been established what is required is a co-ordinator to oversee the setting up of a database of lecturers from as many academic disciplines as possible and to organise timetabling, venue, and to liaise with City and County Librarians, Lifelong Learning Co-ordinators, Adult Guidance services, Mental Health and Addiction Recovery services etc.

The Communiversity is easily replicable and could address the needs of those who are significantly at a distance from attending higher education. It would be possible for MU to explore means of attracting a wider range of participants to engage in programmes based on the Communiversity (in terms of age, cultural and ethnic diversity). The Communiversity could also promote intergenerational and intercultural learning.

The Communiversity can be seen to have developed as a suburban programme working with communities in and around Dublin (Coolock, Walkinstown and Ballyfermot). Clones and Kildare held Communiversity programmes in 2012 and 2013 but these programmes were hampered by access issues for participants where rural transport became a stumbling block to their continuation.[43] The National Transport Authority has developed Rural Transport

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[43] See 2012 Report into the NUI Maynooth Libraries Initiative.

Programme[44] since 2015 which has increased the provision of public transport in towns and rural areas around Ireland. This creates a new landscape for developing Communiversity Programmes in towns which could reach potential participants living in rural areas and increasing community development opportunities that arise from better infrastructure in rural areas. As is commonly known loneliness in older age as a consequence of rural isolation is one of the most significant problems facing Europe where the aging population is increasing.

Developing a resilient structure for the Communiversity

The main threat to the Communiversity is that it continues as it is and runs out of steam because it is not supported to be developed in a sustainable manner. The fuel that runs the Communiversity is the zeal of particular personnel from each of the partner organisations who are dedicated to the programme and to widening participation, community engagement, inclusion and social justice. When other demands are made upon their time, resources or finances to fulfil mainstream activities then the risk to growth and development of the programme becomes evident.

Conclusion

The Communiversity came out of the economic collapse and banking crisis in 2008 it now finds itself in another one, the Covid 19 Pandemic. This crisis too will pass but the underlying needs of the communities that we serve will remain. The longer term societal ills of disadvantage, exclusion, loneliness and isolation in old age, anxiety, depression, mental health issues and addiction recovery will be here for a long time. It is initiatives such as the Communiversity that will help people to come together to and allow healing to take place. As the Communiversity is founded on the concept of human connectedness the boundaries between expert, content and student dissolve into an infinite flow of conversation and debate, dialogue and thought. This is where engagement and widening participation really happens. This is how the Communiversity understands education and can be a showcase for the potential of Democratic Higher Education towards engaged citizenship. To follow the words of Theodore Zeldin, *'…there is room for a new sort of university that is not a ghetto for the young, but a place where all generations can exchange experience, culture and hope'*.[45] It is possible to establish a network of Communiversities for people of all ages creating a learning environment that is non-threatening, low threshold and inviting. From there anything can happen.

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[44] https://www.nationaltransport.ie/public-transport-services/rural-transport-programme/
[45] Theodore Zeldin *An Intimate History of Humanity* (p.31)

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Appendix A – The Communiversity to Date

To date the Communiversity has been run in the following localities/libraries and delivered the subjects outlined below:

Table 2. Venues, Partners, Years, Numbers of Participants and Subjects Studied in Communiversities to 2019

Library	Community Partner	Year(s)	Numbers of participants completing the programme	Subjects studied
Ballyfermot	Ballyfermot Chapelizod Partnership	2016/17 2017/18 2018	42	History/Politics Philosophy/Economics Positive Psychology Sociology of Youth Pilot programme for parents
Coolock	Northside Partnership	2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 Total	144	Local History & Genealogy Community Studies Reading Enrichment Sociology & Me The Economy & Us Politics, Power and People Geography and the Environment Introduction to Philosophy Community Development Psychology, Sociology of Crime, Media Studies.
Clones	Monaghan Integrated Development	2013	12	Local History, Community Development, Psychology, Sociology, Employability
Dolphin's Barn	Dublin South City Partnership	2017	12	Media Studies/History Chinese Studies
Drogheda & Dundalk	Louth LEADER Partnership	2015 2016	87	Local History; Psychology; Youth and Community
Walkinstown	Dublin South City Partnership	2016 2017/2018 2019	52	History/Politics Philosophy/Psychology Economics

Kildare town	Co Kildare LEADER Partnership	2012 2013	42	Genealogy & Local History Community Studies Reading Enrichment/Sociology & Me/Geography & Environment Politics & Power Introduction to Philosophy Engineering & Innovation

Total number of participants who completed the Communiversity learning programmes (to the end of June 2019) is 391. Retention rates are high with a average of 78.5% of participants who enrolled completing the programme.[46] This may be accounted for by the make-up and approach taken of the original steering committee whose diverse remits for engaging with members of the general public made us consider the individual not as a student, service user or client but as a whole person.

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[46] The average was concluded on the basis of the data available *viz* five of the seven locations where the programme took place.

Themes for exploration in focus group

In the focus group the discussion will be guided by the following themes. Other themes may be explored if and as they arise during the focus group.

1. What did you like most about attending the Communiversity?

2. What did you dislike?

3. Would you change the Communiversity in any way? Length of course / Topics covered / course work / Venue / Timing / Times / Pace / Level of Learning etc.

4. How did the group dynamic work?

5. What were your motivations/objectives in attending the Communiversity? Were they met? Did these objectives change as you went through the course?

6. Has the course made you a more active citizen? In what way?

7. What do you expect to do now that you have completed the Communiversity?

8. Have you taken part in education since completing the Communiversity?

9. Is there anything you have done, while participating in the Communiversity, that you can directly attribute to participating on the programme?

Communiversity Review 2018

Page 1: Communiversity Evaluation

Thank you for taking the time to consider this questionnaire. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact of the **Communiversity** course offered by Maynooth University in terms of your experiences accessing the programme, your learning experiences and your progression after the programme. The results of this research will be used to inform the future developments of the Communiversity.

This survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. The **survey is anonymous** and is not linked to your name, email or any identifiable data.

Completed questionnaires will be stored in a secure place and will be destroyed upon completion of the research. For more information contact: Derek Barter, Dept. of Adult & Community Education, Maynooth University, e: Derek.Barter@mu.ie, ph: 01 708 3948. Alternatively you can contact Sinéad Hyland by email: sinead.hyland@mu.ie.

The first few questions asks about your background and entry into the programme

1. What gender are you?

   ☐ Female
   ☐ Male
   ☐ third gender/ trans
   ☐ Prefer not to say

2. What age are you?

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☐ under 22 years

☐ 23 - 29 years

☐ 30-39 years

☐ 40-49 years

☐ 50-59 years

☐ 60-69 years

☐ 70 years or over

3. What year did you attend the Communiversity? *Optional*

☐ 2011

☐ 2012

☐ 2013

☐ 2014

☐ 2015

☐ 2016

☐ 2017

4. What location did you complete the Communiversity? *Optional*

☐ Ballyfermot Library

☐ Coolock Library

☐ Clones Library

☐ Dolphins Barn Library

☐ Drogheda

☐ Dundalk Library

☐ Walkinstown Library

☐ Kildare Town Library

5. Where did you hear about the Communiversity?

☐ Poster
☐ Social Media
☐ Parish Newsletter
☐ Word of mouth
☐ Library
☐ Local Leader Partnership Company
☐ Other

5.a. If you answered Other, could you please say how and where you found out about the Communiversity?

[   ]

6. What most motivated you to engage in the Communiversity?

[   ]

7. What were your favourite topics in the communiversity?

[   ]

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7.a. Why?

8. What were your least favourite topics in the Communiversity?

8.a. Why?

9. Before commencing the Communiversity, what was your previous highest level of qualification? *Optional*

- Primary education
- Junior/inter certificate
- Leaving certificate
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Fetac/QQI level 3-6
- Degree
- No Formal Education
- Other

9.a. If you selected Other, please specify: *Optional*

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[                          ]
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10. **What did you do upon completion of the course?**

☐ I am currently a student on the Communiversity
☐ I was unable to complete the course
☐ I progressed to part-time study
☐ I progressed to full-time study
☐ I am not currently studying
☐ I undertook voluntary work
☐ Other

10.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

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[                          ]
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11. If you continued studying after the Communiversity, what programme(s) did you progress to?

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[                          ]
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11.a. Can you also tell us where you attend(ed) these programmes?

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12. If you did not continue with your studies after the Communiversity finished, could you tell us why?

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13. Do you continue to use your library services?

☐ No
☐ Rarely (1-2 times a year)
☐ Occasionally (monthly)
☐ Often (weekly)

14. If you continue to use the library, what facilities and services do you use?

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15. Is there anything you have done, subsequent to participating in the Communiversity, that you can directly attribute to participating on the programme?

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16. Please use the following section to add any comments or thoughts you may have about your experience on the Communiversity and that you consider important to this research.

Page 2: Thank You

Thank you so much for your participation in this survey

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact Mary Ryan, Head of Department, Dept of Adult and Community Education; email: mary.b.ryan@mu.ie or tel: 01 708 3750. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.