

Case study report (Code IE1C)

Remote work as a promising practice to attract newcomers to rural areas

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

CPD	Continued Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
EC	European Commission
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
IDA	Industrial Development Agency of Ireland
MaREI	Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine
MODAM	Mol Oifig Digiteach Árinn Mhór
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
SMEs	Small Medium Enterprises
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
WDC	Western Development Commission
WP	Work Package

Context

Promising practice case study on remote work and rural newcomers

One area the RURALIZATION project is concerned with is how newcomers can be facilitated to relocate to rural areas. Remote work can act as a tool facilitating bringing new people to rural areas. This case study will focus on the remote work movement in the rural west and southwest of Ireland context as a promising practice to facilitate rural newcomers. Counties included were Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Clare, Kerry, Cork. These areas fall into a NUTS 3 category. It looks broadly at how the remote work movement facilitates rural newcomers, assessing constraints and favourable conditions, as well as specific activities in local communities. It will look at aspects of this movement in relation to facilitating newcomers from three different interconnected perspectives:

1. Local context: The rural remote work environment

Remote work as a tool to support rural newcomers is embedded within the wider rural remote work environment. A supportive environment for remote work needs multiple favourable conditions and faces barriers to overcome. This makes understanding this broader enabling environment important. Remote working newcomers and wider rural remote work depends on similar resources (e.g., co-working spaces, broadband, stability of remote work/remote work careers). But newcomers potentially also have extra needs that will facilitate their arrival and long-term staying in rural areas (e.g., housing, visas for non-EU workers). The remote work environment also supports the wider, more organic movement of newcomer remote workers to rural areas.

2. Local community activities: Actively encouraging rural remote working newcomers

To fully embrace the potential and capture the potentially significant local impacts of remote work, different actors (e.g., Grow Remote and its local chapters, Digital Hubs, community groups, local government agencies) within communities in Ireland have taken a proactive approach. Communities in specific places can use remote work as a tool to help alleviate depopulation by attracting newcomers. This can involve promoting remote work alongside the lifestyle and services their community offers (e.g., Arranmore Island, Co. Donegal). Some local chapters of Grow Remote have organised open days inviting people to come and experience what the local community offers through the 'Town Tasters' approach (e.g.,

Dingle, Co. Kerry). These activities are important to analyse as part of how the rural remote work movement facilitates newcomers.

3. The newcomers: The nature and experience of rural remote newcomer

It is also important to build a picture of the newcomer perspective to begin to understand wider drivers of rural re-location. For example, depending on the personal circumstances of newcomers (e.g., individuals, couples, families), different favourable conditions may facilitate or constrain rural relocation. This potentially makes different local factors important (e.g., potentially two remote jobs needed, local schools and local amenities as important for families). It is also important to understand how newcomers engage with the rural areas they now live and work (the economy, community, local services etc.) to get a picture of the newcomer impact on rural regeneration.

Profile of Case Study Region

The profile of these rural areas is an important backdrop to assess and appreciate the impact of the practice of the remote work movement in facilitating remote work as a social innovation in rural areas.

Ireland’s settlement structure can be expressed as a **predominantly rural country**. Based on the CSO urban/rural classification, over the 2011-2016 period the overall population of rural areas increased, but at a lower rate to urban (1.7% versus 4.8%). These trends varied from county to county which shows further detail and greater variation. For example, in the 2011-2016 period some counties experienced minus growth (Donegal -0.3%), no growth (Mayo 0%, Sligo 0%) or very low growth (Roscommon 0.1%, Leitrim 0.1%, Tipperary S.R. 0.1%) Morgenroth (2018). Table 1 shows the variation across county.

	1991-1996	1996-2002	2002-2006	2006-2011	2011-2016	1991-2016
Border	0.2	1.0	2.1	2.0	0.3	1.2
Midland	0.3	1.6	2.9	2.4	0.7	1.8
West	0.5	1.3	2.2	1.5	0.4	1.3
Dublin	0.6	1.0	1.4	1.4	1.1	1.2
Mid-East	1.4	3.1	3.8	2.3	1.1	2.9
Mid-West	0.4	1.2	1.6	1.0	0.3	1.0
South-East	0.4	1.4	2.2	1.6	0.5	1.3
South-West	0.5	1.0	1.8	1.4	0.8	1.2
State	0.6	1.3	2.1	1.6	0.7	1.4

Figure 1. Variation in population change across counties. - Source: Morgenroth, 2018, p. 17

Issues of service and infrastructure still plague rural areas. The WDC express concerns regarding infrastructures (WDC, 2016), while Murtagh et al., (2020) trace the unequal access to broadband and note that rural dwellers in Ireland are generally speaking more distant from services than their urban counterparts. For most services distances are three times greater. Comparing different areas of Ireland, they demonstrate that overall the data reveals an ageing population, but with the greatest increase in highly rural/remote areas. Average age increased from 39.6 to 41.2 from 2011-2016 and there were more men than women in rural areas. Age dependency (people outside of working ages 15-64) is also higher in rural areas of Ireland than urban with highly rural/remote areas showing the highest overall dependency ratio (see Murtagh and Farrell for more detailed analysis). The workforce trends also reflect more favourably for urban dwellers than rural dwellers. Those living in Ireland's cities have higher disposable income than other areas. The difference is biggest in highly rural/remote areas. Looking at the median household income it was €46,458 in cities, but €29,424 in highly rural/remote areas (Murtagh et al., 2020). An analysis of income by sector reveals a dependency on particular sectors for income in rural areas and with future trends away from employment in agriculture exposes a vulnerability of the economic fabric of rural areas. It shows the highest proportion of income comes from public service, education and health in all area types. The second highest sector by income earned for the three types of rural areas was wholesale, transport and accommodation, then followed by industry. Agriculture, forestry and fishing made up greater proportions of income earned in rural than urban areas (Murtagh et al., 2020).

In the context of these trends this promising practice case study investigates emerging signals of newcomers as remote workers to interrupt these patterns. This case study is concerned with newcomers as a means of addressing challenges in rural areas, for example economic diversification and population renewal. It is important from a policy perspective to understand what is a newcomer in order to put policy supports in place to accommodate this transition to rural areas. While not a 'new' phenomenon to rural areas, return migration is an important in rural areas as it impacts population renewal. Rural newcomers is not a term defined in Irish policy but research identifies a number of groups that would fall under the broad concept of newcomer such as national/international migrants, asylum seekers, newcomer entrepreneurs and second-home owners (Murtagh et al., 2020). Newcomers

bring benefits of cultural diversity (Woods, 2018) while Farrell et al. (2012) argue return migrants can also occupy a key place in rural development and rural society, particularly in the areas of small business development and enterprise.

In contrast to spatial patterns relating to international migration, Morgenroth (2018) finds internal migration by county to have a significant variability over time with both positive and negative trends displayed (see Murtagh et al., 2020). In the context of influencing place preference decisions by newcomers, Morgenroth (2018) identifies a number of important drivers such as house prices, local labour market (employment opportunities and wage-levels of jobs), local amenities and infrastructure. This positions rural areas favourably in terms of appealing to newcomers. National implementation of European Union initiatives are important to facilitate the economic and social integration of newcomer migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland.

Outside of traditional routes to rural development to increase place attractiveness (for example the LEADER as well as the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (DRCD, 2018a) and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (DRCD, 2018b), a number of different campaigns have emerged in Ireland which relate to attracting newcomers to rural areas. For example, the Look West campaign was launched in 2004, which aims to target individuals and businesses potentially interested in re-locating to the western region of Ireland (Sligo Champion, 2004). It is operated by the WDC. Look West capitalises on the importance of quality of life to choice of location. The economic opportunities in the west are also a key focus of the campaign (e.g., the LookWest.ie platform features a jobs board, skills register and a start-up and investment guide for the region). Bottom-up community-led initiatives are also important to support newcomers in rural areas. Mol Oifig Digiteach Árainn Mhór ([MODAM](#)) is a digital hub on Arranmore, an island off the coast of Donegal. It is a result of community and business collaboration, as well as public funding support (The Irish Times, 2019). Grow Remote a national social enterprise has been a driving force to promote relocation to rural areas through highlighting the potential of remote working to enable this transition.

Diversifying the rural economy

The AGRI Vision 2015 report (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2004), highlighted the fact that many rural dwellers are not linked to agriculture and that in order to improve the standard of living and quality of life in rural communities opportunities must be created so that the rural economy can develop agriculture in conjunction with much needed alternative enterprises. O'Donogue et al, (cited in social economic review, 2015) highlighted possible drivers of rural job creation as social enterprise and social services (e.g., childcare and elder care), tourism, 'green' products and services and cultural and creative industries.

With the on-going challenges facing traditional rural sectors, including agriculture, the future success of the rural economy is inextricably linked with the capacity of rural areas to innovate and to develop new opportunities that create jobs and income in rural areas. In response to notions of rural decline (McManus et al., 2012) rural resilience literature posits rural communities as 'active,' and 'proactive' about their future (Skerratt, 2013), developing processes for building capacity and resources. Remote rural regions are described as challenged in terms of distance to core markets, dispersed economic activity and population, which also impacts network development, as well as limited services alongside higher cost of delivery (Naldi et al., 2015; Atterton, 2016; OECD, 2018a). Lack of quality broadband in rural areas is a considerable barrier to the diversification and growth of the rural economy in Ireland. Case studies show that several large firms have moved out of the Southwest of Ireland as a result of poor broadband speed and quality (ECORYS, 2010:237:241). Across Europe the secondary and tertiary sectors are now the main drivers of economic growth and job creation in rural regions however, the previous strategy in Ireland of relying on 'global demand' and foreign direct investment (FDI) has led to a widening of the development gap between urban and rural areas. One of the major problems faced by the government in trying to develop and promote sustainable rural communities is the restricted opportunities in secondary labour markets in rural areas (Socio economic review, 2015). The negative ripple effect of removing public services in rural areas, for example the closure of 139 rural Garda stations in 2012 and 2013, pose a significant threat to the quality of life for rural dwellers and the sustainability of our rural communities (Socio- economic Review, 2015). The removal of resources from rural areas will make it difficult to maintain viable

communities. Employment, diversification of rural economies, adapting to demographic changes and supporting young people to stay in their communities are key challenges for rural areas.

These regions also have innate regeneration potential. They often hold strong natural resources which can provide a basis for new economic activity, such as nature-based amenities and green energy (Atterton, 2016). An important trend influencing regeneration in remote contexts is that digitisation is changing how being geographically distant in rural places impacts development, offering opportunities to overcome some traditional distance-dependent limitations, as well as opening up potential new opportunities (Murtagh and Farrell, 2019). Copus and de Lima (2015, p.6-7) observe a shift in understanding how distance impacts social and economic relationships with physical distance, being located close or remotely in space, as less important where there is now 'relational proximity' and other ways that connect us being elevated such as social or cultural closeness/similarity.

However, access to broadband often means the ability of a region to overcome challenges and harness social and economic opportunities in remote rural regions. Equally, the rural digital divide can impact other types of rural regions, but because of the particular challenges in remote areas, poor broadband access means particular new opportunities cannot be unlocked. For example, McCann and Ortega-Argilés (2015) outline the central role of wireless information communication technology (ICT) to provide connections to less remote regions

Origin of Practice

Digital technologies and remote work

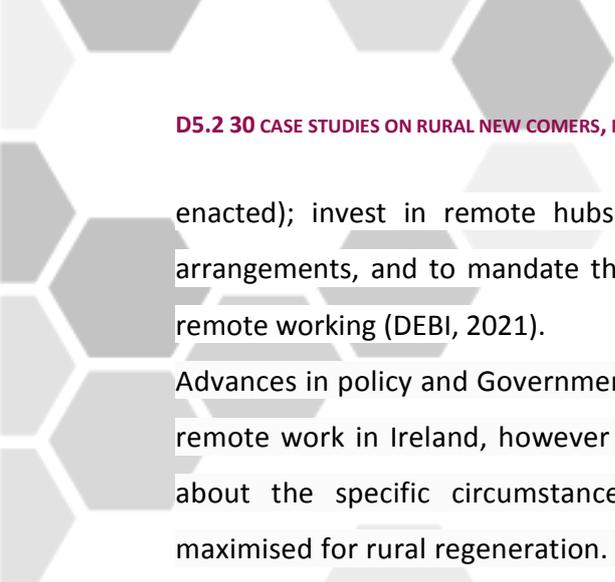
Digital telecommunications have transformed everyday lives and how businesses operate. The potential benefits of digital telecommunications for rural areas, from a rural economic development perspective, have much to offer. Literature suggests that access to broadband provides opportunities for rural businesses, opening up new markets and address other rural challenges such as connectivity and accessibility (Philip et al, 2019). The benefits that information and communications technologies (ICTs) can bring to SMEs, micro-businesses, home based businesses and the self-employed in rural areas have been explored, for example, Galloway et al., 2011; Pant and Hambly Odame, 2017. The necessity of broadband to enable remote work is not only essential for remote working but also to provide employers with confidence that their remote team can perform in an environment dislocated from the office.

A report by the Western Development Commission has traced the evolution of remote working in Ireland (WDC, 2020). Remote working in Ireland had a limited dip into remote working since its official emergence in 1990's. It was officially given government support in 1990's with a number of activities outlined to promote e-working. This was subsequently followed with the setup of an a e-Work Action Forum and produced the report, e-Working in Ireland: New Ways of Living and Working, while in 2003, the Department of Finance issued a circular on pilot schemes to promote e-Working in the Civil Service (WDC, 2020). Data on remote working compiled by the WDC from the National Census suggests that pre-COVID-19, in 2018 that 18% of workers, worked from home on some basis. For those who indicated they sometimes worked from home, 35% reported that they worked from home 1 day per week, 13% reported they worked from home 2 days a week while 11% reported they worked from home 5 days per week (WDC, 2020). In recognition of emerging trends (namely improving technology, the transition to a low carbon economy) and an increase in the demand for, and incidence of remote working, the WDC in conjunction with the Whitaker Institute in NUI Galway, prior to the outbreak of COVID 19 established a working group to investigate the potential of remote work. This led to the establishment of the WDC-NUI Galway Whitaker Institute Expert Group on Remote Working. These activities coupled with a

growing awareness at national level that the business sector is becoming increasingly mobile and business leaders are working independently such that there is a the need to be creative and collaborate in order to support, evolve and grow the Irish business sector, led the Government, in 2019, to publish the Remote Working in Ireland Report which pre-dated the current COVID-19 crisis and was part of the Government's commitment to promote more flexible working generally. This document sets out the potential "to widen the talent pool across Ireland, stimulate regional growth, lessen accommodation pressures in cities and support the transition to a greener economy. This potential has been highlighted in the Government's nine Regional Enterprise Plans for 2019-2020 and the Climate Action Plan" (DBEI, p.6 2019).

The research report highlighted a dearth in data relating to remote working in Ireland but did identify a number of Government, independent and industry led initiatives and programmes aimed at facilitating and promoting remote work. Research for the Remote Work in Ireland report identified that for the adoption of remote work practices to be successful, employees must be assisted with the right supports and training. It acknowledged the work of organisations in conjunction with Education and Training Boards (ETBs), the IDA (Industrial Development Agency of Ireland) and the Training Learner's Skillnet. Of relevance to rural areas, the Department of Rural and Community Development in partnership with the WDC are collaborating to develop and promote a network of enterprise and remote working hubs along the Atlantic corridor with the purpose of rural regeneration.

The policy landscape in relation to remote work has transformed since the outbreak of Covid-19. The national uptake of remote work highlighted the agility of the workforce and the potential benefits to rural areas. A National Remote Work Strategy with objectives to support employer and employees has been published which support the new Irish rural policy document 'Our Rural Future' for rural areas. The future of development in rural areas in this document is underpinned by technological connectivity and the objective to create a rural environment, both physical and social, that is conducive to remote working. A number of key actions in the remote work strategy have been identified to support this rural vision. These include objectives to legislate to provide the right to request remote working, introduce a legally admissible code of practice on the right to disconnect (this has been



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enacted); invest in remote hubs; accelerate the National Broadband plan, review tax arrangements, and to mandate that 20% of the public sector employees will be home or remote working (DEBI, 2021).

Advances in policy and Government strategies has begun to strengthen the foundation for remote work in Ireland, however in the absence of data and research, questions remain about the specific circumstances under which remote working's potential can be maximised for rural regeneration. Engagement in the digital society is widely assumed to be ubiquitous, yet throughout this transformation social, economic and territorial divides remain between those who are digitally connected, skilled and those who are not. The capacity of rural areas, in terms of territorial and community capacities, must be considered in this process to promote and transition to remote work in rural areas.

Actors Involved

Remote work

Remote work means jobs are not tied to a fixed location. Work is done remotely to the traditional workplace, be that at home, in a co-working space or even as a 'digital nomad' where workers regularly change location. More commonly referred to in earlier discussions as 'telework' or 'e-work', remote work is not a recent idea and has been discussed in policy domains in Ireland for more than 20 years, as shown by Hynes (2014). However, recent years have seen growing employer acceptance of remote work and increasing numbers of remote jobs available. The Covid-19 pandemic has also created a necessity for remote work, catapulting society into the normalisation of a previously exceptional work practice.

The rural remote work movement in Ireland

An active remote work movement in rural areas is an important part of rural economic and demographic regeneration. The benefits of remote work to rural communities goes beyond re-population, but also helps improve employment and retain the existing population.

A diverse range of actors who wish to capture the benefits of remote work for rural areas form part of Ireland's rural remote work movement. This can involve community groups, but also state agencies, such as local authorities and enterprise agencies. 'Hubs' that provide broadband access alongside co-working space are also an important actor. County Donegal has been noted as a leader in the rural remote work movement in Ireland. For example, remote work is a strategic priority of Donegal County Council, with activities led out of its Economic Development section. It works to promote the county and its offering in relation to lifestyle and remote work (Grow Remote, 2020b). It ran a public consultation in 2020 to feed into the development of a remote work strategy for the county (Donegal County Council, 2020). Regional and national level actors are also important (who may also have a more local presence), such as state/semi-state agencies e.g., the Western Development Commission, Enterprise Ireland and the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) Ireland.

Grow Remote

The non-profit, national social enterprise, Grow Remote forms a central part of the rural remote work movement, both nationally and locally. Established in 2018 as an informal group of community actors, Grow Remote saw the potential of remote work as a community development tool. Central to Grow Remote is building a “bridge between remote work and local impact” (Keogh, 2019, p.2). It works to bring together remote workers, businesses and communities. Grow Remote is a volunteer-run organisation, but in 2020 received funding to hire a general manager, its first full-time role (Grow Remote, 2020c). One of the key structures of Grow Remote are local groups or ‘Chapters’. This structure helps to create the crucial missing link identified by Grow Remote between the growing number of non-location dependent jobs and local places. The majority of the over 120 Grow Remote chapters are in Ireland, but the organisation has also expanded to have an international presence in 17 countries (Grow Remote, 2020c). In Ireland, chapters have also begun to emerge in urban areas, but the majority are rural. Grow Remote supports local chapters by providing resources, training and wider support. Online communication platforms are an important engagement tool such as Slack and Facebook groups. Chapters are hosted on the ChangeX platform.

Businesses that are remote employers are also an important actor part of the rural remote work movement. Grow Remote also provides an important ‘bridge’ between employers and communities such as through its jobs platform, but also between employers and employers, such as those more and less experienced in employing a remote workforce.

Remote work and rural newcomers: A dual pathway

Local community activities: Encouraging rural remote working newcomers

Two of the core goals identified by Grow Remote (2019) as motivating communities to focus on remote work is to increase local employment and improve local engagement of remote workers. A third core goal identified by Grow Remote (2019) as motivating communities to better harness remote work is to support repopulation.

Focused activities in communities also aim to capture the fuller potential they hold for remote work to attract rural newcomers and support repopulation.

Arranmore island re-location campaign, Co. Donegal

A community faced with youth out-migration for education and work, declining employment in traditional industries, the Arranmore Island Community Council launched the 'Coming Home' campaign in 2017 (Arranmore Island Community Council, 2019). However as described by Begley (2019), the lack of employment opportunities was a barrier. Secondly, lack of high-speed broadband also limited the potential for remote working. This led to the emergence of the MODAM digital hub project, which launched in 2019. This community run initiative has drawn on a range of resources, including funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development via Donegal County Council. The partnership with Three Ireland has provided the technology supporting superfast connectivity and bandwidth at the MODAM hub (Three Ireland, 2019).

While the Coming Home campaign initially focused on targeting the diaspora, the Arranmore Island Community Council has also identified potential for a number of types of people to work on the island, because of MODAM and the high-speed broadband. The holidaying diaspora can now extend their break home by working remotely, or the digital nomad who continuously combine travel and remote work (Begley, 2019).

The Arranmore campaign shows it is also not a simple process of place promotion results in re-location. Newcomers may need help from the local community (e.g., local Grow Remote Chapter), such as to find housing and source VISAs (Grow Remote, 2020b). Emerging from the Arranmore campaign two families have moved into the area, also resulting in five new children starting in the local primary school. Facilitation is ongoing with two further families (Grow Remote, 2020b). These numbers do not reflect the interest this campaign generated from targeting the Irish diaspora (Irish Central, 2019). This suggests there is further untapped potential, but perhaps some key ingredients are missing.

Dingle Digital Hub

The Dingle Creativity and Innovation Hub (Dingle Hub) is a community enterprise initiative supported by Enterprise Ireland, eir, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Kerry County Council, Net Feasa and the Dingle Business Chamber. It grew out of a response to diversify its economic base which was largely dependent on agriculture and tourism.

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The Hub is located at the Údarás na Gaeltachta Business Park in Cuilín, Dingle, in a specially fitted-out office facility underpinned by 1Gb fibre broadband from eir. There are 24 spaces available to support new business formation, comprising of co-working spaces, dedicated offices and hot desks.

The Hub manager joined the Grow Remote movement to establish links with a wider remote working community. To generate community awareness of the hub and link potential remote workers with the hub the Dingle Grow remote Chapter developed the concept of a Town Taster. The notion centres on letting newcomers come to the area and get a feel for the towns culture and to meet the locals. It was hosted in a local bar which contributed to the local economy and created synergies with local businesses that were invited to attend on the night. This concept of 'Town Tasters' has been replicated in other local Chapters.

The digital hub has acted like a springboard for a community transition into green energy projects. The hub now performs as an enterprise hub and aims to foster an ecosystem type model to facilitate the creation of diverse companies with all-year, well paid jobs on the Dingle Peninsula. The Hub has successfully won competitive bids for funding for different projects primarily through the networks it has proactively developed (the details of the hub are expanded in section "Physical resources").

Loop Head Together

Loop Head Together is an initiative formed during 2020 to support the vitality of the economy, communities and environment of the Loop Head Peninsula, Co. Clare. It is formed by over 20 local community-based organisations that unite the 10 electoral districts of the three most western parishes of County Clare – Kilballyowen, Carrigaholt and Kilkee, and stretching from Moyasta to Loop Head Lighthouse. In addition to this the group have opened their discussion up to the world through the medium of whats app. Digital connectivity is one of nine strategic areas the groups considers necessary to regenerate its area. It is a large pro-active group with an ethos of working in partnership and collaboration with our neighbouring communities, counties, external agencies and state bodies. The driving force behind this initiative is the deep concern felt throughout the peninsula at the level of ongoing population decline, a trend at odds with the average situation in County Clare and nationwide (Loop Head Together, 2020).

It has developed strategic partnerships with Clare County Council and a University in Finsbury. This collaboration has reaped rewards toward the development of a community action plan, underpinned by a desire to transition to a greener community.

The role of these groups in the remote work movement in Ireland and the constraints and favourable conditions that they encountered in facilitating remote work is discussed throughout the report. The primary themes that emerged as constraints are outlined in the next section.

Constraints

Participation of volunteers in the community groups in a wide range of tasks, including spending time going door to door to spread information or recruit new volunteers, grant-writing and encouraging new members to the group, while a critical part of facilitating sustainable adoption of this process, similar to other community initiatives, poses ongoing challenges.

Volunteer burnout.

A key challenge was resourcing the significant, time-consuming and resource heavy logistical, coordination and engagement channels to community-based work, which are not often fully appreciated by funding bodies “ *It is a full-time job now really*” (IE1C/int. 17) Resources also need to be made available for the co-ordination of collaborations, for ongoing evaluation, for the extra additional costs involved in engaged research, and for not-for-profit community groups engaging in research projects. Only then will the huge community resource, capacity, expertise and enthusiasm be tapped into and maximized to co-create acceptable, sustainable and viable solutions. The feelings of each participant as a community actor is well represented by this comment “ *But yeah taking away the risk of burnout really. Yeah. Because people can only give so much*” (IE1C/int. 22).

Funding

Current funding for local community development is linked to state level procedures requiring in some instances match funding and is also competitively based. Skerratt and

Steiner (2013) note that current funding mechanisms for rural community development community favours the 'project'- or 'committee'- literate, whilst its short-termism does not achieve the longer-term outcomes required. The issue of funding was echoed throughout the interviews. *"There has to be a long-term mentality. I mean if I look at the finances of this now with Covid we were gonna hit anyway but you know this year we'd be 100 grand more in debt than we were at the beginning of the year. And having said that I get you know 20 grand from Leader to create the plan, the strategy so that's 20 grand less that I have to be in debt. And from Loop Head tourism we have a project which is worth you know 30 grand over a year. So that 50 grand enables me to then leverage and get more debts out from the bank. So thanks to that help I can actually get you know I don't have to go off to do a project to get the debt. But once you've senior people with expenses there's a certain cost if you have your own company and you have to pay salaries and stuff. And when you hit hard times you know the current structure I mean you probably wouldn't. If I did this commercially it wouldn't have happened ..you know it would not be sustainable on the current commercial set-up. There's no way you could afford a senior person to be in these roles"* (IE1C/ int. 16).

Funding for community development initiatives are now delivered through different themes, e.g. Climate transition in order to align community development to national and EU policy objectives. To source funding groups mentioned their struggles to mould community plans to existing funding streams as an ongoing challenge *"So there's a challenge in that like to try and find a place to hook them on"* (IE1C/ int. 18). The short-term nature of funding was also a concern for the sustainability of any of these initiatives *"Basically the money runs out at the end of June 2022. So we're a year and a half in and we've a year and a half to go"* (IE1C/ int. 18).

The current funding mechanisms do not generally make provision for supporting community development activity and, in many cases, specifically exclude such support. If similar projects are to take place in future and if the critical role of local communities is to be acknowledged and encouraged, clear funding mechanisms need to be provided to resource some core staff on the ground with community development, engagement and project management skills, and to cover administrative costs.

Style of Activities Promoted

Technology is a key condition to enable remote work, but human, social, cultural and political resources also emerge as part of the conditions facilitating the newcomer as remote work. Rural remote work as a newcomer is facilitated as part of a diverse system of interconnected linkages. Some of the drivers discussed below are more general to the remote work environment while other are specific considerations in relation to newcomers are also outlined.

Resources

Broadband

Broadband availability or strength consistently emerged as an obstacle to remote work however the accelerated role out of the National Broadband programme will begin to respond to this challenge.

Participants are acutely aware of the need to engage with technology in order to ensure that they can perform as a remote worker, that communities are not left behind but equally cognisant of its connectivity potential to link with external places and spaces. From the newcomers perspective access to broadband was linked to decision-making related to location choice and also the impact on individual's ability to work from home. Comments such as *"So that was one. So you know if this beautiful place where I am didn't have broadband sadly I would have had to you know let it go (IE1C/ int. 6)"* and *"Definitely. Yeah. Its major. We wouldn't be able to be there if we didn't have internet" (IE1C/int. 11)* capture the theme of responses in relation to the importance of broadband.

The issue of consistency of connectivity emerged as an issue among remote workers *"But there are still a lot of areas. And even ours its at an acceptable quality for video messaging, emails, da-da-da but when you get into maybe more live streaming and stuff like that it wouldn't even be strong enough. So that's still kind of a little bit of a challenge alright" (IE1C/ int. 14)*. Other respondents pointed to the spatial unevenness of digital telecommunications infrastructure *"That is one of the obstacles we have in certain areas. There are some black spots you know" (IE1C/ int. 21)*. It also impacts work performance for example *"One lady when Covid struck her broadband was terrible where she lived so she had to drive her car and*

park outside the resource centre because they've good Wi-Fi and sit in her car and work from there. Yeah it is patchy around the area.” (IE1C/ int. 4).

In addition to the physical implications of poor connectivity there is also a level of frustration surrounding the issue *“You know this issue came up yesterday because I’ve an awful problem with broadband ..And it was just a dead end because I got through to technical support and he said no you need to get through to customer care. I said no customer care said to ring technical support. No he said we don’t deal with 4G broadband issues. I said customer care told me to ring you” (IE1C/ int. 7)*

From a regeneration perspective broadband is linked to more than the remote job. Remote workers are a diverse group. They range in age profile, may be single individuals, they may have a spouse that also requires a job or have families which have a wider impact on the community. The broader impact of a lack of technology was one of the triggers for Arranmore to address the issue of technology in their area. *“One of the triggers I suppose for that there was a family moved from the States actually a few years back and they moved to Arranmore and they put two children into the secondary school. And the person in the family had worked in financial services so they needed a good broadband connection. So at the time that wasn’t available. It just wasn’t reliable enough for them to do their job properly so they had to move off the island again to Galway it was at the time. So that sort of opened our eyes and said okay if we don’t get this sorted this is going to be a big issue down the road because of the trends you know towards working from home and being able to bring your job with you” (IE1C/ int. 8).* Arranmore group established an arrangement with a national broadband provider, Three Ireland, which has transformed the whole Island. The Arranmore community of 469 people sees connectivity as a lifeline to reinvigorate their economy, culture and unique way of life. Until now, the lack of connectivity has restricted the ability to establish or develop businesses on the island and made working remotely from the island almost impossible. Three Business has provided local businesses, workers and visitors with state-of-the-art technologies including high speed connectivity, broadband+ and improved bandwidth. This connectivity stimulated a collaboration with Arranmore Business Council and a digital hub has been created to facilitate remote working, meaning islanders and can capture the potential of remote work. The wider implications of this connectivity enabled the medical centre to do video consultations with doctors on the mainland, saving patients a

potential overnight trip to Dublin, as well as improving connectivity at the local school to enhance online learning tools, something that has been unreliable to date.

Loop Head as a grass-roots initiative has digital transformation as one element of its community agenda. To position themselves as attractive and viable places for remote work local community groups have been proactive in their approach to connectivity. For example, Loop Head Together, have been proactive in leveraging broadband services by conducting local surveys and approaching Internet providers with a critical mass for a customer base (Loop Head Facebook, 2021). This group, using WhatsApp as their medium of connection, enlisted residents to record their broadband strength. The results were compiled within two days and all areas across the entire peninsula were measured. Armed with this information the group have adopted a proactive business model approach to secure better services from the private sector. *“So what we’re doing on Loop Head is getting a connection. And we don’t have enough people yet but once we have 200 people lined up we contact three of the service providers and we say over this next year we’re moving 200 people to one of you and away from the other two, what can you commit to”* (IE1C/ int. 16).

Another group carried out research within the local area through downloading an app to gauge broadband connectivity *“But we did a little bit of action research around it. We got the local community involved to just use an app on the phone just to check the signal strength. And then we collated that information and we shared it with the broadband officer for the county and also a company called Cellnex who are I suppose partnership is the wrong word but they work in conjunction with Coillte. So basically we’re in ongoing contact with both of them but Cellnex are now looking at a number of different sites in the area with a view to putting in infrastructure which then would allow for the Eirs and the Threes and the Vodafones of this world to have their networks on this communication mast* (IE1C/ int. 18)

Local innovations such as this are occurring outside state agency bodies, responding to barriers that remote workers are encountering, and are fast-tracking the process of connectivity to ensure that their communities do not miss out on opportunities afforded by remote working. The roll-out of high-speed fibre under the National Broadband Plan is a key aspect to addressing issues of connectivity in rural Ireland. National Broadband Ireland has responsibility for providing this infrastructure. However, there is a legacy of scepticism surrounding the actual level of provision *“she covered a story specifically about our*

connectivity because fibre had come to Burtonport and had stopped in Burtonport and we made the argument that you know it's only three miles. Why can't they come just another three miles you know"(IE1C/ int.17) . Grow Remote have recently engaged in a partnership with National Broadband Ireland (NBI) which suggests the needs of local places will be brought to the decision making table. According to Keogh *"It's one that is needed if we are to accurately identify challenges and build solutions that fulfil the potential of rural Ireland"*.

Human resources

Remote working skills: People must be willing and able to work remotely. Keogh (2019) highlights how effectively working remotely is itself a skill. This does not just need the employee to adapt, so must the employer. This requires employers to do more than facilitate remote work through having a clear policy that allows for it, but also to build a remote work culture (Irish Rural Link, 2020, Galway Chamber, 2020).

Human resources in terms of training are required to enable remote employees and employers to operate effectively but there is also a need to upskill rural communities in the competencies required for remote work so that they are ready to take advantage of the opportunities which will be opened up to them. Philip et al (2019) makes reference to the 'second' digital divide whereby digital divides are more about differences in skills and usage than the 'does/does not use Internet' binary.

Through Grow Remote and community groups a range of different avenues to upskill local communities and advertise Jobs to local communities exist. In collaboration with key partners, Grow Remote activities include a training programme for remote workers and remote managers (Grow Remote, 2020a). Grow Remote local chapters, through local meetings, actively identify skill gaps within their communities and organise training to address this gap. Grow Remote have also been responsive to enabling and facilitating females back to work. A number of female parents identified children as the reason for leaving or not returning to work, however Chapter leaders are also noticing a barrier in the approach women were taking to remote work in comparison to males. "What we were finding as well is that women in particular would if they read the job spec and they saw some terminology on it that they didn't understand they wouldn't go for the job. Whereas if a guy saw it he'd just go ah I'll go for it anyway" (IE1C/ Int.4) . In addition to this Grow

Remote Chapter leaders identified a skill set deficit due to taking time off to mind children. To address this feedback from the local community the Chapter leader sought out local businesses to ascertain the skill set required to obtain employment *“So then with Grow Remote they were full-time permanent jobs. They don’t kind of promote the kind of gig economy or anything like that. But I was thinking I need to peel it back a little bit more just to make it a little bit easier for people. They can’t just go from nothing into these technical jobs. So I was trying to see is there any kind of other work especially when Covid came along, was there any kind of other work that people could get. So I heard there was a guy in Kinvara and he got really busy during Covid with online work. And he was teaching English as a foreign language. And when China went into lockdown he was bombarded with work because the Chinese parents were getting their kids extra grinds in English and they were paying for extra English lessons. And he was teaching four-year-olds in China”* (IE1C/ int.4). This was followed with a partnering with the local rural development company to provide a course for local women to become TEFL teachers. This facilitation by Grow Remote to bridge the gap between employer and employee and provide the necessary upskilling of remote workers is changing the landscape of remote work and rural employment structures.

Grow Remote operate an online Job Clubs at different times which are aimed at the existing rural community *“There’s actually a Grow Remote jobs club meeting at 1 o’clock today that I’m going to go to where they’re trying to encourage say local people to apply for remote roles maybe customer entry roles”* (IE1C/ int. 8).

The online skills module offered by Grow Remote and the proactive community focused courses provided by the different community groups address this issue of ‘digital exclusion’ (Park, 2012). In the context of rural areas where other exclusion issues already reside these actors have a vital role to play in the social cohesion of local areas.

Remote work also brings health and safety issues when remote working, not only for the employee but also the employer. In the absence of the traditional workspace which is regulated by industry standards, remote workers also need to be educated in these aspects. Remote workers in this study highlighted different elements linked to self-care. The need to have appropriate equipment, for example an ergonomic chair and table was one example *“So that’s probably the biggest thing I could say for self-care at home. I know there’s a lot more research now coming out about even how you should sit. You shouldn’t actually sit at a*

90 degree angle, that you should actually be leaning back at a 120 or even further” (IE1C/Int. 24).

Cultural resources

A supportive culture for rural remote work has a number of facets:

Knowledge and Awareness: Improving local awareness of remote work opportunities is needed. Part of Grow Remote’s work involves making remote work opportunities visible. They achieve this through a dual process, online and through local chapters. This involved the creation of an online Remote Jobs Board (Remote Jobs Ireland, no date), alongside wider seminars that support finding and being ready to take up (e.g. IT needs) remote work (Grow Remote, 2020a). Through the local Chapters, leaders were central to provide visibility of remote work and to promote the potential of remote work for local communities *“letting people know in the area that there is remote work out there available to them. So I was getting people coming to me looking for work and then I’d kind of sit down and chat with them and see what their skills were and then look up online and look at all the different recruiters that were in the remote space and see if there was any jobs that would suit the people that I was meeting on the ground” (IE1C/ int.6)* The effectiveness of Grow Remote in this aspect was clear throughout. *“And then I saw the Grow Remote stuff and that really was like this is gonna be a brilliant idea... So I actually had been actively looking at the same time as well so I could you know based on my experience from what I was seeing on jobs boards and watching what was going on in the Grow Remote community with people applying for work and things like that” (IE1C/ int. 24).*

The role of Grow remote in bridging these gaps has been acknowledge *“I think where Grow Remote play a key role that is unlikely to be paid by the state is in you know managing and sharing knowledge around the cultural impact of the shift in remote workings. The soft supports that very often people will look for when they move to like those town taster sessions you know where is the school, where is the local GAA club, where is the shop, where is the really nice place to get coffee. All that kind of soft information that you know where’s the best place to buy a house that people value and can be kind of given in those kind of settings that Grow Remote can support” (IE1C/ Int.5).*

Employer shift: Greater numbers of jobs that are not currently remote could be. This requires employers to facilitate remote work through their workplace policies. The building of a remote work culture also feeds into the strength of human resources supporting remote work. Grow Remote has been engaging employers to not only stimulate this process at employer level *“I think the other aspect of it is because they work with an awful lot of very kind of nimble and early stage companies that have embraced remote that they’re very good at sharing learning in terms of you know up and coming technology”* (IE1C/ Int. 5) but to also support employers in this process. Grow Remote have collaborated with Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board, IDA Ireland and Solas to create two online training programmes designed to upskill prospective and current remote workers and frontline managers in remote working policies and best practices *“And then in the context of more you know kind of structured supports they’re working with the Laois/Offaly ETB in terms of remote courses and remote courses in supporting managers better, introducing remote work”* (IE1C/ int. 5). A Grow Remote Chapter Leader expressed a belief that shifting the mindset of employers is happening and possible *“You train managers. The tech companies that come into the local authorities and this is happening so we’ll show you how to. And then you come down right down to your local solicitors, your local accountants who’ve had to do this and you know train. It’s a culture change. The question is asked can you change a culture,. Yes you can”* (IE1C/ Int.7).

Supervision of remote work is a challenge, and many people in supervisory or management roles reported high stress levels (WDC, 2016). This highlights that more work needs to be undertaken to support employers to enable them to have a remote team.

Lifestyle ambition: If remote work can be leveraged to combat rural depopulation, it also needs the existence of a population that wants to re-locate to rural areas. Anecdotal evidence suggests a trend exists where remote workers move from urban areas to rural locations driven by for example by lower costs of living and rural quality of life (Galway Chamber, 2020).

The motivating factors collected from the newcomers that participated in this research compound this anecdotal evidence. Quality of life centred on issues related to benefits offered by the rural environment *“I love that you know its quiet and yeah its surrounded by nature and you know you don’t hear much traffic at all. It’s what I was craving you know that*

peace and quiet” (IE1C/ Int. 6), to spending time with children “Probably number 1 was a different lifestyle just to have more time with our kids when they’re younger” (IE1C/ Int.11).

To capitalise on personal ambitions of potential newcomers, community groups have been undertaking surveys. Online surveys was the most popular form of survey method mentioned (perhaps reflective of COVID-19 restrictions). *“So it wasn’t difficult for us to get a cohort. And we sent out our survey to anybody who was living away, for people who were interested in moving back who were not interested in moving back, just anybody who was part of the diaspora and asked them what it was that they needed to move back, what was the thing that was stopping them from moving back. And we got the data back” (IE1C/Int.16).* This proactive approach allows communities to identify gaps between place resources and newcomers desires.

Economic resources

The jobs created by remote work are a central resource to support rural remote working.

Remote work availability: The availability of remote jobs is increasing. While the exception and not the rule, all jobs with some companies are no longer linked to a specific location. Companies embracing a completely remote workforce include Shopify, Buffer and Git Hub. More commonly, employers embracing remote work retain a blend, where employees work remotely some of the time, or some employees work remotely all of the time. This trend is reflected in the experiences of the participants with one noting that *“even thanks to Covid as well in a sense all your regular jobs boards such as Indeed and Glassdoor and stuff like that they’ve now obviously they’ve distinguished between jobs.. Like even my reach now say if I left my job and changed careers or did whatever a lot of the work I could now comfortably travel to Limerick because I wouldn’t have to go five days a week” (IE1C/ Int.24).*

However this still seems to be in a transition stage as the same participant noted that some remote jobs are not full-time remote positions “Because there’s a problem that does come up quite often still is you have a lot of jobs that are temporary remote but what’s worse is there’s a lot of companies and they’re putting their jobs up on jobs boards. You’ll see they’ll say remote but the minute you start spending your time going into the job description to read it you’ll read through it and then towards the end or else if you’re lucky at the start you’ll see temporarily remote in the description. So that’s a bit of a downfall there when

you're looking" (IE1C/ Int.24). Grow remote, on their Jobs Board, have created a 'Tips' section to prospective employees to guide them in the process of searching for employment. A 'query' function also exists for users to engage with the wider remote work community on their Slack platform (<https://growremote.ie/irish-remote-jobs-board/>).

At a local level groups have created local websites which act as a 'landing' page for any interested newcomers. These websites provide information on remote jobs and jobs available with the locality. Local groups are also organising employment workshops in their areas " *I suppose we're trying to put in place a few different supports and helps to help them to find a job locally. Very simply we'll say when people engage with us we get them to link in with our social media channels. So plain and simple. So when we see posts coming up, now seasonal work we will put up there from time to time but you know kind of proper jobs you know full-time jobs or whatever we will post those on social media so that they can keep track of those and see what's going on. But for example now on Wednesday this being the month of enterprise in the county we've organised a few different events and one of them is an employment workshop. So we have someone from Grow Remote*" (IE1C/ Int.18). Initiatives such as this are linking perspective remote workers with jobs.

In the context of attracting newcomers to address issues of population decline and to stimulate generational renewal it emerged that having a job before making the decision to relocate was a priority. This reinforces the power of remote work in mobilising newcomers to relocate to rural areas. It also highlights the need to support the awareness of remote jobs and to incentivise employers to develop remote work policies as people will not relocate without employment " *definitely yeah. I definitely wouldn't have been taking on a challenge like that without having an established business that wasn't relying upon a local area as well. I think that would add just another level of stress to it if you were moving to the area*" (IE1C/ Int.25)

Precarious work: Rural remote working can be inhibited by the precarious nature of work. This is not unique to remote work, but if rurally located where other jobs options are limited it becomes more of an issue than in urban areas where job options tend to be more plentiful. Looking beyond the remote job to remote work as a career option is an issue. Also in rural contexts when considering remote work to combat depopulation, the re-location of

families is also a consideration – relocation may depend on the availability of more than one job.

Some respondents discussed the issue of job progression or having to accept a lesser role in order to secure a remote job. *“So you know companies can be flexible to a degree but you need to be on site for some things especially if you’re managing people or dealing with other departments and that. So yeah. So the job pool is kind of limited as well. So you might have to take a side-step or a step down as well”* (IE1C/ Int. 10). Employees in more established positions or later in their career stage, felt that this was less of an issue and in fact accepted a trade between a work-life balance. *“Now I am fortunate because you know I’m kind of taking a step back. I don’t have manager responsibilities but I’m still a consultant. I’m getting nice fees and work nine months in the year .. so I’m kind of a step down but you know a step up in my work/life balance”* (IE1C/ Int.10). However, remote workers are not a homogenous group and from a generational renewal perspective rural areas also require young newcomers as remote workers. The concern of job progression and the need to be seen was especially felt by remote workers earlier in their career *“lot of the young people have expressed concern to me about working remotely from Arranmore and not being seen in the office... And they’re saying about well if I’m not there I’m missing out on you know training opportunities and you know networking”* (IE1C/ Int. 17). Access to mentors, training and knowledge transfer for career development was also highlighted as a potential challenge for remote workers *“I think equally there’s a challenge for early stage workers, those that are just finishing college or just finished school and are starting their careers. It’s important that they have the facilities to develop a professional network to kind of learn through peer learning in workplaces or from the more senior people in workplaces. So that knowledge transfer and the scope to develop their careers is very important. I think remote working probably suits those better in mid-career stage where they’re well-established, they understand their job, they kind of know a lot of what they need to know and occasional refresher or CPD would keep them ticking over”* (IE1C/Int.5). These findings are commensurate with a report by the WDC of remote workers during COVID. The cohort who showed greatest dissatisfaction with remote working were those in the 18-30 age group. In the NUI Galway-WDC Survey Phase II, 24.7% reported that they would not like to continue to work remotely or only to work remotely several times a month (McCarthy, 2020).

The negative implications of this on take-up of remote work by young people was considered a two-fold issue. Firstly, rural areas will only attract older retiring remote workers “You know let’s face it. I mean normally when people come to my age and they’re able to set up a business anywhere they want their kids have grown up. So if I fell in love with Loop Head I would come here but I would be occupying a house with no kids. And that’s fine. We need those kind of people too. But then what happens if all of the houses are occupied like that” (IE1C/ int. 16) and secondly a divide in the remote working community linked to quality of jobs *“Its very important that remote workers are not seen as second class citizens so that they have equality of voice and opportunity and that they’re able to apply for promotion and that they don’t end up in a situation where you have an out of sight out of mind situation so that they miss out on opportunities by not being in the room. And that really has to come from the leadership in organisations”* (IE1C/Int. 5).

Place offering: For rural areas to benefit from the remote work trend, they must be seen as attractive places to live and where remote work is possible. Remote workers are not a homogenous group and vary in profile and needs. Attracting newcomers requires having the necessary resources in place to accommodate the different type of newcomers. Many of the respondents had prerequisites for their choice location. These ranged from the availability of schools, a shop, medical services for example.

“So all the services. There’s a little hospital. There’s you know the county council offices. There were lots of reasons why Arranmore was a good fit in terms of its location as well” (IE1C/ Int.11).

Social resources

A remote work culture is usually intangible and experienced through what are often unwritten behavioural norms and expectations. Some organisational cultures are more conducive to remote working and many IT and tech companies have a long tradition of remote working for many of their staff. However, other organisations have more traditional cultures which are in-person or on-site based with remote working being rarely used or expected in terms of norms and practices.

The early days of Grow Remote grew from anecdotal evidence and early feedback surrounding issues of lack of awareness and isolation *“We had a notion at that stage where*

the CSO was reporting a quarter of a million remote workers in Ireland and we're like oh we'll bring them together because the biggest issue for remote working is isolation and when they all come together they'll be stronger within their communities and other stuff will roll out of that and then they can tell their communities about remote rolls" (IE1C/ Int. 1).

The operation of Grow Remote lends itself to creating two forms of remote working communities. Its online communities which are multi-layered with numerous entry points (ChangeXplatform, Slack community, Facebook) and a physical community through local chapters. In the context of RURALISATION it is noteworthy to reflect on the adopting a definition of community that largely restricts itself to rural communities as geographically defined and having locality-specific services (due to the definitions in the policy we review) but also acknowledge that other types of 'communities' interact and are, indeed, embedded, at this level in multiple ways. These might be communities of practice, as well as online communities of interest and social networks. Therefore communities can be understood as geographically and socio-culturally open systems (Wilson, 2013) and building resilient communities must involve a process of multiple pathways at a range of scales (Skerratt and Steiner, 2013). Wilson reasons that 'striking the right "balance" between communities and their scalar interactions with the global level is key for maximization of community resilience' (2012 p.1218).

Remote Work is posited as a mechanism through which rural issues of depopulation can be addressed. However, rural areas vary widely in terms of their accessibility, connectivity and remoteness. Within rural studies literature, rural isolation is a recurring theme and issues of social exclusion are well documented. Newcomers to rural areas in this study commented on the challenges of finding a 'way-in' to the community. References to being a "blow-in" was referred to during the interviews. Rural areas by their nature do not have the same opportunities for interaction as urban centres, for example shopping centre, coffee shops, and finding a 'way-in' to a community can be a challenge for remote working newcomers. Without family ties or children attending local schools one respondent recounted the experience of being a newcomer *"Well no I think in general my family would have been blow-ins in Waterford so its not like I ever felt like I was from there anyway. But I think its not... I think some people can find it more difficult than others maybe. Like I know someone who lives in quite a remote area and everyone else who lives in that area is all related so*

they're all cousins. And she finds that quite hard because you know you can infiltrate a friendship group maybe and become friends with people but its never quite the same as a really tight knit family group that you're not going to break into or you know you're never gonna be their family" (IE1C/ int. 9). Rural areas must provide a good quality living environment in order to ensure that newcomers become 'stayers'. One community actor framed the dilemma facing rural communities that want to capture the opportunities presented by remote working "how do we get the community amenities for the remote working needs but how do we get the remote worker that also stimulates the community amenities" (IE1C/ int.16).

Communities and local level actors are aware of this challenge and the need to translate newcomer to stayer in order to achieve sustainable regeneration of their areas. The Dingle group initiated the concept of a "Town Taster". The concept is to allow potential newcomers to get a flavour of a place. While, this has been used in other locations, for example in Valentia, Co Kerry and in a local Chapter in Barcelona, other chapter leaders were keen to point out the importance of "*know whos your audience*" (IE1C/ int. 2). They agreed in principal with the need of finding a means to integrate newcomers however the respondent was cognisant of responding to the needs of a place, its offerings and the needs of its community "*I think it is important though too of like you have to kind of test the assumptions and ..okay well why did the town taster work in Kerry, why were they doing it, how did they do it. And so you know there is a rigor. You can't just say oh well let's just you know cut and paste and do that in Clare and its gonna be as successful. Again I think you know you've gotta look and say who's the audience, what are they interested in, you know would this idea work or do we need to adapt it or do we need to do something entirely different"*. Examples of other initiatives by Chapters include organising gatherings at a local venue that has a space for informal social activities such as an evening of music or earlier for a game of chess. "*We did try an after work sort of thing on a Thursday or a Friday. The pub itself has geared itself to sort of early evening music and stuff like that. They're more targeting I'd say my cohort of people you know that you have kids, I'm not gonna go out and drink ten pints but I'll go out and have a cup of coffee in the evening and play a bit of music. Or people come there to play chess. They do like a 2 to 4 on a Thursday the cappuccino*

sessions which were filmed by Prime Time as part of a program they were doing on Grow Remote” (IE1C/ int. 4).

Rural communities have an integral role to play in the integration and embedding of newcomers into a local place. The presence of different clubs were mentioned as pathways to getting to know the locals “the swimming community there is actually groups now that are doing it for the last few months now. There is different groups. There’s a few of them. You know there’s an older group in the local town that go. There’s a few lads I’ve actually found that I didn’t realise were living in the area that aren’t too far off my age group. So I was like yeah I’m hanging out with a few of them and they go in swimming and stuff. So there is that that brought a bit more of a social aspect to hanging around here and stuff like that. Other than that like the only things I can really do here, I wasn’t too keen on it because I have a tendency to get injured but I joined my local GAA club again” (IE1C/ int. 24).

The community level at which the remote working movement is operating enables adaption to local vagaries which can ensure that this social innovation can benefit rural areas through embedding newcomers into local communities.

Political resources

Political resources will underpin the success of this practice. Rural areas suffer from a legacy of service deficits and this issue was reflected in the findings. While remote work enables newcomers some rural areas are not feasible options. Remote workers with families identified the necessity of a school and a GP for example in their location choices, while another respondent noted that there was no female GP in a 60 mile radius. Connections to the ‘ear’ of a politician had proven to reap rewards for local community groups. Remote work may not be attractive to everyone or may be more attractive at different life and career stages. This caveat points to the importance of other supports such as schools, childcare services and facilities being in place to ensure that rural areas are attractive to all types of remote workers. Local politicians and national level policy makers hold the keys to unblocking these obstacles “*And there’s kind of I suppose you know when you have say for example the likes of the county council or Rionn na Gaeltachta and then the ear of the department of community and rural affairs as well it’s pretty powerful like the type of influence that a small tiny community can have” (IE1C/ int. 18).*

Physical resources

Physical resources are integral to remote working. The most used remote work location for employees was working from home, but for others there is a desire to separate work and home or to have a blended arrangement to facilitate video-conferencing or meeting rooms. House size can also impact the option of home workspace therefore co-working spaces are important to respond to different arrangements. The infrastructural requirements for work location spaces should be informed by local specific need.

Co-working spaces

The remote work location for some employees may be working from home, but for others the idea is still to separate work and home. Co-working spaces are important to facilitate this, and also to overcome other issues that arose in relation to remote work in rural areas.

The community groups in this study have mobilised local resources to establish hubs in their local areas. Some have operated as a social enterprises where the hub space provides for other community needs; enterprise centres which support remote workers and enterprises; while others just provide co-working spaces and hot-desk spaces.

Arranmore community group took advantage of a local building to establish a local social enterprise hub. The design of the building lent itself to facilitating accommodation, which is now facilitating tourism around digital nomads and corporate events. The repurposing of the building has also addressed the issue of underused building within the community. *“And there’s a wee bit of accommodation upstairs above the digital hub...it wasn’t purposefully built in. It just so happened. And I probably should have told you this. The space that we got was part of an existing building and this was something that I found fascinating and it actually got pointed out by one of the journalists at the time. The downstairs of the building is a restaurant and next door was what people used to call the pool room and it was a room where there was pool tables and gaming machines and so all the kids hung out and they came and ate ice-cream and played their computer games and what not. And upstairs was eight bedrooms obviously bed and breakfast which was belonging to the restaurant. So the pool room had become defunct because there was no kids about to use it anymore and it just wasn’t viable anymore. So I had gone to the owner and I spoke to her and I said is there any*

chance we could possibly because it ticked all the boxes. It was right beside the ferry. It was right in the middle of one of the main sort of parts of the island where you've got schools and shops and bars and what not so I thought that's the best place for it to be. And they were open to the fact that they would give us that space. And it just so happens now that the kids who used to play in there in their gaming machines and play pool are now working in that space" (IE1C/ Int. 17). On a smaller scale another group gathered the community to clean up an old building "was an existing Údarás building. They just basically kind of painted it up and changed the desks and chairs. Because you know they were conscious of the fact that we didn't have any co-working space in the village here and it was just repurposing of an existing property" (IE1C/ Int.18).

Remote work in some hubs can be part of a **wider community agenda** such that these hubs have become hives for knowledge transfer, synergies and innovation. Co-working spaces or hubs can facilitate an opportunity space for innovation to occur. This is a feature that was experienced by the participants, with one recounting an issue they had encountered being solved by the remote working community within the co-work space "You can come in a room and you can turn around and say to somebody listen I've got this problem and you work in this industry, is there any chance you can come up with a solution for me. And these sorts of things are going on in digital hubs. And that in itself is something totally different again outside of what the benefits is to our community you know" (IE1C/ Int. 17). [Dingle Hub](#), Kerry emerged from a desire to diversify the local economy which had an over dependence of tourism and to position itself to take advantage of broadband "No the hub there was a conversation at one of our lovely festivals here in kind of December 2016. So it was Other Voices and the Ireland's edge conference at that a group of local business people got together and they said look broadband is coming. you know it had the potential to be a game-changer for places like Dingle. We're really too heavily dependent on tourism. We need diversification, what do we do" (IE1C/ Int. 22). The hub started out as a digital hub and used this as a springboard to develop partnerships with key stakeholders. For example, relationships were formed with local groups, local businesses, academic institutions and state agencies all of which provided resources such as training, awareness and information. This broad spectrum of stakeholders has created an open-ended transfer of knowledge which has resulted in the co-creation of a strategic local development plan for the area. It

also acts as a hub for community initiatives. When a local group identifies a potential project for the area the hub functions to make connections with relevant stakeholders to gather information, provide training to locals and ultimately realise the plan *“I think what we’re seeing is that the hubs have a role to play in just providing that kind of institutional memory and capacity for projects. We had a wonderful project here the skin project which really facilitated bringing together a load of groups. It was about short supply chains. And it was with Teagasc and they had a researcher on it who facilitated all the meetings, brought a load of working groups together in the area, food production, tourism and heritage with the aims of encouraging you know agri tourism businesses, new businesses around that”* (IE1C/Int.22).

The success of the hub in Dingle has meant that it is now moving to larger and more modern premises as they want to ensure that remote workers have a good quality work environment but also that they meet standards required by companies to have a remote working team. *“So when we started it was enough to have access to the wonderful broadband that we had and people were very happy with it, I’m delighted with myself sitting in my drafty building. But I think expectations are higher now. And if companies are supporting their employees to go into hubs they’ll expect a certain standard just from the physical building alone. I think we have the plans in place working closely with Údaras na Gaeltachta to re-develop the old hospital here and there would be an enterprise space in that. And I do think yeah. And I think policy is going to support that. It is supporting it to put the capital infrastructure in for rural areas to have you know that physical space to support people”* (IE1C/ Int.22).

Hubs in rural areas were shown to perform a number of roles. They addressed issues of **isolation** by providing a space to engage with people *“to be able to network with other groups and to be able to mix and chat and I think that’s really important for you know your mental health and your working day. And we spend a lot of our time at work so I think its really important that you can down tools at some point during the working day and actually chat to a real live person not on zoom”* (Focus group). Others felt it structured their day and was better for their mental health *“Because working from home is very insular. And I think a lot of people found that over lockdown that it can be a bit depressing not leaving. Like you could get up in your pyjamas, work all day and just go back to bed. And I think some people did that over lockdown and it’s not good for their mental health”* (IE1C/ Int. 9).

This suggests that hubs can respond to the needs of different communities and reflects a theme that emerged during the focus group regarding **co-designing** with communities “*I know there’s a thing just on that. I mean with the county councils wanting to do hubs or whatever there’s some lovely samples like the Porterhouse in Galway where a lot of local people got involved in making that. But I think you know spending six months if anyone does want to do a hub spending six months getting to know the people in the community first and then getting the community to co-design the hub with you. That goes so far in you know making it a community hub and then it really is a welcome you know for other people.* (IE1C/ int. Focus Group). There was also a strong feeling toward the role of community in supporting the promotion of remote work in their communities “*Because communities very often are acutely aware of their own decline particularly when that decline is a population decline. And so communities can, like as one of the other speakers mentioned there about the hub in Skibbereen communities can come together and they can create hubs. They can demonstrate that they are innovators in their own right and that they are prepared to support networks of remote workers. So communities can play a role in supporting remote working but also in demonstrating that they want to see this as a social innovation, they want to adapt this and they want to help it, utilise it to help them regenerate themselves you know.*” (IE1C/ int. focus group).

Place for **social integration**. Newcomers to rural areas can find making connections to place a challenge, especially as rural areas are considered ‘tight knit’. Working in a co-working space provides an opportunity to meet people from a diversity of backgrounds “*And I think there is that apprehension you know particularly for my husband whose you know I’m originally from Ireland, he’s English and he’s kind of going oh my God am I gonna be mocked in rural Ireland with my English accent. And the existence of a hub that has loads of English people and American people and people from all over the world in it was a real signal that you know the community was trying to attract people to come in from outside. So I think that is a huge positive.*” (IE1C/ int. focus group). While another participant joined a hub as a means to get to know local people and find out what was happening in the community “*And as it turned out the house that I was moving into did have good broadband but it was good to join a hub I found moving to a new place for a number of reasons, so to meet people, to get involved in community initiatives*” (IE1C/ Int. 9).

The need to attract young people to rural areas is one of the cornerstones for generational renewal. Providing options such as remote work opens the potential for this. However, it was felt that for young people remote work can be less attractive as an option as it impacts their need for **social connections**. It was regarded that hubs addresses this obstacle by allowing social interaction, so young people can still have an “*office romance*” (IE1C/ Int. 9). Co-working spaces also provide an opportunity to accommodate the needs of **different types of remote workers**. For example, some may be renting or in shared accommodation, or in a house that would not have space for an office. This is an important aspect when advancing a policy for remote workers “*And we have the space for me and my husband to have a separate room each to work from and we need a separate room. Like realistically there are days when we can just be on calls all day. There’s no way we could share a room you know. The issue is if for example for any reason we had to move finding a house that can not only accommodate the family in terms of living space but accommodate two workers that’s a lot to ask for. That’s a big house you’re looking for. And that’s where I go back to you know if there’s more localised co-working spaces that’s less of a concern for somebody who is either looking for a house to buy or rent*” (IE1C/ int. 12).

Hubs not only provide spaces for remote workers they can also provide a space for workers in the short term. One group noted that when family members were gone for a funeral they extended their stay as they could remote work from the hub “*I think our first sort of long-term use of it, when I say long-term use I’m talking about three or four days of the hub was because there had been a bereavement on the island*” (IE1C/ int. 17).

Local groups are also focusing on using hubs as part of their **tourism** strategy with the added objectives of exposing younger people to a better quality of life, a new way of working and building relationships with place “*we were aiming to do was trying to get people to think about spending more time here by the beach. So you know for example a friend of mine she is a lawyer in Chicago and she’s a partner in a law firm there. And you know she moved to Chicago and she’s had two children since and they’re starting to grow up there. She always tries to get home every year for two weeks of the year so they can spend time at home with their granny and granda and enjoy the benefits that she had growing up. But its only two weeks of the year and it’s the only two weeks that she gets with regards to holidays to be able to do that. But like everybody whether they be in America or whether they be in other*

parts of Ireland or London or wherever the thing is the kids all have a summer holiday but they're only getting to spend sort of two weeks of that holiday on Aranmore. What we were of the thinking was that if these children came back and spent more time in their community they're gonna start to build relationships. They'll know their cousins better. Make new friends. See what it is to live in the place that their heritage is from" (IE1C/ Int. 17).

Multiple benefits accrue from hubs, as one local community volunteer noted, *"your Trojan horse is your digital hub" (IE1C/ int. 17).* It was commented that the impact of the hub at the community level in facilitating remote work and newcomers has an immediate impact across all sectors of the community, *"from that comes improvement in education, new business opportunities because there's more people on the ground, come new employment opportunities because people can apply for a job which they ordinarily could never have applied for because they live on an island. And that's a major problem. There's a lot of people who are qualified on Arranmore but the jobs aren't available to them. Unless they move to a city they'll never be able to take that job. But once those jobs become remote all of a sudden that opens up the employment opportunities for people" (IE1C/ int. 17).*

Occupancy is vital for the viability of hubs. Therefore local groups and hub managers are conscious of hub design, function and letting arrangements. Use of hubs by local remote workers will generate revenue to local restaurants, however corporate lettings brings remote workers for short term stays which can spread revenue across a number sectors within the community. Additionally a recent document by the Regional Assemblies of Ireland has proposed a range of match funding opportunities for ERDF projects that will deliver additional co-working hubs of scale within or in close proximity to Designated Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns as defined by each Assembly's RSES and prominent rural communities. This could involve – but wouldn't be limited to – encouraging private sector companies to provide an element of match funding for these type of REDF projects or possibly removing the 20 per cent for these type of REDF projects that provide a sizeable economic uplift to a geographical area (Regional Assembly, 2020). This co-operative approach between public and private partners was also raised in the focus group discussion *"Part of me thinks as well though with regard to social innovation part of this responsibility may lie with employers of remote workers as well. And especially where an employer actually has an opportunity where there's multiple employees that are working from the same area. I*

think there could be an opportunity for them to link in with the community to look at the idea of you know looking at a remote working hub or innovation hub or whatever those scenarios there” (IE1C/ int. Focus group).

Hubs in rural areas have the potential to respond to issues that exist in relation to remote work but can also act as catalysts for community and enterprise development but there must be policy and financial support. The government have provided funding of €5m to support the development of hubs and the Western Development Commission are creating a register of all hubs to create a national registry and develop a centralised booking system. This not only signals confidence in the practice from an employer’s perspective but also ensures that remote workers can expect high quality work spaces which will serve to harness the potential associated with digital nomads and remote workers that extend holiday stays with family. Hubs have evolved into ecosystems for community and enterprise development. However, the delivery of hubs at a local level require community input as community groups are best placed to assess the type, purpose and objectives of the hubs and community.

Innovation

Innovation is key to creating opportunities and solving problems in the rural economy. Innovation is a multi-faceted concept that links to new products and processes, as well as their adaptation and transfer. It is about improving how things are done, as well as addressing problems.

Innovation in the context of rural areas is linked to the individual or active groups within the process of the system of innovation in rural areas. From this perspective the remote work movement engages multiple forms of innovation to enable remote work and remote workers.

Business innovation –one of the goals of Grow Remote is to fill the gap between employers and places. By first connecting, and then creating collaborations between co-working managers, freelancers, nomads, remote workers and remote working companies, through various channels of communication and information distribution, Grow Remote has created a space for interconnectivity which has open the jobs pool for employers and employees.

Digital innovation – The setting up of ‘Chapters’, as part of the Grow Remote initiative, is done so through free to use technology platform called ChangeX, where any local community leader can get trained up online on how to go about building a remote working community in their local area. This makes it possible for people living in rural communities to have instant access to secure remote working jobs. This helps tackle issues such as depopulation, limited employment opportunities and out-migration in rural areas. This model of delivery is the formal structure of Grow Remote however at a local level Chapters have adapted to respond to user preferences and to reach more remote workers to grow the local chapter *“ChangeX is fantastic for community and cause building. If I’m honest and kind of critical in a constructive way the platform itself can still be sort of wonky. Like we kind of go through the motions of you know if you’re interested you sign up and you become a member and you know you’re sort of tagged within that community. But we also kind of recognised how people wanna communicate. We have a Facebook group, we have WhatsApp, we have Slack and those are kind of the tools that people are using for communicating. And frankly that’s where you know we’re constantly having more people join the chapters”* (IE1C/ Int. 2). The ChangeX platform facilitates the first entry point but the fluidity of the Grow Remote structure enables agility at local level to facilitate the heterogeneity of users at different levels.

Social innovation – remote work can be conceptualised as a social innovation however visibility of remote work opportunities in rural areas, couple with issues of isolation is an emerging theme of remote workers. The interaction of these issues were considered barriers to capturing the potential of this innovation *“And that’s the biggest problem of remote work is to feel isolated and then people don’t wanna do it”* (IE1C/ Int. 6). Grow remote addresses this issue by providing different platforms for different actors (remote workers, companies, and local communities) to come together to explore and understand the possibilities of remote working. This model of employment requires all stakeholders to work together to enable local communities to thrive. Grow remote also operates an interactive Slack platform which allows instant connection to other remote workers which reduces the issue of isolation while additionally grows the remote working community *“I think as well some of*

the communication now you know using slack I think is really effective because the way its set up with different channels you know if you're interested in events, if you're interested in you know just the whole move from an urban area down to a rural area, if you're interested in policy you know there are different Slack channels set up and you can always add more" (IE1C/ Int. 2). Creating outlets for communicating, sharing success stories, challenges, and water-cooler chat is vital to creating a remote work community.

Innovative governance: Innovative governance or organisational innovation is also identified by OECD (2014) as particularly important and key to the broader understanding of innovation relevant to rural contexts. Ray (2006) considers governance mechanisms to affect rural development. Local communities should be involved in shaping development actions and how they are implemented. This also depends on local resources and values which can be likened to human and cultural capital "development is contextualised by focusing on the needs, capacities and perspectives of local people...the adoption of cultural, environment and 'community' values within a development intervention" (Ray, 2006, p.278-279). The different actors in this movement had novel approaches to the organisation of their structure. Grow Remote is made up of a National structure overseen by a diverse Board of management, it is then supported by community groups called Local Chapters across the country. Grow Remote provide an online package to guide individuals to become Chapter Leaders to start a local Chapter (<https://www.changex.org/ie/growremote>) and individuals are required to undertake a module on how to become a community leader. There are now over 130 local community leaders established across Ireland. Although there is a guide to support the start-up of a local chapter the form of that chapter is directed by the local agenda and they determine what stakeholders they need to engage to mobilise remote work in their community. A community council is elected by the entire Arranmore community by private ballot. If the nominated individual agrees to become a member they serve on the council for a number of years. Re-election after a number of years ensure there is no burnout and new people can bring new ideas for community development. Loop head is centrally driven but has forty local groups as stakeholders in its make-up. Additionally, the group divide the community agenda into nine interest groups. These groups are then linked via WhatsApp and this WhatsApp link is public to the world.

Networks and Synergies

Building synergies and enabling networks are considered integral to the success of sustainable approaches to rural regeneration. A range of different approaches have been recorded, Woods (2005, p.146-8) for example outlines the approaches with the process of rural regeneration as being “characterised by small, community-led initiatives drawing on indigenous resources” where the state is more of a facilitator versus projects often driven by external investment; while in the context of small town regeneration, Powe et al. (2015) observe it calls for a many different stakeholders to be involved that possess diverse, complementary knowledge and resources to tackle this multidimensionality. Furbey (1999) argues particular priority should be attached to community involvement while it must also work on empowerment and building capacity within communities to enable effective involvement (Furbey, 1999). In the context of regeneration it is argued that multiple stakeholders are required both from within and outside the rural area.

Grow Remote

Grow Remote strategically pursues collaborations and alliances with all key stakeholders involved in facilitating remote work, that is with Government Departments, state agencies, organisations, employers and employees and local communities in order to link enablers to place.

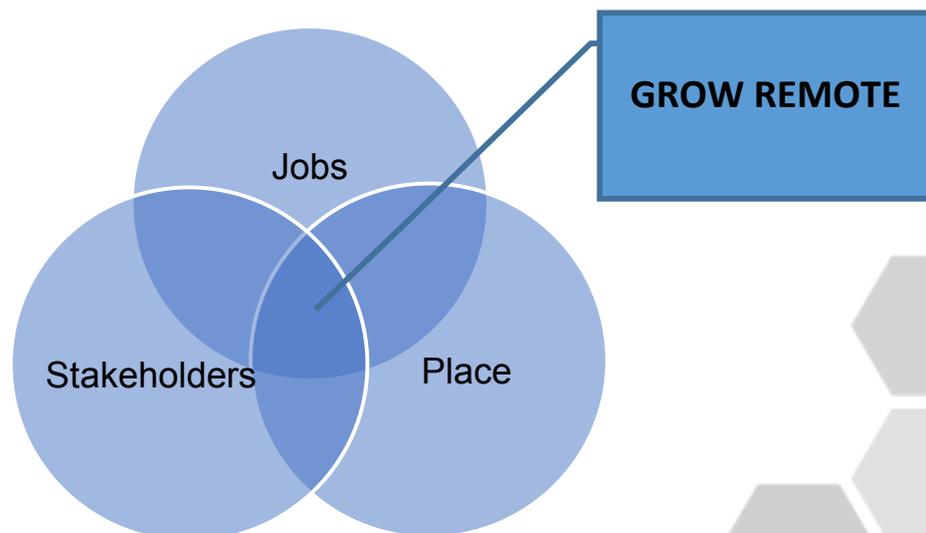


Figure 2. Grow Remote Dynamic

Viewing remote work in a social innovation context, Grow Remote illustrates the dynamics and importance of translocal networks to capture the benefits of this innovation. The key to the success of this social enterprise in enabling the social innovation of remote work to reach local rural areas involved establishing networks both at local and extra-local levels. Being part of such networks “allows them to mobilise ideas, resources, and support in other contexts to the benefit of rural regions” (Fink et al., 2017, p.10). Social entrepreneurs bridge spatial, social and cultural disconnections between rural communities and the wider world as they act as intermediaries connecting different ‘worlds’ that generally are disconnected (Murtagh and Farrell, 2020). Grow remote’s operating structure at a national and local level has enabled these translocal networks to develop. At a national level Grow Remote has developed relationships with key stakeholders that influence regional and rural development in Ireland. For example the Western Development Commission, Enterprise Ireland, IDA, WDC, NACEC and SOLAS. These networks with key stakeholders have enabled the group to influence strategy formation. For example, Grow Remote participated in meetings hosted by the Joint Committee on Community and Rural Development outlining the state of remote working in Ireland in 2019; it co-created an open document with its remote work community to make a submission to the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation’s public consultation on its guidance issued in relation to remote working during COVID-19. It has partnered with National Broadband Ireland (NBI) to influence the delivery of high-speed broadband. The partnerships according to Keogh is “reflective of the collaboration that’s happening across the public, private and voluntary sector, it’s one that is needed if we are to accurately identify challenges and build solutions that fulfil the potential of rural Ireland” (Keogh, 2021a). These networks ensure that the local rural agenda as informed by locals in its local chapters, is part of national dialogue and emerging national strategies or objectives are transmitted back to the remote working community through its Chapters. To further embed itself with key stakeholders and to stimulate new synergies Grow Remote has established an advisory panel (these two developments occurred post data collection). The aim of the panel is to help the social enterprise with its mission to “bridge the gap between remote employers and the communities and talent who are searching for them” (Keogh, 2021b). To meet this aim the panel is made of representatives from the public, private and community sector. The impact of Grow Remote through their

networking was recognised across the interviews *“Ah yeah they’re doing a tremendous amount of work. Unbelievable. Like they’re lobbying the government and they’re talking to all the multi-nationals you know and they’re looking at policies around kind of hiring remote”* (IE1C/Int. 4).

Grow Remote also target employers to generate synergies between organisations and remote workers. To create a platform for this exchange Grow Remote created an employer partnership programme. Through this it offers a range of partnership, corporate membership and engagement opportunities for employers and organisations through its network. It identifies remote employers such as Shopify, HubSpot, Ebay, Automattic and Glofox on its partnership registry (<https://growremote.ie/>).

There were numerous examples of host Chapter leaders not only linking people to remote jobs but also facilitating newcomers. A jobs seminar to spread awareness of remote work led to the identification of someone who wanted to not only work remotely but also to relocate *“Actually I had a guy on a virtual coffee last week he is originally from Tipp but he’s living in Canada and himself and the wife want to move back. And they kind of said Mayo/Galway maybe. So this webpage they go into and they enter in whatever information they have that they want you know if they do know where they want to go if they’ve any particular stipulations and we’re matching that information back out to the chapters”* (IE1C/ Int.1).

The local embeddedness of Grow Remote through its chapters has ensured that the concept of and potential of remote work has been disseminated among local communities. It is argued that the local embeddedness of social entrepreneurs makes it more likely that novel ideas will gain the support of local decision makers and communities, while also part of the social innovation is changed attitudes (Richter, 2019). Local Chapter leaders are pivotal in bringing key local actors together and establishing local remote working communities who can readily respond and adapt to challenges specific to that place.

Grow Remote provide an online package to guide individuals to become Chapter Leaders to start a local Chapter (<https://www.changex.org/ie/growremote>) and individuals are required to undertake a module on how to become a community leader. There are now over 130 local community leaders established across Ireland. Although there is a guide to support the start-up of a local Chapter the form of that Chapter is directed by the local agenda and they determine what stakeholders they need to engage to mobilise remote work in their

community. For example one respondent noted the integration of an academic research institute to aid in an education programme. *“Like we set up on ChangeX which is a platform for you know I suppose bringing people together. But then we had our first in-person meeting here in Ballinasloe and I had invited you know some of the local partners as well. So we also had NUIG actually were down as well. ... She looked after the adult education. .”* (IE1C/ Int.3).

The interconnectivity of these networks create a space for synergies and knowledge transfer across and between local communities, private and public sectors and education institutions. One of the ‘meet-ups’ hosted by a Chapter leader captures the diversity of these networks *“So we had NUIG down and we had remote workers from the company Shopify down. And we had someone from the enterprise training board down as well. And then we also had someone from LEO down and from the jobs club and some of the local businesses. So that kind of thing. And people who you know were trying to find out more about remote working. So we launched it and then after that we’ve had local meetups typically usually down in the Shearwater hotel for a coffee. We’d be very accommodating you know. They just come. They don’t have to book or anything”* (IE1C/ Int. 3). This collaborative approach to establishing networks and local Chapter’s adaptive capacity highlights the innovative nature of this group, a feature which was remarked upon during the interviews *“No it’s a very innovative organisation. It doesn’t seem like there’s anything quite like it elsewhere. And the chapter structure as well seems very important for that kind of local linkage”* (IE1C/ Int. 2).

Community-led initiatives

Access to and engagement with education institutes has a role to play in enhancing social cohesion, through education pathways, rural community engagement with gateway research groups and the potential for research-informed programmes of rural development. Grow remote have developed links with the ETBS to develop skill packages for remote workers. The Dingle HUB have partnered with , ESB Networks, North East & West Kerry Development (NEWKD) and MaREI, the SFI Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine in a collaborative arrangement to develop Dingle Peninsula 2030 plan. Partners actively collaborated with each other and with the local community, schools, business, transport and farming sectors to support and enable the broader societal changes required for a

sustainable transition. The role of MaREI institute was integral to the process of this collaboration. With the skillset from the academic institute they not only facilitated the process but also recorded the collaborate process. This has resulted in the production of 'learning briefs' that provide best practice guidelines for collaborative arrangements (MaREI, 2020).

Community participation and leadership are understood theoretically to play significant roles in resilience (see Norris et al., 2008). To harness this it is necessary to develop relationships with local communities.

These elements were particularly prevalent in this case study. According to the community actors in this case study there were some key elements underpinning their success. These were related to community engagement, animation, capacity building and community empowerment. The issue of trust was central to engagement, *"Now one of our main rules and I can't use this rule, it's not PC anymore but I'd normally try and get drunk with people very quickly...Because it's part of the Russian culture is they'll never do a deal with you unless you've at least got very drunk with them one night because they know that you'll say certain things when you're sober... I think still going out and having the craic with someone is so important because that's where they'll really figure out whether it's worthwhile giving you the time of day"* (IE1C/ Int.16). Another core element was community authorship, to establish a community driven agenda *"Finding a solution to rural communities you know its communities first and foremost. If I had to give somebody a takeaway for anything that I would say no matter how long I speak for (and I could talk forever) but the thing is with regards to communities you know nothing's gonna work unless you bring the community along with you. They have ownership. They have to have input. You can't just tell them this is what you're gonna have and this is what's gonna work for you. It doesn't work like that. You have to go to them and find out what they need. You have to find out exactly what's going on there for the island. You can't turn around and tell them what's good for them. They'll tell you what's good for them and then you need to assist them in delivering that"* (IE1C/ Int. 17). Another participant presented an analogy to explain the difference between traditional 'project' type approach to a community authored approach, suggesting that the community approach has more potential to grow and be dynamic rather than a static one dimensional project *"and I use this analogy of like if you take a kind of a child's pyramid on a table like for*

me that's the project approach. You can take a lot of effort and you turn it on its side and you've moved a bit but it has no necessarily momentum. Whereas if you take the idea of a ball or a globe once you give it momentum it grows and snowballs. So what I'm hoping is that the community authoring by just saying let's go through a process of figuring out what we want. So instead of you know and I'll make it personal. Instead of the Healy-Rae's telling us what we'll get we'll be telling the Healy/Rae's" (IE1C/ Int. 23). Community groups also had a pro-active solution focused mindset when approaching agencies for help within their communities (IE1C/ Int. 8).

The digital economy offers many advantages to rural areas but latent issues linked to social, economic and territorial digital divides continue to create challenges for the adoption of this technology to capture its potential. This posed an obstacle to Arranmore to gain community support. In Arranmore an issue of generational digital divide emerged *"But to turn around and say to somebody in Arranmore who is say 65 or 70 who has never set foot in a digital hub you know they're gonna have the questions like why are you gonna put Arranmore all over the television"* (IE1C/ Int. 17). Additionally, a lack of awareness of its role in traditional sectors *"What benefit is it gonna be to me because I'm a fisherman or what benefit is it gonna be because you know..."* emerged as the community group aimed to gain community buy-in. This reflects the deeper complex issues linked to capacity to adapt (Folke et al. 2010). To address this the group adapted their approach to engaging the community. To respond to this the group developed Internet Of Things solutions to everyday challenges to animate the community in terms of the potential of technology. This involved developing an elderly care package designed to use technology to solve problems in everyday lives.

"we thought the easiest thing would have been a kettle but there was some people turned around and said to us no I put my toaster on first thing in the morning and they didn't want it plugged into their kettle. And we said right fair enough. So there was wee small things like this they started shaping how they wanted the thing to go..We also put in IOT solutions in the environment. So we had you know rainfall monitors. ..We also put in IOT solutions with regards to people counters by the ferry.... Even for example the likes of the education end of things where you know we've got an air quality monitor for example and the secondary school students can access the data to that as part of a project that they might be working on". These measures allowed the group *"to get the community to buy in"* (IE1C/ Int. 17).

With many of the challenges now facing rural areas originating outside the rural area (for example climate change, globalisation) it is argued that resources required to respond these challenges lie both within and beyond the rural boundary. Actors within the remote working movement are acutely aware of this *“So its first of all breaking down the parish boundaries..And now it’s like okay you know the solutions are not all gonna come from here”* (IE1C/ Int. 16).

Studying networks is crucial in understanding empowerment dynamics because networks ‘provide access to resources necessary for the concretisation of ideas’ (Clegg et al., 2016, pp. 281–282). The actors in the remote work movement activated networks at local level through community engagement and at national level through strategic alliances and collaborations. Through the different innovations to establish these translocal networks the remote work movement, Grow Remote and community groups, have played “a role in shifting flows of power” (Clegg et al., 2016, pp. 281–282). Commenting on the effectiveness of Grow Remote one respondent noted that *“From my point of view where Grow Remote made a huge amount of difference is as a non-profit. Its community engagement I think is far more reactive and vibrant than probably any you know structured state agency or for profit agency would be because you know its very much driven by passion and its to be commended in the amount of work that they’ve done in the growth that they’ve seen over a very very short space of time”* (IE1C/ Int. 5).

Policies And Institutional Supports

The concept of remote work is a social innovation thought to have potential to support more balanced, sustainable development. As the diversity of resources outlined above show, harnessing the potential with this social innovation depends on a multitude of factors. IN the context of attracting newcomers as remote workers to diversify the rural economic base the evidence of community action is clear, but communities do not hold all the card. The remote work policy environment, the availability of schools, broadband and housing are impacted by different areas of national policy.

Broader remote work policy context

In order to attract and retain staff many organisations are implementing new work practices recognised as flexible working arrangements (CIPD, 2019; Berkery et al, 2017; Onken-Menke et al, 2018) however, the policy space supporting and regulating remote work is just developing in Ireland. There are new issues created by remote work, such as pay rates (locationless employment but not locationless pay rates e.g. GitLab (fairly) tailors pay rates to locations), issues of being a remote employee to a company outside of Ireland, tax, insurance and health benefits, jobs pool.

Tax issues were raised from remote workers who were hired by companies outside of Ireland. To retain the position the employee adjusts the contract *“just in the case study if you are you know its not meant to be you know I’m not meant to be working with them directly the whole time because there’s tax implications for working with a German company the whole time. So you know its not full-time or its not permanent. Like we’re taking it on a three or six month”* (IE1C/ Int 10). Another employee of a company external to Ireland highlighted the lack of holistic understanding of legislation in Ireland in relation to remote work when one is employed by an international company *“Yeah it’s kind of difficult. So while I am considered an employee of the company by the company I’m actually self-employed because the laws are that you can’t be employed by a company that doesn’t have an entity within Ireland. So they’d have to be a legal Irish entity to employ me so they can’t employ me so I’m an independent contractor which means I’m basically self-employed as far as the Irish government is concerned so I have all of my taxes and my own accounting to do and my*

husband is the same" (IE1C/ Int. 12). The same respondent commented that because of the employment status bestowed on her by the Irish Government she could not, without further tax implications receive the perks of her remote employment, such as health insurance *"its gonna be taxed like income so therefore I don't really get my health insurance covered you know. .which I find it funny because they are an EU company and the whole EU no borders thing you'd think"* (IE1C/ int. 12). This highlights a gap in legislation in Ireland in relation to remote work and undermines the advantages associated with remote work and the potential of rural people to consider themselves part of a global talent pool. From a company owners perspective despite the promotion of remote work he could not hire an employee outside of Ireland as an employee (IE1C/ int. 13).

Housing and accommodation

The most pressing constraint and issue discussed through the interviews, focus group and the feedback session related to policy and regulations relating to national planning policy and the provision of accommodation. Remote workers identified finding accommodation as the most difficult part of their relocation and most identified planning regulations that will impact house builds in rural areas *"Maybe what we should be looking at is employing let's say a thousand people in Ireland instead of looking at one company employing a thousand people. Like we would have a thousand companies employ a thousand people and it is as beneficial as a single company employing a thousand people. IN fact it's more beneficial because a thousand companies employing a thousand people is way more risk tolerant than a single company employing a thousand people"* (IE1C/Int. 20). Another element that emerged with the actual availability of housing from the existing housing stock. These rural areas have high scenic amenity value and as a result there are a significant number of houses that are summer/holiday homes. Community groups have been attempting to put remedial measures in place. This has involved, firstly assess the housing stock that is available *"So what we did was we put together a database of houses that were available for rent and houses that were available to buy and sub-divided. we decided that we'd gather information on those that were in each case ready to move into and needing repair before they could be lived in"* (IE1C/ Int. 17) and secondly some were trying to lever funding from the Department

to incentivise owners to refurbish houses in disrepair *“kind of I suppose talking around potential solutions to try and trigger some of those houses that need to be refurbished and we’d hope to kind of make recommendations in the right places before too long for a pilot scheme around that to see what we can trigger at low cost and figure that into the long-term market”* (IE1C/ Int. 18).

The feedback session deliberated on the issue of planning and housing stock and a consensus emerged that a cross-sectoral response to remote work would force policy cohesion in order to fulfil a policy objective of remote work.

Institutional support

It is argued that social enterprises are best placed to deliver initiatives but equally this shift in allowing social enterprise to fill this gap is criticised, with some suggesting that this vision has been little more than a smokescreen for the dismantling of the welfare state (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011). This decoupling of responsibility was commented upon during the interviews *“The local authority has a long way to go, a long long way to go in recognizing its responsibility ..A more progressive perspective on engagement in revenue. And that’s not being flippant”* (IE1C/ int. 20).

There is evidence of development agencies in the case study area supporting the remote work environment. Traditionally development agencies looked toward Foreign Direct Investments as economic drivers but without typical economies of scale rural areas are less successful with attracting such investment. The Western Development Committee are acutely aware of this shifting landscape and its potential consequences for rural areas *“FDI by its nature tends to be one large company in one large town in one large area. .The challenge is that FDI is very very hard to land in smaller towns and towns in and around 10,000 people. Where remote work changes that is that it allows for a kind of diluted form of FDI. So you can have people that can work for multinational companies and do so from their own village or town”* (IE1C/Int. 5). Additionally, it has been actively responding to these emerging dynamics. For example, The WDC developed an initiative the Atlantic Economic Corridor which sought to create a strategic co-ordinated approach to developing and managing hubs along the West Coast of Ireland (WDC, 2020). The impetus for creating a

national network of hubs is to not only provide spaces for remote workers but to also ease the transition for employers to hire remote workers. The success of this has led to this evolving into a national registry of hubs. *“The benefit of the network furthermore is for large companies that they don’t want to deal with the situation where they have 100 individuals spread across 100 hubs and they’re dealing with 100 invoices every month. So they want things like centralised building, centralised services so that we’ll also be introducing the capacity to use for want of a better term like a kind of a credit card system or a hub card system were you can go in and use a printer or office services in one hub, you can go and then use the same card. You know so there’s a shared services approach across the board”* (IE1C/ Int. 5). In addition to this the WDC are part of a research consortium that have been conducting research surveys on remote work during COVID.

Enterprise Ireland is the government organisation responsible for the development and growth of Irish Enterprise. They provide funding and supports for different types of companies and at different stages of development. There is a growing awareness at national level that the business sector is becoming increasingly mobile and business leaders are working independently such that there is a the need to be creative and collaborate in order to support, evolve and grow the Irish business sector. The support of Enterprise Ireland for a social Enterprise such as Grow Remote reflects this shift in focus. Grow Remote secured funding from Enterprise Ireland through its established synergy with the Western Development Commission. WDC provided match funding for the funding application submitted by Grow Remote. It secured €500,000 from the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, which it will use this fund to hire a further ten people for the organisation *“I think from the point of view of the WDC in Grow Remote we have provided match funding for Grow Remote. And part of that was around their proposal to Enterprise Ireland for support”* (IE1C/Int. 5).

Newcomers or return migrants bring their own external knowledge and networks to bear on the rural social context (Murtagh and Farrell, 2019). According to Farrell et al. (2012) migrants can return with various forms of social, cultural and financial capital, enhancing local economics through self-employment and business development. Further evidence is provided by Atterton (2016) who observes that in-migrants are more likely to partake in entrepreneurship than locals and that they also may have a head-start as part of translocal

networks. There was evidence of this impact in the case study areas. Two pathways were identified during the research. Recognising an increased demand for ‘cool’ food, generated by newcomers to the area, a newcomer as remote worker set-up a food-truck business. This not only provided a second income, provided employment for a local person, it also provided a service for the emerging remote working community. *“And we had a chat last year. And her brother is a qualified chef and basically the three of us set up. So we also have a cable and co. food truck here on the island which was voted in the top twenty food trucks in Ireland this year”* (IE1C/ Int. 19). A spouse of a newcomer as a remote worker relocated to the area with no employment and subsequently developed a local Vermouth, using the gorse growing outside in their field. (Irish times newspaper article (<https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/food-and-drink/the-mermaids-putting-valentia-island-on-the-map-for-vermouth-1.4555882>)). This entrepreneur was supported by the SuperValu Food Academy network (<https://supervalu.ie/real-people/food-academy-programme>).

Enterprise programmes for start-up businesses provide opportunities for the creative industry to develop remote work opportunities, provide a supportive role to remote working in Ireland as they can respond to the need for a second job, promote the attractiveness of the area and also enable supports for facilities and services that arise from newcomers.

Impact on Rural Regeneration and Future Perspectives

Impact on rural regeneration

Remote work has the potential to support territorial cohesion and act as a counterforce to urbanisation. Job location is no longer the leading driver of where people live, personal circumstances and quality of life ambitions can be prioritised in location decisions. Remote work as a tool for regeneration is multi-dimensional and integrated within communities. It has the potential to develop mutually supportive measures that assist with alleviation of a number of aspects of decline.

Economic impacts

Creating a culture where remote work is the norm can help connect businesses to talent and skills they cannot source locally. Keogh (2019) for example points to an example of a rurally located SME that harnessed new digital development opportunities by sourcing remote talent, developing the business and still employing 150 people locally. This report has also shown newcomers as remote workers to have an impact on the diversification of the rural economy in terms of new businesses start-ups for example Cable Cart Food Truck. The Newcomers also generate revenue through buying local and supporting local industries. Local businesses were also stimulated to respond to the needs of the newcomers. Comments like 'There was fancy gin' being served in local pubs "real cappuccinos' and a new local bistro opening reflect this transformation. Newcomers also used their skillset to promote or add value to areas. For example a journalist wrote free promotional material for local businesses (IE1C/ int. 11).

Changing the rural jobs narrative: Keogh (2019) remote work changes the narrative around jobs available in rural communities, away from the more traditional and visible roles such as teacher, publican or farmer. It opens up opportunities in areas not normally part of the rural jobs narrative such as ecommerce (e.g. Shopify), social media marketing (e.g. Buffer) and software development (e.g. GitHub). This also applies to making remote work visible for women.

The impact of diversifying the rural economy through remote workers was captured by one of the interviewees. Not only do remote workers support local shops but when areas are presented with shocks, like COVID, the diversity of wage earners in a rural area ensures that local businesses and communities can still be supported *“Or Covid where you know maybe a lot of factories, lot of restaurants are out of work, I still have money. I can still go to the shops. I can still spend. I can still buy. Obviously its nice for me that I can still splurge on a box of chocolates or something. But then the local businesses where I’m spending that money also benefit. And I do think that’s interesting. I do think its beneficial when its not all farmers right, so its not all cattle farmers and you know if something was to happen to that particular industry then the whole area is depressed and the knock-on affects to like schools and cafes and all the other businesses in that area are affected because of that one industry. And when you’ve got someone who’s working for like a U.S company, a tech company. Now I can’t support the local economy on my own but if you have that mixed use of people where maybe I honestly don’t know people in the area but like you know if I look down the hill and I look at a house like potentially there’s someone over there who’s also working for a different U.S company or something working from home. But equally well next door you know there’s a farm”* (IE1C/ Int. 13).

Grow Remote have also been responsive to enabling and facilitating females back to work. A number of female parents identified children as the reason for leaving or not returning to work, however Chapter leaders are also noticing a barrier in the approach of women to remote work in comparison to males. *“What we were finding as well is that women in particular would if they read the job spec and they saw some terminology on it that they didn’t understand they wouldn’t go for the job. Whereas if a guy saw it he’d just go ah I’ll go for it anyway”*. In addition to this Grow Remote Chapter leaders identified a skill set deficit due to taking time off to mind children. To address this feedback from the local community the Chapter leader sought out local businesses that matched the remote worker profile *“So then with Grow Remote they were full-time permanent jobs. They don’t kind of promote the kind of gig economy or anything like that. But I was thinking I need to peel it back a little bit more just to make it a little bit easier for people. They can’t just go from nothing into these technical jobs. So I was trying to see is there any kind of other work especially when Covid came along, was there any kind of other work that people could get. So I heard there was a*

guy in Kinvara and he got really busy during Covid with online work. And he was teaching English as a foreign language. And when China went into lockdown he was bombarded with work because the Chinese parents were getting their kids extra grinds in English and they were paying for extra English lessons. And he was teaching four-year-olds in China” (IE1C/Int.4). This was followed with a partnering with the local rural development company to provide a course for local women to become TEFL teachers. This facilitation by Grow Remote to bridge the gap between employer and employee and provide the necessary upskilling of remote workers is changing the landscape of remote work and rural employment structures.

Environmental impacts

As Europe moves legislatively and culturally towards a greener society and engages in the transition economy, remote work offers to play a significant role in this process. Grow Remote and others promote remote work as an advantage to reduce the commute time which impacts quality of life, this simultaneously reduces the negative effect emissions. A counter-balance to this was raised in relation to home heating and driving to hubs as rural areas lack public transport or renewable energies at domestic household level. However, the respondents in this research revealed a keen awareness of the environment and had deep value for the natural resources that were available in rural areas. This reflects the ambitions in their decision-making, linked to the rural environment, for moving to rural areas.

Social impacts

Newcomers attracted by place-promotion campaigns have been successful. The exact number of newcomers is not known. However, there are some figures from Arranmore which attracted five families, Grow Remote chapters linked to Valentia Island which used the concept of ‘town taster’ saw a direct translation of remote worker to place *“And that was one of her ideas was to showcase the local community and bring people down and show them around and what not. That sort of developed a bit further then. So the guys in Valentia used this framework. And off the back of the event that they ran two new families moved to the island. And like on an island the size of Valentia”* (IE1C/Int.1). While figures may seem small the impact of newcomers on rural areas with declining populations have a significant

impact on a community. The arrival of newcomer remote workers has a direct impact on the social and economic fabric of communities *“But yeah evidence. I just love looking to areas like Dunquinn and seeing the amount of kids and the amount of new families that have moved back into it. It’s just fantastic. ..Because that would have been an area that had 50% holiday homes so you know you can imagine its impossible then to run a business back there for the full twelve months of the year. So you now it didn’t have a shop and its pub was open you know about two days you know in the summertime. ..But those holiday homes have been taken on by I can count you know how many families have gone back there in the last year alone and as I said filling the school not to mind the GAA teams in the Gaeltacht like they’re fielding you know two under twelve teams or it was under twelve last year and they’ve all moved up now”* (IE1C/Int.22). These impacts are directly attributed to remote working community *“And it is because remote working can do it. And actually, the community in Dunquinn I really admire them so much. They have some great leaders I suppose there. But they started with a remote working community I think seven or eight years ago”* (IE1C/Int.22).

It is well documented that rural areas are areas imbued with local history, heritage and culture all linked to a sense of place which has a role to play in developing community capital. The impact of newcomers on community fabric can raise issues. This study has found numerous instances where newcomers have supported local culture and heritage. For example, in Irish speaking areas in Dingle the children of newcomers have joined Irish speaking schools *“I saw in the school recently as well like they’re pretty much all Irish speakers or you know the families that have moved in are learning Irish to support their kids which is you know a really big deal in the community here as well. So its very very positive and I love to see it happening”* (IE1C/Int. 22).

Social Cohesion

The remote work movement actors have been instrumental in helping rural communities build capacity, stimulate innovation, increase participation and assist communities to ensure that they can be full actors in creating new pathways for their own regeneration. Grow Remote through digital platforms, local Chapter get-togethers not only nurture a remote working community but facilitate direct links with local communities. They have successfully

employed a diversity of measures to embed newcomers, for example through town tasters, draughts sessions, community participation in groups, provision of services or social settings. Community groups have been instrumental in building social and community capital. They have also been instrumental in the development of co-working spaces and hubs. These spaces provide connection opportunities for remote workers and also through the classes or training provided in these centres allow for social integration and embedding of newcomers with the existing rural community. Newcomers have also had an impact on the social cohesion of the receiving place. There were numerous examples where newcomers as remote worker had supported communities' activities, for example coaching a local team, joining local clubs, developing websites for local areas; or children of remote workers adding much needed numbers for local schools. One of the recurring influencing decision factors to return to the rural area was linked to family. This is significant in the context of support for the aging population in rural areas. One newcomer was exploring the possibility of opening a mens-shed to respond to a lack of facilities for older men in the area "I mean my dad and I'm like here will you go to a yoga class and he'd be like what, what are you talking about. And I think when I see my mam and dad like my mam is like oh well I've plenty going on. I'll meet my friends for coffee. I'll go to whatever. But my dad like he doesn't have as much going on so I'm like yeah you'd like to see something for the men especially I think too (IE1C/int. 14).

Resilience

The RURALIZATION process is built upon the concept of resilience. Resilience is understood as the capacity of individuals and communities to proactively adapt to constant change through processes of building capacity and resources. Ashmore et al., (2017) develop a framework which depicts the conditions under which resilience emerges. Their conceptual framework is constructed from dimensions they consider necessary to achieve strong resilience, Fig 1. They suggest that social resilience is supported with the availability and development of capitals, the ability to proactively engage and exercise human agency, and place-based characteristics such as social memory and previous community engagement, termed 'sense of place'.

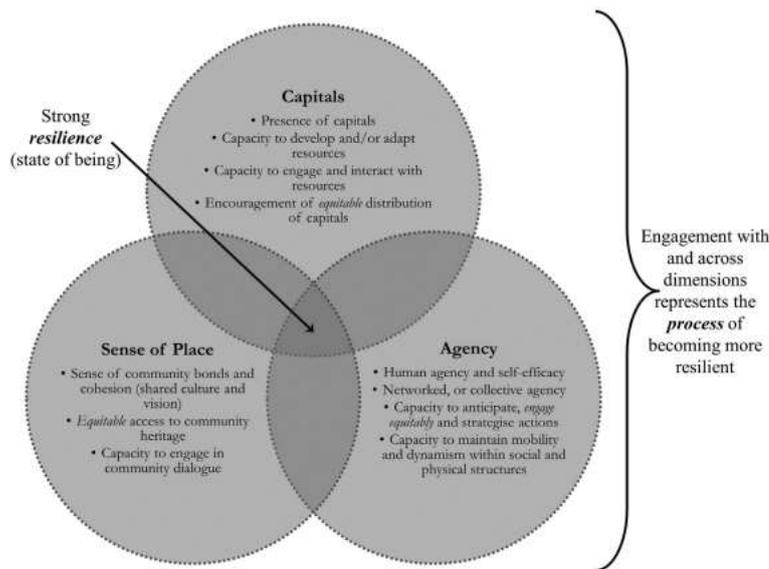


Figure 3. Dimensions of Social Resilience from Ashmore et. al. (2017).

The results of this case study have revealed the interdependencies between agency and resources and that the actors involved in the remote work movement in Ireland are integral to mobilising community capitals and external resources to create the conditions necessary to support social resilience. With so many dimensions, linked to independent elements the findings support the notion that resilience should be thought of not only as an outcome, but also as a process (Wilson, 2012; Magis, 2010).

The ability to transform and adapt is linked to the concept of resilience (Murtagh and Farrell, 2019). The transformative capacity of the remote work movement is reflected in its ability to capitalise on the crisis presented by COVID-19 as an opportunity to catalyse change. Their deliberate actions in mobilising remote work to regenerate rural areas has directly impacted in shifting the economic base of the rural areas. In the social-ecological resilience context transformation means capacity to transform economic, social and environmental aspects of the existing system that is not supporting resilience. Working to engage local communities, create remote work communities across all scales, making strategic alliances and collaborating with strategic stakeholders has had a transformative impact across a range of diverse phenomena such as “shifts in perception and meaning, social network configurations, patterns of interactions among actors including leadership and political and power relations, and associated organizational and institutional arrangements” (Folke et al., 2010, p.5).

As a social innovation the impacts of remote work are difficult to measure. A key information noted that finding a way to measure other impacts, like social cohesion, will be an important step to placing a value on this innovation. *“If you were to measure the impact of remote working you can obviously measure the number of jobs but the other thing to measure is time.. So when you give time back to people I think that should be captured and predominantly can be used in two ways. It can either be used for professional development so at an individual level of where they do CPD and learn a new skill or you know learn to play the guitar or learn to do something that’s of benefit in a non-monitory way. And as well as that it can also be of benefit at a community level. So if they’re involved in training their local team, if they’re part of the tidy towns committee you know I think there are significant benefits for rural and regional areas in that increased time that people will have just in the locality. And I think ultimately it will have an economic benefit but it also has a very important societal benefit. **And I think I think one of the challenges we’ll face is how to capture that benefit and measure it and acknowledge the fact that remote working plays a very important role in that as well**”*(IE1C/ Int.5).

Future perspectives

Remote work is not a panacea for diversifying rural employment. It is not an option for all jobs. It may not be attractive to everyone or may be more attractive at different life and career stages. However, acknowledging this is not to undermine its importance. The wide ranging positive impact of remote work found during this research aligns to other reports that suggest it is a key and important emerging **opportunity** and an option rural areas can tap into (e.g. Kennedy, 2018; Keogh, 2019).

Remote work movement

The remote work movement is effectively **facilitating** remote work in rural areas and also **attracting** remote work newcomers to rural areas and **collectively** the actors involved in the remote work movement are building rural resilience- through networks; innovations; integration and shifting the economic base of rural areas.

The remote work movement has carved out a space outside of traditional institutions and power arenas enacting changes in the absence of decision-making powers. However it is built on an army of volunteers and the sustainability of the movement into the future must be considered. The future of Grow Remote was discussed during interviews and the public feedback session. Suggestions centred on linking it to existing structures like local authorities but this progressed to broader questions around the community ethos of the organisation. It was acknowledged that in a very short timeframe Grow Remote grew from a conversation to a WhatsApp group in 2018 to a national social Enterprise with over 60 Chapters, 130 remote communities and numerous partnerships across public and private sectors. It has also grown an international base in four different countries. This success was attributed to the **bottom-up** approach that it operates. Grow remote has been central, through its blended approach of raising awareness of the companies hiring remotely and upskilling communities, to bridging the gap between remote work and local communities and place. Its structure and innovative digital connectivity enables its success. It was suggested that it can remain as a key stakeholder as a national social enterprise at national and local level if a remote working policy was developed. This would give a **direct mandate** to Grow Remote. It was highlighted that the recent funding secured to employ more personnel signals government commitment to the organisation and the discussion group were confident in its future. Community groups have been pivotal in generating community support for remote work and for transiting the newcomer to stayer. **Novel governance** structures are in place which should support the longevity of these initiatives. There were proposals for government funding to **invest** in communities rather than projects.

This research process identified that although the actors involved in this movement are inextricably linked to the success of this practice, newcomers as remote workers is a dual pathway and at present the actors enabling this social innovation are currently delivering this transition through two separate systems. The researchers raised this as a topic for discussion during the public feedback session. This was widely accepted and following the presentation it emerged that the different actors identified other approaches that they were interested in applying in their local contexts. A need for connectivity between the actors in the movement was considered imperative. A **'hackathon'** for brainstorming was one suggestion to facilitate this connectivity.

Broader remote work perspectives

Broadband is fundamental to the enabling of remote work. To enable effective remote working, including teleconferencing, high speed broadband is necessary. To be truly locationless mobile coverage also needs to be addressed.

Additional investment in **training** and **skills** and legislative reviews to ensure that current regulation is fit for purpose. Employers and employees need a supportive policy environment to enable remote working. Training and skills development are essential. Training for managers, as the skills for overseeing remote colleagues are completely different to managing a team in an office, and training for remote workers is also required to ensure that staff are supported in learning to work in this new way and environment.

Awareness and visibility of remote work needs to be promoted at national, company and community level.

A national **policy** for remote work would ensure that a remote first approach was adopted across different policy departments but also infiltrate company policies. Grow Remote, suggest that employers must adopt 'remote-first' recruitment policies, such as advertising jobs as location-agnostic. This would embed a remote work culture rather than a 'add remote work and stir'.

Social infrastructure supports, in terms of interaction and connection, are imperative to create a sustainable work environment for remote workers

Incentivise employers to have remote work policies

Terminology surrounding 'remote' work was a theme during the interview process but particularly evident in the public feedback session. The definition of remote work is ambiguous however, as legislation is moving forward the concept needs to be developed to enough it does not limit its application. The use of the term 'remote' is attached to negative connotations. Suggestions such as locationless, or placeless were made.

In relation to future remote work expansion many believe that a hybrid approach will emerge. The challenge is to ensure that the culture enables **job progression** and an equally engaging and positive experience for employees who are remote as those who are on-site.

Workspace for remote work is expected to be a blended approach. Some will continue to work working from home, but for others there is a desire to separate work and home or to

have a blended arrangement to facilitate video-conferencing or meeting rooms. The infrastructural requirements for work location spaces within the community should be informed by local specific need and co-created with the community.

Potential to use Hubs as **multi-functional** spaces for rural communities to accommodate local social enterprises. This also aids occupancy levels and generate revenue.

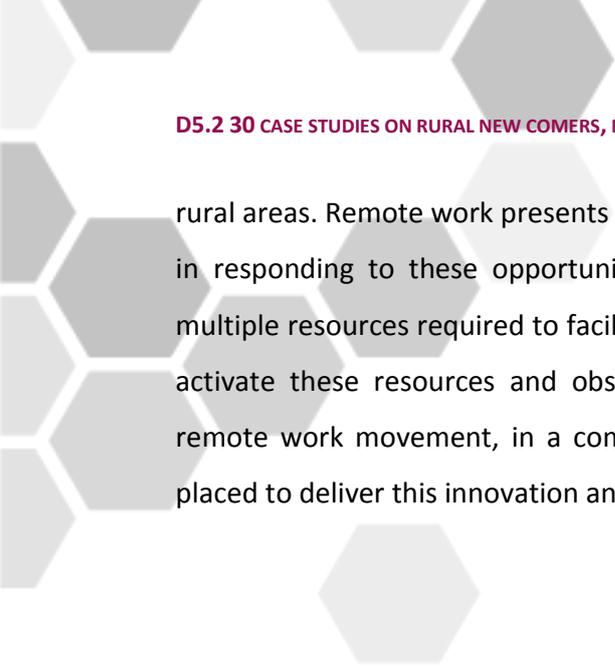
Newcomer

To attract newcomers to rural areas there is a need to shift the perception of rural areas as something lesser than urban environments. **Place promotion** campaigns will have a key role to play in this. To facilitate newcomers to rural areas government needs to respond with a **coherent policy** to address the current housing crisis (build and availability) in rural areas and to put actions (policy and related incentive schemes to refurbish buildings) in place to provide services that will cater for the diverse range of newcomers. **Community** will be key to transitioning newcomer to stayer in rural communities.

Rural regeneration

Remote work can facilitate workers to work anywhere, however this promising practice hinges on people relocating to rural areas. A recent study of remote workers in Ireland found that over 90 % of remote workers wanted to remain remote working. Promising for rural areas was the finding that 24% of the respondents would consider relocating. Findings note that the highest proportion of those considering relocation currently reside in the Dublin region, the main urban centre of Ireland. Specific to this research, the respondents in this national survey identified areas that overlapped with this case study region, including two counties that are predominantly rural. The top three regions respondents would move to are: 1. Outside Ireland 2. West: Galway, Mayo, Roscommon 3. South-West: Cork, Kerry (McCarthy, 2021).

Rural Ireland is a valuable natural resource with much to contribute to Ireland's future social, environmental and economic development. However it faces significant challenges in terms of job creation and an ageing population, ensuring the natural capital and biodiversity of rural areas is protected and encouraging young people who have left to return and settle in



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rural areas. Remote work presents itself as a social innovation that can have a significant role in responding to these opportunities and challenges. This case study has identified the multiple resources required to facilitate remote work, the approaches taken by the actors to activate these resources and obstacles that impede its use. The actors involved in the remote work movement, in a community-driven capacity have proven that they are best placed to deliver this innovation and that this social innovation can aid rural regeneration.

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Appendix 1. The list of interviews

Code.	Interviewee (Pseudonym)	Gender	Role	Place and date of the interview	Other information
IE1C/Int. 1	Mary	Female	Key informant/national organisation	Zoom; 30/10/2020	1.13.18
IE1C/Int. 2	John	Male	Key informant/local actor/Newcomer	Zoom; 06/11/2020	1.03.51
IE1C/Int. 3	Ann	Female	Key informant/local actor	Zoom; 11/11/2020	47.22
IE1C/Int. 4	Louise	Female	Key informant/local actor	Zoom; 12/11/2020	42.12
IE1C/Int. 5	Pat	Male	Key informant/regional development	Zoom; 19/11/2020	54.04
IE1C/Int. 6	Nora	Female	Newcomer/remote worker	Phone; 25/11/2020	56.02
IE1C/Int. 7	Martin	Male	Key informant/local actor	Zoom; 26/11/2020	Part A (36.17); part B (60)
IE1C/Int. 8	Paul	Male	Key informant/local actor	Zoom; 10/12/2020	1.05.16
IE1C/Int. 9	Joan	Female	Newcomer/remote worker	Zoom; 10/12/2020	55.43
IE1C/Int. 10	Maria	Female	Newcomer/remote worker	Zoom; 15/12/2020	58.25
IE1C/Int. 11	Laura	Female	Newcomer	Phone; 18/12/2020	34.11
IE1C/Int. 12	Patsy	Female	Newcomer/Remote worker	25/02/2021	1:05:46
IE1C/Int. 13	Will	Male	Newcomer/ Remote worker	26/02/2021	1:06:20
IE1C/Int. 14	Kate	Female	Newcomer/Remote worker	01/03/2021	53:30
IE1C/Int. 15	Megan	Female	Newcomer/Remote worker	05/03/2021	55:00
IE1C/Int. 16	Paul	Male	Key informant/local actor	05/03/2021	1:15:05
IE1C/Int. 17	Tommy	Male	Key Informant/ Local Actor	08/03/2021	1:42:17
IE1C/Int. 18	Meabh	Female	Key informant/ Local Actor	08/03/2021	1:07:12
IE1C/Int. 19	Faye	Female	Newcomer/ Remote worker	09/03/2021	58:27
IE1C/Int. 20	Molly	Female	Newcomer/ Key Informant	09/03/2021	1:04:35
IE1C/Int. 21	Tim	Male	Newcomer/Remote worker	10/03/2021	1:00:49

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Code.	Interviewee (Pseudonym)	Gender	Role	Place and date of the interview	Other information
IE1C/Int. 22	Debbie	Female	Key informant/ Local Actor	11/03/2021	1:00:00
IE1C/Int. 23	Maura	Female	Newcomer/ Remote Worker	15/03/2021	1:09:56
IE1C/Int. 24	Mike	Male	Newcomer/ Remote Worker	16/03/2021	53:10
IE1C/Int. 25	Jack	Male	Newcomer/ Remote Worker	22/03/2021	40:46

Table 1. Interviews