



Exploring community stewardship through place-based learning: A case study from the Burren

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Exploring Community Stewardship through Place-based Learning: a case study from the Burren.

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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burrenbëotrust
connecting people and place



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



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Abstract

This dissertation presents a comprehensive exploration of the intertwined concepts of place-based learning and community stewardship, drawing upon the work of Burrenbeo Trust, a landscape charity located in the west of Ireland. Through a practitioner-led study, this research aims to address key questions assessing the impact of the Trust's initiatives, providing both theoretical insights and practical frameworks for future endeavours in this domain. Framed around three central research questions, the study is presented in the form of a compilation thesis, where three peer reviewed publications form the central focus with each paper building on the findings of the previous.

The first paper presented as part of this dissertation scrutinises programme evaluation practices from the practitioner's standpoint, leveraging insight from environmental education, evaluation methodologies and practitioner research. Through a meta-evaluation spanning a decade of data, the paper assesses the effectiveness of place-based learning initiatives delivered by Burrenbeo Trust, offering critical reflections on evaluation processes and outcomes.

The second paper delves into the process of scaling-up a place-based learning initiative, using the Heritage Keepers programme as a case study. Through an examination of the programme's inception, assessment and achievement, alongside discussion on scaling-up community stewardship approaches, this paper identifies necessary steps for successful implementation and broader implications for similar initiatives.

Finally, the third paper, builds on the perspectives of the previous two papers, introducing a practical framework for community stewardship designed to facilitate and promote this process. Drawing from empirical research within a community stewardship initiative, the framework synthesises insights from facilitator observations, participant feedback and literature review. Comprising five essential components – Care, Knowledge, Facilitation, Agency and Action – augmented by Collective Action, this framework offers valuable guidance for researchers and practitioners alike, transforming the abstract notion of community stewardship into actionable steps applicable across diverse contexts.

By integrating findings from the three papers, this dissertation contributes a nuanced understanding of place-based learning, community stewardship and their symbiotic relationship. It serves as a valuable resource for researcher, practitioners and policymakers, providing insights and frameworks to inform future research, practice and policy in the realms of environmental education, community development and sustainability. The primary findings of the research indicate the importance of practitioner evaluation and suggest a meta-evaluation approach could be beneficial. For organisations such as Burrenbeo, effective engagement in place-based learning and community stewardship is enhanced by active programmes, broad topics, fun elements, and the appropriate facilitators. Scaling-up local stewardship initiatives presents challenges and benefits, emphasising the importance of organisational knowledge, pilot phases, networks, peer learning, and collective action. Community stewardship initiatives significantly impact participants by increasing local heritage knowledge, action capacity, pride,

and cohesion, with tangible environmental benefits such as tree planting and monument maintenance. Additionally, the practitioner-led framework identified informs researchers, practitioners and policymakers, with the essential components necessary for community stewardship: Care, Knowledge, Facilitation, Agency, Action and Collective Action.

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare this thesis is entirely my own and that I have acknowledged the writings, ideas, and work of others where necessary within. I also declare that this thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of another academic degree at this or any other university. Furthermore, I have not knowingly allowed another to copy my work.

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Statement of Contribution

The candidate assumed the role of the first author, taking responsibility for the conception, design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of results, and the composition of each of the three published articles within this research. Additionally, they oversaw the construction and completion of the entire compilation thesis. The PhD supervisors collaborated as co-authors for the three component articles and played a pivotal role in offering expertise, guidance, support, and maintaining the research's overall focus, including facilitating the ethical approval process. The Graduate Research Committee, consisting of Dr. Nessa Cronin and Dr. Manuela Heinz from the University of Galway, along with Dr. Brendan Dunford, an Employment Mentor at Burrenbeo Trust, provided invaluable advice, encouragement, and support throughout the entire duration of the PhD journey.

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Dissemination of Study Findings

Publications:

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Bird, Á., Reilly, K., and Fahy, F. (2024) [under review] 'A practitioner led framework for the process of Community Stewardship', *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*. (*Journal article*)

Supplementary Publications:

Bird, Á. (2023) 'Place-based learning initiatives in the Burren', in Smith, E. R., & Pike, S. (eds.) *Encountering ideas of place in education: Scholarship and Practice in Place-based Learning*. Routledge, pp. 65-77 (*Book chapter*).

Conference Presentations:

International Conferences:

Bird, Á. (2024) 'Enhancing Place-Based Learning through the Heritage Keepers Programme'. *World Environmental Education Congress*. Abu Dhabi. (*Oral Presentation*)

Bird, Á. (2024) 'Fostering Community Stewardship Through Place-Based Learning- Insights from Burrenbeo Trust Initiatives'. *World Environmental Education Congress*. Abu Dhabi. (*Oral Presentation*)

Bird, Á. (2023) 'Place-based learning and community stewardship: a practitioner's perspective'. *Conference of Irish Geographers*. Wexford, Ireland. (*Oral Presentation*)

Bird, Á. (2019) 'Exploring the Burren and place-based learning'. *7th EUGEO Congress in conjunction with the 51st Conference of Irish Geographers Re-imagining Europe's Future Society and Landscapes*. University of Galway, Ireland. (*Fieldtrip facilitator*)

Bird, Á. (2019) 'Beyond the Ivory Tower'. *7th EUGEO Congress in conjunction with the 51st Conference of Irish Geographers Re-imagining Europe's Future Society and Landscapes*. University of Galway, Ireland. (*Oral Presentation*)

National Seminars:

Bird, Á. (2021) 'Playing with Places'. *GMIT Outdoor Play Conference*. Virtual Webinar. (*Oral Presentation*)

Bird, Á. (2020) ‘Burrenbeo Trust: our experience with place-based learning and how to spread the model’. *Burrenbeo Trust Learning Landscape Symposium*. Virtual Webinar. (*Oral Presentation*)

Bird, Á. (2020) ‘David Sobel Place-based Education in Public Schools’. *Burrenbeo Trust Learning Landscape Symposium*. Virtual Webinar. (*Panellist*)

Bird, Á. (2020) ‘Exploring your local place through place-based education’. *FOLM -New Education Forum*. Virtual Webinar. (*Oral Presentation*)

Bird, Á. (2019) *Burrenbeo Trust Learning Landscape Symposium*. Kinvara, Co. Galway. (*Event Convenor*)

Bird, Á. (2019) ‘Exploring Community Stewardship through Place based Learning’. *University of Galway Education Postgraduate Research Day*. Nun’s Island, Galway. (*Oral Presentation*)

Bird, Á. (2018) ‘Place based learning for action: the Burrenbeo Trust story’. *Iveragh Learning Landscapes*. Waterville, Co. Kerry. (*Oral Presentation*)

Bird, Á. (2018) ‘Áitbheo : tools to learn and teach about your local place’. *Iveragh Learning Landscapes*. Waterville, Co. Kerry. (*Workshop*)

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1. Introduction

There is now widespread acceptance that we are currently experiencing a global crisis of climate change and biodiversity loss (Pascual et al., 2022). Addressing these challenges requires multifaceted responses across a variety of scales (Shin et al., 2022). The role of local communities in this response has been considered, and it has been observed that, with the necessary supports in place, they have the potential to address these challenges (Moser & Pike, 2015). The following thesis provides a unique unpacking and analysis of various concepts related to place-based learning and community stewardship. It also provides a useful framework for both further research on these topics as well as practical application of similar initiatives. Based on a practitioner-led study that considers the work of Burrenbeo Trust, an independent membership charity that has facilitated place-based learning programmes with the communities of the Burren in the west of Ireland since 2008, this thesis addresses three key questions. Firstly, it seeks to assess the tangible impact of Burrenbeo Trust on community stewardship activities and attitudes within the Burren region. Through a comprehensive examination, the thesis aims to examine to what extent the Trust has influenced and shaped local perceptions, behaviours, and engagement in environmental stewardship. Secondly, the study delves into the transferability of Burrenbeo Trust's community place-based learning programmes with a focus on exploring mechanisms for extending these initiatives to benefit broader communities. By investigating the adaptability and scalability of these programmes, the project aims to identify pathways to disseminate successful models for environmental education and community engagement. Lastly, the research aims to explore the intersection between community stewardship and place-based learning, specifically investigating how the latter can serve as a catalyst for enhancing the former. By examining the synergies between place-based learning and community stewardship, the study seeks to contribute insights into the potential of educational strategies to foster sustainable environmental practices and attitudes within communities. It is presented in the form of a compilation thesis, where three peer reviewed publications form the central focus. These publications are supported by chapters that engage relevant literature on the themes, as well as a discussion and conclusion highlighting the significance of the findings in advancing new knowledge. Throughout the course of this thesis, ideas around place and place connection, place-based learning and community stewardship will be explored with reference to the findings around the potential for a place-based learning approach to facilitate community stewardship behaviours.

The discipline of geography provides all the necessary elements for this interdisciplinary study, which incorporates elements of place, governance, conservation, education and heritage studies. As Liverman (2004) argued, geographic inquiry holds significant potential in a world characterised by widespread environmental change and the emergence of new actors, scales, and metrics that influence environmental decisions. With its foundational focus on human-environment relations and regional disparities, geography is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping environmental and international strategies in the twenty-first century through research, education, and engagement in public policy. An interdisciplinary approach is fitting as it reflects the lived experience of places – as spaces that are inhabited by, shaped by and in turn

shaping the communities that live, work and engage in and with them (Low, 2016). The concept of place forms a central thread running through this work, again particularly fitting as place as an intellectual construct finds its origins within the domains of geography. While distinctions have been made between a specific geographic location, the physical elements of a location and the affective and emotional sense of place that individuals form with a specific location, for the purposes of this study all of these elements of place are considered. It is worth drawing attention to the work of Yi Fu Tuan (1977) who maintained that a difference between place and the more general concept of space, was that place is typified by its inherent specificity, familiarity, sense of security, and stability, while space is associated with expansive vistas, mobility, freedom, and, conceivably, potential threats. However, within this (and something we will return to over the course of this thesis) it is noteworthy that space has the capacity to evolve into place through deliberate engagement in immersive encounters with its distinctive attributes, thereby fostering an increasing familiarity. Our relationship with place can evolve over time and engagement, again, central to this study, the nature of our relationship with our place and the resulting impacts. As will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 2, place-based learning and community stewardship are grounded in local places, for this reason consideration of place more generally and the human relationship to place is important as it informs the subsequent discussions around care for, and of, place.

This multiphase study considers the impact of a place-based learning approach on community stewardship. This is an under researched area, particularly as to date, many studies considering a place-based approach have focused on the formal education space (Smith and Sobel, 2010a; Gallay et al., 2016; Pierce and Telford, 2023; Stickney, 2023). This study looks to engage with and understand participants in formal education and community learning spaces. Phase one of the study pertains to the evaluation of the impact of Burrenbeo Trusts' programmes over a ten year period from 2008 when the organisation was founded, to 2018 when this study commenced. The process of conducting evaluations and the significance of them for similar endeavours is the focus of the first paper arising from the study. This initial evaluation focused on cataloguing and analysing the extensive existing participants feedback archive, and interrogating the data in relation to attitudes and behaviour of participants around the initiatives and their places. The resultant insights are useful for future programme development while simultaneously focusing a lens on evaluation practices more generally. Building on these evaluations, phase two looked to facilitate national dissemination and delivery of an adapted Burrenbeo Trust place-based learning programme that is sensitive to local contexts across interested communities throughout Ireland. This scaling-up from a local to national context is the focus of the second paper arising from this study. The third paper synthesises the findings from the first two and provides an overview of the process involved in facilitating community stewardship initiatives across a range of contexts.

The three central research questions addressed over the course of this thesis include:

- What impact has the work of Burrenbeo Trust had on community stewardship activities and attitudes in the Burren?

- How can Burrenbeo Trust's community place-based learning programmes be transferred to benefit wider communities?
- How can community stewardship be enhanced through place-based learning?

1.1. Context

As outlined above, this study is a practitioner-led research project conducted by a researcher embedded in Burrenbeo Trust. The following section will outline the context for the research project in relation to the embedded researcher (something that will be examined in further detail in the Chapter 3 Methodology) and the organisation in question, Burrenbeo Trust.

In October 2018, this study commenced through an Irish Research Council funded Employment-Based Postgraduate Programme. While the researcher had been employed by Burrenbeo Trust since 2012, this meant that a new role, 'Research and Impact Officer' was created to allow time and space within the organisation dedicated to this study. This effectively resulted in a case of an 'insider researcher'. Insider research refers to studies carried out within a social group, organisation, or culture where the researcher holds membership or affiliation (Greene, 2014). A more in-depth interrogation of the positionality associated with this 'insider researcher' position can be found in Chapter 3.

Further contextual factors for this study reflect both the Burren landscape, where the original programmes were developed and delivered, and Burrenbeo Trust, the organisation responsible for facilitating the programmes. On initial consideration of the Burren, people often ask where exactly the Burren is? And then perhaps, what the Burren is? Neither question is particularly easy to answer and depending on who you ask you may get a different response. A geologist might speak of a karst limestone landscape, an ecologist of the species diversity – orchids, gentians, invertebrates and more, a farmer of the upland pastures bordered by stone walls where cattle graze and an archaeologist has much to consider with the vast array of monuments left behind by previous generations. At its core, the Burren (from the Irish word *Boireann*, 'place of stone') is a living landscape of international importance with a unique natural, built and cultural heritage. This distinctive limestone region covers approximately 720 km² of Ireland's mid-western coast (Burren Programme, 2022). With its mixture of exposed limestone pavements, hazel woodlands, species rich grasslands and lakes, the Burren is home to over two thirds of Ireland's native plant species and is now a refuge for many plant and animal species that are rare elsewhere in Ireland and Europe (Burrenbeo Trust, 2022). Alongside this, the fascinating archaeological record maps almost 6,000 years of human habitation, and the role of traditional farming practices on what is sometimes referred to as 'the fertile rock' (Dunford, 2002). The Burren has been the focus of varied research attention, whether focused on ecology (Parr et al., 2009), geology (Doyle, 2022) or archaeology (Jones et al., 2011) but also in relation to its position as a landscape with unique human ecology interactions (O'Rourke, 2005) and consequent pressures in terms of land-use, tourism and sustainable management practices (McDonagh, 2022).

The story of Burrenbeo begins in 2001 when Burrenbeo Teoranta, was set up by Brendan Dunford and Ann O'Connor, initially as an information sharing portal, primarily a website to help inform people about the Burren and the role of the local community, particularly farmers, in its care. Registered as a charity in 2008 and changing titles to Burrenbeo Trust, the organisation has evolved and developed over the years but maintains a focus on engaging people on the heritage of the Burren, and our collective role in caring for the region. While now also delivering programmes with national reach, the Burren remains a source of inspiration for developing and location for establishing new initiatives. The name Burrenbeo speaks to the approach and aims of the organisation. While the Burren is undoubtedly a place of limestone, biodiversity, monuments, stories, legends, music, art and more, it is the epitome of a living landscape. *Beo* is the Irish word for living, alluding to the evolving nature of this place. And just as the first farmers shaped the landscape 6,000 years ago by clearing the trees, establishing pastures for their livestock and building megalithic monuments, the current community continue to shape and influence the place which they call home, and are central to the development of their place. Providing opportunities, through place-based learning initiatives in schools and the wider community can serve to enhance the sense of agency where communities can act to enhance their places into the future.

The following provides an overview of some of the significant organisational activities and priority areas and their evolution.

Since its inception Burrenbeo has organised monthly **heritage walks** every month, year-round. These walks explore various locations within the region, delving into the rich natural, built, and cultural heritage themes. Emphasising information sharing rather than walking long distances, the walks are exclusively available to members due to high demand. Volunteers coordinate the walks, with unpaid walk leaders guiding participants through the fascinating heritage sites. The walk leaders include farmers, artists, ecologists, archaeologists, geographers and more.

During the winter months, Burrenbeo hosts a series of monthly talks, known as **Tea Talks**, from November to March. These gatherings serve as a community-building activity, offering insights into the special and unique aspects of the region. Covering diverse topics ranging from nature and history to culture and environment, the talks take place in different venues across the Burren area. Free for Burrenbeo Trust members, non-members can attend for a nominal donation, with the added opportunity for attendees to socialise over tea before the talks begin.

Burren in Bloom is an annual event celebrating the natural heritage of the Burren through a series of walks, talks, demonstrations, and open gardens. Over the years, and dictated by staff capacity the event has varied between being a weekend long event to a whole month event. The focus is always on the month of May. Participants gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Burren's formation and its significance as a reservoir of botanical, archaeological, and cultural wealth.

The **Burren Winterage¹ Weekend** is a community-driven endeavour coordinated by Burrenbeo Trust with support from local businesses and residents. This weekend celebrates the distinctive farming traditions of the Burren and other high nature value farming landscapes. Events include the Winterage School, showcasing traditional practices, as well as activities like music performances, herdsman's walks, and a Burren Food Fayre. The highlight is the community-led cattle drive, symbolising the culmination of shared efforts in preserving and celebrating the region's cultural and natural heritage.

In 2003, the **Ecobeo** initiative was introduced to Burren schools, aimed at investing in the upskilling of the future guardians of the Burren. The programme involved up to 12 visits to local primary schools by local geologists, botanists, ecologists, farmers, musicians and others to share their perspective on the Burren with the school children and their teachers. The formal education programme evolved to *Áitbheo* (Living Place) that had 10 school visits that were all delivered by the same tutor and also saw a move to secondary school settings. Both Ecobeo and *Áitbheo* also included a local, guided fieldtrip. Up to the end of 2022, 2113 young people had graduated from Burrenbeo education programmes – representing a significant investment in the future of this place. As will be discussed in much greater detail later in this thesis, one outcome of this study has been the development of **Heritage Keepers**, Burrenbeo's newest learning programme.

Today, Burrenbeo is a thriving, inclusive organisation dedicated to shaping a brighter future for the Burren, its communities and all those who love this special place. Through a series of place-based learning initiatives for schools and the community, participants learn about, in and for their local places and are supported to carry out projects that enhance and protect their local built, natural and cultural heritage. Place-based learning is focused on using local resources to teach and learn for the benefit of both participants and places, taking a holistic view of place (incorporating the multiple layers of a place and its interconnections), and including learning in formal and informal settings for people of all ages.

Over the years, Burrenbeo has continuously evolved and adapted, and now also has a national reach and programmes that were developed locally have been shared with schools and communities around Ireland. Burrenbeo has also provided training to 192 teachers interested in applying similar programmes in their own setting. Today Burrenbeo is a company limited by guarantee, has a board of voluntary directors, reports to the Charities Regulator and currently has just over 850 members who sign up and pay a membership fee, comprised of individuals, couples, families, schools and businesses who are local, national and international.

1.2. National Context

While the focus of this study is on a specific instance of a place-based learning and community stewardship initiative it is important to consider these in the wider context of policy,

¹ Winterage is a distinctive farming method practiced in the Burren, involving the movement of cattle to the hills and highlands during the winter months, and bringing them down to the lowlands during the summer, which is the opposite of common practice in other regions.

governance and community agency in Ireland. As already outlined, place-based learning and community stewardship can play an integral role in sustainable development and environmental education. In Ireland, these concepts are deeply intertwined with policies, governance structures, and the agency of various stakeholders. This section unpacks the role of policy, governance, and agency in promoting place-based learning and community stewardship in Ireland, with reference to several specific policies and initiatives.

The three main policy areas with relevance to this study are those that address heritage protection, sustainability education and local development. The topics considered in this study, place-based learning and community stewardship are concerned with heritage protection, learning and facilitating local community development and because of this are impacted by these policies. The following Table 1.1 gives a brief overview of the relevant policies and plans.

Policy/Plan	Summary of Relevance
National Development Plan 2021 – 2030 (2021)	Ireland's NDP outlines the country's strategic goals and investments in various sectors, including education and environmental sustainability. It highlights the importance of place-based education and community involvement in achieving sustainable development. Initiatives within the NDP support community-led projects that enhance local environments, fostering a sense of stewardship.
County Development Plans	In summary, County Development Plans in Ireland serve as comprehensive frameworks that balance the needs of community development with heritage protection. They guide land use, infrastructure development, and environmental sustainability while preserving cultural, historical, and natural heritage, all with the aim of enhancing the overall quality of life for local communities. These may be supplemented by County Biodiversity and Heritage plans
Education for Sustainable Development Policy: ESD to 2030 (2022)	Ireland's Education for Sustainable Development Policy is a comprehensive framework that seeks to embed sustainability principles, values, and practices throughout the education system. It emphasises integration into the curriculum, professional development, community engagement, collaboration, monitoring, and research to foster a generation of learners who are equipped to contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future.
Ireland's Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2022 – 2024 (2022)	Ireland's Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan provides a strategic roadmap for the country to work towards achieving the UN's SDGs. It focuses on four pillars (People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnership), emphasises cross-cutting themes, encourages stakeholder engagement, and establishes a monitoring and reporting framework to track progress. The plan reflects Ireland's commitment to advancing sustainability and addressing global challenges within a national context.

National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 -2040 (2024)	Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) delineates the national biodiversity agenda spanning from 2023 to 2030, focusing on instigating transformative shifts in how we appreciate and safeguard nature. The plan advocates for a "whole of government, whole of society" approach, aiming to raise awareness among citizens, communities, businesses, and government entities about biodiversity's importance and the urgency of conservation efforts. This strategy reflects a national commitment to collectively address the biodiversity crisis and "act for nature."
Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management (2021)	In summary, the "Framework for Integrated Land and Landscape Management" by An Fóram Uisce provides a strategic and holistic approach to managing land and landscapes in Ireland. It focuses on sustainability, water-centric management, collaboration, climate resilience, policy alignment, data-driven decision-making, and public engagement, with the aim of achieving balanced and integrated land use practices that benefit both the environment and society.
The Heritage Councils Strategic Plan 2023 – 2028 (2023)	The Heritage Council of Ireland's strategic plan focuses on preserving and promoting cultural heritage, including historic buildings, archaeological sites, and traditional skills. Programmes such as the Adopt a Monument scheme look to facilitate specific stewardship behaviours.

Table 1.1 Overview of relevant policies and plans

While each of these policies or plans make reference to varying degrees of the need for, and importance of, local community engagement, Irish governance structures can also be fundamental. Local authorities play a crucial role in governing place-based initiatives. Ideally, county councils and city councils (local government bodies responsible for the administration of specific geographical areas within Ireland) would collaborate with communities to develop and implement projects that enhance local environments. Instances, where this can be successful are where they support community gardens, local clean-up campaigns, and sustainable transport initiatives, all involving local communities in stewardship activities. However, these initiatives are often started by the local authority, are funding dependent, and do not often build in ongoing capacity building. The approach advocated by Burrenbeo means that the ideas are generated by the local community, the funding is not tied to any particular action (whether biodiversity or built heritage related for example) and also, the focus is on sharing a process of considering and learning about local places in hope that future actions can also be taken. Equally, there are often obstacles to local authority initiatives, and there has been a recognised departure from traditional hierarchical systems where the state alone shoulders the responsibility for society (Hajer et al., 2015). Instead, a move towards fostering partnerships and acknowledging the interdependencies among state entities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the economy when addressing sustainability and environmental challenges has been encouraged (Hajer et al., 2015). This brings up questions in relation to agency and scale, topics that will be considered in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Of interest here also is research conducted by Shandas and Messer (2008), who recognise that involvement at the grassroots level can present difficulties for governmental entities. However, this dynamic creates openings for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to play a meaningful role. Working on a smaller, local scale, groups like Tidy Towns² and local environmental organisations can work collaboratively with residents to protect and enhance local environments. They can organise educational events, clean-ups, and restoration projects, empowering communities to take ownership of their surroundings. Teachers and educational institutions can also have a vital role in promoting place-based learning. Through their agency, they can connect students with their local environments, incorporating place-based projects into the curriculum. Initiatives like Green-Schools and the Leave No Trace education program exemplify the collaborative efforts of schools, educators, and environmental organisations.

In Ireland, policy and governance structures have a role in determining the success and promotion of place-based learning and community stewardship. While national policies and strategies recognise the importance of connecting individuals to their local environments and fostering a sense of responsibility for their stewardship, their enactment on the ground does not always match the potential identified. Local authorities, specialised agencies, community-based organisations, schools, and educators all play crucial roles in implementing these policies and engaging communities in sustainable practices. As Ireland continues to evolve its approach to biodiversity and heritage conservation and community engagement, these elements will remain central to fostering a culture of stewardship and sustainable development. In future policy development, the findings from Carragher and McCormack (2018) are worth considering in an Irish context. They explore the diversity of factors driving sustainable behaviour and transition and offer insights into how policymakers can better support these efforts. While single policy measures can work, bundling communities with similar characteristics could lead to more effective policy design and enhanced sustainable transition. Community and local authorities are seen as providing an economy of scale for sustainable transition, bridging the gap between community action and policy. The report suggests that co-design and co-production of sustainability with communities hold significant potential based on the results and stakeholder feedback. There are similarities with the Burrenbeo approach, where participants are encouraged to explore the elements of their place that specifically interest them, to work collaborative with fellow community members and to collectively design and implement a local action plan. This study will look more closely at the mechanism involved in this process.

1.3. Research Approach and Scope of the Study

The following section outlines the scope of the study and the research approach employed. Aligned with the pragmatist philosophy, this PhD project utilises a mixed methods approach. The choice of a pragmatist perspective is driven by the approaches inherent belief that comprehension is derived from practical experience. This philosophical stance, as advocated

² Tidy Towns is an annual contest that began in 1958. It is organised by the Department of Rural and Community Development to recognise the tidiest and most appealing cities, towns, and villages across the Republic of Ireland.

by Kitchin and Tate (2000), is particularly apt for this study due to its emphasis on a societal approach. The pragmatic philosophy asserts that knowledge is best gained through hands-on engagement with the world, aligning seamlessly with the study's focus on understanding societal dynamics. Therefore, the adoption of a pragmatist framework provides a robust rationale, as it resonates with the study's overarching goal of exploring and comprehending the intricacies of societal phenomena through a blend of experiential and analytical methods.

A mixed-method approach is appropriate for several reasons. The study seeks to formulate a theory that examines the behaviour and processes associated with community place-based learning and its dissemination based on data collection and analysis. Given the researcher's longstanding involvement in this field, adopting this approach allows for a thoughtful consideration of the established relationship between the researcher and the data. The outcomes of the initial data evaluation will significantly shape subsequent research phases, as later stages will be influenced by the preliminary analysis of the archival data.

The research was conducted using a multiphase practitioner-led research approach that included archive creation and analysis, as well as pre- and post- intervention surveys. Survey instruments were developed to elicit feedback from those who had previously engaged with the work of Burrenbeo Trust as well as pre- and post- programme surveys for those that participated on the initiatives developed over the course of this study. Further details on these will be provided in Chapter 3.

1.4. Research Rationale

This study looks to unpack the intersection of place-based learning and community stewardship. Building on years of experience delivering programmes, the study facilitates reflection, and adaptation to scale that allows for the benefits to be experienced more widely.

This is an important study as it provides practitioner insight on the process of place-based learning and community stewardship that will be valuable for others engaged in similar endeavours while also providing a framework for future researchers to engage when investigating place-based learning or community stewardship initiatives. As mentioned previously, this research had two phases, an initial phase that looked to establish the situation as it existed (and also to implement improved structures for ongoing evaluation) and the second phase that focused on the scaling-up of the initiatives to uncover the implications for community stewardship more broadly. To date there has been very little research that incorporates such a breadth of audiences and contexts (from school children to community groups throughout Ireland). The research that exists on place-based learning is focused on place-based education where programmes are delivered through the formal education space (Smith and Sobel, 2010b; Gallay et al., 2016; Pierce and Telford, 2023; Stickney, 2023) and the research to date on community stewardship is often focused on addressing specific concerns (Shandas & Messer, 2008; Krasny and Blum, 2017; Flood et al., 2022) rather than looking to encourage a broader active citizenship ethic. This study expands significantly on the existing international research and also clearly outlines the elements necessary for successful

stewardship initiatives allowing replication in a variety of contexts for the benefit of heritage and communities alike. The increasing challenges we face globally mean that this research has added significance given the potential impact that the actions facilitated by community stewardship could achieve.

The thesis is presented in the form of a compilation thesis comprising three peer-reviewed journal articles, two that are published and one that is under review.

1.5. Research Aims and Objectives

In addressing the three research questions outlined above, this study aims to achieve four primary objectives involved in the process of enabling community stewardship through place-based learning with each objective addressed in one of the three interrelated journal articles included in the thesis. Below is an outline of these objectives and their coverage across the articles.

Objective 1: Evaluate the impact of Burrenbeo Trust's existing learning programmes.

Drawing on 10 years (2008 – 2018) of collected data (participant numbers and survey responses), evaluate the impact of Burrenbeo Trust's existing learning programmes. This will be achieved through the construction, examination and analysis of collected data, forming an archive of community feedback. Article 1, published in the *Environmental Education Research Journal*, is presented as Chapter Four of this thesis. This article focuses on evaluating the existing body of Burrenbeo Trust's work and related evaluation procedures, directly addressing the research question: "What impact has the work of Burrenbeo Trust had on community stewardship activities and attitudes in the Burren?"

Objective 2: Develop a best practice model for similar programmes.

Informed by the evaluation, develop a best practice model to pilot the implementation of similar programmes across other communities in Ireland. Article 2, published in the *Irish Geography Journal*, is presented as Chapter Five of this thesis. This article deals with the development and piloting of the national Heritage Keepers programme, responding to the research question: "How can Burrenbeo Trust's community place-based learning programmes be transferred to benefit wider communities?"

Objective 3: Oversee the piloting of good practice principles.

Oversee the piloting of such good practice principles with a range of participant communities. This objective is also addressed in Article 2, as it critically presents the piloting phase of the Heritage Keepers programme, integrating the evaluation of good practice principles with a range of participant communities.

Objective 4: Produce recommendations for community stewardship.

Coalesce collected data and subsequent analysis from initial evaluation material and the wider implementation of the best practice model to produce recommendations for an emerging new paradigm - community stewardship. Article 3, currently under review in *Gateways*:

International Journal of Community Research and Engagement consolidates and builds on the previous two articles. It outlines key elements of the community stewardship process and proposes a framework for its application, addressing the research question: “How can community stewardship be enhanced through place-based learning?”

Each article contributes to the overall research aim by addressing specific objectives through structured analysis and presenting findings in accordance with the publication requirements of the respective journals. Each paper is presented in accordance with the specific publication requirements of the relevant journal, meaning that the content remains unchanged and adheres to the original publication's conventions, including referencing. The cumulative insights from these articles offer a comprehensive examination and enhancement of community stewardship through place-based learning.

The brief account of each article that follows will establish the empirical setting, aims and objectives and research questions discussed in each.

Article 1	Bird, Á., Fahy, F. and Reilly, K., 2022. Making evaluation work for the practitioner evaluator: experience from the field of environmental education. <i>Environmental Education Research</i> , 28(5), pp.715-734.
Article 2	Bird, Á. and Reilly, K., 2023. From Local to National: Perspectives from a Community Stewardship Approach. <i>Irish Geography</i> , 56(1).
Article 3	Bird, Á., Reilly, K., and Fahy, F. 2024. [under review]. A practitioner led framework for the process of Community Stewardship. <i>Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement</i> .

Table 1.2 Overview of Journal Articles

1.6. Article 1 Overview: Making evaluation work for the practitioner evaluator: experience from the field of environmental education.

Utilising insights from the fields of environmental education, evaluation, and practitioner research, this paper engages in a discourse concerning program evaluation practices from the practitioner's standpoint. This discussion is underpinned by a meta-evaluation carried out on a decade's worth of data spanning from 2008 to 2018, collected from a series of place-based learning initiatives administered by a charitable organisation based in Ireland. Through the analysis of this body of data, an assessment of the effectiveness of the mentioned programmes was undertaken, and subsequently subjected to meta-evaluation.

The critical findings and deliberations arising from this analysis encompass various aspects, including the influence of time constraints on the evaluation process, the integration of evaluation within the organisational culture, the merits and demerits associated with evaluations spearheaded by practitioner evaluators, and the prospects presented by meta-evaluation in guiding organisational transformations.

This paper serves as a valuable resource for both researchers and practitioners by furnishing a structured framework to support future practitioner-led evaluations, particularly longer term meta-evaluations.

1.7. Article 2 Overview: From local to national – lessons from a community stewardship perspective

This paper investigates the process of expanding a place-based learning initiative from a local to a national level, delineating the necessary steps for its successful implementation. The Heritage Keepers programme, initiated in 2022, serves as a nationwide place-based learning initiative, originally piloted through a collaboration between Burrenbeo Trust and the Heritage Council of Ireland. This paper offers insights into the program's inception, assessment, and achievements, alongside a discussion on the broader implications of scaling up community stewardship approaches. By elucidating the pivotal factors involved in transitioning a place-based learning endeavour from a local to a national scale, the discussion also contemplates its applicability to similar initiatives. Furthermore, there is an examination of the significance of supportive conditions in fostering stewardship outcomes, that are exemplified through the successful execution of action projects demonstrating active stewardship practices among participants.

1.8. Article 3 Overview: A practitioner led framework for the process of Community Stewardship

Community stewardship entails active engagement and shared responsibility among local residents in collectively preserving and managing their common environment and resources. Its pivotal role revolves around nurturing sustainable behaviours, empowering communities to make well-informed decisions, and catalysing enduring positive impacts towards a more sustainable and environmentally conscious future. Nevertheless, a prominent challenge explored in existing literature centres on the effective engagement of citizens in community stewardship endeavours. This paper introduces a practical framework designed to facilitate and promote the process of community stewardship, drawing from over five years of empirical research conducted within a community stewardship initiative in western Ireland. This framework synthesises insights gained from facilitator observations, participant feedback, and an extensive review of relevant literature. The framework comprises five essential components: Care, Knowledge, Facilitation, Agency, and Action, all enhanced by a sense of Collective Action. By amalgamating these elements, the framework offers valuable guidance for both researchers and practitioners aiming to implement similar community stewardship initiatives. It transforms the concept of Community Stewardship from an abstract notion into a series of coherent and actionable steps that can be applied in diverse settings.

1.9. Thesis Structure

This introductory chapter provided a contextual overview and outlined the direction and purpose for the remainder of this article-based thesis. Chapter 2 builds on this introduction by

outlining some of the key areas of existing literature on the topic. Chapter 3 presents the methodologies and the multiple theoretical frameworks adopted. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are each comprised of the three interrelated journal articles that form the basis of this thesis. Chapter 7 then consolidates the research findings and presents a discussion while Chapter 8 presents a conclusion with recommendations for future research, other practitioners and policy makers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview

The concepts of place, scale, and community, which are central to this study, are fundamental to the discipline of geography. Each of these concepts has a substantial body of associated literature, some even forming distinct sub-disciplines within geographic research. This chapter aims to present a strategic summary of these concepts as they pertain to this specific study. Additionally, each of the three research articles draws directly on a body of previous studies. This literature review chapter provides a broader context, situating the topics as they relate to this study.

The following chapter is broken down into six sections. In responding to the stated research aims and objectives, it is necessary to consider a cross section of the existing literature over a range of topics. To fully interrogate the concepts of place-based learning and community stewardship that are central to this work, it is necessary to consider broader topics around place, scale, community, education and conservation before moving to the specific concepts of place-based learning and community stewardship. In each section, the literature is discussed with reference to how it relates to the research questions of this project.

In outlining key concepts and existing literature on place-based learning and community stewardship, this chapter unpacks findings in relation to the value of and potential for such approaches and how this connects to the current study. The chapter highlights the complex interplay between individual and collective experiences, emotions, policies, and governance structures in shaping our relationship with the environment and the places we inhabit.

2.2. Considering the role of Place

“The catalyst that converts any physical location - any environment if you will - into a place, is the process of experiencing deeply. A place is a piece of the whole environment that has been claimed by feelings. Viewed simply as a life-support system, the earth is an environment. Viewed as a resource that sustains our humanity, the earth is a collection of places.” Alan Gussow, 1971

As mentioned in the Introduction, aligning naturally with themes rooted in the discipline of geography the concepts of place and how humans relate to places are central to this study. Place is also at the core of Burrenbeo Trust’s work. Each of the three research questions are grounded primarily in an exploration of human interactions with their places. The concept of place itself and how it relates to place-based learning and community stewardship must first be considered before consideration is given to place in relation to other interdisciplinary concepts such as community, conservation, education and stewardship. Malpas (2010, p1), stated that “place is perhaps the key term for interdisciplinary research in the arts, humanities and social sciences in the twenty-first century”. The concept of place is covered in literature, from the study of physical place to considerations of place attachment and place identity (Devine-Wright, 2009; Lewicka, 2011). While consensus is hard to come by, it is generally accepted that place is differentiated from ideas such as space or environment as it allows for inclusion of the range

of meanings and emotions that individuals or groups associate with the place (Tuan, 1977). What may begin as merely a space can become a place, as we get to experience and know it and attach emotions in the process. Gruenewald (2003) considers the interplay between human culture and place as a reciprocal and influential dynamic. As geographer Mike Crang (2010, p. 103) describes beautifully, “spaces become places as they become “time-thickened”. This idea of “time-thickened” emphasises how passage of time enriches a location with experiences, memories, and meanings, transforming a mere physical space into a place filled with personal and communal significance. It is through this temporal layering that places acquire their unique identities and emotional resonance. However, as described by Cresswell (2014) in his book "Place: An Introduction," the idea that places are produced through practice, representation, and materiality, highlights the dynamic and contested nature of place.

The work of Kyle and Chick (2007) is also useful to consider. They found that the establishment of a socio-cultural bond with a particular place frequently materialises in the company of significant individuals, who contend that such relationships often flourish when shared with others of significance. Kyle and Chick (2007) further assert that the ascription of meaning and emotional attachment to a specific place represents manifestations of both cultural and individual identities. This connection between places and humans, and perhaps the danger of increasing disconnect are fundamental to the approach employed in this study. In contemporary society, the complexity surrounding the conceptualisation of place is heightened by the widespread availability of global mobility (including our online ‘places’), a phenomenon often accompanied by a reduced rootedness to any specific geographical location (Relph, 2008a; Orr, 1992). Where once we had an immediate connection to place due to food sources, water, livelihood, energy, materials, recreation and sacred inspiration, with growing mobility, this is no longer the case (Orr, 1992), and that we are now “a deplaced people” (p. 126). Augé (1995) has posited that individuals residing in the era of super-modernity increasingly inhabit what he terms "non-places" (p. 78) that stand in stark contrast to the distinctive characteristics and the myriad human and non-human relational possibilities intrinsic to a sense of place.

Expanding on the broader notion of place, this study focuses more specifically on the concept of place attachment. Given that the three research questions centre around the influence of community stewardship on communities and their local places, as well as the mechanisms through which it can be enhanced, this particular focus is warranted. As outlined by Irwin and Low (2012), place attachment is connected to ideas of topophilia, place identity, insidedness, genres of place, sense of place or rootedness, environmental embeddedness, community sentiment and identity. Irwin and Low (2012) further maintain that place attachment can both foster and maintain group, community and cultural identity. Similarly, Carrus et al. (2014) compare the links between place attachment, community identification and pro-environmental engagement. While not limited to environmental engagement, parallels could be drawn here with the concept of community stewardship, that also requires engagement around local issues. Echoing the ideas around de-placed people and non-places, this importance of place attachment can be considered in tandem with research on “disconnection hypothesis” (Corcoran, Gray and Peillon, 2009, p. 39) that contends that changes in our physical landscape, amongst other factors, have influenced the way we develop a sense of place and attachment to our natural

surroundings. Diener and Hagen (2020) considered place attachment specifically as featured in geography literature. While they found there was less explicit research on the topic than in some other disciplines, particularly psychology, they did find that it was often implicitly featured. They go on to suggest that increased engagement with the concept from geographers is warranted, particularly from a viewpoint that place attachment is not a static concept, rather that people are continuously forming and unforming attachments to places. There has been criticism of some discussion of place attachment that insinuates that it is not dynamic (Devine-Wright and Quinn, 2020).

There is also a particular subset of the disconnection literature that looks specifically to nature disconnection and by contrast, ways that we can reconnect with nature (Lumber et al., 2017). Considering the role nature connection can play in relation to human wellbeing and in fostering pro-environmental behaviours, the examination and implementation of pathways to enhance our connection to nature is worthy of further exploration (Richardson, 2023). Again, in considering the outlined objectives and research questions of this study, it becomes evident that the choice to emphasise a place-based learning approach encompassing all facets of a place, including its natural heritage, is significant. As will be discussed later, in evaluating the impacts of place-based learning and community stewardship initiatives, there are multiple potential impacts from both the perspective of the participant and the place.

In this section we consider the various aspects concerning place and place attachment relevant to this study. The literature outlined unpacks some of the multifaceted dimensions of how humans interact with their places. Now, the focus shifts towards consideration of scale, to include an exploration of the spatial contexts that influence our perceptions, behaviours and attachments to places. Through this exploration, the nuanced interplay between individuals, communities and the wider context is interrogated.

2.3. The importance of Scale

Discussions of scale, whether around ‘bottom-up’ or ‘top-down’ approaches are frequent in relation to actions and interventions (Sheppard and McMaster, 2008). Given that the focus of this research is around communities and action, it is pertinent to consider the role that scale plays. In the context of Burrenbeo Trust and community stewardship, the concept of scale encompasses various dimensions, including the participants involved (individuals, groups, or communities), the geographical scope (local, national, or global), and the specific focus (whether on a particular place or broader issues such as climate change or biodiversity loss). Lopez and Weaver (2023) explore these dimensions by examining stewardship initiatives, highlighting the significant role of micro-motivations in smaller community-based organisations and macro-motivations in larger, multi-jurisdictional entities. They stress the nuanced relationship between micro and macro scales, challenging the simplistic dichotomy often presented. This perspective echoes Ardoin's (2014) findings, that reveal a connection between the scale of actions and the degree of place attachment among volunteers. Stronger local-scale connections tend to drive actions at a smaller scale, while broader-scale connections lead to engagement at a larger scale.

Research conducted by Cuba and Hummon (1993) acknowledges the significant impact of scale on individuals' connection to and efforts to protect a place. As discussed in the preceding section, considerations of place connection are central to this research project. In a related vein, Friis et al. (2023) delve into the concept of scale within interdisciplinary academic discourse, addressing potential ambiguities surrounding scale-related terminology and metaphors like local, regional, national, and global. They note the varied usage of these terms, often driven by specific analytical or political agendas. Additionally, Blakey (2021) contributes to the discourse on scale by exploring ongoing debates that shape contemporary understandings, particularly the contrast between epistemological and ontological perspectives. These debates gained prominence following Marston et al.'s (2005) challenge to the concept of scale, advocating for a 'flat' ontology.

The importance of scale in the context of education or stewardship initiatives, whether they are local or global in scope, has sparked debates and differing viewpoints (Werse, 2023). One educational aspect under scrutiny involves the balance between local and global ecocritical awareness. Ecocritical awareness involves understanding and appreciating the interconnectedness between human actions, the environment and ecological systems. While ecopedagogy promotes a unified "planetary citizenship" on a global scale, ecojustice education stresses the cultivation of ecocritical awareness at local level. The philosophical disagreement between Gadotti and Bowers in 2004 exemplifies this contrast in their emphasis on ecocritical awareness, with Bowers questioning Gadotti's concept of planetary citizenship and highlighting the necessity of integrating ecocritical awareness education into both local and global initiatives. The approach employed on the programmes under investigation for this study, focuses first on local ecocritical awareness before then moving to relate this to global concepts.

Considering another scale that is relevant to this study, a pivotal element of collective action is the shift from individual to group endeavours. Expanding on the earlier discourse regarding scale, it becomes essential to reassess the notion of agency and the relevant dimensions of scale associated with this process. Faulkner et al. (2018) emphasise the importance of collective action in building community resilience and addressing the challenges posed by climate change. They also highlight the role of place attachment alongside effective leadership in mobilising collective action and bringing the community together. In their 2024 study, Carmen et al. highlight the critical role of collective action in community-based sustainability efforts. They assert that collective agency and a shared commitment to common goals significantly enhance these initiatives' ability to drive social change. Their study underscores the importance of social relationships and networks in organising collective action, emphasising that building connections among diverse participants is essential. Furthermore, Carmen et al. point out that learning through these relationships can amplify the benefits and advance the progress of sustainability initiatives. This resonates with the insights shared by Newman and Dale (2005) regarding social capital, where they suggest that individuals often lack the necessary resources for effective action. The discussion encompasses both bonding and bridging social capital. Newman and Dale highlight that while bonding capital can yield positive outcomes, an overly

insular community, resistant to external influences, may result in adverse effects. Conversely, bridging social capital, while not independently instigating change, facilitates interaction with novel information and a departure from entrenched social norms. The actualisation of agency within communities evolves through the dynamic interplay of both bonding and bridging connections. Adger (2003) also argued that the concept of social capital is central to understanding collective action and adaptation to climate change while Carmen et al. (2024) acknowledge the crucial role of forming social connections within community-driven projects. The processes employed by Burrenbeo Trust leverage these principles, aiming to bolster existing group efforts while also easing the introduction of potentially unfamiliar concepts.

Likewise, Müller (2015) explores the significance of assemblages in cultivating agency, emphasising that the assembly and alignment of alliances are vital in developing the capacity for action. Similarly, McFarlane (2009) demonstrates how social movements can be firmly rooted in specific locations while also sharing knowledge, practices, and resources across different sites. Cresswell (1996) discusses the importance of scale in understanding place. Places can be understood at various scales, from the body to the home, region, city, county and beyond. Each scale involves different sets of relationships and power dynamics. Effective community stewardship requires navigating these scales and understanding how local actions are connected to broader social, economic, and environmental processes. This underscores the complex interaction among the different levels of engagement within community stewardship endeavours as demonstrated by the work of Burrenbeo. The following section will consider the meaning of community more carefully, particularly in the context of this specific study.

2.4. Defining Community in this context

The term community has been described as “intrinsically problematic” (Shannon et al., 2021, p. 3), reflecting ongoing debate about its definition. Perhaps at the most fundamental level, Gregory et al. (2011) characterises a community as a group of people united by a shared culture, values and/or interests, typically rooted in social identity and/or geographic location, fostering recognition and interaction among its members based on these commonalities. However, Joseph (2002) argues that community is not primarily defined by social identity but rather by its associations with production and consumption within a capitalist context. Joseph also suggests that the concept of community can objectify and idealise what can often be a very diverse and potentially hostile population at a local scale. Although community is frequently linked to a scale conducive to easy interaction and mutual recognition, Anderson (1991) suggests, particularly in reference to nations, that community can be both imagined and actualised through media and culture rather than just through face-to-face interactions (Gregory, 2009). Shannon et al. (2021) in considering the wider concept of community geography, suggest that community arises from a process of social exploration, rather than a pre-existing entity awaiting involvement. In discussion relating to scale, community often represents the activity that takes place within the ambiguous realm between the individual and familial micro-level and the broader macro-level of cities, counties, and nations (Howarth et al., 2022).

In the context of Burrenbeo and the programmes considered in this study, the concept of community shares similarities with the aforementioned discussion. While Burrenbeo frequently interacts with geographical communities, there are also communities formed through interests or values. Moreover, the idea that programmes or research involving communities aims to facilitate inclusive and diverse initiatives in partnership with communities, contributing to the collective betterment of both participants and their places, as proposed by Shannon et al. (2021) has resonance.

As discussed in the preceding section, Newman and Dale in their 2005 work, explored the concept of social capital, examining both bonding and bridging forms of social capital. They suggest that while bonding capital can be beneficial, excessively tight-knit communities, resistant to external ideas, can have negative consequences. On the other hand, bridging capital facilitates access to new information and fosters departure from established social norms, though it does not directly drive change on its own. Further considering social capital, Carmen et al. (2022) underscore the importance of social networks, trust, and reciprocity in fostering resilience within communities. They discuss how different combinations of social capital, including bonding, bridging, and linking, are crucial for achieving various objectives and displays of agency at community level. The connections between different social networks and their multi-functionality provide flexibility over time to mobilise diverse resources and address needs identified in local communities. For the programmes under consideration in this study, there are both local networks and also the wider participant network created during the programme engagement. Similarly, while discussing the aspects of a community as they relate to this study, it should be noted that the process of engaging with a programme such as Heritage Keepers can play a role in constructing community – again, both on a local scale where individuals come together to complete the programme but also at a national scale where the Heritage Keepers are connected by taking part. As will be considered further in the subsequent discussion of scale, there is recognition of community-based efforts and shared responsibility in a community stewardship approach but this should not downplay the role of individual leadership or innovators who can catalyse broader community engagement through existing social capital. In the following section, the focus will shift to education and learning as they relate to this study.

2.5. Situating Education

In their role with Burrenbeo the author has facilitated a range of heritage education programmes over the years, in both formal and non-formal learning environments. The programmes were developed with reference to the concept of place-based education. In defining the approach as it applies to the programmes in question, it is referred to as place-based learning, reflecting the application outside of uniquely formal education settings.

While not widely referenced in the Irish context, place-based learning is not a new concept. Combining elements of various theories, academic approaches and educational concepts such as Dewey (1915) and Piaget (1973), place-based education, has been defined by Sobel (2004, p. 7) as: ‘the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach

concepts in language, arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum'. While this alludes to a more formal, curriculum-based learning setting, Sobel goes on to speak of how the approach utilises hands-on, real-world learning experiences, something that has been central to the education programmes featured in this study. He also mentions that a place-based approach, 'helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens' (Sobel, 2004, p. 7). This is another key feature of the education programmes informing the evaluation in the first phase of this study, as initiatives support wider community engagement and facilitate active stewardship behaviours in schools and communities. As Lewicki (1998) explains, place-based pedagogies can unite schools and communities on a shared journey – considering first local and then building to regional, national and international concerns. This echoes the earlier consideration of scale and how it relates to this study and these concepts more broadly.

Educators frequently use local environments and communities as a context for learning (Almjeld, 2021; Woodhouse, 2001), and outdoor learning became particularly popular during the Covid-19 pandemic (Howley, 2022). However, in Ireland, the conscious adoption of place-based education and engagement with all elements of the concept is not currently widespread (Pike, 2011). Adopting a place-based approach effectively means using a place-based pedagogy to deliver the existing curriculum rather than viewing the local learning elements as an 'add on' to the existing provision. In practice this might mean looking first to learn about history through local stories and monuments or considering the local landscape features first when studying geography. Equally, learning about local plants and animals rather than more exotic species from further afield and taking on locally relevant civic engagement projects would be deemed place-based. There are also opportunities to perhaps read local poetry or prose, use local examples to highlight concepts from maths, physics or other subjects or using local inspiration for art projects. In the researchers work developing Burrenbeo education programmes, these factors were all considered and included where possible.

In his 1992 book, *Ecological Literacy*, David Orr, the political scientist and environmental activist, outlined the important role place could play in reversing the environmental destruction and damaging cultural trends of our time. Orr (1992) argued that we are not currently only putting our environment at risk but also humanity itself. In this respect, Sir David Attenborough said that 'the wild world is becoming so remote to children that they miss out, and an interest in the natural world doesn't grow as it should. Nobody is going to protect the natural world unless they understand it' (Attenborough, cited in Cassidy, 2008, p. 1). Alongside this there is increasing literature and documented commentary arguing for children to reconnect with the natural environment through direct experiences outdoors (Louv, 2005; O'Malley, 2014). Through adopting a place-based approach educators have the potential to enhance future generations connection to place and develop future environmentalists and conservationists (Place, 2016). Significantly, in a study informed by the voices of young people in relation to climate change education Reilly et al. (2024), reported that the young people recommended that climate change education should draw from local and national examples to demonstrate

the importance and urgency of the climate crisis. They felt that relating the issue to their own communities would make it more relevant and impactful.

The above discussion highlights where the majority of place-based pedagogy research has been focused to date – in the formal education space. While the author delivers programmes within this space, there has also been a deliberate adaptation of the pedagogy to incorporate learning in the broadest sense. This includes informal learning opportunities for the whole community as well as more structured (but still community based) learning programmes such as the Heritage Keepers initiative that will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis. As Callanan et al. (2021) have pointed out, defining informal learning can pose challenges, often oversimplified by merely categorising it based on the learning environment, such as whether it occurs within a school setting or not. Instead, they advocate for a more comprehensive approach, considering factors such as the degree of deliberate teaching and learning, the level of social collaboration involved in the activity, the extent that tasks are meaningful, the initiative taken by the learner in selecting what and how to learn, and ultimately, whether the learning is assessed (and if the assessment holds significance for the learner). While this analysis would include all of Burrenbeo's learning opportunities, it is also possible to envisage school-based learning also meeting these criteria.

The applied definition for place-based learning used by Burrenbeo is learning about the place, in the place and for the place. This echoes Lucas' (1972) definition of environmental education as education in, about and/or for the environment. However, while there are parallels between place-based learning and environmental education, there is again a fundamental difference as place-based learning is concerned with the whole place including the built and cultural environment as well as the biodiversity and habitats. As is often the case, there are other learning approaches that share some characteristics with a place-based learning approach such as 'rooted learning-based solutions' starting with local histories, dynamics, and capacities to co-create solutions (Kronlid, 2014); transformative learning (Pisters et al., 2019); but none have been found to encompass all the elements of the place-based learning approach that form the basis for Burrenbeo Trust initiatives. As outlined in the thesis Introduction, it is the focus on the whole place, looking to engage the whole community and the ultimate aim of facilitating actions to enhance these local places that is central to the Burrenbeo approach and the reason why a place-based learning approach is adopted. This definition and approach has been reached through extensive engagement with literature as well as empirical work through the various Burrenbeo initiatives over the years.

Returning to the earlier consideration of place-attachment, one of the suggested outcomes of a place-based approach is impact on participants sense of place and place attachment (Devine-Wright, 2013). While it has also been argued that place-based learning could potentially address some of the issues arising from our current disconnect, where people are again viewed as an ecology, within a cultural, political, social and biological context (Woodhouse, 2001). Bascopé and Reiss (2021) also found that using place-based learning strategies in addressing local challenges can bolster both personal and community resilience in confronting socioecological issues. As outlined above, this is the aim of Burrenbeo Trust's work and

determining the success of this approach in the context of Burrenbeo and this study, as well as considering the opportunities for scaling-up same are the focus of this study.

The following section turns to a discussion of heritage and conservation. Given their central role in the programmes under consideration in this study, it's beneficial to explore these concepts within the broader literature context.

2.6. Heritage and Conservation

As they relate to this study, understandings of and definitions surrounding, heritage and conservation have changed over time (de la Torre, 2013). Equally, the two concepts can often be intertwined. Traditionally, conservation was seen as a specialised professional field dedicated to recognising, evaluating, revitalising, sustaining, and interpretation of heritage sites or features (Fairclough et al., 2008). Avrami et al. (2000) contend that the notion of conservation has evolved into a multifaceted and ongoing endeavour, encompassing decisions regarding the identification of heritage, its utilisation, maintenance, interpretation, and more, influenced by various stakeholders and their interests. It is increasingly recognised that determinations about what to conserve and how to do so are predominantly shaped by culture, societal, political and economic dynamics, that are subject to continual change (ibid). This discussion around how decisions are made in terms of conservation, and who is responsible for conservation are pertinent to this study given that the Burrenbeo approach advocates for empowering everyone to play a role in the conservation of local heritage.

The Heritage Council of Ireland define heritage as ‘what we have inherited from the past, to value and enjoy in the present, and to preserve and pass on to future generations’ (Heritage Council, 2023). Ireland’s national heritage is defined in the Heritage Act, 1995 as including: ‘monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, seascapes, wrecks, geology, heritage gardens, and parks and inland waterways.’ While Castree et al. (2013) in the online version of *A Dictionary of Human Geography* define heritage as:

The legacy of people, culture, and environments inherited from the past. In its broadest sense, heritage includes natural and built landscapes, physical artefacts, and cultural forms (e.g. music, literature, art, folklore, monuments), intangible culture (values and traditions, customs and practices, spiritual beliefs, language), and biological traits. Heritage is considered important because it connects people with the past and affirms and reproduces cultural identity.

They go on to define heritage conservation in a separate entry as:

The deliberate preservation and conservation of heritage. This includes the identification, restoration, and protection of significant heritage items from the past (including buildings and landscapes), the collecting, archiving, and display of cultural artefacts and forms, and programmes and policy designed to protect and promote important aspects of cultural identity, such as dialects and national languages.

As the above definitions outline, heritage can encompass a wide range of elements and its conservation consequently can take on many forms. Where heritage is referred to in this thesis

it can be taken as a collective for built, natural and tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This broad defining of heritage is reflective of how the term is used in practice when the author and Burrenbeo are communicating with programme participants. Incorporating all the elements of heritage mirrors their representation in real world where each occurs simultaneously and are intertwined for example, an old church (built heritage), with a bat roost (natural heritage) and local traditions related to the associated saint (cultural heritage).

Heritage also brings us back to the earlier discussion of scale, as heritage places can be small from a local plaque or holy well to larger and with national (or international) significance such as Newgrange or the Giant's Causeway. There are also differing scales in terms of the official responsibility for conservation with a variety of international, national and local agencies holding responsibilities such as the UNESCO, the National Monuments Service, Office of Public Works and county councils.

An area of contention in relation to heritage conservation, is the degree that aspects of traditional, professionally led, conservation practice can diverge from how individuals truly engage with places, that encompasses various social, memory, and experiential engagement (Sleight, 2018). It is also worth noting that particularly in the realm of natural heritage, while there may be significant statutory protection for heritage via the adoption of several conservation agreements from Europe and the United Nations, including the Habitats and Birds Directives and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, alongside substantial investments through EU agri-environment-climate initiatives, the decline in natural heritage is still continuing (Rourke et al., 2020). Given these reservations around traditional conservation practices, the following section begins to point towards the community stewardship model for conservation as one that is particularly relevant.

2.7. What is Community Stewardship?

The following section focuses on a discussion of community stewardship, a key feature of this thesis. Although community stewardship shares similarities with community-led conservation (where communities have a voice in natural heritage management) and pro-environmental engagement (where individuals act in a way that is positive for the environment), even to a degree with active citizenship, essentially it can be viewed as a stage beyond engagement, signifying a transition from involvement to active participation, and referring to all the elements of place i.e. the built, natural and cultural heritage. Again, as with the place-based learning approach outlined above, this is an area that is relatively underrepresented in literature. While there are elements of various other approaches that can be adopted, there is no accepted definition of community stewardship that adequately describes the process for the context of this project. This brings us to the idea of stewardship, a well-recognised concept, of environmental management and in seeking to define community stewardship, we look first to establish what is meant by stewardship more generally. Cockburn et al. (2019) contend that stewardship provides a pathway for tackling sustainability challenges within social-ecological systems, spanning scales from community-based initiatives to global endeavours. Carnell & Mounsey (2022) present stewardship as the place-specific actions that individuals and

communities directly contribute their time. Cockburn et al. (2018) give extensive consideration to the definition of stewardship and suggest two different perspectives, environmental stewardship and ecosystem stewardship. While this certainly incorporates much of what stewardship means in this context, there is a little of the nuance missing. In particular, when examining the broader stewardship perspective advocated for by Burrenbeo and the author, it involves the integration of built, natural, and cultural aspects of each place, as well as the implied sense of ownership associated with stewardship. This suggests that those involved in these actions perceive themselves as having a role to fulfil and believe they can influence the future of their local environment. As we refer specifically to community stewardship, the focus is on where people are working collectively on local stewardship actions rather than individual acts of stewardship.

There are a number of studies on, and examples of, specific stewardship projects, whether focused on community gardens (Krasny and Blum, 2017), waterbodies (Shandas & Messer, 2008) or bogs (Flood et al., 2022) and there have been calls for more work on the links between theory of community stewardship and its practice (Cockburn et al., 2018). Relatedly, research has been done in the Irish context on how to engage communities with topics around environment and sustainability (Carragher et al. 2017; Carragher and McCormack, 2018; Scott, 2017; Bell and Emanuel, 2014). The community stewardship approach suggested here integrates both, where communities are engaged around local environment and heritage, leading (through a process and in the presence of various conditions that will be outlined over the course of this thesis) to action around local issues.

In a review of environmental stewardship literature that focuses on stewardship activities impacting environmental or natural heritage initiatives, Peçanha Enqvist, et al. (2018) found three key dimensions in successful stewardship initiatives; care, knowledge and agency. Essentially, for people to take action locally, they need to see relevance and feel some connection to the place i.e. the care dimension. Without this emotional or personal attachment, stewardship efforts often lack the motivation needed for sustained action. Peçanha Enqvist et al. underline that fostering a sense of relevance and connection to the environment is crucial to building a stewardship ethic.

People also need to be supported through knowledge provision that is appropriate to their level and setting, the knowledge dimension. Providing information that matches the setting and the audience's level of understanding is essential for empowering individuals to make informed decisions. Finally, structures need to be in place to support the actions, the agency dimension. Without the means to act (institutional support, legal frameworks, or resource availability), even motivated and knowledgeable individuals may struggle to engage in stewardship. Peçanha Enqvist et al.'s inclusion of this dimension is particularly valuable because it highlights the need for systemic support to turn intention into action. The other element leading to successful stewardship practices included a feeling of collective action.

Peçanha Enqvist et al. propose a framework based on the three elements above, and suggest that these components are critical in fostering community engagement and ensuring effective

environmental stewardship. While this framework provides a useful theoretical start point for considering community stewardship, it does not focus on the practical steps which are required to implement each of the essential elements. We will discuss this study and the elements identified in greater detail in Chapter 6. Building on the theoretical findings of this review served as a useful initiating reference in the design of the programmes that form the basis of this study.

We return now to the earlier consideration of place and place attachment but in this instance in relation to the notion of stewardship and caring for a place. As outlined in the opening of this chapter, how people relate to a place varies hugely and this will then have implications for how people want the place to be into the future (Anton and Lawrence, 2014). Enhanced place connection and place identity can be motivating factors for people's stewardship behaviour, something that can be ignited through education and develop over the years. The Nature Connectedness research group at the University of Derby (Richardson, 2018) looked at humans' relationship with the natural world and have developed methods for measuring a person's nature connectedness as well as identified ways that this can be enhanced (Lumber et al, 2017). Where this connection becomes important in terms of actions and behaviours is when considered alongside Otto and Picini's (2017) study of 255 children that found that while 2% of their pro-environmental behaviours could be attributed to environmental knowledge, 69% was attributed to nature connection i.e. related to feelings, emotions and connections. Similarly, Mackay and Schmitt (2019) found in a review of 75 studies involving 27,120 participants that not only was there an association between nature connection and pro-environmental behaviours but there was also evidence that nature connection causes pro-environmental behaviour. The finding that it is sense of connection more than knowledge that results in conservation actions has particular significance in the development of stewardship initiatives. This mirrors the work of Toomey (2023), who considered the approaches taken in the communication of conservation research. They found that facts alone will not encourage people to behave in certain ways, rather that the affective and social elements play a significant role. Equally, research around cultural connections to landscapes suggests that these cultural dimensions and their corresponding values are pivotal catalysts for environmental stewardship. They form the foundational basis for societal transformations in the utilisation, perception, and appreciation of landscapes, ultimately promoting more sustainable trajectories for the future (Hirons et al., 2016).

2.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 2 has provided a considered review of the literature relevant to this study, focusing on place-based learning and community stewardship. As previously outlined, this study is interdisciplinary and while each of the topics discussed above has an extensive body of related literature, for the purposes of this study it is necessary to focus on certain aspects of each. The chapter began by emphasising the significance of place and place attachment in the context of environmental education and community engagement. It highlighted the interplay between human culture and place, stressing the importance of

understanding the complexities of place in contemporary society, where global mobility has challenged traditional connections to specific geographical locations.

Place-based learning, that forms the basis of Burrenbeo Trust initiatives, was introduced as an approach that integrates various theories, emphasising hands-on, real-world learning experiences that connect participants with their local environment. The chapter highlighted the potential of place-based learning to enhance participants' sense of place and place attachment. From this, community stewardship emerged as a key theme, bridging community engagement and active participation in local stewardship actions. The review indicated that community stewardship involves collective, place-specific actions driven by care, knowledge, and agency. The role of cultural connections to landscapes and nature connection in motivating stewardship behaviours was also discussed.

3. Methodology

3.1. Overview

The Methodology chapter examines the methodologies employed over the course of this thesis project, covering research design, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and researcher positionality. This chapter ensures transparency and rigor in the research process by clearly outlining how the study was conducted, from the initial conceptualisation to data collection and analysis. By doing so, this chapter lays the groundwork for the subsequent presentation of findings and their implications in the articles presented in the following chapters.

3.2. Purpose of this Study

The core aim of this study is to unpack the potential for a place-based learning programme to facilitate community stewardship. The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a considered outline of the existing knowledge around these two intersecting topics and the reasons why this research is necessary. The central research questions that this study addresses are;

1. What impact has the work of Burrenbeo Trust had on community stewardship activities and attitudes in the Burren?
2. How can Burrenbeo Trust's community place-based learning programmes be transferred to benefit wider communities?
3. How can community stewardship be enhanced through place-based learning?

3.3. Theoretical Framework

Different ontological, epistemological, and theoretical viewpoints shape research within the realm of human geography. Recognising that researchers inherently bring their own perspectives, paradigms, and beliefs, to their projects, and that these foundational assumptions guide the work, it is crucial to examine and clarify the researchers personal ontology and epistemology and how it relates to the work. Further discussion of the researchers positionality will be provided in Section 3.7.

Having considered the work of Moon and Blackman (2014) alongside Kitchin and Tate (2013) a social constructivist epistemological stance, with a pragmatist theoretical approach were found to best describe the researcher's position and approach to the research design and analysis. Social constructivism provides a valuable framework for informing a research project by emphasising the ways in which social phenomena and realities are constructed through interactions, language, and shared meanings (Burr, 2015). By adopting this perspective, researchers can investigate how knowledge and understandings of the world are not merely reflections of objective reality but are shaped by the cultural, historical, and social contexts in which they are embedded. This approach allows for an exploration of how individuals and groups participate in the co-construction of realities through discourse, practices, and institutional structures. Adopting this approach can reveal the underlying assumptions, power dynamics, and social processes that influence perceptions and behaviours (Burr, 2015). For instance, it can be used to examine how concepts such as identity, community, and place are

negotiated and redefined in learning settings, thereby uncovering the ways in which place-based learning and community stewardship are not just isolated practices but are also shaped by broader social and cultural narratives. This perspective encourages a reflexive stance, prompting the researcher to consider their own role in the construction of knowledge and to engage critically with the voices and experiences of participants. Given the practitioner-led nature of this study, this has added significance. The work of Crotty (1998) who maintained that human's construct knowledge as they engage with and interpret the world resonates strongly with the place-based learning ethos central to this study. When working with individuals and communities, in each setting there is potential for new meanings and interpretations of the concepts and information being shared and discussed. Equally, as a facilitator, the researcher has found that their thinking around these concepts has developed and evolved through engaging with others on the topics, and experiencing the impacts in various settings.

The study also integrates techniques which are associated with Thematic Analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method commonly used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns within data (Braun et al., 2016). It involves systematically coding the data—usually from interviews, focus groups, or textual sources—and organising it into themes that represent key ideas or insights relevant to the research questions. This approach allows the researcher to explore complex meanings, perceptions, or experiences within the data while maintaining flexibility. Thematic analysis is especially useful for interpreting rich, qualitative data without being tied to a specific theoretical framework, making it a widely adaptable methodology for understanding subjective phenomena in various fields. The specific methods employed fall within what Braun and Clarke refer to as reflexive Thematic Analysis which emphasises the role of researcher reflexivity, and views researcher subjectivity as a resource (Braun and Clarke, 2019). The specific application of the methods are described in greater detail in section 3.4.5 Data Analysis.

Now to expand on the suitability of the pragmatist approach employed in this study. Pragmatism endeavours to comprehend the world by scrutinising practical issues, asserting that delving into specific real-world scenarios is crucial for offering both theoretical comprehension and practical resolutions (Kitchin and Tate, 2013). Pragmatism is often action and user orientated (ibid.). As Moon and Blackman (2014) outline, pragmatism aims to strike a balance between empiricism that posits that knowledge stems from sensory experience, and rationalism, that contends that knowledge is derived from logical and deductive reasoning. Again, when considered in the context of this study, as will be outlined in further detail over the course of Article 2, there are a number of elements at play in a community stewardship initiative, including but not limited to knowledge and care. This suggests that the outcome is as a result of a combination of sensory and logical elements.

As outlined above, several rationales underlie the selection of this theoretical framework. Integrating social constructivism and pragmatism in a research project creates a robust framework for understanding and interpreting complex social phenomena. Social constructivism emphasises the role of social interactions in shaping knowledge, thematic

analysis provides a systematic methodology for generating information directly from data, and pragmatism focuses on the practical implications and application of research findings. These approaches intersect by prioritising the context-specific and dynamic nature of knowledge creation, allowing development of theories which are both empirically grounded and socially relevant. While social constructivism stresses the importance of emerging insights from social contexts, pragmatism adds a layer of practical utility, ensuring that the research has real-world applicability. This intersection enhances the depth and breadth of analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding that is theoretically sound and practically meaningful.

This study endeavours to construct a theory exploring the behaviours and processes associated with community-based place-based learning and its dissemination through rigorous data collection and analysis. Given the researcher's extensive engagement in this field, adopting this approach enables a deliberate examination of the established rapport between the researcher and the data. The findings of the preliminary data analysis will substantially influence subsequent research stages, as subsequent phases will be informed by the initial scrutiny of the archival data.

The following section of this chapter goes on to outline the detail of the research design process and how it was applied.

3.4. Research Design

This study is a practitioner-led research project. Practitioner research means that the researcher is investigating their own practice in a bid to improve their practice and the programmes they deliver (Lightowler et al., 2018). This has many advantages, one of which is the possibility for knowledge mobilisation, where the knowledge generation through the research process is applied directly and put into action (ibid). While this is undoubtedly an advantage there is also an expectation that the process of translating this knowledge into action can be complicated, even messy (Graham et al., 2006). In an attempt to overcome some of this, a model that facilitates meaningful knowledge mobilisation through practitioner research has been proposed by Lightowler et al. (2018), where they outline the considerations necessary to ensure a more holistic outcome. They suggest that to fully reach the potential for knowledge transfer through practitioner research (rather than the more commonly stated outcomes around increased research capacity amongst practitioners) that a thorough analysis of the actors involved (practitioners, organisation, academics), the surrounding environmental conditions (time and supports available), the core knowledge's content and nature within the procedure (what is it that will be produced and shared), the methods by which the knowledge is put into action (dissemination procedures), and the fundamental principles and values that form the basis of the undertaking is required. These elements are relevant to this study and it could be argued the degree to which they are all present has led to the success of this project, and the delivery of outcomes beyond those originally envisaged. This approach to practitioner research is in keeping with the knowledge-to-action approach outlined by Graham et al. (2006).

This project involved two distinct phases and there were different methodologies employed in the phases. The initial phase was focused on archive construction and evaluation while the second phase involved the development of workshop materials followed by an initial pilot delivery of the workshops with pre- and post-programme surveys for the participants. Following the pilot, the workshops were further developed and delivered to a larger audience in partnership with the Heritage Council of Ireland. These workshops continue to include programme feedback surveys. The data obtained allows for a mixed methods analysis – providing both qualitative and quantitative data.

The adoption of a mixed methods approach is fitting for this project, that combines elements of various methodologies to achieve the desired outcomes. As outlined already, central to the approach is the practitioner-led element but the study also draws on action research and case study methodologies. Action research has been described as a meta-methodology (Erro-Garcés & Alfaro-Tanco, 2020) recognising that a variety of methodologies can be used together in an action research project. This approach is perfectly suited to this study as action research has been characterised as an approach that aims to enable change rather than just generating knowledge about a situation (Kitchin & Tate, 2013). Simultaneously, there are elements of the case study approach in this study. Case study research involves the study of a real life phenomenon in a specific time and space (ibid), in this case an organisational case study of Burrenbeo Trust. Use of elements of the case study approach are relevant here as they allow the focus to centre on the specific organisation of interest, allow this to inform analysis of a set of complex real-life situations providing a clearer explanation of phenomena and a comprehensive account (Chik et al., 2023).

3.4.1. Phase 1: Examining Programme Feedback - Archive creation, feedback survey and analysis

The first phase of the study involved the construction and analysis of a feedback archive from the previous 10 years of place-based learning programmes delivered by Burrenbeo Trust. This analysis provides insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the various Burrenbeo Trust programmes under investigation and will also be used to inform the subsequent phases of the PhD study. Analysis was completed on ten years of survey data relating to attendances at place-based learning events coordinated by Burrenbeo Trust. Attendance figures were available for Heritage Walks, Tea Talks, Burren in Bloom, Winterage Weekend, Primary School Programme Participants, Secondary School Programme Participants, School Tour Participants, Learning Landscape Symposium and Áitbheo Training. The following Table 3.1 provides a brief overview of each of the programmes in question.

Winterage Weekend	The Burren Winterage Weekend is a community-led initiative that was borne out of the Burren Community Charter Process. It is coordinated by the Burrenbeo Trust and is supported by local businesses and the community. During the Winterage Weekend we join together to celebrate the unique farming traditions of the Burren and other ‘high nature value’ farming landscapes across
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	Ireland and Europe, as well as sharing ideas on how these special places and their custodians might best be supported at a time of great challenge. Beginning with a Winterage School, the celebration of the winterage also includes many other events over the weekend, from traditional music and singing to herdsman's walks to a Burren Food Fayre and much more. The weekend culminates with the annual community-led cattle drive in the Burren.
Heritage Walks	The Burrenbeo monthly heritage walks are held 1st Sunday of every month, 12 months of the year. They are held in various locations and cover themes from the vast natural, built and cultural heritage of the region. The focus of the walks is on information sharing rather than covering long distances. Walks are only open to members due to high demand. The walks are coordinated by volunteers.
Burren in Bloom	This event celebrates the Burren's natural heritage with an exciting series of walks, talks, demos and open gardens throughout the Burren over an early summer weekend with additional walks over the following weeks. The Festival gives people an understanding and appreciation of the Burren and its formation, and how it is a source of great botanical, archaeological, and cultural wealth with its unique wild flowers and ancient sites.
Tea Talks	Learning about our special and unique places, and doing it as a community is the aim of the Tea Talks. Each year Burrenbeo Trust coordinate a series of monthly talks from November to March as a means of coming together through the long winter evenings. Topics are varied and cover everything from nature, history, environment, culture and much more. Whilst the venue for these talks alternates, they are always situated in the Burren area. The talks are preceded by tea that allows attendees to mix socially as well.
School Tours	Local schools are brought on a day long exploration of the unique Burren landscape. Through a series of interactive and fun learning experiences they learn about the built, natural and cultural heritage of the region.
Primary School Programme (Ecobeo or <i>Áitbheo</i>)	<i>Áitbheo</i> Primary was a place-based learning programme that was designed, developed and delivered by Burrenbeo Trust. It was developed and piloted in Spring 2017 and is the evolved successor to the Ecobeo programme that had been delivered in local primary schools for the previous 10 years. The objective of <i>Áitbheo</i> Primary was to contribute to an increased sense of awareness, informed pride and responsibility for an individual's place amongst its residents, and to encourage a sense of active stewardship going

	forward for both their community and environment, and the wider community and environment. The programme consisted of 9 classroom-based modules, an action project and a final fieldtrip.
Learning Landscape Symposium	This event brought together leading national and international specialists on the theme of how best to use our local places as a learning resource through different principles and practice in place-based learning. Featuring keynote speakers, workshops and fieldtrips, the symposium investigated ways to use local resources to make learning a richer, more exciting and rewarding educational experience, as well as an opportunity to network with individuals that work in same sector. All situated in Kinvara and the Burren, the ultimate ‘outdoor classroom’
Secondary School Programme (<i>Áitbheo</i>)	The <i>Áitbheo</i> senior programme provided an innovative approach to the study of some of the standard curriculum subjects. Students were led on an investigation of their own area, focusing on a 3km radius of their homes, gaining skills and knowledge that can be applied throughout their education. Starting with a fieldtrip, students applied for a scholarship to participate in the programme. The programme was then delivered over 3 full school days. Students were encouraged to engage critical thinking skills, take part in self-directed enquiry learning and express views and opinions on topics such as landscape, biodiversity, looking to the past, conservation and community.
<i>Áitbheo</i> Training	The objective of this course was to provide primary schoolteachers, other educators, and people with an interest in place-based learning with some simple strategies and resources through which they can effectively integrate the learning resource of their local environment into the school curriculum.

Table 3.1 Overview of Burrenbeo programmes included in feedback archive

These figures were kept in a variety of excel spreadsheets and had never been previously collated that meant overview of the figures and comparison were more difficult and less likely to occur. Some of the programmes had been in existence for the entire 10 year period while others were more recent. The following Table 3.2 outlines the relevant figures for each of the programmes.

Programme (2008 to 2018)	Total attendances	Average attendance per event
Winterage Weekend (7 years, 1 event/year)	11312	1616
Heritage Walks (10 years, 1 event/month)	4474	37
Burren in Bloom (10 years, 1 event/year)	4017	401
Tea Talks (10 years, 6 events/year)	2478	41
School Tours (6 years, multiple events/year)	1682	NA

Primary School Programme (10 years, various number of schools/year)	1446	NA
Learning Landscape Symposium (7 years, 1 event/year)	440	62
Secondary School Programme (6 years, various number of schools/year)	304	NA
Áitbheo Training (5 years, 1 event/year)	112	22

Table 3.2 Burrenbeo attendance figures (2008-2018)

The quantitative data regarding attendance numbers and the information regarding event topic and leader in relation to the Heritage Walks and Tea Talks was explored to establish any patterns in attendances in relation to the month, topic or leader.

In conjunction with the quantitative data analysis, a qualitative feedback archive was compiled and subsequently analysed. The data comprised survey responses completed by past participants (at the time of their participation). There was a mix of open and closed questions. This archive consists of 1233 discrete data entries; this data is from feedback received from participants on programmes over the 10 years from 2008 -2018. The programmes that feedback was available for were the Primary School programmes, Learning Landscape Symposium, Secondary School programmes and *Áitbheo* Training. Feedback included both formal feedback obtained from surveys and informal feedback that was sent by participants via email. The qualitative data underwent iterative coding utilising the constant comparative method (Fram, 2013), facilitating thorough exploration and comparison of the data to detect emerging themes. This method involves first reading the data and assigning initial codes to summarise the content and then continuously refining the codes to create categories and concepts that uncover patterns and themes within the data. Further detail is provided on this in section 3.4.5 Data Analysis.

This data were explored in order to provide a contextual framework for the subsequent phases of the study. When the data included in the feedback archive was originally collected, it was not intended to analyse the data in the method that has been completed for this study. This means there are limitations to the analysis and findings that emerge, however the prominent themes that come to the fore provide a useful contextual background for the study. Limitations include broader analysis around any demographic or socioeconomic trends (as this was not recorded or asked). Equally, it should be noted that the organisation has evolved over time and some of the themes that are being investigated through this study were not explicit aims of the programmes or organisation at the time that the feedback was created. It would be expected that this will also have an impact on the ability to draw conclusions in relation to these topics when analysing the available data.

The data and analysis obtained through the construction of the feedback archive (1233 data entries) and online survey (99 responses) provides insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the various Burrenbeo Trust programmes under investigation, information that was used to inform the subsequent phases of the study.

3.4.2. Phase 2: Workshop Series Design and Implementation

After completing the initial phase of this research, the subsequent step involved integrating the pertinent insights into the existing place-based learning programmes and formulating a strategy for piloting these adapted programmes on a national scale. The starting point for the workshops were the content of the existing *Áitbheo* programme, however as the aim of the programme was to encourage and facilitate active community stewardship, there was an increased emphasis put on this. Building on the experience and work of the author and Burrenbeo Trust, the collaborative workshops facilitated local communities looking to develop and deliver initiatives that encourage pride of place, connection and active local engagement to the benefit of communities and places. The process (and resulting initiatives) aimed to incorporate a whole place, whole community approach, be sociable, active and fun - reflecting findings from research on the successful elements of Burrenbeo Trust programming.

The workshops were piloted initially to ascertain the effectiveness of the content and also to trial the online delivery (this pilot programme was originally called Exploring Place). The author worked directly with participants to develop, enhance and implement local place-based learning initiatives. Participant groups comprising geographic communities, communities of interest and communities of circumstance (a group of individuals brought together by common experiences, challenges, or circumstances) were identified. The pilot programme was delivered 3 times; once to a community of circumstance, once to a geographic community (a group of individuals who live in the same geographic area) and once to a combination of the three. Group size ranged from 4 to 8 participants. The sessions were delivered online via the Zoom platform. The workshops were carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic. While it was originally envisaged that facilitators would travel to deliver the workshops in person this was not possible. The Zoom platform provided a reasonable tool to deliver the workshops, and was also much more convenient than having facilitators travel all over Ireland to deliver the workshops. However, there is obviously some compromise delivering online rather than in person. There were a total of 5 workshop sessions and each lasted for no more than 90 minutes.

The researcher provided ongoing support to participants during the process. Participants completed two short questionnaires (one pre- and one post-workshops) and each participant was asked to complete one final questionnaire after a period of approximately six months (August 2021). This pilot phase did not include the micro-financing element or structured project support post workshops. Following this pilot phase, the content was further developed and a partnership arrangement was reached with the Irish Heritage Council for ongoing national delivery under the programme title 'Heritage Keepers'.

The following Table 3.3 provides an overview of the Heritage Keepers programme aims and outcomes.

Heritage Keepers – Explore and enhance your place
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Inspiring Community Action, Restoring people and place through community stewardship	
Programme Aim	Vibrant communities who are connected to the Place they live and who work together to enhance their Place
Anticipated Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced connection to and pride of local place. • Awareness of components of local place (heritage, community, environment). • Ability to research and learn about local place. • Understanding of risks, threats and opportunities in relation to local heritage (and more global links). • Empowerment around action on local issues. • Increased local community stewardship.
Workshop 1 Intro and my place	Participants will; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand programme outline, objectives and expectations. • Begin to explore the concept of place-based learning. • Consider the layers of their place and their connection to it. • Identify the people, places and features that make up their place.
Workshop 2 Culture and the past	Participants will; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the impacts and evidence of past people in their place. • Competently use the Heritage Maps online resource. • Research local stories via the online Folklore Collection. • Access relevant 1901 and 1911 census records and discuss the material. • Find and discuss old pictures (from their place, culture or lifestyle).
Workshop 3 Biodiversity and land use	Participants will; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the terms biodiversity, habitats and ecosystem services. • Research local biodiversity and habitats using Heritage Maps and the biodiversity data centre maps. • Consider and discuss changes in land use and biodiversity. • Assess the risks, threats and opportunities in terms of their local heritage (and consider the global elements).
Workshop 4 Enhancing our place	Participants will; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit the elements of their place previously introduced (also considering the social and economic value). • Be inspired by other programmes and projects. • Consider what they want for the future of their place. • Identify meaningful actions that they would like to carry out.
Workshop 5 Planning for action	Participants will; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the actions that could have highest impact with lowest effort. • Consider how the wider community can be included in their actions. • Develop PLACE plans.

Table 3.3 Overview of the Heritage Keepers programme aims and outcomes

3.4.3. Participant recruitment

Developing an effective, fair and ethical participant recruitment strategy is crucial for the success of any programme. For Burrenbeo programmes, an effort is made so that any programme recruitment is as short and simple as possible given the diversity of our audiences (teachers, farmers, families, professionals, academics and more). In this case, a multifaceted approach combining email outreach, engaging personal and professional networks, and harnessing media publicity was used.

Firstly, an email outlining the programme and the application process was circulated (Appendix 2) to existing Burrenbeo contacts and relevant mailing lists. Secondly, the Heritage Council as partners utilised their national networks to publicise the programme. Participants are more likely to engage when they receive recommendations from trusted sources that brought added value from the partnership (Manohar et al., 2018). Finally, media publicity was used as an amplifier for recruitment. Utilising press releases and social media campaigns spread the word about the workshop series to a broader audience. This exposure can attract participants who may not have been reached through direct emails or personal networks. Additionally, media coverage may have lent credibility and legitimacy to the programme, making it more appealing to potential participants who value authoritative sources and endorsements.

Participants wishing to take part completed a simple Google Form, making it convenient for interested individuals and communities to express an interest in the programme. All who completed the form were eligible for selection and a random selection (based on the capacity to deliver) were chosen. Those that were not offered the programme in any one cycle would be contacted and invited to apply again for any future cycles.

3.4.4. Survey Design and Implementation

As the programme development was part of a research study, the inclusion of survey materials for participants was essential. As the programme developed, so too has the survey. The initial survey that was used with the pilot programme is included in Appendix 3. This was completed by participants once before the workshops had commenced and then once post workshop. There was also a follow up survey 6 months post workshop.

Having initially completed Phase 1 of this study that focused on evaluation and evaluation materials, the questions included on the surveys were carefully selected in hopes of establishing the impact that participation had on the people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour around their place and community stewardship. Using a combination of closed and open questions, participants shared their views on awareness of local initiatives, challenges and benefits associated with place-based learning and community stewardship. These were completed online for those that did their workshops online and on paper by those that did their workshops in person. Following analysis of the surveys completed during the pilot phase, and in conjunction with logistical considerations around the time required to complete surveys, and the level of understanding amongst some participants, it was decided to shorten and simplify the survey and to only complete one post programme survey that still included an opportunity

for participants to provide responses for their views and knowledge pre programme. This survey will be used going forward for evaluation of all Heritage Keepers cycles. This finding is considered in Article 1 in terms of the methods for evaluation and how they are applied practically. It also reflects the iterative nature of an embedded research project that can respond to the changing needs and dynamics within the research context as they occur.

The following Table 3.4 outlines the number of participants and survey responses received for each workshop cycle to date.

Timeframe	Format	Participant numbers	Survey responses
February to April 2021	Exploring Place	The programme was delivered 3 times; once to a community of circumstance, once to a geographic community and once to a combination of the three. Total Participants: 26	Pre Programme: 21 Post Programme: 15 Six Month Post Programme: 10
January to June 2022	Heritage Keepers	5 x Primary Schools (4 in person & 1 online) – 119 participants. 4 x Secondary Schools (3 in person & 1 online) – 73 participants. 10 x Community Groups (3 in person & 7 online) – 64 participants. Facilitators/Educators (25 in person & 9 online) – 34 participants. Total participants: 290	Pre Programme: 252 Post Programme: 138 Six Month Post Programme: NA
January to July 2023	Heritage Keepers	21 primary schools (11 in person, 10 online) – 541 participants. 1 Youthreach group (online) – 5 participants. 16 community adult groups (online) – 94 participants. Total Participants: 640	Post programme: 249

Table 3.4 Number of participants and survey responses received for each workshop cycle

3.4.5. Data Analysis

To analyse the data comprehensively, a mixed-method approach was employed. Quantitative data, derived from Likert scale responses, were graphically represented using bar charts. This visualisation facilitated a direct comparison of participants' pre- and post- Heritage Keepers responses, allowing observation of any notable shifts in reported emotions, knowledge, and behaviours related to heritage, community, and the environment. There was no statistical analysis beyond basic descriptive percentages conducted on the quantitative data available.

Concurrently, qualitative data were meticulously examined and thematically analysed through iterative coding, employing the methods of Braun et al. (2016) and the constant comparative method as delineated by Fram (2013). This involved several steps:

1. Initial reading and coding: The data was imported into an Excel file and each question was given an individual sheet. All of the responses were then included on the relevant sheet. Each discrete data item (e.g., open-ended survey response) was then read thoroughly. Initial codes were assigned and written on the sheet beside each data item. These initial codes summarised the content, focusing on capturing the essence of each response. For example, the response, “yes....by encouraging participants to try something similar in their own communities...eg a heritage walk” which was given to the question, “Are there ways the programme(s) you participated in could have a greater impact on community stewardship?” was coded initially as “Encouraging replication in own community”.
2. Refinement of codes: These initial codes were continuously refined and grouped to create broader categories and concepts. For example, codes such as “Learning about monuments”, “Finding out something about a castle” and “Discovering information on ringforts”, could all be grouped into a “Learning about built heritage”. This process was iterative, involving constant comparison of new data with existing codes to ensure consistency and relevance. This also involved taking time away from the data and returning to it to reassess codes and groupings. A sample of the data and refined codes is included in Figure 3.1 below.
3. Development of themes: As categories and concepts were refined, patterns and themes began to emerge. Each individual question was coded in this way so that responses could be analysed in relation to each. For example, while a group of codes could emerge around learning about specific elements of a place or the programme, the overall theme which could be assigned to all was “Learning”.
4. Holistic Analysis: After coding individual questions, the data were all analysed as one, to provide an overview of the themes that emerged. This holistic approach helped in understanding the overarching patterns and connections within the dataset.

	A	B	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	ID	Year	Data type	Data source	Data	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	
865	864 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	I enjoyed the fieldtrip and have a better understanding of important it is to save the landscape.	Enjoyable/fun	Doing/helping/caring for place		
866	865 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	I enjoyed the fieldtrip. I have become more aware of my surroundings and the area I live in. This place is filled with beauty and meaning.	Enjoyable/fun	Outdoor (rain/cold)	Appreciation for their place	
867	866 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	I think that we have to do more to protect our area in any way we can	Doing/helping/caring for place			
868	867 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	The trip has taught me about how the Burren has so much culture. I also learned how the smallest things that you might not even notice can change the environment	Learning/wanting to learn/not knowing much beforehand			
869	868 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	I liked it. I enjoyed the activities and I liked the nature side. Could have had a few more activities.	Enjoyable/fun	Activities		
870	869 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	I really liked the walk and animals, discover new place. I really enjoy the day the smells of the place, etc. It made me appreciate my local place more with all its history.	Outdoor (rain/cold)	Appreciation for their place		
871	870 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	It changed my understanding of places especially places like the Burren that need our help to be protected. I feel the activities were very interesting in the regard of making you use your senses in areas which you wouldn't have before.	Change after the programme	Activities		
872	871 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	It has made me more aware of my senses and it has made me question different aspects of place.	Senses			
873	872 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	The only thing that changed on me is that we have to maintain the environment, protect it.	Doing/helping/caring for place	Conservation/Respect		
874	873 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	Not really				
875	874 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form	It was very informative and the people had a lot of knowledge about the Burren. It changed the way I think about the Burren, how we treat the environment and we might take it for granted. I learned you should respect the natural habitat.	Change after the programme	Conservation/Respect		
876	875 ÁBS, Participant, 2018	2018	FEP	Fieldtrip Form		Learning/wanting to learn/not knowing much beforehand	Change after the		
877					It was interesting and the information was good. I like in a rural area because it				

Figure 3.1 Sample of data coding

There are a number of reasons for choosing this methodology, first because it allows for flexibility to adapt the process as new data is collected, enabling iterative refining of codes. This flexibility enabled continuous refining of codes, ensuring they remained relevant and accurate. Secondly, it allows for themes and findings to emerge from the data rather than being assumed in advance, thus enhancing the authenticity and reliability of the results. In the context of this study, the third benefit was the iterative nature allowing for reflexivity, prompting the researcher to critically reflect on their assumptions, biases and interpretation throughout the analysis process. This method enabled a thorough and systematic exploration of the data, affording the opportunity to identify emerging themes.

Moreover, since this PhD encompassed the publication of multiple peer-reviewed papers, the timelines, objectives, and themes for each publication, along with the relevant feedback from their respective peer-review processes, inevitably influenced, shaped, and directed the ongoing data analysis process. The ensuing discussion of the evaluation results centered on assessing whether the programme achieved its intended outcomes, thus guiding the evaluation process.

3.5. Burrenbeo Facilitator Focus Groups

The Burrenbeo programme facilitators contributed their feedback during a semi-structured focus group session, which was conducted with four key staff members involved in the facilitation of the programme. This session took place in May 2022 and was designed to gather qualitative insights regarding the programme's effectiveness. The focus group approach allowed participants to openly share their experiences, facilitating a collaborative discussion on both the strengths and areas for improvement in the programme (Cameron, 2005).

The focus group followed a semi-structured format. There were some topics for discussion circulated in advance. These included; workshop content, delivery method (facilitator training, online or in person), programme administration and next steps. This ensured that key themes were addressed while also allowing for the exploration of emergent topics raised by the staff. Data collected from this session focused on identifying elements of the programme that were perceived to be successful, such as participant engagement and learning outcomes, as well as challenges or aspects that were less effective, including logistical hurdles or gaps in resource provision. This feedback was noted to inform future programme iterations and to enhance the programmes overall impact.

3.6. Limitations and Validity

Several limitations were encountered during the course of this research project, that warrant acknowledgment to maintain transparency and rigor. Participant attrition in terms of survey responses was one notable challenge; efforts were made to collect surveys from all participants; however, this proved to be unachievable. Additionally, as the researcher played the role of an insider researcher, there was a risk of bias stemming from their close involvement with the subject matter and participants, potentially affecting data collection and interpretation.

To mitigate these limitations and bolster the validity of the results, several steps were undertaken. Firstly, efforts were made to maximise the number of survey responses received by regularly reminding participants that this was a requirement. The survey itself was also simplified and shortened to make it easier for participants to complete. Originally participants were asked to complete 19 questions, of that six were open questions and 13 involved closed responses (but within that some had up to nine different items that they had to indicate their agreement on a Likert scale). When modified, the survey comprised 13 questions, where three were open questions and the remaining 10 involved closed responses. The decision to modify was based on the analysis of the original surveys and a sense that some of the questions were repetitive or did not add significantly to the data available on the programme.

Strategies were implemented to address the potential for an insider researcher's bias, including practicing reflexivity and maintaining an open dialogue with colleagues for peer debriefing. Peer debriefing involved continuously seeking feedback from colleagues who were involved in supporting delivery of the Heritage Keepers programme. It provided a form of quality assurance and helped to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of research findings. It also allowed for changes to be considered and made if required. This is a central element of the findings in relation to the Heritage Keepers programme as all those who were involved in development and delivery were included in focus group sessions in both the planning and post programme stages. These measures collectively aimed to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the research results while addressing the identified limitations.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by Research Ethics Committee of the University of Galway, Ireland (ref 18-Dec-02).

Ethical considerations relating to participant consent, privacy, and confidentiality were important considerations throughout the workshop series. Firstly, informed consent was obtained from all workshop participants. Participants were provided with comprehensive information about the objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the workshops. They were explicitly informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw at any time without consequence. The consent form which Exploring Place participants completed is included as Appendix 4.

To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, measures were implemented to anonymise their responses and discussions when analysing their feedback. Discussions within the workshops were treated as confidential, and participants were reminded not to share personal stories or experiences outside the group.

Ensuring participants' well-being was a key ethical priority throughout the workshop series. Acknowledging that differences of opinion around some topics were likely, facilitators were trained to create a safe and respectful environment where participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. Participants were at all times encouraged to be open to new viewpoints, this is actually something that enhances a place-based or stewardship approach generally as it allows participants to consider why other members of their community may or may not do or want certain things. While the focus of this study does not explicitly relate to gender (and minimal non-compulsory demographics were collected via the surveys), it should be noted that in the initial workshop cohort, there was exactly half male and half female participants.

Given that the data used to create the feedback archive were historic, there was not approval given for its use in this context. However, the data had been submitted by respondents on the understanding that it was to provide feedback to Burrenbeo on whichever programme they had been a participant on. The data were anonymous and did not contain any identifying or sensitive data. The data were retained in compliance with the Burrenbeo GDPR obligations.

3.8. Researcher Positionality

Positionality is a critical aspect of research, shaping the way researchers perceive and engage with their subjects and their research environments. As an insider researcher (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) this has added importance as I actively participate in and belong to the community and context being studied. This insider perspective offers a deep understanding that extends beyond mere observation, allowing me to comprehend the intricacies, nuances, and lived experiences of the communities and Burrenbeo Trust as an organisation. This involvement, however, also implies that I bring my own subjectivity and biases into the research process. It becomes imperative to maintain self-awareness and reflexivity to navigate these dual roles effectively and mitigate potential biases. There is an additional dimension at play here as an employee of the organisation that is part funding the research. While my position provided me privilege in access to organisational resources and knowledge, facilitating

participant recruitment and data collection, there are also considerations around power dynamics and conflicts of interest. For example, when approaching participants for workshops, many had a familiarity with Burrenbeo and the work of the organisation. On the other hand, when answerable to the organisation's Board of Directors, I had to ensure that my research would not impinge on the day-to-day business of the organisation.

Furthermore, Harré's (2019) emphasis on "skin in the game" and a "compelling sense of personal recognition" (p. 84) is particularly relevant in the context of community research. Being deeply committed to the community and its well-being goes beyond the detached researcher's objective stance. It fosters a sense of shared purpose, that can lead to more authentic relationships with community members and a deeper understanding of their needs and aspirations. However, it also necessitates ethical considerations and a commitment to ensure that the research serves the community's interests and empowers its members.

In the context of this practitioner research study, my positionality as the researcher assumes a pivotal role. It is imperative to delineate the underlying values and beliefs that I bring to this study, as they serve as the foundational framework influencing the approach taken and the trajectory of the research. Embracing this role has necessitated a significant shift in my identity, transforming me from a practitioner with a primarily action-oriented role to one characterised by heightened reflexivity and a greater emphasis on comprehending the broader impact of my work. The multifaceted interplay between my personal experiences, values, and the socio-cultural milieu that I am embedded in plays a nuanced role in shaping this research endeavour.

My engagement with place-based learning began in my formative years, exploring the natural wonders around my family's home, further cultivated during my undergraduate studies in Botany at the University of Galway. The allure of Burren field trips left an indelible mark on my passion for natural sciences and the significance of local landscapes. This academic trajectory eventually led me to pursue a master's degree in Science Communication, driven by a belief in conveying the narratives of places and their ecological significance to wider audiences.

Subsequently, my career path aligned with my interests in environmental education with organisations such as Eco-Unesco and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, engaging young people with their natural heritage. In 2012, a pivotal opportunity arose to join Burrenbeo Trust, where I initially assumed the role of Communications Officer. Over the years, I became deeply involved in all facets of the Trust's work, evolving into my current position as Coordinator. My participation in the 2012 Learning Landscape Symposium coordinated by Burrenbeo and featuring David Sobel, a seminal figure in place-based education, consolidated my understanding of place-based learning's holistic approach.

As my role at Burrenbeo gradually shifted toward programme delivery, I pursued a Master's degree in Education at the University of Galway in 2016, focusing on the potential for place-based learning in Irish primary schools from teachers' perspectives. This endeavour introduced me to practitioner research, a journey I found intellectually invigorating, as it allowed me to

delve into topics with direct applicability to my practice. It was in 2018, upon encountering the Irish Research Council's employment-based postgraduate scheme, that I recognised the potential to dedicate time to the exploration of topics of personal interest that could also substantially benefit the organisation and its stakeholders.

In the context of a small non-governmental organisation like Burrenbeo, action often overshadows reflection. This research process has highlighted the importance of reflection, particularly in evaluation. Moreover, during my tenure at Burrenbeo, the global imperative for action on issues related to biodiversity loss and climate change has escalated. These issues resonate personally, as Burrenbeo has shifted from a local to a national focus, recognising the growing demand for its initiatives. This shift underscores the need for meaningful change through this research journey.

The theoretical frameworks which inform this work, social constructivism and pragmatism have also significantly informed and driven this project. Social constructivism emphasises the role of societal interactions in shaping knowledge while pragmatism focuses on practical implications, ensuring the research's real-world applicability. These intersecting approaches enhance the analysis's depth and breadth, offering a comprehensive understanding that is both theoretically sound and practically meaningful.

Engagement in the traditional journal publication process, where a minimum of two discipline-specific blind peer reviewers assess submitted draft manuscripts, was an enriching, and valuable process, upon reflection. This process contributes to the advancement of research and elevates the overall quality of study outcomes. In the case of each of the three published articles, the feedback received from the review process was consistently constructive, often providing specific insights regarding crucial aspects of the research process undertaken or yet to come, as well as particular arguments presented. At times, the feedback proved particularly helpful in guiding me towards additional significant existing research or related literature, always delivered within the context of the reviewers' expert understanding of the potential impact of the research within a given field or target audience.

Working with Professor Frances Fahy and Dr. Kathy Reilly, who have aligned research interests in geography, society, sustainability and place, has been invaluable. Their guidance, from conceptualisation to the current research stage, has significantly influenced the project's direction.

In this narrative, the researcher's reflexivity is crucial, acknowledging the interplay between personal experiences, values, and the broader socio-cultural context. This reflexivity shapes the research process and influences participants' perceptions and the construction of research outcomes (Holmes, 2021). Consequently, it underscores the need to uphold this reflexivity throughout the research journey.

In essence, the positionality of an embedded, insider researcher involves a delicate balance between immersion, subjectivity and empathy. This dynamic role can yield rich and nuanced

insights but also demands a heightened ethical responsibility to ensure that research maintains objectivity.

3.9. Conclusion

In this chapter, the study's purpose, research design, phases, data collection, analysis, limitations, and ethical considerations have been comprehensively presented. The core aim of this study is to explore the potential of a place-based learning programme to foster community stewardship. The central research questions have been outlined, guiding the research towards addressing key aspects of this inquiry.

The research design follows practitioner-led research, positioning the researcher to investigate their own practice to enhance both their work and the programmes they deliver. This approach aligns with knowledge mobilisation, emphasising the application of research findings in practice. The model proposed by Lightowler et al. (2018) has been adopted to facilitate meaningful knowledge mobilisation through practitioner research, ensuring a holistic outcome.

The chapter also examines the researcher's positionality and their journey into place-based learning. This autoethnographic reflection highlights the researcher's personal experiences, values, and the socio-cultural context that inform their work. The researcher's role as an insider is recognised, emphasising the need for self-awareness and reflexivity to navigate this dual position effectively.

In summary, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study's design, methodology, and ethical considerations, setting the stage for the subsequent presentation of findings and their implications in the following chapters.

4. Article 1 – Bird, Á., Fahy, F. and Reilly, K., 2022. Making evaluation work for the practitioner evaluator: experience from the field of environmental education. *Environmental Education Research*, 28(5), pp.715-734.

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Making evaluation work for the practitioner evaluator: experience from the field of environmental education

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on work from environmental education, evaluation, and practitioner research, this paper presents a discussion of programme evaluation practices from the practitioner's perspective. This discussion is informed by a meta-evaluation conducted on ten-years (2008–2018) of data collected from a suite of place-based learning programmes delivered by a charity in Ireland. Analysis of the data available allowed for an evaluation of the programmes in question, and these were then further analysed to provide the meta-evaluation. Key findings and discussions from the analysis include the impact of time constraints on evaluation; evaluation as part of organisational culture; strengths/weaknesses of evaluations led by practitioner evaluators; and opportunities provided by meta-evaluation in directing organisational change. This paper serves as a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners as it provides a framework to support future evaluations led by practitioner evaluators.

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impact measurement

Introduction

Programme evaluation in the context of a disconnect between practitioners and academic researchers presents challenging and complex issues. The knowledge or research implementation gap is a topic widely discussed in relation to conservation (Cadotte, Jones, and Newton 2020) and there have been calls in environmental education research for a greater flow of practical information between research and practice communities (Ardoin, Clark, and Kelsey 2013). The challenging practitioner evaluator context reflects the lack of access to practical literature, coupled with a lack of time to engage and use available resources and has resulted in an ad hoc approach to evaluation to date. This paper unpacks these areas of evaluation, practice and research to provide insight at their point of intersection. Questions around the reflective perspectives of practitioners and the role they play in research are central to this discussion. Based on the experience of conducting a meta-evaluation on a suite of environmental education programmes in the Burren in the west of Ireland, this paper provides a practitioner researcher's perspective on programme evaluation and monitoring in a small organisation. When considered in the context of literature in this field, these perspectives provide an insight to the complexities of evaluations led by practitioner evaluators and how this relates to practice in environmental education.

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Figure 4.1 Cover page of Article 1

Abstract

Drawing on work from environmental education, evaluation, and practitioner research, this paper presents a discussion of programme evaluation practices from the practitioner's perspective. This discussion is informed by a meta-evaluation conducted on ten-years (2008–2018) of data collected from a suite of place-based learning programmes delivered by a charity in Ireland. Analysis of the data available allowed for an evaluation of the programmes in question, and these were then further analysed to provide the meta-evaluation. Key findings and discussions from the analysis include the impact of time constraints on evaluation; evaluation as part of organisational culture; strengths/weaknesses of evaluations led by practitioner evaluators; and opportunities provided by meta-evaluation in directing organisational change. This paper serves as a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners as it provides a framework to support future evaluations led by practitioner evaluators

Keywords

Evaluation; practitioner research; meta-evaluation; place-based learning; impact measurement

4.1. Introduction

Programme evaluation in the context of a disconnect between practitioners and academic researchers presents challenging and complex issues. The knowledge or research implementation gap is a topic widely discussed in relation to conservation (Cadotte, Jones, and Newton 2020) and there have been calls in environmental education research for a greater flow of practical information between research and practice communities (Ardoin, Clark, and Kelsey 2013). The challenging practitioner evaluator context reflects the lack of access to practical literature, coupled with a lack of time to engage and use available resources and has resulted in an ad hoc approach to evaluation to date. This paper unpacks these areas of evaluation, practice and research to provide insight at their point of intersection. Questions around the reflective perspectives of practitioners and the role they play in research are central to this discussion. Based on the experience of conducting a meta-evaluation on a suite of environmental education programmes in the Burren in the west of Ireland, this paper provides a practitioner researcher's perspective on programme evaluation and monitoring in a small organisation. When considered in the context of literature in this field, these perspectives provide an insight to the complexities of evaluations led by practitioner evaluators and how this relates to practice in environmental education

While drawing from a wide range of concepts, the central objectives of this paper are multiple; we explore the challenges and opportunities associated with evaluations led by practitioner evaluators; and the potential of long term meta-evaluations. For the purpose of this paper meta-evaluation is described as an 'evaluation of evaluations' (Scriven 1991, p. 228). The paper outlines an analysis of extensive participant evaluation data collected over a ten-year period, in addition to a critique of evaluation practices within

the study organisation delivering a variety of environmental education programmes. Registered as a charitable trust since 2008, the study organisation, Burrenbeo Trust (BBT), has been involved in the development and delivery of a suite of community place-based learning programmes. This paper essentially presents an iterative process synthesising ten-years of BBT programme evaluation data to develop a reflective meta-evaluation focusing on, and learning from, how both the practitioner and the organisation evaluates.

4.2. The role of evaluation

In the context of this paper relevant literature on evaluation synthesises contributions relating to environmental education and evaluations led by practitioner evaluators. Patton (2002) describes evaluation as the collection of information about programme activities, characteristics and outcomes to assess the value of such programmes and make improvements as required. While the definition of evaluation might not be universally agreed, it generally is taken to involve the collection and analysis of data in order to either determine the degree to which programme objectives have been achieved or to make decisions regarding programming into the future. It is of course conceivable that an evaluation could provide answers to both these questions—depending on the evaluation design and interests of the evaluator. For organisations, there may be additional reasons for carrying out evaluations such as meeting the requirement of funders, assessing the quality of programmes and informing future decisions for the organisation (West 2015). However, for some organisations, evaluation, why and if it happens, may be a challenge. The burden of proving what they are doing is working (and what that means) can be immense.

There are specific challenges associated with evaluation in environmental education; these include the interdisciplinary nature of the work and diverse operational contexts. Carleton-Hug and Hug (2010) outline some of the main challenges. These include a lack of clear objectives or structure in some programmes; programmes having more long term aims; and the challenges around establishing causation. Despite these challenges, there are numerous publications evaluating the outcome of a wide range of environmental education programmes (Ardoin et al. 2018; Ardoin, Bowers, and Gaillard 2020; Stern, Powell, and Hill 2014). In most cases the evaluations included in the literature have been carried out by academic researchers. Alongside this, numerous calls have been made for further research into the evaluation practices of education practitioners (Henry and Mark 2003); with West (2015) acknowledging that even less is known about evaluation practices within environmental education. Fien, Scott, and Tilbury (2001) speak to the lack of a culture of evaluation in environmental education and the potential implications of this in terms of organisational or programme objectives and methods (see also Keene and Blumstein 2010; Fleming and Easton 2010). Of the studies that have been conducted to review evaluation in environmental education, the results indicate that evaluation practices could be improved (Fien, Scott, and Tilbury 2001). There are also papers providing insight to possible improvements that could be

implemented in the methods used for evaluation of environmental education programmes (e.g. Norland 2005; Patton 2008). The context of this paper then, provides a meta-evaluation of environmental education programmes delivered by the study organisation, and addresses some of the calls made throughout this body of literature.

A further recurrent theme in this literature represents the disconnect between academic or theoretical evaluation research and practitioners, with ongoing debate around the benefits of so called ‘expert’ external evaluators. In this regard, academic research on professional evaluation has been well documented; by comparison, there remains relatively little work on evaluations carried out by practitioner researchers. Smith (1993) addresses this directly arguing that theorists often work on abstract conceptual ideas without reference to how (or even if) these theories can be utilised by practitioners. In practice, for many individuals delivering programmes, evaluations, if completed, are done by ‘practitioner evaluators’ where they are responsible for both delivery and evaluation of the work (Whitehall, Hill, and Koehler 2012). The level of practitioner involvement in evaluation varies from design input, administration, and analysis to merely administering an evaluation developed by someone else (Donaldson, Gooler, and Scriven 2002). When it occurs, the benefits of evaluations led by practitioner evaluators include: practitioners being able to include information on context; their having a comprehensive understanding of the programmes; the possibility of it being more practical, efficient and cost effective; and finally, the practitioner may already have a familiar relationship with the participants (2017). West’s (2015) research with environmental educators found some reported that the results of their evaluations were not really used. As well as the questions and concerns this might pose for the educators, West also outlines the possible ethical problems associated with collecting but not using data. Mertens (2017) asserts that evaluation is not worth doing unless someone uses it. This is interesting when considered in conjunction with Greene’s (2012) contention that individual practitioners, while competent in their evaluations, may not have the capacity to promote evaluation culture in their organisations. Similarly, Perrin (2012) outlines the need for the whole organisation to engage with evaluation and think about impact and improvements—acting on the results of any evaluations completed.

For the practitioner who wants to engage with programme evaluation, there are numerous online courses, publications and guidelines developed to provide support for these activities. These include courses such as the ‘Applied Environmental Education Programme Evaluation’ (Friedman et al. 2008), and the online resource ‘My Environmental Education Evaluation Resource Assistant’ (Zint 2010). Guidelines in this area include the Nonformal Environmental Education Programmes: Guidelines for Excellence (NAAEE 2004), the Framework for Evaluating Impacts of Informal Science Education Projects developed by the National Science Foundation in the US (Liddy and Gallwey 2020), and in Ireland the Irish Development Education Association’s Using Results-Based Approaches in Development Education Settings: A Practical Toolkit (IDEA 2019). However, practitioners may not be aware of such resources, or in the instance that they are aware, may not have sufficient time to implement the principles of such evaluation

activities (for example the Applied Environmental Education Programme Evaluation course requires ten hours work per week over a twelve-week period). Equally, these various evaluation methodologies are not without critique and it is important to ensure that appropriate methods are being used to truly reflect the programmes under evaluation. Monroe et al. (2005) also contend there are alternatives to formal training in building evaluation capacity such as mentoring, partnering, networking, and collaborating with colleagues.

Facilitating improved evaluation practices in environmental education could be achieved through evaluation capacity building. Fleming and Easton (2010) discuss the lack of reference to evaluation capacity building in environmental education literature and argue that this is badly needed, evidenced in their view by the lack of environmental education evaluations and the poor quality of those that exist. They go on to discuss the use of methods such as randomised control trials, which were considered optimal in 1960s American evaluations. The argument was that this approach gave evaluators information on inputs, outputs, outcomes and how they were related. One reason for carrying out these approaches was to try to ascertain what programmes worked best so this information could then be used to inform future programmes and funding-bids. However, critics of these approaches outline how they were very expensive and were unable to provide definitive answers due to the difficulty in establishing causation. The difficulty around establishing causation is something also discussed by Rossi and Williams (1972) in their seminal publication, where they outline how the lack of clearly defined outcomes in advance of a programme leads to difficulties in establishing causation afterwards. They describe the difficulty in establishing whether changes are happening due to specific programmes or as a result of other events happening in society more generally. Where pro-programmes aim to impact people's behaviour and attitudes rather than simply impart knowledge, questions around establishing causation are particularly problematic and something regularly encountered in the study organisation, Burrenbeo Trust.

As was the experience of the primary researcher prior to this research, the practitioner engaged in evaluation may unknowingly be following the Kirkpatrick methodology (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2006). This frequently cited evaluation methodology firstly emphasises the importance of establishing how success is to be determined in an evaluation. The categories used by Kirkpatrick are represented by four levels: Reaction, Learning, Behaviour, and Results (ibid). These evaluation categories can be explained as follows: Reaction evaluation is a measure of how well the participants liked a programme; Learning evaluation is concerned with the changes participants have in learning or awareness; Behaviour evaluation looks to assess participants' behaviours after a programme; and Results evaluation measures tangible long-term impacts (ibid). For organisations such as Burrenbeo Trust, the findings from 'results' and 'behaviour' evaluation are particularly useful for measuring programme impacts. However, these evaluations are more difficult and time consuming.

While the methodology described above may still hold some relevance in practice, there has since been a movement towards the use of logic models in informing evaluation. Knowlton and Phillips (2013) describe two types of logic models: theory of change and programme. While the level of detail is different depending on the type (with programme models including more elements than theory of change) they present similar ideas. Theory of change models outline how you believe change occurs, while programme models include details on the resources, activities, outputs and outcomes involved in the process. They go on to explain how they can be used to support not only evaluation but also programme design, planning, communication and learning. The models are used to graphically describe planned action and the expected result. In evaluation, for organisations such as Burrenbeo Trust logic models could provide a framework through which to evaluate, as Boulmetis and Dutwin (2011) explain they provide an outline of what staff think will happen before, during and after a programme and these assumptions can then be tested through data collection.

In a 2004 review of research on outdoor learning, Rickinson et al. discuss the inherent difficulties attached to evaluating the benefits of fieldtrips and outdoor learning. Equally, the complexities of long-term evaluations can be too much for practitioners who may only spend a short time with participants (West 2015). Some of the reasons for these difficulties, confirmed by the practitioners in West's study, are time constraints, costs and logistics around contact with participants. As asserted by West, practitioners are often focused on Kirkpatrick (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2006) style 'reaction' evaluations. The challenge lies in trying to measure long-term actions or change as opposed to more short-time 'reaction' evaluations (Perrin 2012). Fien, Scott, and Tilbury (2001) also speak to the issues around measuring long-term impacts under pressure from stakeholders who require short- to medium-term progress. A significant impact of the possible disengagement with evaluation theory could result in a conflating of 'data collection' and 'evaluation' (West 2015). West goes on to highlight how many methods of data collection employed by practitioners would not be deemed appropriate by evaluators. Essentially, the issue arises as the methods deemed appropriate, and the level of evaluation required (particularly in relation to longer-term evaluations) are just not practical for practitioners to carry out themselves (West 2015).

Challenges can also arise as evaluations may be planned after a programme has been completed. This can mean that the necessary baseline data, or outcome statements, are not available. Without this necessary data measuring impact and/or attributing it to the programme is problematic (Stern, Powell, and Hill 2014). This is a concern if a meta-evaluation approach, such as that employed in this study, is to be taken. Further questions are raised by Rossi and Williams (1972) in evaluating social programmes as transformation is often focused on autonomous individuals rather than an organisation or institution.

In a 2013 report for the UK based Evaluating Low Carbon Communities (EvALOC) research project, Mayne et al. argued that organisations are focused on action and so

to justify the time used for evaluation it needed to provide multiple benefits for the organisation. They contended that evaluation must provide opportunities for reflection and future development but also deliver data that uncovered the impact of an organisation. Following a similar theme, in their 2010 paper Fleming and Easton outline the challenge of allocating sufficient time to conducting appropriate evaluations. In this regard, measuring participant numbers or post programme reaction evaluation is relatively easy; measuring the elements that led to success of programmes and their impact is difficult and requires more time. Maintaining a simple record of participant numbers provides immediate data. However, long term studies measuring the impact of the programme on participants' behaviours, attitudes or knowledge are considerably more complex and time consuming. Such evaluation often also requires specific expertise and knowledge on the part of the evaluator, and as already outlined this is not always available to practitioners. In a review of 66 articles, Stern, Powell, and Hill (2014) found that the specific characteristics of programmes that resulted in the observed outcomes were rarely articulated. They questioned whether more evaluation was being conducted on knowledge rather than on behaviours and attitudes. They found that knowledge gain remains a central focus of the environmental education evaluation field. However, as Fien, Scott, and Tilbury (2001) outline, while it may be easier to measure an output or outcome than impact, there are connections between the three as the long term impact of a programme can be influenced by successful shorter term outcomes.

Evaluations can provide practitioners and organisations with very valuable information. If appropriate methodologies are utilised, sufficient time is available and a clear understanding of what is to be evaluated is in place, evaluations can inform future practice and provide evidence for stakeholders. With environmental education programmes, the benefits of evaluation may be on two levels—the outcome for the participant in terms of knowledge and attitude, but equally, the potential impact on environmental quality as a result of the programme (Scriven 1991, p. 228). Therefore, it should be borne in mind that programme evaluations are concerned with values, as judgements are made about quality and worth (*ibid.*). Simultaneously, the important issue of who is asking the questions, about what and of whom, mean that the interests of a certain cohort may be advanced over others through the evaluation process (*ibid.*). Publishing and sharing of research into outcomes of environmental education would be useful for practitioners looking to answer funder's questions about long-term outcomes from their programmes (West 2015). This speaks to the question raised by Rossi and Williams around indicators. Is it possible or beneficial to have agreed indicators against which programmes could be evaluated, allowing for comparison between programmes? The challenges and opportunities outlined here were all considerations in the undertaking of the meta-evaluation that informs this paper which strives to provide practical guidance to support evaluative practices within the field of environmental education research.

4.3. Evaluation context

4.3.1. Study organisation

The study organisation, Burrenbeo Trust is an independent membership charity focused on connecting people with place and facilitating people's understanding of their role in caring for such places. The organisation has been registered as a charitable trust since 2008 and is primarily involved in the development and delivery of a range of community place-based learning programmes. With one full time and two part time staff members, the organisation's work programme includes education, information provision, active conservation, place-based learning and community stewardship research and advocacy around heritage, place-based learning and community conservation. Based in the flagship heritage landscape of the Burren in the west of Ireland, Burrenbeo Trust works to raise awareness of the significance of Burren and to empower and encourage local communities to act as stewards of its priceless heritage. Building on lessons learned over the past two decades, Burrenbeo Trust also advocates for 'place-based learning' across Ireland as a means through which communities can learn more about their place and their role in actively caring for it.

While the fields of environmental and outdoor education are well established in Ireland, place-based learning is still in its relative infancy; Burrenbeo Trust is the primary promoters of the approach in Ireland. Place-based education has been defined as an approach to education which uses the local community and environment as a starting point to teach the curriculum, it prioritises active learning methodologies and connects schools to the wider community (Sobel 2004). Incorporating this approach into the organisation's work in the formal education context, Burrenbeo Trust has also widened the remit and extended the place-based education approach to work outside formal education. In this context, Burrenbeo Trust developed its own working definition for this broader place-based learning concept. The organisation defines place-based learning as learning about the place, in the place and for the place, expanding on Lucas categorisation of environmental education as education in, about and/or for the environment. While there are considerable crossovers between environmental education and place-based education or learning, in the context of Burrenbeo Trust one of the primary differences is that a place-based approach encompasses the whole place; including emphasis on built, natural and cultural heritage, as well as positioning the local community at the centre of any decisions or discussions around local place. There is discussion around the idea of place-based environmental education and what this would entail—which may go some way to aligning the two approaches, which have many shared objectives (Harrison 2010). Further details on Burrenbeo Trust can be found at www.burrenbeo.com.

4.3.2. Place-based learning programmes

Burrenbeo Trust has 25 different key projects and areas of work. Of these, the programmes for which there were data and which were included in this meta-evaluation

include multi-visit formal education in primary and secondary school³ settings, training for educators (through a week-long course and a symposium), community festivals celebrating local heritage, a series of heritage walks and talks, an active conservation volunteering programme and more. To date, some additional projects focused around communications, fundraising, sponsorship, outreach or individual events do not have evaluation mechanisms in place. The study is informed by experience of coordination and delivery of the programmes outlined in Table 1 below.

³ Primary school is Irish first level education, generally attended by children from the age of 4 or 5 until 12 or 13. Secondary school is Irish second level education, attended by young people from the age of 12 or 13 until 16 to 18.

Programme	Programme overview	Frequency	Total recorded participations
Winterage weekend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekend community festival celebrating the region's farming heritage. <p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information on farming heritage and how it relates to built, natural and cultural heritage. Engage wider community on importance of local farming and farming traditions. Provide best practice examples of farming which benefits heritage. Locally led walks focused on information sharing in relation to built, natural or cultural heritage. 	2012–2018 (1 event/year)	11312
Monthly heritage walks	<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information on local built, natural and cultural heritage (either from research or practice). Provide opportunity for community to engage, network, socialise and connect through place-based learning. Community festival celebrating the region's natural heritage. 	2008–2018 (12 events/year)	4474
Burren in bloom	<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information on local built, natural and cultural heritage. Engage wider community on importance of natural heritage and how it relates to built and cultural heritage. Provide opportunity for community to engage, network, socialise and connect through place-based learning. Community talks series on elements of local built, natural and cultural heritage. 	2008–2018 (1 event/year)	4017
Tea talks	<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information on local built, natural and cultural heritage (either from research or practice). Provide opportunity for community to engage, network, socialise and connect through place-based learning. One day excursions to the region to learn about built, natural and cultural heritage. 	2008–2018 (6 events/year)	2478
School tours	<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce young people to built, natural and cultural heritage. Share skills for participants to continue learning in their own setting. Encourage critical thinking around local heritage. 9 week multi-visit school programme delivered by practitioner on school grounds sharing skills and resources to engage with local built, natural and cultural heritage. Culminates in an action project. 	2013–2018 (multiple events/year)	1682
Áitbheo ^a primary school programme	<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce young people to built, natural and cultural heritage. Share skills for participants to continue learning in their own setting. Encourage critical thinking around local heritage. Facilitate planning and execution of local place-based actions. Weekend event bringing together place-based educators for workshops, fieldtrips and networking opportunities. 	2008–2018 (various number of schools/year)	1446
Learning landscape symposium	<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide training for place-based educators. Provide opportunity for community to engage, network, socialise and connect through place-based learning. Provide best practice examples of place-based learning. 9 week multi-visit school programme delivered by practitioner on school grounds sharing skills and resources to engage with local built, natural and cultural heritage. Culminates in an action project. 	2012–2018 (1 event/year)	440
Áitbheo secondary school programme	<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce young people to built, natural and cultural heritage. Share skills for participants to continue learning in their own setting. Encourage critical thinking around local heritage. Facilitate planning and execution of local place-based actions. Week long course bringing together place-based educators for workshops, fieldtrips and networking opportunities. 	2013–2018 (various number of schools/year)	304
Áitbheo training	<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide training for place-based educators. Provide opportunity for community to engage, network, socialise and connect through place-based learning. Provide best practice examples of place-based learning. 	2014–2018 (1 event/year)	112

^aÁitbheo is an Irish word meaning 'living place'.

Table 4.1 Overview of place-based learning programme evaluation(s) included in the meta-evaluation.

Programmes were developed with input from a range of organisation staff, volunteers and external stakeholders (such as teachers, farmers and community members). While varying according to the specific programme parameters each follows a broad curriculum focused on engaging the participants with their local built, natural and cultural heritage. Focused on activities which facilitate participants' discovery of the layers of their place including their landscape, geology, biodiversity, archaeology, history, culture, folklore and traditions, land use practices and conservation initiatives, the programmes also encourage active citizenship behaviours in participants. The programmes all share a focus on encouraging participants to think critically on the heritage related issues which may be encountered in their place and to look to initiate local action projects addressing these issues. For the programmes delivered in formal education settings (the Áitbheo programmes as outlined above) there is an agreed curriculum which addresses all of these elements. However, in some of the more informal programmes such as the walks and talks series, the elements listed above are considered and addressed through the series as a whole rather than covering all elements in each individual event.

4.3.3. Existing evaluation procedures

The basis for this paper is a meta-evaluation undertaken on ten-years (2008–2018) of evaluations and feedback collected from the breadth of BBT's programmes. Evaluations from each programme were analysed (further details on the analysis are provided at a later point), and these analyses were then combined to provide a meta-evaluation of the programmes and by extension the overall work of the organisation for the period in question. The sources for the evaluation data are outlined in Table 2 below. Data was also kept in relation to attendance figures at events (as recorded above in Table 1).

Data was routinely collected, briefly assessed by the practitioners and then reported informally. In some instances this reporting was incorporated into report documents shared with funders. However, where no such requirement was stipulated formal reporting would generally not be completed. Records of the feedback may also be included in Team Meeting minutes, but this was intermittent. Initially, there was no defined evaluation plan for the individual pro-programmes or the organisation more generally; this was largely completed on an ad hoc basis.

In an attempt to more explicitly and systematically catalogue the impact of the Áitbheo Primary programme, research was carried out to investigate if any existing verified scale could be used for the varying data gathered, but it was found that no scale could fully cover the range of topics and activities included in the programme. The Children's Environmental Attitude and Knowledge Scale developed and validated by Leeming, Dwyer, and Bracken (1995) most closely matched the organisation's requirements and was trialled but unfortunately was found not suitable to account for the whole place approach espoused by Burrenbeo Trust. It was also time consuming to complete and

challenging for younger participants. As a result, the approach was abandoned after two years of use (2017–2018).

The ten-year time frame from 2008 to 2018 was used as 2008 marked the establishment of the organisation as a charitable trust and the study commenced in 2018. It was felt that this ten-year period would provide a sufficient span to identify broad trends and themes in the feedback. This was the first time any substantial review or analysis of feedback was conducted in the organisation. Prior to this study, as evaluation forms and informal feedback were collected post programme, these data were simply summarised in terms of whether the majority was positive or negative along with any suggestions for improvement. This only provided for very basic evaluation. In response, where feasible, and in keeping with the programme's aims and objectives, alterations were made to future iterations of programmes. Examples of changes encompassed spending more time on a particularly well-reported activity, including (or excluding) contributions based on feedback or changing the running order of modules. In a small organisation, it is perhaps unsurprising that there was no time allocated to a comprehensive evaluation, no agreed methodologies for data collection and very little emphasis on data analysis. Practitioners had autonomy in deciding how to act on the information received. At the same time, there was a growing recognition that funding bodies required greater evidence of the outcomes and impact of the work being conducted along with an organisational desire to provide evidenced input into policy. Ardoin et al. (2018) speak to this disconnect between practice and research when considering the growth in research on environmental education. They posit that because of this it is probable that practice may not reflect the most up to date findings from literature and research, impacting both practice and research, as they do not directly inform one another. This idea, specifically as it relates to evaluation will be investigated further over the course of this paper. Equally Norland (2005) outlines how those involved in non-formal education practice often have very broad and varied responsibilities and this along with a lack of formal training in evaluation can impact the practice.

Programme	Source of initial programme evaluation	Sample questions (where relevant)
Winterage weekend	Unsolicited written feedback, anecdotal conversation during or shortly after the event, staff and volunteer debriefs	
Monthly heritage walks	Unsolicited written feedback, anecdotal conversation during or shortly after the event, staff and volunteer debriefs	
Burren in bloom	Unsolicited written feedback, anecdotal conversation during or shortly after the event, staff and volunteer debriefs	
Tea talks	Unsolicited written feedback, anecdotal conversation during or shortly after the event, staff and volunteer debriefs	
School tours	Evaluation forms completed by student participants and teachers, unsolicited written feedback, anecdotal conversation during or shortly after the event, staff and volunteer debriefs	Participants: What was your favourite part of this event? Teachers: Please rate and comment on the following elements of this event. Tutors (their level of communication and engagement with the students), Content (level/pitch, range, etc.), Relevance (to curriculum), Methodology (activities used), Organisation & support. As above for School Tours
Aitbheo primary school programme	Evaluation forms completed by student participants and teachers, participant reflective journals, unsolicited written feedback, anecdotal conversation during or shortly after the event, staff and volunteer debriefs	
Learning landscape symposium	Evaluation forms completed by participants and workshop leaders, unsolicited written feedback, anecdotal conversation during or shortly after the event, staff and volunteer debriefs	Please give comments on the following: Support in the lead up to the event (any suggestions), The overall format of the event, The workshops you attended—anything you want to say (good or bad about them), Would you consider attending a similar event in the future?, Do you have any suggestions for the improvement of the event?
Aitbheo secondary school programme	Evaluation forms completed by student participants and teachers, participant reflective journals, unsolicited written feedback, anecdotal conversation during or shortly after the event, staff and volunteer debriefs	Participants: What did you like about the Aitbheo programme? What did you not like about the Aitbheo programme? What should we change if we're doing Aitbheo again? Do you think differently about the place you live? Teachers: Teachers: Please rate and comment on the following elements of this programme. Tutors (their level of communication and engagement with the students), Content (level/pitch, range, etc.), Relevance (to curriculum), Methodology (activities used), Organisation & support.
Aitbheo training	Evaluation forms completed by participants, unsolicited written feedback, anecdotal conversation during or shortly after the event, staff and volunteer debriefs	What was your favourite part of the course and why? What do you feel could be improved and how? On a scale of 1-10 how likely are you to use the content you learnt this week in your work? (1 = never, 10 = regularly) If not, why not?

Table 4.2 Sources and sample questions.

4.3.4. Researcher positionality

At this juncture it is important to acknowledge that this study forms part of an employment-based PhD project, facilitated through an employment-based research award from the Irish Research Council enabling time and attention to be given to the structure of evaluation within the organisation. This involves the practitioner holding dual roles

as employee and researcher, continuing to carry out work delivering and developing place-based learning programmes within the community while simultaneously completing a university-based research project focused on various aspects of the organisation and its programmes. Time is shared between the university and organisation setting, with mutually beneficial work programmes.

This dual role potentially poses difficulties for the researcher in addition to the common issues which can arise for doctoral researchers. In this specific context it could be argued that any negative findings in relation to Burrenbeo Trust programming could conceivably have an impact on the future career of the researcher. As Creswell (1998) outlines there is a risk that researchers can jeopardise their jobs if negative data is reported or findings reflect unfavourably on the organisation or workplace. This dual role places the researcher broadly in the insider researcher category, an additional layer of complexity along with the role of practitioner evaluator. Insider researchers are those that conduct research in and on their own organisations (Brannick and Coghlan 2007). Insider or embedded research has been considered by others who have engaged in similar studies (Rowley 2014; Wong 2009) and there are acknowledged benefits to insider research, many echoing the benefits of practitioner research, as the researcher has built up knowledge, and is developing their own area of practice as opposed to research being done ‘on’ other people’s practice (Munn-Giddings 2012). However, there is also a risk that insiders are too close to the situation under review and may therefore be unable to objectively carry out research, analysis and reporting (Brannick and Coghlan 2007). While Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2007) acknowledge that the issue of positionality exists in all research as all researchers are part of the world that is under exploration and can never be completely objective, they expand in their (2013) work in relation to insider research more particularly outlining the need for clear role negotiation and trust in situations such as that encountered by the primary researcher. Specifically in relation to evaluation, there are opposing views in terms of whether an evaluator should have knowledge and expertise in relation to the programmes under evaluation; with some arguing they should and others feeling it is better that they have no expertise in the area (Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey 1999)⁴.

Given the concerns outlined above, clear communication and boundaries were prioritised from the outset and a ‘Research and Impact Officer’ role was established on receipt of the employment-based PhD award from the Irish Research Council. This has created space for an examination of the evaluation practices of the organisation. Coupled with the findings of the meta-evaluation, which have a specific usefulness and application for the organisation, the exercise has highlighted a number of particular areas of interest around evaluations led by practitioner evaluators, meta-evaluation and the disconnect between research and practice.

⁴ These reflections around the role of PhD candidate as ‘meta-evaluator’ with academic supervisors and graduate committees reviewing their work and evaluation, are particularly interesting in light of Scriven’s (2009, p. vi) work which calls for improved forms of peer review and highlights that ‘choosing a meta-evaluator requires the same integrity that all evaluation requires’.

4.4. Materials and methods

This study provides a meta-evaluation of data collected through attendance records and feed-back forms (essentially evaluations of individual events) collected over a ten-year period (2008–2018). As outlined previously, meta-evaluation is identified as the ‘evaluation of evaluations’ (Scriven 1991, p. 228), allowing for long term analysis of evaluations as well as critique of evaluation practices. Such overarching analysis can reveal themes that may not be evident through singular evaluations and also allows for greater reflection on the part of the evaluator, an area where Henry and Mark (2003) maintain there is a lack of existing research and evidence. Questions about the relationship between evaluation theory and practice often emerge during meta-evaluations (Wellington 2000), a central consideration of this paper.

The results presented in this paper stem from quantitative and qualitative analysis conducted on the evaluations collected from participants on a suite of place-based learning programmes delivered by Burrenbeo Trust. Initially the evaluation data for each programme delivered over the ten-year period had to be compiled and inputted to a centralised spreadsheet, forming a feedback archive that could then be analysed as a meta-evaluation (essentially an analysis of the culmination of all evaluation material collected during the reporting period). This collated 1,233 items of qualitative data from hard copy records to spreadsheet. The 1,233 items range from one or two line responses to more lengthy and detailed responses providing feedback on each particular event. The qualitative data was categorised by year of participation, programme and data source. Simultaneously, a spreadsheet was created compiling the available quantitative data; this included the event year, event type and participation numbers. Participation numbers were available for two school-based education programmes, two educator training programmes, two community celebrations and one walks and talks series (details of programmes and events are included in Table 1). Previous to this work, evaluation data had not been collated by Burrenbeo Trust representatives. For example attendance figures were stored across a variety of excel spreadsheets with no real sense of the level of engagement across programmes and over time. In collating this data an overall participation figure of 26,265 emerged, totalling participants in programmes across the ten-year reporting period. While it is not possible to track specific participants and ascertain if they participated in a number of programmes over these years, we assume that there are a considerable number of repeat participants (members of the organisation in particular would participate repeatedly). A qualitative analysis was completed on these participation figures and any available demographic data. This involved categorising the events into themes according to their main topic (built, natural or cultural heritage), the month and year they occurred and attendance numbers. Comparisons were then made between the various categories to determine whether specific topics or timings were more or less popular and whether this had changed over the ten-year period in question.

The initial qualitative analysis was followed by more extensive quantitative analysis, where the feedback data was coded following the constant comparative method (Wellington 2000). This method allows in depth analysis of raw feedback data through which themes or categories could emerge from the data itself. The data was divided into ‘units of meaning’, before being grouped into corresponding categories, these categories were then further compared and combined or separated where necessary (Wellington 2000). The data for quantitative analysis consisted of 1,233 discrete data entries, including both formal feedback forms and informal feedback sent by participants via email after events. The data was coded using a mixture of gerunds and in vivo codes. Initially there were 31 categories identified within the data which were refined to create eight main categories for discussion. For example, some of the 31 categories identified included Mentioning activities; Debating; Doing not talking and Talking too much were combined to form the Keeping it Active category (discussed below). The eight categories represent predominant themes emerging from the data. Equally, it is acknowledged that the themes are not mutually exclusive but rather some of the categories speak across a number of the eight core themes. Findings from the analysis informed the meta-evaluation, comprising both an evaluation of the programmes in question and an evaluation of the existing Burrenbeo Trust internal evaluation systems⁵⁶.

4.5. Synthesis of evaluations

A meta-evaluation was carried out with a view to examining any questions around impact, why people engaged with the programmes, evidence of learning or changing views, and evidence of action taken (reflecting wider organisational aims and vision). We envisioned that findings would both inform future programming decisions and add to the evidence base relating to organisational impact. Data relating to all programmes, across all available years were analysed simultaneously, providing cumulative themes stemming from organisational programmes in their entirety, rather than focusing specifically to one or other of the programmes. Coupled with this several themes identified by literature in the field of evaluation and environmental education were reflected in the data driven analysis. Additionally, the process of undertaking this meta-evaluation resulted in a range of observations for the practitioner evaluator. The remainder of this section outlines some of these themes and findings, before considering them in relation to the literature.

The quantitative meta meta-evaluation analysis provides insight to patterns relating to event attendances, the popularity of topics, and the gender breakdown of event leaders. This information could not be surmised through the evaluation of a single event and the learnings can be used when planning future events. Patterns emerge through examination of cumulative data. Also, the attendance figures for the various programmes

⁵ Due to the data available and the constraints of this study, a number of potential areas of interest or enquiry were not possible such as how the identified themes changed over time, how the programmes changed or how individuals (and their engagement) changed over time.

⁶ Ethical approval for this study was granted by Research Ethics Committee of the National university of Ireland, Galway. The data in the feedback archive is anonymous

highlight where the largest engagement is—although it is obviously understood that this does not necessarily translate to a larger impact and is also relative to the type of event, time of year, and other factors. The establishment of a quantitative basis for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of programmes is hugely beneficial to the organisation. While seemingly obvious, practitioners are often entirely focused on practice and have little, if any, time to conduct and compile such analysis. This information has also been shared with other organisations as it may be useful in informing their programming. More broadly this information is significant in that it adds to the evidence base for future environmental education research.

Similarly, the qualitative data provides a rich context for ongoing study of the impact of this suite of programmes across the ten-years under investigation as well as providing very useful information for the organisation. Through the meta-evaluation clear themes emerged from across the cumulative programme data. While the feedback received was from a mixture of adults, young people, teachers and other heritage educators, similar themes were evident across all demographics indicating that irrespective of participant age the experience of participation was similar. The main themes identified were: keeping it active; engaging a wide audience; having fun while learning; changing views and taking action; being outdoors; having an interest in and learning about place; importance of personality; and attitude to place.

These themes were then mapped onto the outcome categories identified in the review of environmental education evaluation studies completed by Stern, Powell, and Hill (2014), who themselves commented on the similarity of categories identified in a range of other studies (Leeming et al. 1995; Rickinson et al. 2004). The categories of evaluation identified by Stern et al. include: knowledge, awareness, skills, attitudes, intentions, behaviour, and enjoyment. In their review of 119 environmental education studies, Ardoin et al. (2018) found similar broad categories that they describe as knowledge, dispositions, competencies, behaviour, personal characteristics, and multi-domain outcomes. Themes identified through this particular meta-evaluation are not mutually exclusive but are often interconnected in a myriad of ways. This is also reflected by the ‘multi-domain’ category included in the work of Ardoin et al. (2018).

4.5.1. Keeping it active

The range of data included in this category highlighted the importance of programmes employing active, inquiry-based learning methodologies. This was one of the most prominent analysis categories. This participant on the second level programme explains clearly: ‘I enjoyed how we did activities to break up the time, to keep our minds engaged and to help us understand the topic actively’ (Second level student participant, Feedback Form Entry, 2017). For those who had critical feedback, a similar theme can be identified; participants were calling for more use of activities. One participant indicates: ‘some classes were too much sitting and listening. Have less sitting, more interaction’ (Second level student participant, Feedback Form Entry, 2017).

4.5.2. Engaging a wide audience

Analysis of the data revealed that a factor in participant engagement with Burrenbeo Trust programmes was the wide range of topics covered (including built, natural and cultural heritage). Some participants reported a preference for specific topics or events over others. This resulted in broader audience participation. It was not possible to determine which of the topics (or even broad categories of built, natural or cultural heritage that are addressed by the programmes) was of most interest to the participants from the qualitative data, as there was such a broad range of topics mentioned as being enjoyable or favoured. The quantitative analysis showed that the average number of attendees at natural heritage themed walks was 37, and at talks was 39; attendances at cultural heritage events averaged 36 at walks, and 35 at talks; the built heritage walks and talks both had average attendances of 42. So while the attendances at the built heritage themed events were slightly higher, there was not a significant difference compared to cultural or natural heritage events. Equally, participants also commented on the topics that they did not like. Presumably, this may have been for a variety of reasons. Unfortunately, these reasons were not often included in the feedback. One participant on the primary level programme succinctly demonstrates this with the comment: ‘I liked learning about farming. I did not like learning about geology’ (Primary level student participant, Feedback Form Entry, 2013).

This like or dislike of specific topics included in the programmes perhaps alludes to the potential for a holistic, place-based approach to learning managing to engage a wide audience. While every participant may not enjoy, or be interested in, every element of the programme, it is hoped that there will be at least one element that they do enjoy—and that this may well be the element that facilitates their local place-based connection. Conversely, if one were to take a traditional environmental education approach, for example, there is perhaps a greater possibility of participants becoming disengaged if they do not have a specific interest in this potentially narrower approach. It is posited that this is one of the strengths of a place-based approach and that this evaluation process indicates that the diversity of topics was a factor in people’s engagement with these programmes.

4.5.3. Having fun while learning

The data analysis shows that a number of participants described their programme engagement as being fun or enjoyable. This is significant as it directly mirrors Stern, Powell, and Hill (2014) ‘Enjoyment’ category. Although an effort is made to make programmes engaging, fun was not an explicit aim while developing the various programmes. A teacher, whose primary level class participated in one of the programmes, indicates that he/she believes that ‘the children really enjoyed the whole experience’ (Primary level teacher, unsolicited Email, 2012). This was also the case for one of the adult participants on a training programme, who found the experience ‘most enjoyable with loads of interesting information and resources’ (Educator training participant,

Feedback Form Entry, 2014). As indicated, these categories are not mutually exclusive and there is crossover between the programmes being fun and employing active learning methodologies.

4.5.4. Changing views and desire for action

Participants reported changing opinions in relation to their local place, heritage and their role in conservation. This theme could be mapped on to a number of the categories identified by Stern, Powell, and Hill (2014) and Ardoin et al. (2018), including 'Behaviours' (included by both) and 'Skills' and 'Attitudes' from Stern et al. and 'Competencies' and 'Dispositions' from Ardoin et al. The changing views were also connected to a realisation of the impact of our actions on our places, evidenced in this feedback: 'I feel I have more understanding of the area and that it can be easily destroyed if we do not think about the consequences of our actions' (Second level student participant, Fieldtrip Feedback Form Entry, 2018).

A number of participants commented on the fact that they had not been paying sufficient attention to their place prior to the programme and that participating in the programme might lead them to pay more attention into the future. This is demonstrated in a quotation from a primary level participant who states: 'it's amazing how much is right in front of us but we can't see it. I want to make my place better' (Primary level student participant, Journal Entry, 2018). The concept of taking action for your place was also articulated by this second level participant: today made me think about the area and treating it better. It made me more conscious of how my actions and other people's actions affect the area we live in' (Second level student participant, Fieldtrip Feedback Form Entry, 2018).

4.5.5. Being outdoors

Another prominent theme that emerged from the analysis of the feedback archive was an emphasis on the outdoor elements of the various place-based learning programmes. Participants frequently referenced how they enjoyed being outdoors, even when, for some primary level participants, this meant only getting out into the school yard. Echoing the feedback of many, one primary level participant explained: 'I liked when we done stuff outside the classroom' (Primary level student participant, Feedback Form Entry, 2017).

4.5.6. Learning about place.

In delivering place-based learning programmes, the aim is that participants learn about their place through the process. There was widespread reporting of content learning from participants through their participation. As well as that, participants also noted that the programme had increased their interest in learning more. For some, it highlighted how little they had known prior to the programme.

The interest in the participants' place also extended to a broader interest in related themes around conservation, heritage, and the environment. This second level participant puts it clearly stating: 'I thought I knew my area very well as my parents have told me about certain monuments and places around my house. There are more historic things such as a holy well and a castle around my house that I didn't know about. I really want to find out more about these' (Second level student participant, Journal Entry, 2016).

The importance of knowing about place was referenced by some participants, evidenced by this primary level participant: 'I'm amazed with how much I didn't know about the monuments around my place—I feel it's so important to learn about it otherwise we'll lose it' (Primary level student participant, Journal Entry, 2018). For many, this extended beyond merely knowing the facts around built, natural, and cultural heritage to a more engaged appreciation for the various factors that affect places and our potential role in determining their future.

4.5.7. Importance of personality

One unexpected outcome of the meta-evaluation was the degree that specific facilitators were referenced by the participants. On occasion, the facilitators were named and, in other instances, they were referred to in relation to the topic that they had covered. There were both positive and negative references in relation to various facilitators. This participant at the symposium gave positive feedback on the facilitators they encountered: 'the workshop leaders I had selected were first class and extremely knowledgeable...the wealth of understanding and knowledge they had to share. I could have listened to each of them for days' (Symposium participant, unsolicited Email, 2012). This feedback, perhaps, indicates that the interest and ability of the facilitator plays an important role in the engagement of the participants. This could have a significant impact on the transferability of the various place-learning programmes under discussion.

4.5.8. Attitude to place

With direct comparisons to the 'Attitude' and 'Dispositions' categories identified by Stern, Powell, and Hill (2014) and Ardoin et al. (2018) respectively, the meta-evaluation indicated a trend of participants reporting a change in their attitude to place following participation on the pro-programmes in question. As will be discussed in the following section, assessing the impact of place-based learning programmes is a challenge, particularly in terms of determining the behaviours and attitudes of the participants after a programme. However, participants did report changes in their attitude through participation, as indicated by this second level participant: 'I have realised the importance of my landscape and how unique it is to this area. I'm so lucky to be surrounded by nature and the sea and I have a new found appreciation for the community and culture and landscape' (Second level student participant, Journal Entry, 2016).

There were also interesting references to programmes highlighting the connections between people and place, the impact of our actions and also the potential for people to influence what happens in their place. This symposium participant outlines these ideas when they said: ‘it reaffirmed for me the importance of the connections between people and place and of bringing back a value for empathy’ (Symposium participant, unsolicited Email, 2012). There were also very positive attitudes to place reported by a high number of participants, ‘I love my place and I hope I can help it’ (Primary level student participant, Journal Entry, 2018). Obviously, it is unclear whether this was already the case prior to the programme.

4.6. Outcomes and recommendations for the future

The process of undertaking this meta-evaluation has a number of implications for Burrenbeo Trust and similar organisations involved in environmental education. Essentially this research demonstrates the continued relevance of, in addition to building on the work of, Ardoin et al and Stern et al. The learnings that emerge from the meta-evaluation point towards the importance of evaluation in the context of environmental education and specific outcomes and recommendations are discussed in this penultimate section of the paper.

4.6.1. Defining what evaluation means for an organisation

Prior to engaging in this work, evaluation was not discussed extensively within Burrenbeo Trust, which is interesting to reflect on in light of West’s (2015) concerns around the ethical problems associated with collecting but not using data. Through undertaking the meta-evaluation and engaging with academic literature there is now a greater understanding of what evaluation is; what it is not; and how it can be best utilised by the organisation. Future practices can be implemented to enable the organisation best use the resources available to ascertain the value of the programmes being delivered and where improvements may be required. This clarity would be useful for all small organisations looking to maximise their evaluation while also being mindful of what can and cannot be achieved.

This work would not have been possible without the funding that was received to conduct the meta-evaluation. Small organisations, or individual practitioners, are focused on practice and doing, without the time or capacity to conduct long-term evaluations. It is suggested that this is one of the most significant challenges for the practitioner evaluator—should sufficient time be afforded to evaluation it would allow for enhanced, sustained and consistent evaluation practices. As time and resources are often limited, attention should be given to greater evaluation of long term programmes, or those such as the programmes offered by Burrenbeo Trust which engage people for a longer period of time—those allowing for a more longitudinal analysis.

4.6.2. Development of programme logic models and feedback mechanism

Another key outcome for Burrenbeo Trust, and equally important for any similar programmes, is the development of programme logic models. These models graphically represent the predicted programme inputs/resources, implementation/outputs, outcomes/impact, context and relationships between them. The logic models have resulted in clarity around data collection, which now focuses on the main aspects of each programme and relationships between them. These data and the subsequent analysis will help to explain how programmes work to achieve their outcomes, or occasionally why they do not achieve them. This is something now prioritised for all existing programmes and is completed at the planning stage for any subsequent programmes. This, along with the additional learning around evaluation will provide a much stronger focus for evaluations in the future.

Where a feedback mechanism currently exists, the questions asked are being revised and developed to provide greater insight into the programme, rather than the previous situation which predominately provided only for a positive or negative response. Reflecting the evaluation parameters suggested by Stern, Powell, and Hill (2014) statements on the themes of knowledge, awareness, skills, attitudes, intentions, behaviour, and enjoyment will be incorporated using Likert scale options for responses as well as addressing logistical elements such as programme delivery methods, activities, the programme materials and participant engagement.

Sample statements include:

- The instructor communicated clearly and was easy to understand.
- The instructor encouraged student participation in class.
- I could get help if I needed it.
- The programme workload and requirements were appropriate.
- The programme was organized in a way that helped me understand underlying concepts.
- The programme was well organized.
- I have learnt more than I expected.
- This programme has increased my interest in these topics.
- I believe that what I am being asked to learn in this programme is important.
- I would recommend this programme to others.

Additionally, open ended questions will provide more qualitative data such as;

- What parts of the programme helped your learning the most?
- What are one to three specific things about the programme that could be improved?

While still in development, the hope is that a standardised feedback form can be developed allowing for comparison more readily across the various programmes. As Greene (2010) outlines, programme evaluations are based on the data gathered and the

evaluation methods used. This process has resulted in the development of the evaluative capacity of the organisation, where there is a greater appreciation for the need to align activities specifically to a measurable long-term vision of the organisation (Crohn and Birnbaum 2010).

Undertaking these meta-evaluation highlighted shortcomings in the organisation's feedback and evaluation processes. This is largely down to the lack of time and consideration given to these processes. Of particular note was the lack of structured feedback mechanism for a range of the organisation's programmes (the walks and talks and community celebrations). As well as developing a greater understanding of the need for and potential of evaluation, finalising pro-programme logic models, refining and standardising feedback forms, it is also hoped that the programmes which historically were not included in collection of feedback (other than quantitatively) will be incorporated. Ideas around online feedback collection post event or distribution of physical forms at the events are being trialled.

4.6.3. Organisational change through meta-evaluation

This brings us to the overarching finding from this meta-evaluation. Despite issues and short-comings in terms of the evaluations previously conducted by the organisation in the years under investigation, once time and resources allowed for this meta-evaluation to be conducted, significant benefits could accrue. Ideally there are clear benefits for small organisations to conduct ongoing evaluation if they have the capacity, additional funding and/or specific personnel to do so. However, this study suggests that delayed evaluation (incorporating a meta-evaluation approach) can be conducted when feasible to the benefit of the organisation.

From this experience meaningful, summative evaluations need to happen regularly for them to be part of an organisation's culture. It is too much to expect individual practitioners to conduct such evaluations without support from the organisation where they work. It has been widely argued that top-level support, a culture that values evaluation and structures that support evaluation, are required for evaluation to be a feature of organisational decision-making (Crohn and Birnbaum 2010). However, it could also be argued that this study has highlighted the potential for long term meta-evaluation as an alternative where an organisational culture of evaluation is yet to emerge.

A real benefit to evaluations led by practitioner evaluators is the potential for immediate action, (i.e. formative style evaluation) evidenced throughout this study. However, this focus on immediate reactionary change may be to the detriment of more summative meta-evaluation. Monroe (2010, p. 196) acknowledges that smaller organisations, that she describes as 'nimble non-profits', have the ability to change programmes, direction, or vision more readily as a result of evaluation findings.

The threats to credibility of evaluation findings outlined by Heimlich (2010) include: assumptions of causality; projection of motivation (in relation to participant behaviour); and lack of theory. These are issues that could arise in relation to evaluations led by practitioner evaluators. In this instance, a lack of engagement with contemporary research in the field of evaluation on the part of the organisation as a whole is clearly a significant weakness. The potential for engagement brought about by this study will bring broad benefits to the evaluation practices of the organisation into the future. However, this is a single case. The issue of bridging the gap between practitioner and research is unfortunately not within the scope of this paper.

4.7. Conclusion

While the challenges associated with evaluating environmental education type projects are relatively easy to identify—realistic proposals focused on addressing these challenges are less common. Building a culture of reflective organisational learning, where evaluation is ongoing and iterative rather than merely conducted at the end of programmes (Crohn and Birnbaum 2010), could be one practical and effective approach to evaluation going forward. In relation to research on the evaluation of environmental education, calls have been made for greater measurement considering behaviour and dispositions, coupled with more longitudinal research (Ardoin et al. 2018). These considerations have been evidenced by this study, highlighting the specific issues that arise for the practitioner evaluator, while also suggesting an approach to address some of these through use of meta-evaluation.

Essentially, it comes down to a question of capacity, time, and organisational structure. As Monroe (2010) outlines, unique evaluation methods are required when trying to establish changes in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, intention and behaviour. There is no one size fits all evaluation methodology for the types of programmes conducted in environmental education. However, there is potential for development of broad indicators that could be used in evaluations, perhaps using the themes from this meta-evaluation along with those outlined by Ardoin et al. (2018) and Stern, Powell, and Hill (2014) as a starting point. Also, there is space for consideration of an approach such as Patton's (2008) model of utilisation-focused evaluation. This model requires the evaluation to be useful to the stakeholders, i.e. the participants and practitioner. Equally, this model allows for limiting factors such as time and budget.

As evidenced by this meta-evaluation, having wider, relevant access to up to date research and theory on these topics could greatly enhance the evaluation practices of practitioners. How this is achieved presents significant scope for future research in this area. Increased practitioner engagement with research in this field can only enhance the connections between research and practice, and will mean that findings can be made more accessible to practitioners. This paper serves as a valuable resource as it provides practical guidance to support evaluative practices in the future. In considering the challenges and opportunities of evaluations led by practitioner evaluators, coupled with

the difficulties posed by evaluating environmental or place-based programmes, this paper presents a nuanced overview of core issues, while providing an argument for meta-evaluation as an approach to mitigate contemporary challenges within the sector.

5. Article 2 - Bird, Á. and Reilly, K., 2023. From Local to National: Perspectives from a Community Stewardship Approach. *Irish Geography*, 56(1).

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From Local to National: Perspectives from a Community Stewardship Approach

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Abstract: This paper explores how a place-based learning programme was scaled-up from a local to national context, identifying the steps required for this to be effectively accomplished. The Heritage Keepers programme is a national place-based learning programme piloted in 2022 as part of a partnership between Burrenbeo Trust (located in County Galway in the West of Ireland) and the Heritage Council of Ireland. This paper provides details on the programme's background, evaluation and outcomes; in addition to discussing the findings regarding the scaling-up of a community stewardship approach more generally. In outlining key considerations to scaling-up a place-based learning initiative from a local to a national context, we reflect, in particular, on the relevance of the experience for other initiatives looking to do similar. In considering stewardship outcomes, the conditions through which actions were supported have particular significance. The supports provided resulted in the completion of action projects clearly displaying active stewardship practices amongst participants.

Keywords *Community stewardship, scaling-up, place-based learning, collective action*

Introduction

This paper engages discussion on the intersections between place-based learning, stewardship, and community through the lens of a Burrenbeo community stewardship initiative. In particular, data for this paper were collected as part of the 2022 national piloting of the Heritage Keepers programme delivered by Burrenbeo in partnership with the Heritage Council of Ireland. Burrenbeo is an independent membership charity based in Kinvara, Co. Galway, working predominately in the Burren region in the West of Ireland. Since 2008, the organisation has coordinated and delivered a series of initiatives focused on engaging people with their places and helping to identify the community's role in caring for these places. This work has been completed through community and school-based programmes including walks, talks, community festivals, training events,

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Figure 5.1 Cover page of Article 2

Abstract

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⁷ Burrenbeo developed a working definition for place-based learning as learning about the place, in the place and for the place. This extends Lucas' (1972) categorisation of environmental education as education in, about and/or for the environment.

⁸ Further details on Burrenbeo can be found at www.burrenbeo.com.

Burrenbeo's school based education programmes have undergone a number of iterations since their inception in 2008. Originally called Ecobeo, the programme started as a 20 week course with fortnightly visits to schools by a range of local heritage experts (for example geologists, archaeologists, historians, ecologists, farmers, business owners and conservationists). Expensive to deliver and generally didactic, the programme was redeveloped and became *Áitbheo* (living place), placing more emphasis on inquiry based, active learning methodologies, and was delivered by Burrenbeo staff. The central aim of this reconfiguration was to result in an action project by schools once the programme was completed. More recently, the *Áitbheo* programme was further extended to move beyond the classroom, for delivery to community groups. Between 2008 and 2018, 1,446 primary school students and 304 secondary school students completed a Burrenbeo delivered programme (either Ecobeo or *Áitbheo*). However, research and practitioner experience suggested that, given the need for widespread action on issues related to biodiversity, climate, and heritage, extensive education programmes that do not address direct actions in response, were less meaningful. Similarly, given concern amongst young people around climate change (Hickman et al., 2021), education and supports that facilitate action are now more important than ever. In an increasingly globalised world, with associated environmental and societal concerns, place-based learning is proposed as an approach that looks to address some of the challenges faced by contemporary society. As anxiety around climate change, biodiversity loss and community fragmentation receive more and more attention (Gidron & Hall, 2020; Panu, 2020), communities are keen to do what they can to address ongoing concerns. However, without support, both in terms of knowledge and finance, knowing where to start and knowing what is achievable, can be challenging.

Considering these perspectives, this paper presents a case study of learnings from the Heritage Keepers programme, a place-based learning initiative designed by Burrenbeo. Providing an overview of the Heritage Keepers programme and sharing relevant findings for future (similar) activities, this paper will be informative for academics and practitioners alike. The paper's lead author has been employed by Burrenbeo Trust since 2012 and in this time has engaged in development and dissemination of a variety of place-based learning initiatives. In 2018, on commencing an Irish Research Council employment based doctoral programme, a new role was developed and taken on by the lead author involving practitioner research that ultimately resulted in the Heritage Keepers programme. The programme was designed and piloted by the lead author before being implemented more broadly within Burrenbeo, with delivery support and input on programme design from additional staff facilitators. The emphasis on supporting community actions through the Heritage Keepers programme is particularly relevant. We begin with an overview of the relevant literature around place, stewardship and connectedness, followed by an outline of the Heritage Keepers programme before concluding with the learnings from the national piloting of the programme and some suggestions as to how such learnings might be useful for similar initiatives.

5.2. Literature Review

For the purpose of this paper we draw from literature addressing a number of concepts. These include: place, stewardship and connectedness. This reflects the ethos of the Heritage Keepers

programme engaging themes at the intersection of each of these concepts with a view to developing actionable plans for participating community and school groups.

5.2.1. Place

The concept of place is central to this paper. Academic literature on place encompasses a wide variety of considerations including physical place, place attachment, and place identity (for further discussion see: Devine-Wright, 2009; Lewicka, 2011). While there are many definitions, there is general consensus that place is distinct from other concepts (such as space or environment) and encompasses the range of meanings and emotions associated with a specific location by individuals or groups (Tuan, 1977). Space has the capacity to be transformed into place as individuals experience, know, and create meaningful attachment to it. In contemporary society, the conceptualisation of place is further complicated by global mobility, including online 'places,' leading to a reduced rootedness to any specific geographical location (Relph, 2008a; Augé, 2020; Orr, 1992).

Altman and Low (2012) associate place attachment with place identity, insideness, sense of place and rootedness (among other themes), positing that place attachment can foster and maintain group, community, and cultural identity (see also Carrus et al., 2014). The impact of physical places on the development of a sense of place and attachment to natural surroundings is also represented in this literature (Corcoran et al., 2009). In the context of this paper, these ideas reflect research on ways to reconnect with nature (Lumber et al., 2017), further emphasising the importance of examining pathways to enhance our connection to nature for human wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours (Richardson, 2023). Place-based learning then has the potential to address issues arising from contemporary concerns around our connection with the environment, viewing people as an ecology within a cultural, political, social, and biological context (Woodhouse, 2001; Devine-Wright, 2013). Gruenewald (2003) emphasises the reciprocal and influential dynamic between human culture and place, while Kyle and Chick (2007) assert that socio-cultural bonds with specific places often flourish in the company of significant individuals. They argue that meaning and emotional attachment to a place manifest both cultural and individual identities. To isolate either culture or place without recognising their intricate interrelationship overlooks the distinctiveness that culture imparts to place. This connection (or disconnection as the case may be), underpins the approach employed in this paper, and the Heritage Keepers programme that informs it.

5.2.2. Stewardship

Much has been written on the concept of stewardship but defining the term is dependent on the context and discipline. Here, stewardship refers to the place-specific actions to which individuals and communities directly contribute their time (Carnell & Mounsey, 2022). Burrenbeo programmes look specifically to community stewardship, where people are working collectively on local stewardship actions rather than individual acts of stewardship. Irrespective of context (and partly in response to the various different definitions that exist) Bennett et al. (2018) have developed a useful framework for considering the key elements of stewardship initiatives. While their research relates specifically to environmental stewardship, this

conceptual review and subsequent analytical framework suggests that context, actors, motivations, capacity, actions and outcomes are the elements informing successful stewardship initiatives.

Also considering the multiple contexts for stewardship and looking to identify the elements that connect them, Peçanha Enqvist et al. (2018) suggest care, knowledge and agency as critical elements for consideration in effective stewardship initiatives. In this instance, care refers to a feeling of attachment and responsibility that people hold in relation to their place. This is echoed in the findings of Masterson et al. (2017), who consider the contribution that sense of place can have on stewardship behaviours. Knowledge refers to necessary information and understandings about the place, which must be delivered in an appropriate manner (i.e. one that is understandable to the audience and relevant to the local context). Significantly, Schweizer et al. (2013) found that a place-based approach had significant potential for encouraging climate change actions, where the actions were situated in cultural values and beliefs, were meaningful to the local audience, and encouraged specific action. The final dimension, agency, refers to the ability and capacity of the community in question to enact change and complete actions. This is also of importance when considered in relation to the work of Haggard and Tsakiris (2009) who identify individual action and sense of agency as having the capacity to impact both individual and collective action. In developing the Heritage Keepers programme, the above elements were considered collectively and incorporated into both the ethos and practical delivery of the initiative.

Central to this care, knowledge, agency framework is an acknowledgement that if we want people to take action, knowledge (or awareness) on its own is not sufficient (Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020). Instead, a meaningful place-based approach is required where people care about what is happening in their place, and have sufficient knowledge to operationalise the ability to act (Khadka et al., 2021). This speaks directly to the notion that education will not be sufficient in addressing some of the issues faced by contemporary society, issues such as environmental and societal challenges (biodiversity loss, climate change, community fragmentation, inequality, among many others). While government action is required, there is also an important role for on-the-ground and grassroot community-led initiatives to address such challenges. The UNESCO 2020 Education for Sustainable Development Roadmap emphasises how meaningful transformation and action in terms of sustainable development is most likely to occur at community level. Considering climate change action specifically, Pickering et al. (2021) found that when young people had understanding around causes of climate change and knowledge of specific actions their sense of agency was increased. They recommended educational initiatives that highlight the positive and significant impacts which individual behaviours can have as a way of encouraging further action. Locally adapted solutions, alongside a combination of bottom-up and top-down actions are deemed essential (Pereira et al., 2021).

5.2.3. Connectedness

A further important element in considering the possibilities for stewardship is the idea of collective effort (Peçanha Enqvist et al., 2018), where those that are taking action are supported to feel part of a network who are both equally concerned and taking similar action, amplifying their impact through collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000). Coupled with this, the findings of Gallagher & Cattelino (2020) speak to the apparent contradictions between the desire for action and the feeling that individual actions are inadequate to address global problems. These authors further emphasise the importance of a collective approach – where behavioural change and action is based on an expectation that others are doing similar, resulting in a cumulative effect. Of significance to the work of Burrenbeo, is the suggestion by Diener and Hagen (2022), that a sense of place that embodies identities, meaning and belonging, is connected not only to the place, but also to the connections and networks that exist within and between communities and other organisations. If we are looking to encourage and support community action, we must consider not just the finances available to communities but also their human resources, networks, partnerships and physical infrastructure (Verlinghieri, 2020). This is echoed in the work of Toomey (2023), who argued that facts will not change minds around conservation issues and that if the necessary changes in how we engage with our places and environments are to be realised, social networks, emotions and connections are fundamental.

As outlined above, the concepts of place, stewardship and connectedness are central to the design of the Heritage Keepers programme and essentially provide a contextual backdrop for the programme's work. Highlighting the significance of place as a lens through which stewardship actions can be initiated, is further considered in terms of the role which connecting participants through networks can play in enhancing active citizenship behaviours. These ideas are further explored and developed throughout this paper.

5.3. The Heritage Keepers Programme

Burrenbeo's Heritage Keepers programme stems from over a decade's experience working with schools and communities on place-based learning initiatives. Heritage Keepers is an educational programme, developed by Burrenbeo that essentially supports the development of community-based actions (for specific content delivered as part of the programme see Table 5.1)⁹. The programme is built around principles of discovery and learning, critical thinking, problem solving, planning and project support to ensure that programme outcomes are achieved. It incorporates the key elements of care, knowledge, agency and collective action (as discussed in the previous section). The following discussion engages the Heritage Keepers programme, identifying key learnings as they emerged from a piloted national delivery of the programme. Discussion incorporates details on programme outcomes, the impact of scaling-up actions (from local to national contexts), and the resulting guiding principles for activists, practitioners and academics looking to support (similar) community stewardship projects.

⁹ A detailed overview of the evolution of Burrenbeo learning programmes can be found in Bird (2023) which is included at Appendix 1.

Heritage Keepers emerged from the delivery experiences of place-based learning programmes at Burrenbeo in the Burren region. The programme was piloted nationally in 2022 (in partnership with the Heritage Council) and represents a national initiative to support schools and communities to take local action for heritage (among other associated themes). Heritage Keepers consists of a series of workshops for the development of a local action plan. Table 1 below provides an outline of the programme's content. Following the completion of workshops, groups can then apply for funding to complete their plans and during the process of completion receive ongoing mentoring from Burrenbeo. In the context of the Heritage Keepers programme the term group refers to a multitude of diverse collectives and group representatives. Groups included: primary and post primary (secondary) school classes (often represented by class teachers); adults who represented an already established community group (for example a local Tidy Towns group); and adult representatives who had come together to engage collective action specifically to complete the Heritage Keepers programme. In other instances community groups sent representatives to the workshops to learn about programme delivery; these representatives became newly trained facilitators or teachers who then returned to their communities and delivered the programme in their locale (similar to train-the-trainer initiatives). Workshops associated with the programme are 10 hours in length (usually delivered once a week, over five two hour sessions) and were delivered to primary school, post-primary (secondary) school and adult community groups, both online and in person, as well as to teachers and facilitators (who then returned to their own community setting and delivered the programme). Interested groups and their associated representatives were invited to complete an expression of interest form to essentially apply to participate in the programme. This call was promoted nationally through various media channels and also disseminated through established networks and contacts. In the first instance, numerous expressions of interest were received for the pilot. There were 91 applications responding to the first expression of interest call for participation; 32 from adult community groups, 16 from primary schools, 10 from post-primary (secondary) schools and 33 from teachers and facilitators who had delivered the programme in their own communities following training. Capacity issues necessitated a lottery system for the selection of participants from those who had successfully completed the expression of interest form. There were a total of 5 places for primary school classes, 5 for post-primary (secondary) school classes, 10 for adult community groups (with each group comprising 6-10 members) and 35 for teachers and facilitators who were trained by Burrenbeo representatives to deliver the programme in their own communities.

As a result of the lottery process, participants for the pilot were located across Ireland with community groups from 18 counties in both urban and rural settings represented. During the workshops, community groups and/or their representatives considered their local place, were introduced to resources where they could learn more about their local built, natural and cultural heritage, questioned how they wanted their place to be in the future, and finally, planned actions to facilitate this visioned future. Workshops are engaging and interactive, aiming to share a concept (community stewardship) and a process around community engagement with heritage and the environment to work collaboratively on identifying and addressing concerns in participants' local areas. Essentially, successful action plans developed through the workshops,

by workshop participants (rather than people coming to the programme with definite actions already in mind).

The following table provides an overview of content for the Heritage Keepers workshops.

The Heritage Keepers Programme
<p>1. Introduction and My Place</p> <p>This workshop introduces participants to the Heritage Keepers approach. Participants begin to consider the layers of their place, what they like or dislike about their place and the local assets which exist within their place.</p>
<p>2. Culture and the Past</p> <p>Using a variety of online resources participants investigate what life was like in their place in the past. They learn about ancestral legacy, the stories and folklore, and monuments and buildings in their place.</p>
<p>3. Biodiversity and Land Use</p> <p>With a focus on natural heritage participants look to identify changes in land use and local environments, and are encouraged to think about what they can do to protect biodiversity locally.</p>
<p>4. The Future</p> <p>Having considered the present day contexts of their places participants look to the future to think through how they would like their future places to exist. Initial ideas for action plans are discussed and a framework for moving them forward is shared by the workshop facilitator.</p>
<p>5. Planning for Action</p> <p>Participants look to finalise local action plans as well as discussing how to engage the wider community and sharing some inspiration from actions already taken.</p>

Table 5.1 Content overview of the Heritage Keepers Programme. Each component is presented as a 2 hour workshop.

Workshop content (Table 5.1) drew from a number of areas of expertise; firstly content was developed based on the lead author's expertise (both in terms of delivering place-based learning initiatives and in relation to knowledge of the Burren region); secondly content was developed as a result of engagement with practical training opportunities engaged by staff, in addition to being informed by academic and practitioner literature in this field (e.g. Smith & Sobel (2010a) and Sobel (2017)). All workshops were facilitated by the Burrenbeo Trust team. The workshops were designed with active learning methodologies, involving facilitator-led instruction followed by group and/or group representative engagement in various tasks (discussion, debate, introduction and utilisation of online and local resources and information). While the content deliberately focuses on consideration of local places through a heritage lens, by their nature these topics allow for wider consideration of more global issues, with the programme creating a space for discussion of, and projects relating to, climate change and sustainability more broadly.

The objectives of the Heritage Keepers programme pilot include:

- Provide place-based learning opportunities and ongoing mentorship to participating community groups across Ireland.

- Stimulate local community stewardship actions within these communities through micro grants of up to €1000.
- Empower communities to become local leaders through local ‘Place Day’ events where they show their work to others.
- Develop and implement a Theory of Change¹⁰ for assessment and evaluation of the Heritage Keepers programme.
- Make recommendations for the wider implementation of learnings from the pilot project.
- Build a place-based learning community in Ireland which works to inform policy, research and good practice.

The anticipated outcomes for programme participants included: enhanced connection to, and pride of, local place; awareness of and within local place (including: heritage, community, environmental components); ability to research and learn about local place; understanding risks, threats and opportunities in relation to local heritage and environment (and more global links); empowerment around action on local issues; and increased local community stewardship. These outcomes were anticipated during the planning stages for the Heritage Keepers programme using the Theory of Change approach. A Theory of Change is a comprehensive and dynamic tool frequently used in programme planning, implementation and evaluation (Anderson & Harris, 2005). It goes beyond merely outlining the desired outcomes of a programme or intervention; rather it delves into the underlying assumptions and causal mechanisms that drive change. By systematically articulating how and why a programme works to achieve its desired outcomes, it enables stakeholders to make informed decisions and maximise the impact of their interventions. For a small organisation like Burrenbeo, with limited resources and capacity, the approach provides a useful framework for building effective programmes. The Theory of Change approach was used to develop the Heritage Keepers programme in conjunction with external evaluators, outlining projected programme inputs from Burrenbeo, in addition to anticipated outcomes for participants. Developing the Theory of Change in advance of the programme also provided structure for the programme evaluation (assisted by and through engagement with external evaluators from the programme’s inception), assessing the degree to which projected outcomes were achieved, as well as the identification of unanticipated outcomes.

Following completion of the workshops follow up support (through email, phone contact, and dedicated online Q&A sessions) for any of the community groups and/or their representatives was available to help finalise ‘PLACE plans’ and complete funding applications. Adapted from the well-known SMART plan (Doran, 1981; for more recent discussion see: Addison et al., 2020, Bjerke & Renger, 2017), identifying specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives when planning, PLACE plans are a simple tool developed by Burrenbeo for all participating community groups to advance their local action plan. While addressing similar planning elements to the SMART plan, Burrenbeo felt a more specific and relevant acronym

¹⁰ A Theory of Change looks to explain how a change (of behaviour, attitude, in knowledge etc.) will occur. It considers how and why a programme works to achieve the desired outcomes (Anderson & Harris, 2005) and is discussed in the next paragraph in the context of how this works for the Heritage Keepers programme.

would help groups relate to the process. The PLACE plan acronym developed by Burrenbeo refers to Project, Logic, Activities, Committee and Evaluation, and represent the headings that community groups must address as part of their action plan.

An important element of the programme was the delivery of micro grants (if required) to facilitate the completion of actions outlined through PLACE plans. Funding up to a maximum of €1000 was provided to any group that applied, based on pro forma invoices (from a maximum of three suppliers); this ensured that community groups were not obliged to cover any costs of implementing the PLACE plan up front. Many community groups may not have bank accounts or access to funds, and so this is vital as it ensures transparency and efficiency around finances (i.e. grants are not sent to individual group member bank accounts and therefore individuals do not have to cover costs and be reimbursed later). More often than not community grants work from the principle of reimbursement based on receipts, this is problematic. The micro grant scheme requires a simple one page application, this was a conscious effort to keep the required administration for the organisation and applying community groups to a minimum. Groups were also encouraged to take local fieldtrips to the sites they had been learning about and funding was made available for this. Facilitation of local fieldtrips was deemed important in recognition of a complete place-based learning approach, where the groups also got to learn ‘in’ their place as well as learning ‘about’ and ‘for’ their places. The fieldtrips allowed participants all over Ireland to visit and learn about the local sites of significance to them. In total 19 grants were awarded in 2022, totalling €15,429.83, in addition to four grants for fieldtrips totalling €1400. This was funded by the Heritage Council through the partnership agreement.

A synopsis of the stages involved in the Heritage Keepers methodology is included in Figure 5.2 below.

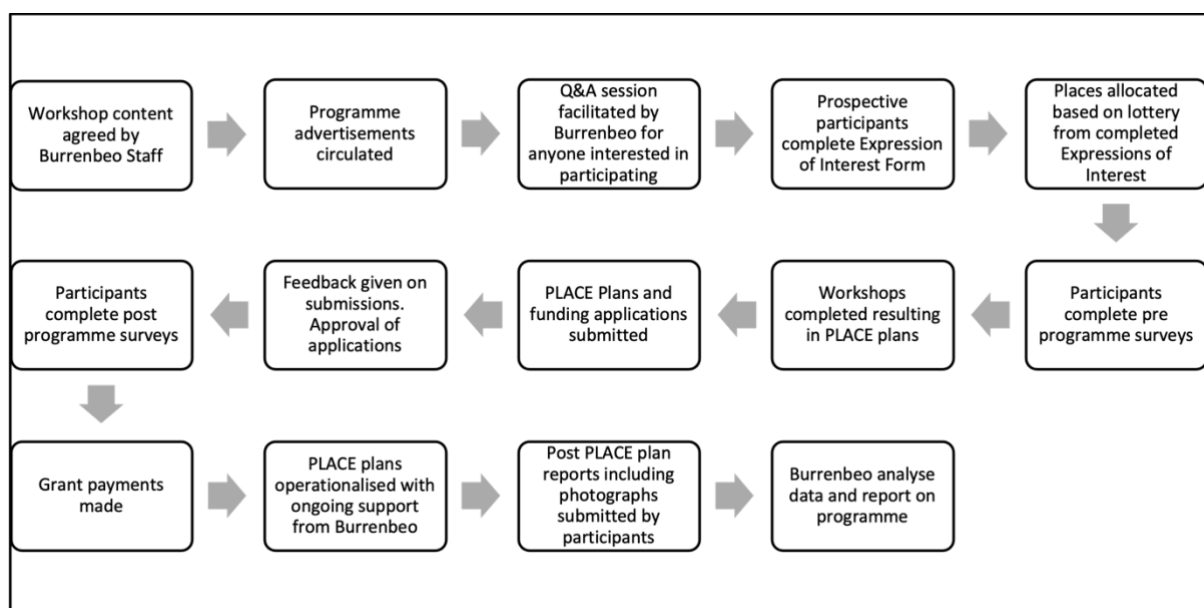


Figure 5.2 Stages involved in Heritage Keepers methodology

The final element of the programme was the Heritage Keepers inclusion in the ‘Communities for Heritage’ networking and skills day which was hosted by Burrenbeo in Corofin, Co. Clare during National Heritage Week on the 20th of August 2022. Over the course of a day, community groups from around Ireland came together to meet and learn from each other. While, the original intention for Heritage Keepers was that each community would hold their own celebration day (a Place Day), it became apparent that while some still did this, it was not practical to expect every community to do it due to external pressures around time and availability. Ultimately it emerged (reflecting the research of Peçanha Enqvist et al. (2018) around a sense of collective action), that the community groups were particularly interested in meeting other groups and sharing their stories, and prioritised this by attending the ‘Communities for Heritage’ event over the individual Place Days.

5.4. Programme Evaluation and Data Collection

Given that the Heritage Keepers programme was delivered as a national pilot, programme evaluation was necessary to ensure future learning. The evaluation of Heritage Keepers engaged two sources. Firstly, Burrenbeo staff working on the programme provided feedback via focus group. The four staff members involved in facilitation shared and discussed the elements of the programme they perceived as successful and those that were less so. Secondly, data on the experience of community groups and their representatives were gathered through a pre- and post-programme survey. Group representatives were asked a series of questions in relation to their experience of the programme, to assess if programme outcomes had been achieved¹¹. The evaluation process was also informed by consultation with an external evaluator who assisted in the development of the programme (as per the approach advocated by a Theory of Change) and survey tools¹².

Pre- and post-programme surveys were designed to evaluate the Heritage Keepers programme. Given the diverse community groups engaging the programme (both young and old), one survey was designed for distribution to adults, and the other was created for children and young people. We prioritised informed consent, voluntary participation and anonymity when conducting the surveys. The survey for young people had less questions and used adapted and accessible language. There were a combination of online and paper completions. The surveys included closed and open ended questions, asking participants to indicate their feelings, knowledge and actions in relation to local heritage, community and environment using Likert scale questions and open responses. Questions included asking participants to rate the degree to which they feel part of their local community, are proud of where they live, are motivated to take action on local issues, are overwhelmed by climate change and biodiversity loss, and to indicate their level of knowledge on heritage in their local area, effectively engaging local community and accessing funding for a community project. In total, 252 participants provided data at the pre-programme stage, and 138 participants gave responses at the post-programme

¹¹ For discussion on the evaluation of place-based learning see Bird et al. (2022).

¹² Please note this work received ethical approval from the University of Galway’s Research Ethics Committee and adhered to the standard processes and practices associated with this type of research.

stage. The drop in responses was mainly due to difficulty getting the online participants to complete the post-programme surveys.

Expressions of interest received from participants	91	
Participants	5 x Primary Schools (4 in person & 1 online) 4 x Secondary Schools (3 in person & 1 online) 10 x Community Groups (3 in person & 7 online) Facilitators/Educators (25 in person & 9 online) Total	119 participants 73 participants 64 participants 34 participants 287
Programme delivery hours	90 hours schools + 70 hours adults = 160 hours total	
Project support hours (email and phone communication, and online Q&A sessions)	c. 35	
PLACE plans submitted	24	
Grants awarded (all that applied were awarded)	19	
Pre programme surveys completed	Primary School Secondary School Community Groups Facilitators/Educators Total	84 60 81 27 252
Post programme surveys completed	Primary School Secondary School Community Groups Facilitators/Educators Total	38 42 31 27 138
Attendees at Communities for Heritage event	88	

Table 5.2 Summary of key characteristics from the Heritage Keepers national pilot

5.5. Results

A detailed programme evaluation report was completed and has informed subsequent iterations of the Heritage Keepers programme. The evaluation combined feedback and observations from participating community groups and staff from Burrenbeo. The quantitative data (based on the Likert scale responses) were graphed to compare the pre and post Heritage Keepers survey responses. The qualitative data were analysed using iterative coding based on the constant comparative method (Fram, 2013), allowing for in-depth exploration and comparison of the data to identify any themes arising. Consideration of the desired programme outcomes and whether these were achieved formed the basis of discussion of the evaluation results. For the purposes of this paper, the focus is on the final two outcomes that focus on stewardship actions

that the programme hoped to achieve: empowerment around action on local issues and increased local community stewardship.

Anticipated programme outcomes for community groups engaging the Heritage Keepers programme included: enhanced connection to, and pride of, local place; awareness of components of local place (heritage, community, environment); ability to research and learn about local place; understanding of risks, threats and opportunities in relation to local heritage (in global perspective); empowerment around action on local issues; and increased local community stewardship. As discussed above, the first four outcomes were measured using a comparison between a pre (n=252) and post-programme (n=138) survey. The resulting data was read as a single set of responses, combining all community group feedback and observations. We acknowledge that this approach is not without its limitations, it essentially presumes homogeneity between the community groups (groups that include children, young people and adults – a diversity of voices and life stages) when this is not necessarily the case. However, in the context of the Heritage Keepers pre and post-programme surveys, when the data was analysed there were no significant differences between the adult responses and those of children and young people. As a result, the presented data relates to the Heritage Keepers programme in its entirety.

The analysis and evaluation of this data ultimately reveals little difference in pre and post-programme ratings of participants in relation to several of the desired outcomes particularly around enhanced connection to and pride of local place, perhaps pointing to a self-selection effect amongst the participants. The difficulties around evaluating place-based initiatives has been considered previously (Heery et al., 2018), as has the self-selection bias in programme outcome evaluation (Meyer et al., 2019). For example in this context, one question asked participants about their level of pride in their local area. On reflection, it is likely that people who chose to take part in Heritage Keepers were already proud of where they lived and wanted to help their communities.

However, there were two areas where the results did show a difference between pre and post-programme surveys. The first is around awareness of components of local place (heritage, community, and environment). Across the various community group representatives completing the post-programme survey, 52% of participants reported that their knowledge had increased as a result of their participation. In particular, 79% of those responding to the survey indicated that they had learned a significant amount about resources for finding out more about heritage in their local area. As illustrated in Figure 3 below, the majority of survey respondents had a positive experience of the Heritage Keepers programme. Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale from one to five how much they agreed with the statements ‘I found the programme informative and relevant’, ‘I found the programme enjoyable’ and ‘I would recommend this programme to a friend’. As indicated below, over 80% of all participants strongly agreed that the programme was informative, enjoyable, and they would recommend Heritage Keepers to a friend.

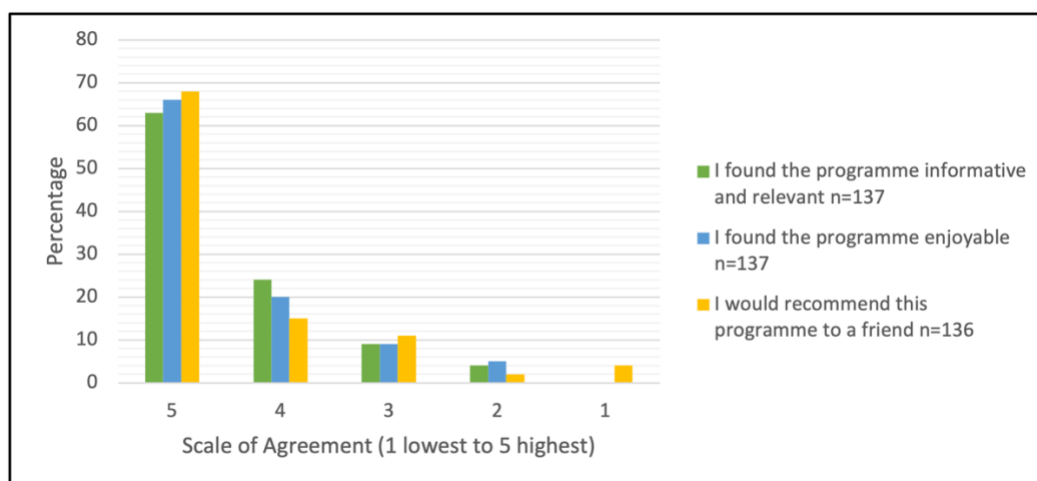


Figure 5.3 Participant response on their general experience of Heritage Keepers

Respondents were also asked to comment specifically on elements of the programme which they liked or disliked. The responses were analysed and a number of themes were identified. The elements participants liked included:

- Discovering resources for learning about their local place
- Fieldtrips/being outdoors/being in their local place
- All aspects of the course
- Interacting/meeting others/learning from others
- Planning for action/ working in groups
- Learning about/considering their local place.

In contrast, the main themes identified in relation to elements people didn't like included:

- Preferring in person delivery/having issues with internet connection
- The level of engagement - too much writing, class, listening
- Programme not meeting their expectations.

Central to Heritage Keepers is the empowerment of communities so that they feel motivated and supported to take meaningful local actions. This is done through the workshops, provision of micro financing and project support. The actions undertaken by the groups clearly demonstrate that this was achieved. The resulting actions completed by the diverse groups included an extensive oral history recording project, a local heritage trail developed by school children, publications on local legends, monuments and biodiversity, and a day long community celebration of a local hero. The full list of projects is included in Table 3 below. Of the 24 submitted PLACE plans, only those that requested and were granted funding were required to complete a report on their actions so it is possible that the other 5 groups did also go on to complete their planned actions but this cannot be verified (something which will be addressed in subsequent programme iterations, resulting in a more complete record of the actions undertaken and conditions necessary for such action). All submitted grant applications were assessed by two Burrenbeo staff members. The applications were considered in conjunction with the details included in the corresponding PLACE plan and in relation to guidelines around responsible procurement and value for money which had been supplied to all community group applicants.

The projects, planned and delivered by the schools and communities, display a range of meaningful actions undertaken for the conservation and celebration of Ireland's heritage. While workshop sessions allowed for exploration, learning and careful consideration of the possibilities and issues which existed in local areas, the provision of project support (through email and phone communication, and online Q&A sessions) and microfinancing proved vital elements in the empowerment of groups who ultimately carried out the community stewardship activities. Participants also reported an increase in local community stewardship, with participants indicating that they have engaged with other people taking action to improve their local environment in the last month. This rose from 31% in the pre-survey to 52% in the post programme survey; those reporting a 'not at all' response to the same questions dropped from 10% to 2%.

	County	Grant Amount	Details
Community Group	Tipperary	€980	Build two wooden benches and planters in heritage area of village.
Community Group	Clare	€914	Local wildlife survey and workshops to school and community on same. Brochure produced.
Community Group	Cork	€1,000	Oral history project (including training workshops).
Community Group	Waterford	€999.99	Fieldtrip for 6 local primary schools to local farmers.
Community Group	Roscommon	€750	Design and installation of interpretive signage for local flora and fauna.
Community Group	Wexford	€998.80	Design and hand build a small rustic shelter for local viewing point.
National School	Galway	€760	Write, illustrate and print a local history booklet.
National School	Mayo	€916	Map the crowsfeet / benchmarks in local town and design and print trail map of same.
National School	Waterford	€192.15	Design heritage trails and create trail brochure.
Secondary School	Roscommon	€219.08	Make wooden bird boxes and bat boxes and install them on schools grounds.
Facilitator	Kilkenny	€910.31	Record historic stone carvings and design and publish booklet.
Facilitator	Cork	€768.75	Design and print local natural heritage booklet.
Facilitator	Roscommon	€916.35	Design and print pull ups detailing local environment.
Facilitator	Tipperary	€644.40	Design, print and install 3 heritage information panels.
Facilitator	Clare	€760	Design a heritage trail with commissioned drone pictures and publish online.

Facilitator	Clare	€1,000	Design and install information signage at local heritage site.
Facilitator	Clare	€700	Hold commemoration day for local historic figure.
Facilitator	Clare	€1,000	Publish local cultural heritage material and print local heritage map.
Educator	Galway	€1,000	Create a new school garden.
	Total	€15,429.83	

Table 5.3 Projects completed by Heritage Keepers groups

5.5.1 ‘Communities for Heritage’ Event Evaluation

The Heritage Keepers programme cycle concluded with a wider celebration of community volunteering and heritage action with the ‘Communities for Heritage’ event (August 2022), held as part of National Heritage Week. Community groups from around Ireland were invited to come together to learn, network and showcase the actions which are and can be taken on local heritage projects. The Heritage Keepers community groups were given an opportunity to speak about the projects they had undertaken, sharing their experience with others, networking and learning together.

Participant feedback on the event (obtained post event via an online survey) indicated that all participants found the event useful for networking; 96% found that the event had increased their knowledge of heritage and community action and 96% would attend a similar event in the future. The ‘Communities for Heritage’ event has particular significance when considered in terms of the research around a feeling of collective action. For groups that were participating remotely, this event brought them together to share their experience and learn from others. The importance of a sense of collective action as mentioned earlier in this paper, is something we subsequently return to in the discussion section. Based on the piloting experience outlined above, in 2023 the Heritage Keepers programme delivery concentrated on primary schools, youth groups and community groups and a total of 45 groups were invited to participate in the workshops beginning in January 2023.

5.6. Discussion

There are a number of areas for discussion arising from the development and delivery of the Heritage Keepers programme. Building on years of local community stewardship initiatives, piloting the scaling-up of the Heritage Keepers programme for a national audience, provides useful learnings for researchers and others looking to engage similar initiatives. The following section includes a discussion on the importance of developing organisational knowledge, before considering how this might inform, and allow for, the evolution and adaptation required to scale-up similar educational, community focused programmes. The discussion then moves to initial findings from this experience in relation to the conditions required for supporting community stewardship, particularly around ideas for providing appropriate knowledge, supporting agency and the power of collective action.

Regarding the experience of adapting and scaling-up a local initiative to a national level, Burrenbeo has considerable experience coordinating and delivering local education programmes. However, the Heritage Keepers national pilot presented questions in terms of how best to achieve the desired outcomes on a national scale given the organisation's capacity and resources. Would Burrenbeo staff deliver the programme or train others to do so? Would Burrenbeo staff travel to locations or deliver online? How much post workshop support would groups require to complete their action projects? The learnings from the pilot and the breadth of delivery methods and participants engaged, resulted in sufficient data to determine the best course of action for future iterations (for example, in person, online or blended delivery; suitability for primary or secondary school; suitable times for community delivery). The importance of and potential learnings from undertaking pilot programmes is something which is recognised across many fields (Malmqvist et al., 2019) and beginning with a pilot is an approach we would advocate if considering scaling-up.

It is worth noting that such scaling-up was possible due to the development of organisational knowledge over time. Organisational knowledge creation is a dynamic ongoing process, and in multidisciplinary organisations, such as Burrenbeo, represents one of its most valuable resources (Fong, 2003). The education programmes from Burrenbeo had already been through a number of iterations, from Ecobeo to *Áitbheo* before Heritage Keepers was developed. Over this time, staff had also been engaged with a number of research projects. This experience informed the design and development of the Heritage Keepers programme. While impossible to measure, it is unlikely that the programme and all the related processes and considerations, could have been arrived at when Burrenbeo's original education programmes were being developed. These learnings are unpacked in greater detail in Bird et al. (2022), which further emphasises the need for long-term evaluation and programme development. It is perhaps even more significant to allow for more long-term, longitudinal programme development when considering scaling-up initiatives, so that sufficient time is allowed for knowledge creation to occur.

As discussed by List (2022), significant scaling-up of an idea can require and result in a degree of dilution from the original. The experience of scaling-up the Heritage Keepers programme resulted in evolving and adapting existing models and initiatives to meet the expanded reach – both geographically and numerically. Moving from local delivery to a small number of participants to a national delivery with a more diverse cohort, required careful consideration. Deciding what was essential, what could be lost and how the programme could best be delivered at scale has been fundamental to the piloting of Heritage Keepers (and reflects the influence of a Theory of Change approach). The trialling of multiple delivery methods then provided a basis for determining which was most effective. Finally, consideration of the evaluation outcomes will inform subsequent programme iterations. As a result, the content is now adaptable to any audience, materials are designed to ensure efficiencies of time and resources, and the processes for participants (from initial expression of interest, to application, workshop participation, PLACE plan and grant submission, and project completion) have been streamlined to an extent that means the outcomes, expectations, and timeframe are realistic and achievable.

The Heritage Keepers programme now has all the elements described by Peçanha Enqvist et al. (2018) as being required to ensure community stewardship is achievable. Participating community groups have been seen to care sufficiently in volunteering their time to participate (and ultimately complete their action projects), but even when this is not a choice they have made (particularly for school children), the programme allows them to consider their own personal feelings around their local place and its heritage. Significantly, the programme also highlights the potential for participating community groups to achieve change. This is particularly noteworthy if considered alongside the literature in relation to climate anxiety discussed in the opening sections (Hickman et al., 2021; Gidron & Hall, 2020; Panu, 2020). Through participation, and the completion of actions that address issues broadly relating to climate and sustainability (particularly around biodiversity loss), those that completed their action projects felt like their actions could make a difference. The knowledge gained through participation in the Heritage Keepers programme is locally relevant and delivered in a way that is easily understood by all. To this end, a supporting resource book and video tutors on some of the websites used (such as www.heritagemaps.ie and www.duchas.ie) have also been developed. For many participating community groups, the Heritage Keepers programme will merely be the introduction to investigating local built, natural and cultural heritage, with capacity for groups and their representatives to continue to learn more themselves. Others may have significant knowledge already in one or more areas included in the programme, but may not previously have considered them holistically. The Heritage Keepers programme acknowledges the various types of knowledge within communities and supports this through conscious provision of new knowledge which is practical, relevant and accessible. This intersection of technical and other forms of knowledge is something which environmental organisations often negotiate (Eden et al., 2006).

The importance of agency, which is the final element discussed by Peçanha Enqvist et al. (2018), has been further highlighted in the piloting of this programme. While Burrenbeo's previous education programmes suggested why people should undertake local actions, there was not sufficient (or at times any) support for them to do so. Heritage Keepers, in providing a structure, ongoing support and finances, has overcome this obstacle. When considered in terms of community stewardship, this speaks to the role that additional supports play in moving people from attitudes to actions. This is a topic which has been widely considered in terms of both moving from research to action (Van Kerkhoff & Lebel, 2006), the value-action gap between policy and local action (Blake, 1999) and approaches to encouraging pro-environmental behaviours (Grilli & Curtis, 2021). From our experience, the additional support provided when groups were completing their actions meant that almost all groups were able to complete their actions. Despite the diverse and eclectic participating community groups (some well-established in their locality and others in their infancy), with guidance, all were able to develop an achievable plan based on their specific capacities. The positive effect of the supports provided by the Heritage Keepers structure may increase over time, as the programme network continues to expand and participants are inspired by both the actions completed, as well as the growing sense of collective efficacy where more is achieved by virtue of collective action. The feedback from the 'Communities for Heritage' event (and the value which participants placed

on this opportunity) further emphasises this point. This idea of a ‘movement’ or network being a significant element in strengthening environmental actions is acknowledged (Saunders, 2013) and warrants consideration for those looking to achieve similar outcomes.

5.7. Conclusion

Considering the discussion and results in relation to the possible outcomes of place-based learning within community stewardship initiatives (useful for similar programmes), the following observations arise. The Heritage Keepers programme has been shown to successfully empower community stewardship. The combination of workshops, ongoing support and microfinancing allows communities to carry out meaningful actions which might otherwise have been unachievable. The sense that groups are participating in something more than just their own action and that they can learn from and share with other groups is significant. There is evidence supporting the role that networks, peer learning and discussion groups, play in encouraging behavioural change around conservation and heritage issues (Toomey, 2023); this was also evident through the Heritage Keepers programme. This is significant for others looking to implement similar programmes or achieve similar outcomes reflecting the importance and power of bringing participants together to learn from each other through collective action.

The concept of agency stands as a pivotal consideration in any community stewardship undertaking. The Heritage Keepers programme plays a crucial role in nurturing agency by providing a structured framework for discussion, decision-making processes, and the requisite support for translating decisions into actions. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that in the broader context of scaling-up, it is the agency element which imposes limitations on the achievable scale. The capacity to meet the demands of all the groups wishing to participate in a programme such as Heritage Keepers is constrained by the availability of funds for microfinancing, as well as the constraints of staff capacity associated with providing adequate support to groups throughout the project completion process. In the context of community stewardship and scaling-up, careful consideration of developing and supporting participating group’s agency is vital.

This paper unpacks a range of ideas relating to scaling-up community based educational programmes. We also point towards the need for further research on themes exploring people’s willingness to participate, the legacy and sustainability of actions catalysed by participation, and the broader role of supporting organisations and structures in anchoring community action. Community stewardship has the potential to address a wide range of issues. Engaging and empowering communities around local concerns has benefits for communities and their localities. The experience of the pilot scaling-up of Heritage Keepers has been very informative for community stewardship initiatives more broadly. Ultimately, the programme framework outlined throughout this paper has the capacity to be replicated and employed across a wide range of settings, with the central aim of achieving community stewardship outcomes at a variety of scales and over a multitude of diverse contexts.

**6. Article 3 - Bird, Á., Reilly, K., and Fahy, F. 2024. [under review].
A practitioner led framework for the process of Community
Stewardship. *Gateways: International Journal of Community
Research and Engagement***

Abstract

Community stewardship involves active participation and responsibility from local residents in collectively caring for and managing their shared environment and its resources. The essential role of community stewardship lies in its capacity to foster sustainable behaviours, empowering communities to make informed decisions, and driving positive, lasting impacts towards a more environmentally conscious future. A key challenge presented in much of the related literature is how to engage citizens in community stewardship initiatives. This paper aims to address this challenge by exploring the theoretical and practical aspects of community stewardship, using the Heritage Keepers national initiative in Ireland as a case study. The paper navigates the complexities of community stewardship, acknowledging diverse perspectives within communities and the importance of scale in stewardship activities. It explores the intersection of place-based learning and stewardship, emphasising the need for a holistic approach.

The paper is based on a five-year practitioner-led doctoral project undertaken while the primary author was embedded in a community stewardship initiative in the west of Ireland. Various methodologies are employed that reflect both practitioner and community-based research principles. Emerging from the empirical research conducted as part of a change-oriented community-university research initiative, this paper presents a practical framework to support the process of community stewardship. Specifically, the paper identifies five key elements central to the community stewardship process; these include: Care, Knowledge, Facilitation, Agency, and Action. Enhancing and under-pinning each of these is Collective Action. By synthesising these elements, the framework offers valuable insights for researchers and practitioners seeking to implement similar community stewardship initiatives, moving community stewardship beyond a conceptualisation to a series of sequential and operational steps that can be implemented across a variety of contexts.

Keywords: Community Stewardship; Place-Based Learning; Scale; Community-University Partnership; Ireland

6.1. Introduction

“I found it a wonderful programme for people like me who didn't think their voice could be heard, but now I feel that there are people who help and encourage everyone to protect nature, the environment, and the heritage of an area”.

(Heritage Keepers Community Participant, 2023)

This article presents a case study based on a five-year practitioner-led doctoral project, where the primary researcher was embedded in a community stewardship initiative in the west of Ireland. While conceptual framings of community stewardship exist, there is a lack of literature relating the theory to practice (Couceiro et al., 2023). Addressing this, the aims of this paper are two-fold. Firstly, we identify and discuss the elements that play a significant role within successful community stewardship initiatives. Secondly, we propose a practical framework that supports the process of ‘doing’ community stewardship, moving beyond a conceptualisation of community stewardship to consider how the concept might be operationalised through communities and programmes in a range of contexts. The paper embeds practitioner experience and empirical data in a theoretical discourse, providing a framework that informs future research considering the community stewardship paradigm. It also most usefully outlines the necessary elements for others looking to facilitate community stewardship in their setting. We examine the underlying processes and their interrelationships in the act of facilitating and promoting community stewardship.

Following a brief review of the community-university research context, the next section of the paper reviews existing literature in the fields of community stewardship and place-based learning, before outlining the research context and methodology. The results and emergent framework are presented, this is followed by a detailed exploration of the framework elements. The paper concludes considering the future implications for both community stewardship practice and research.

6.2. Community-University Research Context

This paper explores community stewardship and place-based learning through the lens of the Heritage Keepers programme in Ireland. Launched in 2022, this initiative assists schools and communities in exploring and improving their local environments through workshops and the development of local action plans (discussed later in this paper).

The programme was developed as part of a practitioner-led doctoral research project, marking it as the first of its kind in Ireland. This collaborative effort involved the Burrenbeo Trust, a community-based organisation, and the University of Galway, focusing on researching evaluation, best practices, and scaling-up of place-based learning and community stewardship initiatives. The lead author, embedded in Burrenbeo through an employment-based PhD funding scheme by the Irish Research Council, was both employee and researcher bridging theory and practice by assuming dual roles in both the organisation and academic community. This strategic framework promotes collaborative inquiry and knowledge co-creation, offering nuanced insights into real-world challenges and fostering contextually relevant solutions (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007).

Moreover, the close partnership between the university and community organisation enhances mutual learning and capacity building, enriching understanding of pertinent issues. Campbell et al. (2016) underscore the advantages of embedded researchers in fostering trust, ongoing engagement, and development beyond the research project's lifecycle, though challenges such

as managing conflicting priorities and potential conflicts of interest must be navigated (Kruijf et al., 2022). Haverkamp (2021) unpacks complex considerations when researching with and in communities, emphasising the importance of integrating ethical considerations, especially in addressing environmental challenges, advocating for a transformative strategy that prioritizes care, cooperation, and the empowerment of marginalized groups.

The outcomes of this project presented in this paper exemplify how collaborative efforts between academia and community organisations can offer valuable insights and solutions to real-world challenges.

6.3. Conceptualising Community Stewardship and Place-based Learning

Community stewardship has become an increasingly popular approach for managing natural resources and promoting sustainable development in many parts of the world (Couceiro et al., 2023; Peçanha Enqvist et al., 2018), and this also is reflected in recent calls for more research in this area (Dawson et al., 2021). Depending on the context, there are multiple meanings, definitions and understandings of the term stewardship and by extension, community stewardship (Bennett et al., 2018). The stewardship approach emphasises local participation, collaboration, and empowerment in the management of natural resources and the promotion of social and economic development (Berkes, 2009). In the context of this paper, stewardship is defined as place-specific actions to which individuals and communities directly contribute their time (Carnell & Mounsey, 2022). An adapted version, community stewardship refers to the actions of groups of people. These groups can be gatherings of people who share a place, common interest, goal, or cause (for example; development associations, schools, environmental advocacy groups, or sports clubs). In a review of conservation efforts, which also considered local community well-being, Dawson et al. (2021) indicates that the majority of studies showcasing positive impacts on both well-being and conservation predominantly emerge from situations where Indigenous peoples and local communities hold a pivotal position. Conversely, interventions overseen by external organisations, which aim to alter local practices and replace customary institutions, tend to yield less effective conservation outcomes while concurrently leading to adverse social consequences (ibid.). While community stewardship has been recognised for its potential to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of conservation and development initiatives, there is still much to be learned about how to effectively engage communities in stewardship activities (Moser & Bader, 2023). Addressing these questions is central to the work informing this paper.

There is an ever-increasing need for greater attention and action from wider society to address climate change and biodiversity loss. There is also a role for small scale, ground up initiatives (with the potential to develop into something more significant) (Jans, 2021). A move away from more traditional, hierarchical systems where the state bears sole responsibility for society has been acknowledged with a shift towards partnerships and acknowledgement of the interdependencies of state bodies, NGOs and the economy in addressing sustainability and environmental issues (Hajer et al., 2015). Communities taking action to explore and enhance their local places has an immediate effect but can also be the initiating factor for future action

(Foster-Fishman et al., 2006). Studies have demonstrated that involving various interest groups in decision-making can contribute to a process that garners broader acceptance among community members (Dawson et al., 2021). However, as argued by Massey (2004), places are not typically composed of singular 'communities' characterised by cohesive social groups. Even in instances where such groups do exist, it does not necessarily imply a unified sense of place. This is a consideration in the community stewardship process proposed, acknowledging the potential for differing views and approaches within communities.

Place-based learning takes a holistic view of place, involving the acquisition of knowledge about a specific place while being physically immersed in that place and with the central purpose of enhancing that place. Commentary around the growing disconnect between people and places more broadly has been present for a long time (Relph, 2008a). According to Relph (2008b), establishing a connection to specific places serves as a practical basis for confronting significant challenges, both local and global, such as climate change and economic inequality. However, as suggested by Massey (2004), the significance of place and locality should be tempered by an understanding of, and connections to, broader geographical contexts and global requirements for example globalisation, economics and movement of people. Massey (2004, p.98) suggests that we now see “the global construction of local place” where the essence of a place does not solely stem from its internal activities; rather, it also arises from the blending and interaction of external influences, connections, and relationships.

The way individuals connect with and strive to safeguard a place has been recognised to be influenced by scale (Lopez & Weaver, 2023). Connection to place and scale are central to this paper and the Heritage Keepers programme. Scale, as it relates to the potential for interdisciplinary academic study is discussed in detail by Friis et al. (2023) unpacking the potential confusion around terminology and metaphors related to scale, encompassing concepts like local, regional, national, and global, acknowledging that these phrases can be used with specific analytical or political objectives in mind. In the context of Heritage Keepers and community stewardship, several dimensions of scale are considered including the participants themselves (individual, group or community), the geographic area of focus (local, national or global) and the topic of focus (relating to a specific place or a broader issue such as climate change or biodiversity loss). These issues were considered by Lopez & Weaver (2023) where they looked at those that engage with stewardship initiatives and considered the impact of scale, finding that micro-motivations play a crucial role in steering stewardship within smaller community-based organisations, while macro-motivations are instrumental in influencing engagement in larger, multi-jurisdictional organisations. They also (importantly in the context of Heritage Keepers) emphasise that the proposed binary is oversimplified, and it is more appropriate to perceive this distinction as a flexible continuum rather than a rigid dichotomy. This also echoes the findings of Ardoin (2014) who identified a noteworthy correlation between the scale of actions and the level of place connection held by a volunteer. Individuals with stronger local-scale place connections were notably more inclined to take action on a smaller scale, whereas those with larger-scale place connections were significantly more prone to engage in actions on a larger scale (ibid.).

Understanding why people do or do not protect their environment is a central consideration when proposing a community stewardship approach. While this paper provides insight to the elements that play a role in successful stewardship initiatives, it is important to note that determining why people undertake environmental actions is a vast area of study in its own right and detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this paper (for examples see Huoponen, 2023; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Numerous factors drive individuals to form deep connections with nature, and these factors can serve as motivation for endorsing conservation initiatives (Pascual et al., 2022). A multifaceted combination of factors, encompassing social integration, the exploration of shared values, the reinforcement of environmental identity, self-efficacy, and agency, is required to cultivate stewardship (Nelson et al., 2022). However, there is a significant body of evidence suggesting that an individual's values and world view play an important determining role in their pro-environmental behaviour (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Sockhill et al., 2022). Gally et al. (2016) contribute to this discourse by examining place-based stewardship education, arguing that such education nurtures a sense of responsibility and commitment to safeguarding rural communal spaces. This approach not only promotes aspirations for environmental protection but also encourages community engagement, emphasising the vital role of education in fostering a sense of environmental stewardship. Furthermore, enabling a holistic comprehensive viewpoint of the factors that influence community stewardship plays a significant role in fostering sustainable environmental behaviours (Ojala, 2017). Across the various approaches, what emerged as crucial was the need to select an approach based on particular objectives and the intended audience (Grilli & Curtis, 2021). Grilli & Curtis (2021) also consider the lack of knowledge around the degree to which behaviours are sustained beyond programmes or research studies.

The following section outlines the research context and research methodology.

6.4. Case Study Context

Community stewardship as an approach is not widely employed in Ireland but is growing in recognition and application, particularly in small locally specific contexts (for example where the community engage and take responsibility for the care and management of a landscape feature such as a bog or beach) (Flood et al., 2022). Ireland has a very rich natural, cultural and built heritage, and is also characterised by diverse communities (urban and rural; newcomers and long-term residents) .

Engaging local communities with heritage and environmental themes through place-based learning initiatives is at the core of Burrenbeo's mission. As previously mentioned, the primary author was embedded in Burrenbeo during this practitioner-led research project. Burrenbeo, an independent membership charity headquartered in Kinvara, Co. Galway, primarily serves the Burren region in the west of Ireland. Since 2008, they have been actively coordinating and executing various programmes that aim to connect individuals with their surroundings, highlighting the community's role in protecting these places. These initiatives encompass community and school-based activities such as walks, talks, community festivals, training events, and conservation volunteering. Burrenbeo's work is grounded in the principles of place-

based learning and community stewardship (reflecting the work of Smith and Sobel (2010a) who focused on the power of local learning to encourage community action).

The Heritage Keepers programme, launched in 2022, supports schools and communities in taking local actions for heritage conservation. It involves a series of place-based learning workshops that culminate in the development of a local action plan. Participants can seek funding of up to €1000 to implement their plans and receive ongoing guidance from Burrenbeo. The programme's design, delivery, and outcomes were shaped through consultation with an advisory committee and by adapting existing Burrenbeo programmes. Programme delivery has ranged from two teacher rural schools to community groups in large urban areas, highlighting the adaptability of the approach and the potential for delivery across a broad scale (for further detail on the Heritage Keepers programme see Bird and Reilly, 2023).

Heritage Keepers workshops, lasting 10 hours in total over a five week period, were delivered to a diverse range of participants, including primary and post-primary school groups, adult community groups, teachers, and community facilitators (who were tasked with then delivering the programme in their own setting). These workshops, offered both online and in person, encouraged participants to explore their local environments, discover resources related to their heritage, envision the future of their places, and plan actions to realise their vision. The workshops fostered interactive and engaging discussions, focusing on the concept of community stewardship and collaborative heritage engagement. Importantly, the action plans developed through the workshops were crafted by the participants themselves, ensuring that they reflected the specific place-based concerns and aspirations of each community. Since the programme was initiated, almost 1000 participants from 177 different schools and communities have completed the 10 workshop hours resulting in almost 50 local action projects, 18 local heritage fieldtrips and microfinancing of over €40,000 to groups and schools. Average school group sizes are 18 children or young people and average community group sizes are 5.

6.5. Methodology

This paper incorporates a range of methodologies reflecting both a practitioner and community based research ethos. The primary author is a practitioner researcher and has led the development, coordination and facilitation of the Heritage Keepers programme. This paper follows analysis of data relating to the initiative, followed by reflection and interrogation of the literature resulting in the development of a proposed framework. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected over a 12 month period (May 2022-May 2023) across the country. Specifically, surveys and focus groups were employed in this study to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of community members and facilitators, and provide context-specific insights into the dynamics of the community stewardship process. Limited demographic information was collected relating to the location of participants (rural or urban) and gender. The questions relating to demographics were not compulsory.

	Location		Gender		
	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	Other
Pre-programme survey (n=252)	93	86	122	107	6
Post-programme survey (n=138)	31	46	57	60	4

Table 6.1 Participant demographic data

The composition of the participant pool (n = 290) is displayed in Figure 6.1 below.

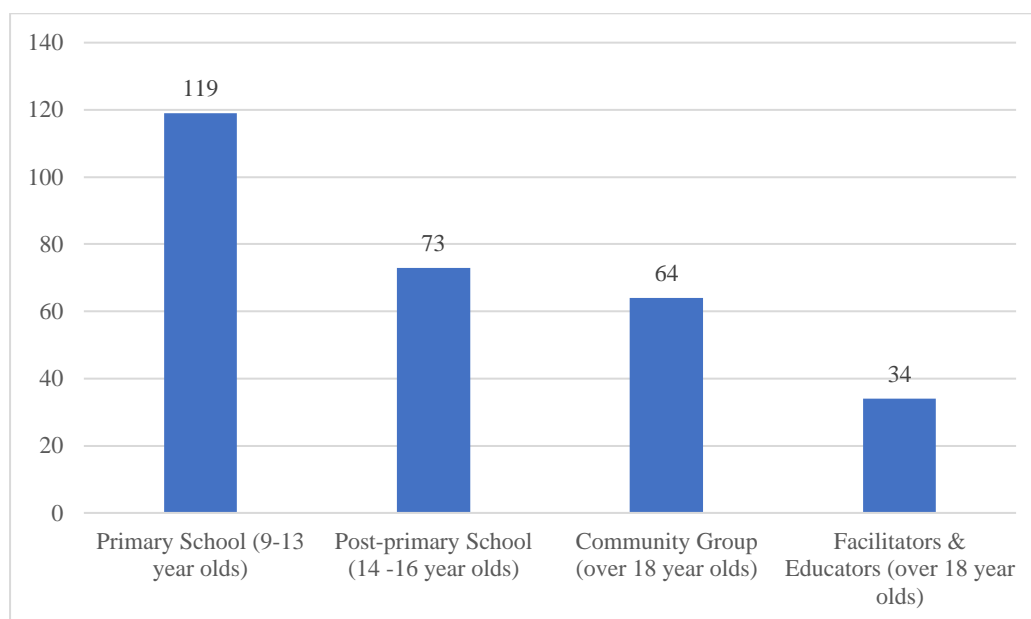


Figure 6.1 Composition of the Heritage Keepers participants

Participants were recruited for the Heritage Keepers programme via an open call seeking expressions of interest, advertised through national media, and existing networks and contacts. Some community groups were from pre-existing organisations (e.g. a local development group). However, participants were encouraged to create new groups, amalgamating existing local groups where possible, for instance; one from a local sports club, one from a tidy towns group, one a local business owner; one a newcomer to the area.

The titles of the five 2 hour workshop sessions were; Introduction and My Place; Culture and the Past; Biodiversity and Land Use; The Future; and Planning for Action. The study received ethical approval from University of Galway and anonymity was maintained during data collection, analysis and reporting, using pseudonyms for participant identities. The analysis of participant data in this study was conducted by comparing pre-programme (n=252) and post-programme (n=138) completed surveys. Survey responses provided insight to the impact of the programme on the participants' community stewardship perceptions and behaviours. Questions included impressions of the overall quality of the programme, demographic information, and various scaled questions to determine participant knowledge, motivation and feelings around

the environment, sustainability and community stewardship. There was also an opportunity to provide open ended responses, including a question detailing any positive actions participants had taken that were inspired by the Heritage Keepers programme.

Burrenbeo staff contributed their insights through a focus group discussion. This tool allowed four staff members involved in facilitation of the Heritage Keepers programme to share and discuss the aspects of the programme that proved successful and those that presented challenges. This multi-faceted approach to data collection ensured a comprehensive understanding of the programme's outcomes and effectiveness. As the PhD researcher was simultaneously the practitioner implementing the programme, the feedback coupled with the survey results, could inform the programme evolution in real time.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret patterns, themes, and meanings within the collected data. The qualitative survey data were reviewed and initial codes emerged. These initial codes were then grouped into potential themes, which were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined. Despite the rigorous approach, this study has some limitations. The research is grounded in a particular community stewardship initiative within a specific geographical area, for replication of the process specific local contexts should be carefully considered to ensure a nuanced understanding. Additionally, as with any qualitative research, the interpretations and findings are influenced by the researchers' perspectives and subjectivity.

6.6. Findings

The following section outlines the key elements of the community stewardship process as engaged by this study, and situated within existing literature. This is followed by a discussion outlining an emergent framework supporting community stewardship processes from the perspective of the Heritage Keepers programme. The points outlined are not mutually exclusive and the inherent interconnections are discussed later in the paper. In the community stewardship literature, the work of Peçanha Enqvist et al. (2018) resonated particularly strongly. They examined various stewardship contexts and identified three critical elements for effective initiatives: care, knowledge, and agency, all underpinned by the concept of collective action. The framework proposed in this paper extends on Peçanha Enqvist et al.'s work by adding two additional elements: facilitation and action, while also expanding on care, knowledge, and agency.

6.6.1. Care

The first element we consider is care. At its most basic, care in the context of community stewardship is concerned with the participant's emotions and feelings about their local place. Care addresses the sense of connectedness participants feel toward their place helping to identify what people value about their local place and how they would like their place to be in the future.

The Heritage Keepers surveys revealed that participants already felt a significant sense of belonging in their communities before participating. Participants were asked pre and post

workshop to indicate their degree of agreement with the statement ‘In the last month, I have felt part of my local community’. Pre workshops 49% responded A Lot, 42% responded A Little and 10% responded Not at All. Post workshop series the respective responses were 55%, 35% and 10%. This was not anticipated, but upon reflection indicates that those that already feel that sense of belonging may be more invested in their place and more likely to engage in a process such as that offered by Heritage Keepers. The possibility of their prior involvement with, and knowledge of, other participants and the place is also significant here.

Expanding on this, the insights suggest that without a sense of connection, people are unlikely to engage in stewardship behaviours. West et al. (2018) explore care as foundational to stewardship, emphasising its practical expression. This viewpoint highlights the need for fostering relationships and ethical values in stewardship initiatives, guiding communities toward sustainability.

A challenge emerges regarding the language used in discussing environmental, heritage, climate, and biodiversity issues. The scientific and academic community often prioritises precise language, which may not resonate with local communities seeking more emotive and story-based communication approaches (Tait, 2021). To cultivate affection and commitment toward local places, an assets-based approach is beneficial, focusing on strengths, resources, and community capacities rather than solely addressing needs (Mathie and Cunningham, 2005). Similarly, Toomey (2023) argues that facts alone do not sway public opinion on conservation; acknowledging the role of experiences, values, and emotions in communication is crucial. Heritage Keepers workshops allow participants explore and express their feelings about their local environments.

Of note also when considering the degree to which people care about their environments is the methods which have been used historically to engage people around conservation and environmental issues. The approach proposed through Heritage Keepers while acknowledging the issues that exist, maintains a focus on first identifying the positive elements which exist and then subsequently on the actions which can be taken, shifting from a fear based lens to one which empowers. This emphasis on what can be achieved was reflected in feedback from one of the participants, who noted: ‘*The positivity of the participants about their own place and what they can do to improve it*’. Historically there has been an over reliance on ‘Fear Appeal’ where the worst case scenarios are described in an attempt to scare people into caring and action, this approach is often counter-productive (Stoknes, 2014). It has since been suggested that people may experience ‘Apocalypse Fatigue’ and choose (knowingly or unknowingly) to disengage from the issue (Nordhaus & Shellenberger, 2009). Several inconclusive studies have tried to measure the impact of fear based approaches to encouraging action around climate change and the environment (Kothe et al., 2019).

The focus on care contends that for community stewardship initiatives to be successful, participants must care about the topics, place or community in question. The sense of belonging and connection to a place and community can be a key factor in this, as are the methods employed to encourage caring.

6.6.2. Knowledge

It could be argued that the knowledge element of building community stewardship is the simplest – premised on the idea that if people have information and skills, they can take the required action. However, knowledge as an element of a community stewardship process is often reductively oversimplified and does not receive adequate consideration. Returning to Peçanha Enqvist et al. (2018), they include the importance for community stewardship initiatives to engage basic information about the place, acknowledging that various knowledge sources and types are required and relevant for the community to engage with stewardship. However, findings from the Heritage Keepers initiative point specifically to the exact knowledge required and consideration for how such knowledge is delivered becomes apparent. Post workshops all participants were asked ‘What was your favourite part of the programme?’ In response, a theme emerged around the discovery of resources facilitating participants learning more about their local place. Another theme related to how much participants had learned (e.g. from free online websites and demonstrations on how to use the resources).

Practical information is crucial for community projects. Precise details and procedural steps are necessary for communities to successfully execute projects. This need for clarity was evident in post-workshop support and focus group discussions with practitioners. Communities required targeted knowledge to avoid mistakes, such as correctly placing a wildlife pond to preserve biodiversity or using safe techniques for historic graveyard surveys. Additionally, information must be condensed to avoid overwhelming participants. While abundant resources exist, like those from the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and Heritage Council, targeted and simplified content proved effective in the Heritage Keepers initiative. Although customising information for each community is labour intensive, key guides (e.g., "Top Ten Tips for Pond Building") and facilitator support mitigated this. Despite the national scale of the programme, information provided was specific to local contexts and needs.

Not all knowledges are equal. As Bonnett (2023) outlines, while factual knowledge and skills remain important, there are other knowledges, such as embodied knowledge one has through experience of a place or community. In the context of community stewardship, embodied knowledge may be even more important. Bonnett argues that this established knowledge serves as a foundation for more conceptual understanding, helping to counterbalance excessive human-centred utilitarian approaches, speaking again to the notion of care and how we view our environments. The Heritage Keepers initiative encourages engagement with knowledge from within the local community whether it be from farmers, storytellers, musicians, local historians or the local business owner. Arguments have been made for a more critical pedagogy of place to replace scientific dominance prevalent in Western culture and education (Tsevreini, 2011). Pretty (2011) examines the significance of local knowledge of nature as a guiding force for actions and decision-making in a place-based approach, thus fostering a deeper connection between individuals and their natural surroundings.

The final element to consider around the knowledge required for successful community stewardship initiatives is around capacity building. Capacity building, in the context of empowering communities and facilitating community stewardship, refers to the process of

equipping individuals and groups with the knowledge, skills, resources, and confidence they need to effectively take control of their own development, make informed decisions, and manage their local resources and affairs. Regardless of the project undertaken, building the capacity to identify local actions, plan and complete them has a value for communities. As one participant noted: *‘The online sessions were inviting, and so empowering, by sharing resources that can guide myself and our group to seek out places to care for’*.

6.6.3. Facilitation

In considering community stewardship from the context of the Heritage Keepers programme, it is important to consider the role and importance of facilitation. For Heritage Keepers, the programme is facilitated by a member of staff who directs the activities, moderates discussions and supports action plan delivery. In general, a facilitator empowers each individual to engage and learn with the group, both collaboratively and experientially (Creswell, 2003). One of the findings identified from the post-programme surveys was that groups reported that the process of engaging with facilitated activities and workshops can shed new light on local issues and assets, propose new ways of thinking about their place and community, in addition to shifting dynamics in existing groups. The facilitation experience can also be fundamental for groups who have come together specifically for the programme in question. The presence of an external facilitator, leading the group through exploration of their place can provide an objective view on the local place, which can be useful in determining where the group’s action would be best focused (Nelson & McFadzean, 1998). This does require the facilitator to have a certain skillset and competencies, some of which include creating empathy, being specific, being genuine, engendering respect, listening effectively (and hearing) and very importantly, gaining trust (Hughes, 1999). The model employed in the Heritage Keepers programme follows the well-recognised approach where instruction is not imposed, rather a space is created for participants to explore for themselves the elements of their place and community and their desires for its future, facilitated by conversation (Sharples et al., 2006).

6.6.4. Agency

Arguably the most critical element in achieving positive outcomes from community stewardship processes is agency. Considering the potential for communities to respond to environmental problems, Adams et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of understanding the political economy, arguing that power imbalances and unequal distribution of resources can hinder collective action and perpetuate socio-ecological problems. They also discuss the role of social capital, trust, and collaboration in fostering effective collective action. Peçanha Enqvist et al. (2018) include agency in their framework as the abilities and capacities of communities or individuals to carry out actions. Essentially, do the structures and supports needed to carry out stewardship actions exist? Are the planned actions feasible, given the specific conditions for the group in question? There were some specific findings that emerged following the analysis of the data from the Heritage Keepers programme which spoke directly to the importance of agency. Over the years, various programmes with a similar focus, delivered by Burrenbeo, have encouraged action, and while participants on these previous programmes indicated in post-programme surveys that they felt encouraged to take action, it

very rarely actually resulted in action – could this have been because the agency element had not been adequately considered in these earlier programmes? We argue that when developing Heritage Keepers, the addition of financial support via micro financing for the initiatives alongside the provision of ongoing support and mentoring for participants while they complete actions has resulted in the programme's positive outcomes. These elements ensure that local schools and communities were supported to complete the actions they had identified. Equally, the process of engaging with the Heritage Keepers workshops as outlined, assisted the participants in identifying areas where they could have an impact in their area.

Drawing on experience of delivering previous programmes to a wide range of groups and individuals lead to the specification of the Heritage Keepers programme being exclusively developed for groups (rather than individuals). While acknowledging that this may exclude those that do not already have connections within their community, or feel safe or welcomed in community spaces, practitioner experience suggested that it was often too much for one person to be tasked with taking on a community stewardship action. In addition, group participation makes space for collective participatory-decision making and the emergence of a community mandate. The groups that participated could be pre-existing and groups were encouraged to connect (e.g. a representative from existing local groups or societies came together to form a local Heritage Keepers group).

6.6.5. Action

It may seem unnecessary to include action as a separate element when the assumption is that if the goal is community stewardship that an action will result, however it is useful to add some specifics here from the Heritage Keepers perspective. In deliberately focusing the programme around the identification of, planning for, and completion of local heritage actions, the programme provides a clear and achievable goal for participants. This echoes the earlier suggestion from Grilli & Curtis (2021) that in encouraging pro-environmental behaviours identifying a very specific objective was a good approach. Equally, Oinonen et al. (2023) highlight the importance of strengthening young people's beliefs in their ability to make a difference and produce desired sustainability outcomes.

For each participating Heritage Keepers group, deciding on the particular action and refining the plan if required is supported by the facilitator (who as previously mentioned can provide a useful outside perspective). Examples of actions which have been completed by participants include development of heritage trails; publication of oral history records; creation of biodiversity areas; celebration of notable figures; community networking events; art installations; digging of wildlife ponds and many more. While the scale and legacy impact of work involved is different in each setting, actions look for 'small wins' (Foster-Fishman et al., 2006), showing that a community can achieve something if they set out to (providing the necessary elements are present). This also builds on the earlier discussion of 'Apocalypse Fatigue' (Nordhaus & Shellenberger, 2009). Peters et al. (2013), in a discussion of fear based approaches to encouraging action, found that prioritising efficacy was most effective – in this case, the power of the group to complete their desired action.

However, it could be argued that this focus on an often discrete action is one of the weaknesses in this type of work as it does not allow for a longer-term consideration of stewardship behaviours of participants. It would be desirable to build in a mechanism to continue to engage with and monitor the actions of participants beyond the time-frame of the programme to establish whether the actions which were initiated were continued, developed, expanded or simply finished once the programme finished.

6.6.6. Collective Action

The final point to address is collective action, where individuals are motivated by seeing their efforts contribute to a larger cause, knowing their 'small wins' are bolstered by similar successes across the country. Collective action is increasingly recognised as crucial for advancing global environmental initiatives (Gulliver et al., 2022). While some may equate collective action solely with activism (Gulliver et al., 2022), Heritage Keepers participants have found that connecting with other communities, both online and through culminating showcase events, enriches their experience by sharing challenges and learning from others' achievements. One participant remarked; *'The accomplishments of other Heritage Keepers ... was amazing to hear and see. It certainly has encouraged our group to complete our projects and take on other aspects within our community.'* This underscores the earlier discussion on the need for multi-level action to tackle challenges collectively, where shared initiatives alleviate the workload. The role of networks and social movements, extensively discussed in literature (Saunders, 2013), resonates with participants who value connecting with like-minded individuals passionate about their environments and evidenced by the participant who said: *'Great to connect with people who feel the same passion about their own place/ environment as I do'.*

Nelson et al. (2022) in their Climate Stewards programme in America highlight the importance of early connections in fostering shared beliefs and values among participants. Groups involved in Heritage Keepers bring diverse backgrounds and experiences, collaborating to build local knowledge and engage with other community groups, enhancing peer learning and knowledge exchange. The nature of the groups and the interactions between the groups is something which will be discussed at a later stage.

In summary, collective action is pivotal in community stewardship, amplifying individual efforts into a unified movement towards environmental sustainability. The next section will delve into practical applications of the community stewardship process, drawing on insights from the Heritage Keepers programme and existing literature to provide a framework for researchers and practitioners alike.

Expanding on the discussion of scale, it's crucial to revisit agency and its scale-related aspects. This aligns with insights from Newman and Dale (2005) on social capital, emphasising that individuals often lack resources for action. They discuss both bonding and bridging social capital: while bonding can have positive outcomes, overly insular communities may resist new ideas, potentially causing harm. In contrast, bridging social capital encourages engagement

with new information and challenges existing norms. Agency in communities emerges through the interplay of both bonding and bridging connections. Müller (2015) explores how alliances and assemblages are vital for fostering agency, while McFarlane (2009) shows how social movements rooted in specific places exchange knowledge, practices, and materials across diverse sites. These dynamics underscore the varied scales in community stewardship initiatives, as seen in the Heritage Keepers experience.

As noted from the outset of this paper, research indicates that engaging communities in stewardship initiatives can be a challenging endeavour (Moser & Bader, 2023). Based on the literature outlined above and the experience of facilitating the Heritage Keepers programme in Ireland we have constructed a framework for facilitating the process of community stewardship providing a practice-based tool that can be incorporated and adapted by researchers in similar initiatives, while also serving as a guide for others looking to implement community stewardship programmes in their localities. The following section discusses the stages of the community stewardship process and how they might be applied in practice.

6.7. Discussion: The stages of the Community Stewardship process

Before discussing the stages of the community stewardship process and the suggested framework, we start with a broader look at scale and the scaling-up of environmental and sustainability actions. Participants from the Heritage Keepers programme engage immediate local actions while also representing integral parts of larger social and spatial assemblages. The previously discussed work of Lopez and Weaver (2023), Ardoin (2014) and Massey (2004) all point towards the role of scale in community stewardship initiatives. Essentially, recognising one's place on a scale beyond the local enhances understanding of how individual actions can collaborate with others, contributing to broader transformative change (Ardoin, 2014). Equally important in this context is the move from a focus on actions taken by an individual, to collectively supported actions within a group, building on social capital bonds to positively facilitate meaningful action (see Figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2 Framework for the process of Community Stewardship

The elements comprising the community stewardship process interact in intricate and dynamic ways. The framework identifies five distinct phases integral to the overall process. However, the nuanced relationship between knowledge and caring (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002), underscores a reciprocal connection. Individuals may find themselves in a symbiotic relationship where caring is propelled by knowledge acquisition, or conversely, the pursuit of knowledge is fuelled by pre-existing care. This interplay resonates with discussions on 'information deficit' models and the 'value-action gap' within environmental action (Blake, 1999). These discussions suggest that individuals' engagement in environmental initiatives hinge on their awareness and understanding, emphasising the interconnectedness of knowledge acquisition and the manifestation of caring attitudes. Relatedly, the proposed framework elements are part of an iterative process and at times participants may return to earlier steps in the process, particularly if their engagement with community stewardship is ongoing (as would be desired) rather than a single occurrence. For example, participants may first focus on a local archaeological feature, learn about it, feel a connection and engage in an action associated with it. Over the course of the engagement they may discover a specific ecological feature connected to the site leading to further ideas for research and emerging actions.

Critically reflecting on the research conducted and emergent framework, it is clear that the process of facilitating community stewardship is a complex yet crucial endeavour. To support and encourage communities in becoming stewards of their local places, facilitation is key. A skilled facilitator can create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere, encouraging active participation and empowering participants. In recognising and valuing the diverse perspectives and experiences within communities, the facilitator fosters a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, essential for successful community stewardship initiatives. In the process of facilitating community stewardship, the knowledge shared must be easily digestible and

relevant to the community's needs and interests. Complicated jargon and technical information can be overwhelming and disempowering. Instead, the process should employ clear, concise, and accessible language, making complex concepts relatable and digestible for all participants. Sharing resources and building capacity among participants supports informed decision-making, ensuring that stewardship efforts are well-informed and sustainable.

Emotional connection proves pivotal in community stewardship, motivating individuals to protect and conserve their environment. Utilising storytelling, personal experiences, and cultural ties may evoke emotions that resonate. While this paper explores community stewardship through participant perspectives, a key question arises: how can we increase involvement from non-participants? Further investigation into fostering emotional connections could drive future research on enhancing community stewardship. The Heritage Keepers programme exemplifies how engaging in this process promotes stewardship behaviours, including sustainability, conservation, and responsible management of local environments. Additionally, collective action among participants nationwide reinforces these behaviours, uniting toward shared environmental goals and catalysing impactful change.

6.8. Conclusions

In conclusion, as outlined above there are multiple factors determining whether community stewardship initiatives are successful. The first element, Care, highlights the significance of cultivating an emotional connection and sense of responsibility towards local community and place. In fostering a deep sense of care and attachment, community members are motivated to protect and preserve their surroundings, providing a strong foundation for stewardship behaviours. Future research on how care is initiated (and the influencing factors of this) would be useful to explore through the community stewardship lens. The second element, knowledge, emphasises the significance of the accessibility and relevance of the information shared during the process. By presenting information in a digestible and meaningful manner, participants are empowered to make informed decisions, contributing to informed and effective stewardship practices. The third element, facilitation, plays a pivotal role in the community stewardship process, creating an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages active participation and ownership. Effective facilitation ensures that diverse perspectives are valued and integrated with decision-making processes, driving collaborative and community-driven initiatives. The fourth element, agency, acknowledges the importance of supports and external drivers in empowering participants in their stewardship efforts. This element is fundamental for any successful community stewardship initiative, providing an opportunity for initiatives (across a variety of scales) to be implemented. There is also a need for further research around community stewardship legacy (i.e. once the specific supports provided by programmes are no longer available). The fifth and final element, action, relates to the tangible, measurable and achievable goal(s) attained through the process. We have presented these findings as a practical framework that is readily adaptable by similar initiatives. As outlined previously, this work has been developed via an embedded practitioner researcher in partnership with a university. The applied nature of the work as well as the fact that the project is ongoing could be viewed as a testament to the value of an embedded practitioner research design.

When communities are provided with the necessary tools and support, they may emerge as powerful agents of positive change for their environment. By fostering a sense of ownership, belonging, and collective responsibility, the journey towards community stewardship becomes a collaborative and empowering experience. It is through this process of partnership and active engagement that communities can truly become champions of their place and environment, ensuring a greener and more resilient future for generations to come.

7. Discussion

7.1. Overview

The following chapter will revisit and synthesise the key findings and insights from the preceding chapters of this multiphase practitioner-led study, that has been primarily focused on the concepts of place-based learning and community stewardship. Place-based learning, as explored throughout this study, encompasses learning experiences that bridge formal and informal settings, engaging participants of all ages, with a specific emphasis on connecting individuals with the unique characteristics and heritage of their local environments. This approach aims to empower participants by sharing resources and encouraging critical thinking about local issues. Additionally, this study (and the related Heritage Keepers programme) recognised the diversity of knowledge related to local places and the significance of this diversity in our exploration of community stewardship – the active involvement of communities in conserving and shaping the future of their places. Throughout this study, various conditions that place-based learning programmes should address to facilitate community stewardship effectively were identified.

As outlined previously, this study began with three sequential questions;

1. What impact has the work of Burrenbeo Trust had on community stewardship activities and attitudes in the Burren?
2. How can Burrenbeo Trust's community place-based learning programmes be transferred to benefit wider communities?
3. How can community stewardship be enhanced through place-based learning?

In carrying out the research, these questions have been addressed along with some additional findings. The following section brings to the fore the new knowledge created through this work from an academic perspective, for the case study organisation and for other organisations nationally or internationally who wish to engage in similar work. The discussion focuses around three key areas; positionality, scale of action and mechanisms of support.

7.2. Negotiating Position

As has been discussed already, positionality is central to this study. This emerges primarily as a result of the practitioner-led nature of the research but wider consideration of position and the implications of same are worthy of further discussion in the context of this study. With reference to the findings outlined in the preceding three chapters, the potential for insider practitioner-led research, the value of insider practitioner-led evaluation in community stewardship initiatives and the role of independent outsider facilitators in developing community stewardship projects are now discussed.

The most significant methodological findings from this research relate to the experience of conducting embedded practitioner research via an employment-based funding mechanism. The study was undertaken through a specific funding scheme of the Irish Research Council, which supports employment based research and sheds light on the unique opportunities and challenges inherent in this approach. As outlined in the literature review?, insider research

pertains to investigations conducted within a social group, organisation, or cultural context where the researcher holds membership or affiliation (Greene, 2014). Through this methodological approach, the researcher gains intimate access to the organisational context and first-hand experience of the phenomena under investigation, fostering rich insights and nuanced understanding. Equally, the findings can be applied immediately, as was evidenced by the increased focus on and capacity around evaluation seen in the instance of this researcher. The employment-based funding mechanism facilitates sustained engagement and collaboration between the researcher and the organisation, enabling iterative data collection, analysis and interpretation. However, the research design findings also highlight potential tensions arising from the dual roles of the researcher as both insider and investigator, navigating competing demands, expectation and loyalties. Despite these challenges, the embedded practitioner researcher methodology offers a valuable avenue for generating contextually relevant knowledge and facilitating impactful organisational change informed by rigorous research evidence.

This research model is also of specific benefit to the researcher, allowing them to leverage accumulated knowledge and develop their own practice, rather than conducting research solely on others' practices (Munn-Giddings, 2012). This is very relevant to the discussion of practitioner-led evaluation. Through the process of conducting the meta-evaluation discussed in Chapter 5, the researcher significantly developed their practice as a practitioner-evaluator and was also able to share this knowledge with colleagues to the wider benefit of the organisation. In addition while there are arguments around whether evaluators should possess knowledge and expertise related to the programmes under evaluation, with some arguing for it and others advocating for impartiality (Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey, 1999), in the instance of this study, the insider position of the evaluation has been both beneficial and also, necessary given that there is very often no funding available for external programme (or organisation) evaluations.

However, the insider position is not without potential risks, as Creswell (1998) highlights researchers could jeopardise their positions if negative data is reported or if findings cast unfavourable light on the organisation or workplace. This is also true for insider evaluation, where the insider evaluator may be disinclined to report the negative findings while an external evaluator could be less constrained. From the experience of this study, while these potential concerns are valid, where the researcher or evaluator is based in an organisation which is transparent and supportive the issue does not arise. The concerns outlined perhaps speak to broader concerns around power and culture within organisations, and while nowhere is entirely immune to issues arising, this was not a feature of this research project.

The most significant difficulty encountered as a result of the insider research position in this instance related to tensions arising from the dual roles of the researcher as both employee and investigator, navigating competing demands and expectation in relation to available time and capacity. Within small organisations, such as Burrenbeo, there is frequently blurring of roles where colleagues will work in support of each other's programmes as required. Equally, there are certain periods of the year, in the lead up to significant events like Burren in Bloom or the

Winterage Weekend, where additional support is required from all staff. Ensuring adequate time is afforded to the research work on these occasions was more difficult, however the experience of completing this research and recognising the significant time pressures faced by all Burrenbeo staff, has reemphasised the need to allow adequate space for all team members to engage in training, reflection and evaluation. This is something which Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison (2013) reflected upon, emphasising the importance of clear role negotiation in insider research situations. As discussed, while not without critique, overall both insider practitioner-led research and evaluation offer valuable avenues for generating contextually relevant knowledge and facilitating impactful organisational change informed by rigorous research evidence.

From considerations of insiders, the discussion now switches to the outsider position. As discussed in Chapter 7, when considering community stewardship within the framework of the Heritage Keepers programme, examination of the role and significance of outside facilitation arises. In general, a facilitator empowers individuals to engage and learn within a group context, fostering collaborative and experiential learning (Heron, 1999). In relation to this study, participants reported that facilitated activities and workshops provided fresh perspectives on local issues and assets, suggested new ways of conceptualising their environment and community, and influenced dynamics within existing groups. This echoes Nelson and McFadzean (1998) who maintained that an external facilitator guiding the exploration of a local environment can offer an objective viewpoint, aiding in identifying areas where the group's efforts would be most beneficial. In the case of Heritage Keepers, community participants also had the opportunity to hear from other peer community groups, providing not only the outsider perspective but also one which they could readily relate to. This notion of an outsider leading the discussion, perhaps challenging assumptions or historic ways of working, is a key finding in terms of enabling successful community stewardship initiatives.

However, while the above discussion is relevant, there is also room to consider the arguments of Mullings (1999) who argued that individuals cannot consistently maintain a strictly insider or outsider status, as few manage to remain entirely detached. She maintains that attempts to adopt either extreme position reflect the influence of dualistic thinking prevalent in Western ideologies. This dynamic consideration of positionality was also considered by Carling et al. (2014) who argue for strategic and reflexive management of positionality. So, while the insider researcher can at times hold a position which allows them additional scope, they may also simultaneously be deemed an outsider by the participant communities that they are working with. Equally, the outsider perspective afforded when facilitating workshops with unknown groups can be emphasised in some incidences where there is less in common for example, urban or rural locations or perhaps age or socioeconomic status, but may not be so pronounced where the facilitator shares features of the participant community.

This discussion of position is relevant in considering the second and third research question associated with this study. When looking to implement place-based learning initiatives and consequently community stewardship actions, the position of those involved, and whether this has implications, is worthy of consideration. As evidenced through this study, while there is

potential for insider engagement whether in a research or evaluation capacity, there are also occasions when an outside perspective is of value. However, within all of this it is noteworthy that at times there can be flexibility within these positions, where one may be more or less either insider or outsider depending on the circumstances. This consideration of position also reinforces the relevance of the social constructivism framework which informs this study, where reflexivity is encouraged, prompting the researcher to critically engage with participants' experiences and consider their own role in knowledge construction.

7.3. Considerations of Scale

The second aspect that merits discussion is a fundamental, albeit contested (Moore, 2008), component of geographical theory: the concept of scale. Explored in the literature review and Chapters 6 and 7, scale has featured across this thesis in various ways, from the scope of programme reach (ranging from local to national), participant involvement (from individuals to groups or communities), geographical dimensions concerning local areas and actions, as well as the extent of the stewardship actions undertaken. As discussed by Haarstad (2014), our perception and approach to scale, as well as the manner in which we conceptualise environmental (or perhaps wider heritage) issues in terms of magnitude, hold significant importance in our capacity to effectively address them. They also discuss the challenge inherent in considerations of scale that demonstrates how our societal, political, and cognitive frameworks hinder our ability to effectively tackle problems that transcend borders and exist and impact across multiple scales. Given the focus of a community stewardship approach is to equip communities to address environmental or heritage challenges the scale of actions and participation require further unpacking.

The question of whether a place-based learning initiative could successfully be moved from a local to a national scale is central to this study. As outlined in Chapter 6, through a piloting of an adapted programme this was successfully achieved. However, there were many considerations which resulted in the success. As List (2022) discusses, significant scaling-up of an idea may lead to dilution from the original concept, in the case of Heritage Keepers it was necessary to adapt existing models and initiatives to accommodate the expanded geographical and numerical reach. Alongside the necessary programme adaptations, trialling multiple delivery methods helped determine the most effective approach. Equally, this is not a static situation and if alterations are required in the future this can also be accommodated, the outcome of programme evaluations as well as the fluctuations in organisational resources and staff capacity will shape future programme iterations. Consequently, the content is now adaptable, materials are designed for efficiency, and participant processes are streamlined, ensuring realistic and achievable outcomes within a feasible timeframe. The process of moving from a local to national scale has been informative and could be applied for future initiatives if required.

The second consideration of scale is in relation to the participation and efficacy of actions undertaken by individuals, groups and/or communities. In keeping with the human geography assessment that scale is relational (Howitt, 1998) and therefore that understanding a specific

scale requires consideration of its relationship with other scales and the political, social, and spatial processes shaping them, the discussion in terms of scale at which participants are operating is interesting. This relational view contrasts with viewing scales as independently existing, distinct units that can be analysed in isolation. MacKinnon and Derickson (2013) suggest that presenting climate change on a local or global scale perspective can place climate change adaptation responsibility on local actors while normalising global crises, instead they argue for a more scale-specific and relational approach, emphasising building community capacities and fostering spatial linkages. This underscores the political implications of how we conceptualise scale, shifting responsibility from governments to local actors. In terms of this research project, a deliberate research design decision was taken that participation would be in groups (whether as a school class or community group) rather than individual participants. While emphasis is often placed on individual actions and the magnitude of personal effect, the experience of delivering previous initiatives underscored the importance of the collaborative nature of the process when participating as a group, necessitating cohesion amidst diversity to amplify shared objectives. As previously discussed, the group participants were often drawn from a range of existing collectives but in assembling for the purposes of completing the Heritage Keepers initiative they were facilitated to engage in a process which allowed for fresh perspectives. Coupled with this, the emphasis on identifying one achievable group goal ensured the focus was on a shared positive outcome which each individual could have an input on, whether in the action design and planning, implementation or both.

Another dimension of scale which has been discussed in Chapter 6, is the scale of actions undertaken through a community stewardship initiative such as Heritage Keepers. As outlined, each local Heritage Keepers group works with a facilitator to decide on specific actions and fine-tune plans as needed. The facilitator, offering an external perspective, plays a crucial role in this process, advising and supporting in the identification of an achievable plan based on the capacity, time and resources available. Crucially, participants do go on to complete their proposed actions and have successfully completed a variety of projects, such as developing local heritage trails, publishing oral history records, creating biodiversity areas, celebrating notable local figures, organising community networking events, installing art pieces, and digging wildlife ponds. Although the scope and long-term impact of these initiatives vary, they all focus on achieving "small wins" (Foster-Fishman et al., 2006), demonstrating that communities can accomplish their goals with the right resources. This deliberate approach emphasises achievable actions, echoing the work by Peters et al. (2013) that indicated that emphasising group efficacy is more effective than fear-based methods in motivating action. This approach, aligns with the pragmatism theoretical approach, where the action-oriented nature ensures that the research findings are not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable, contributing to real-world impact.

The discussion now moves to the concept of amplifying scale through collective action and networking. At the collective level, scale emphasises the transformative potential of coordinated endeavours, underscoring the imperative of systemic change to address global issues. Bodin (2017) maintains that the majority of environmental issues can be considered interdependent collective action issues – given the interconnectedness of our

environments (and it could be argued places). For meaningful change to be enacted, a collective approach is required. This has an added prescience when considered in relation to action on climate issues, where focus on the local scale has intensified as inertia is observed at national and global levels, resulting in a growing anticipation that the local scale can assume a more significant role and address the gaps (Howarth, 2022). To this end, the Scottish Government have enacted 'The Place Principle,' advocating for a collective comprehension of place and emphasising the necessity for collaborative strategies towards enhancing community outcomes and furthering collective achievements through coordinated management of local services and resources in meeting Scotland's National Performance Framework (Scottish Government, 2019). Scotland also has a Community Empowerment Act which aims to provide more involvement in local decision-making for communities through affording Community Planning Partnerships statutory recognition to plan and deliver local outcomes. This approach would seem to hold many similarities with the community stewardship approach advocated for in this study.

The final area of discussion presented below ties together the preceding two sections. While positionality and scale are important, ultimately adequate support is necessary for community stewardship initiatives to be successful. The mechanisms of this support will now be considered.

7.4. Mechanisms of Support

The study has led to a crucial point for discussion, echoing one of the primary findings highlighted in Chapter 7. Through the research undertaken and in addressing the outlined three research questions, it became evident that a pivotal determinant affecting the success of community stewardship endeavours is the level of support offered, or as articulated in the proposed community stewardship framework, the degree of agency held by participants to enact change. This discussion will delve into this topic through two main lenses: firstly, examining the importance of having an organisation like Burrenbeo to facilitate initiatives such as Heritage Keepers, and secondly, exploring the practical requirements for monetary and mentoring support essential to foster stewardship actions.

Research supports the contention that the existence of NGO's such as Burrenbeo can impact on active citizenship behaviours (Buijs et al., 2023). This impact can be based on the collaborative cultivation of contextualised understanding of environments and communities, as well as the establishment of interconnected networks across various scales, and the fostering of collective momentum (Krasny and Tidball, 2012). Equally, through the embedded understanding of both local places and culture, while engaging with broader concepts and policies, organisations such as Burrenbeo can adapt and integrate inventive methods for specific local settings (ibid.). But, it has also been suggested that the impacts achieved can be limited in scope and disjointed, seldom extending beyond the local level (Mattijssen, Buijs, and Elands 2018). Although this argument might also pertain to the impacts of the Heritage Keepers programme, the strong sense of collective action, the establishment of a network of community stewards, and the potential for ongoing engagement with Burrenbeo significantly

mitigate these concerns. The additional benefits which may result from the Heritage Keepers participation and actions such as enhanced community cohesion, biodiversity increases, monument preservation or local economic benefits have not been quantified or evaluated during this study but could also address the possible shortcomings if researched in the future. This is something that will form part of the wider programme evaluation once sufficient time has passed to allow for a meaningful sample of completed actions. There is also a wider observation around the need for an organisation such as Burrenbeo Trust to facilitate actions such as those achieved through the Heritage Keepers initiative. While the programme goal and the achieved outcome was community empowerment, the role that the supporting organisation plays, and consequently the potential that once the organisation is no longer so involved that the actions cease, is something that definitely requires further investigation. These sentiments have been echoed in work around the role of paid professional support for community gardens (Fox-Kämper et al. 2018, Kelly, 2023).

The discussion moves finally to consider the important findings specifically around the support necessary, as evidenced by the Heritage Keepers programme, to enable community stewardship actions. As outlined extensively in Chapter 7, successful community stewardship initiatives are influenced by various factors. As evidenced throughout this thesis, fostering care cultivates emotional connections and responsibility towards the local community, laying a strong foundation for stewardship behaviours. Secondly, knowledge underscores the importance of accessible and relevant information, empowering participants to make informed decisions. These findings build on the framework proposed by Cash et al. (2002), which focuses on the concepts of credibility, salience, and legitimacy in the provision of scientific information regarding climate action. This framework highlights that the delineation between science and policy, or science and practice, poses a significant obstacle to effectively incorporating scientific knowledge into decision-making processes. To address this challenge, Cash et al. assert that evidence utilised for decision-making purposes must possess three key attributes: credibility (such as being authoritative, believable, and trusted), salience (providing information pertinent to decision-makers' needs), and legitimacy (ensuring unbiased and equitable information production that considers the values and requirements of diverse stakeholders). While the decisions or actions taken through the Heritage Keepers programme are all based on scientific concepts there are parallels in how participants are looking to the programme facilitators to inform and guide them regarding decisions on their actions. In collaborating with the many Heritage Keepers groups over the course of this study, it became evident that participants were eager to undertake initiatives that would benefit their local heritage and environment. However, many were uncertain about the specific actions they could take. Those who had identified potential projects were particularly keen on obtaining sufficient information to ensure the successful and effective implementation of their ideas.

While the provision of micro-financing is central to the model proposed, building agency within the participants is found to be more significant, ultimately there were some meaningful actions completed which did not require funding. In these instances, it may have been that the process of engaging with Heritage Keepers, and the support structure which was provided

through access to both their peer participants and the knowledge of the facilitators was sufficient to enable them to take on and complete an action.

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the core themes of positionality, scale, and mechanisms of support in the context of place-based learning and community stewardship. The interplay between these elements is central to the findings of this study, both from the perspective of practitioners and researchers. By fostering a deep understanding of local contexts, promoting collaborative efforts, and ensuring sustained support, place-based learning programmes like Heritage Keepers can effectively empower communities to engage in stewardship actions that are both impactful and sustainable. The insights from this study offer valuable guidance for future initiatives aiming to enhance community stewardship through place-based learning. Additionally, there are methodological insights, particularly concerning practitioner research and scale.

The following chapter will synthesise these insights, drawing together the key findings and implications for the researcher, the case study organisation, and other similar initiatives, researchers, and policymakers.

8. Conclusion

This final chapter provides a concluding overview of the study, summarising the main research findings in alignment with the research aims and questions, while also assessing their significance and contribution. Additionally, it examines the study's limitations and suggests avenues for future research.

8.1. Key Findings

When examining each research question, a series of new findings emerged. The primary finding in relation to question 1 centres on the role of practitioner evaluation. Equally, the potential for a meta-evaluation approach was clearly outlined in Article 1, something that other practitioners could consider in their work. There were also significant findings for Burrenbeo (and possibly other similar organisations) in relation to the reasons why people engage with place-based learning and community stewardship such as ensuring programmes are active, that the topics are broad to engage a wider audience, that there is a focus on fun, that participants views can change through participation, and the importance of the facilitator.

In Article 2, the specific findings around scaling-up a local community stewardship initiative to a national scale were unpacked. This paper directly addresses research question number 2. Insights around allowing sufficient time for the development of organisational knowledge followed by piloting of the expansion will be useful for others looking to carry out similar initiatives. In this article, the role of networks, peer learning and collective action was also discussed. Perhaps of most significance here was the finding that showed that if necessary conditions are met, community stewardship initiatives can have really significant outcomes for both participants and places. Some of the outcomes for participants include increased knowledge of local heritage, increased capacity for action, enhanced pride of place and community cohesion. The outcomes for places are specific to the actions undertaken, such as tree planting, monument maintenance or pond creation but there is also the indirect outcome which could be achieved through communities who are better informed and better equipped to enact change.

Finally, paper 3 in addressing research question number 3, develops a practitioner-led framework for those looking to employ community stewardship initiatives in their settings. The paper identifies five essential components at the core of the community stewardship process: Care, Knowledge, Facilitation, Agency, and Action. Supporting and strengthening each of these is Collective Action. Through synthesising these elements, the developed framework offers valuable guidance for researchers and practitioners aiming to enact similar community stewardship initiatives, transforming the concept of community stewardship into a set of actionable and sequential steps applicable across diverse contexts.

8.2. Study impact

This study has had a profound impact on multiple levels, reflecting a multifaceted influence that extends from the individual researcher to the broader academic and professional

community. The nature of embedded research means the study has generated significant benefits for both the researcher and the organisation.

For the researcher, the journey of conducting doctoral research has been transformative, fostering substantial personal and professional growth. This process hones critical thinking and problem-solving skills, instils resilience in the face of challenges, and refines the ability to conduct rigorous scholarly work. The act of designing and executing a complex research project has deepened the researcher's expertise, positioning them to contribute original insights and innovations to their discipline.

A notable aspect of this journey is the evolution of the researcher's role within the organisation. Initially serving as the Research and Impact Officer at Burrenbeo Trust when the study commenced in 2018, the researcher transitioned to the role of manager in February 2021. This transition was concurrent with significant organisational changes, including shifts within the Board of Directors and the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The leadership skills developed through this research have proven invaluable in navigating these changes. The iterative nature of the research allowed for the immediate application of findings, ensuring that the insights gained were promptly integrated into the organisation's strategies and operations.

The study has also significantly benefited Burrenbeo Trust, the organisation at the heart of this research. The development and implementation of evaluation materials and practices have enhanced the organisation's effectiveness, efficiency, and overall impact. Specifically, the piloting and national scaling-up of the Heritage Keepers programme have had a substantial effect on both the organisation and its participants. The PhD project's findings are informing strategic decision-making, particularly in applying the Community Stewardship Framework to other programmes, thereby improving policy development and leading to positive outcomes for stakeholders and beneficiaries. Moreover, the completion of this study has strengthened the evidence base available to the organisation, bolstering its applications for funding. The researcher's involvement in academic and professional networks, cultivated during the PhD, has extended the organisation's reach and influence. These connections have fostered new partnerships and enhanced Burrenbeo Trust's reputation within both academic circles and the broader professional community.

The impact of this PhD extends beyond the immediate confines of the researcher and their organisation. Arguably the most significant impact achieved through this process has been for the participants on the Heritage Keepers programme. Through engaging with the process and via the ongoing networking opportunities provided, they have both undertaken specific actions to enhance their local place but have also developed their capacity to engage with further actions. The positive impacts in relation to the built, natural and culture heritage of the areas where actions were undertaken have not yet been adequately quantified. As previously mentioned, this is something which warrants further consideration.

By disseminating research findings through scholarly journals, conferences, and other platforms, the researcher contributes to the advancement of knowledge within and beyond their field. The decision to complete the PhD by publication, while demanding, has offered valuable opportunities for learning and growth. Engaging with peer reviewers' feedback has refined the research and ensured its rigor and relevance. The interdisciplinary nature of the study, encompassing education, geography, and practitioner-led research, underscores its broad relevance. The three chosen publication outlets reflect the diverse scope and scale of the project, highlighting its significance across multiple domains. In selecting each publication, the various audiences for whom this research has relevance were considered, as well as considering where the geographers voice should be represented.

While the preceding discussion presents the positive impacts of this work, there is also discussion of the limitations of this research at section 8.6 below.

In summary, this study exemplifies the profound impact that embedded research can have on various levels. For the researcher, it represents a journey of personal and professional enhancement, marked by significant role evolution and the acquisition of invaluable leadership skills. For Burrenbeo Trust, it has led to improved organisational practices, enhanced strategic decision-making, and strengthened funding applications. Finally, through broad dissemination, the study contributes to the wider academic and professional discourse, advancing knowledge and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration.

8.3. Theoretical Advances

In addressing the three research questions, this study has significantly enhanced the theoretical understanding of place-based learning and community stewardship. The three resultant articles illuminate new dimensions in the dynamic interplay between evaluation, education, learning, place, scale, community, conservation, and heritage. As noted by the expert peer-reviewer of Article 1, *“The overall topics of your paper—practitioner-based evaluation and meta-analysis—are important.”*

This research contributes to a more holistic understanding of how place shapes learning experiences and fosters community engagement, underscoring the potential for community stewardship to address contemporary conservation challenges. Through the analysis of the Heritage Keepers programme and the applied framework, the study reveals mechanisms for cultivating a sense of responsibility and care for local places, empowering individuals and communities to become active stewards of their surroundings. Particularly in Article 3, the framework developed in response to the third research question provides a clear theoretical basis for community stewardship, demonstrating its applicability and replicability.

These theoretical advances deepen scholarly understanding of the intersections between education, place, and community, offering practical insights for educators, policymakers, and community leaders. By harnessing the power of place-based learning, these insights support the development of sustainable communities and places.

8.4. Practical Applications

As this was a practitioner-led study, there are multiple practical applications from this research. The first practical application was in the development and design of evaluation materials and methodologies for Burrenbeo. As outlined earlier, the focus for many years within the organisation was on programme delivery, without sufficient time or attention given to measuring and monitoring impact. Through this study, a greater emphasis has been placed on this, as well as the researchers upskilling in terms of practical application of evaluation methodologies that best suit the needs of the organisation. This is something that will continue to expand develop over time to the ongoing benefit of the organisation.

Another significant practical application of this study has been the scaling-up of the national Heritage Keepers programme that has now been delivered to over 1000 participants. This is hugely significant for the organisation but also of great benefit to the participants. Development and refining of this programme will be ongoing and it is now one of Burrenbeo's core programmes. As commented by peer-reviewers providing expert feedback on Article 3 *"This is a really timely topic, especially given recognition on the need for a 'whole-of-society' approach to address global biodiversity decline with large- and small-scale actions"*.

The dissemination of findings through peer-reviewed publications and conference presentations and the need to respond to the subsequent feedback not only enhances the strength and visibility of the study but also fosters knowledge exchange and collaboration with diverse stakeholders. Furthermore, these dissemination efforts facilitate the establishment of partnerships with academic institutions, governmental agencies and community organisations, strengthening the organisations reach and impact while fostering a collaborative ecosystem for future research and practice in the field.

Overall, the key contributions from this research underscore the importance of robust evaluation methodologies, effective dissemination strategies, innovative research mechanisms and the huge potential for place-based learning and community stewardship to be more widely employed.

8.5. Implications of the Research

This study has contributed significantly to our understanding of place-based learning and community stewardship, particularly in the context of Ireland. The following sections will consider specific implications from the two phases of the research. The implications are considered on 3 scales, firstly locally for Burrenbeo, then secondly for communities more generally, before finally considering at a national scale in terms of implications for policy and practice.

8.5.1. Implications at a local level – for Burrenbeo

Phase 1 of the study was focused on investigating the impact of Burrenbeo Trust initiatives over a 10 year period and through this to also review the feedback and evaluation practices of

the organisation more generally. This phase looked to address the first research question associated with this study, ‘what impact has the work of Burrenbeo Trust had on community stewardship activities and attitudes in the Burren?’

The findings in terms of the organisations impact, and more specifically the reasons why people engage with the organisation as outlined in Chapter 4, are particularly useful. In outlining the role that the themes identified (keeping it active; engaging a wide audience; having fun while learning; changing views and taking action; being outdoors; having an interest in and learning about place; importance of personality; and attitude to place) have played in encouraging participation in Burrenbeo Trust events, this work allows for others to implement or research similar themes across a broad range of settings. As an organisation, this has also implications for Burrenbeo Trust in the future development of programmes.

One of the other critical implications from the first phase of this research is the attention that this work brought to the deficiency in the existing system of feedback, monitoring and evaluation within Burrenbeo Trust. Not unique to Burrenbeo, this deficiency is often attributed to the characteristics of environmental and conservation organisations, that are typically small, underfunded, and lack access to the necessary research capacity and resources required to scientifically evaluate the effectiveness of their actions (Close et al., 2016). This finding highlights the need for increased support and resources for such organisations to enhance their capacity for meaningful impact evaluation and in turn to improve their stewardship activities. Given the experience of this researcher, the call would also be for support for more practitioner-led, insider research that through this study has been seen to have significant and direct impact.

As outlined in Chapter 4, the process of undertaking this review has resulted in improved understanding of both the procedures around and importance of strategic evaluation within Burrenbeo. The use of Logic Models to articulate clearly intended programme outcomes has been instrumental in clarifying the desired impacts of specific programmes and also in establishing a methodology for measuring them.

8.5.2. Implications for Communities

Building on the first phase and taking the learnings around reasons for engagement as well as programme evaluation into account, the second phase of this research, looked to develop and pilot the scaling-up to a national context of a place-based learning programme that specifically aimed to encourage community stewardship. When this research project was proposed, the second research question was ‘how can Burrenbeo Trust’s community place-based learning programmes be transferred to benefit wider communities?’ and this process has clearly outlined a model where this can and has been achieved.

Through the development, coordination, delivery and subsequent evaluation of first the Exploring Place workshops, and then the Heritage Keepers initiative (as described in Chapter 5), the necessary considerations for scaling-up of similar initiatives were outlined. This is essential. As discussed, place-based learning programmes have huge potential to encourage

and facilitate community stewardship, however for meaningful change this needs to be achievable at scale.

Chapter 6 synthesises the earlier chapters and presents an analysis of the necessary elements for community stewardship generally, ultimately suggesting a practical framework for similar endeavours. In doing so, the final research question identified, ‘how can community stewardship be enhanced through place-based learning?’ is answered. A wide range of elements are considered and outlined, moving beyond the technical aspects of heritage and environmental conservation and delving into the interpersonal dimensions of social change. The emphasis on how decisions are made and who has a say in those decisions is crucial. Place-based initiatives, as exemplified in this study, play a pivotal role in implementing and achieving globally-established objectives like the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. These initiatives not only address environmental goals but also have a role to play in addressing social factors such as food security, gender equality, and community resilience. They contribute to social capital, governance processes, and a sense of belonging in vulnerable regions. Therefore, policymakers and global actors should recognise and support these place-based sustainability initiatives to ensure that international commitments translate into tangible, ground-level impacts.

8.5.3. National Programme and Policy implications

The policy implications of this research are substantial. The emphasis on collective decision-making and the recognition of place-based initiatives as essential drivers of sustainability align with international objectives such as the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, and the UN Decade on Restoration. Policymakers need to acknowledge and actively support these initiatives to ensure the success of global sustainability efforts.

Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of empowering individuals and fostering community agency in policy design and implementation (as discussed extensively in Article 3). Plurality and inclusivity in decision-making processes should be a central focus of policies aimed at addressing complex challenges like climate adaptation and environmental stewardship (Londres et al., 2023). The focus on diversity and collaborative decision-making underscores a more profound, often overlooked aspect of social change. It highlights the concept that our goal extends beyond simple heritage or environmental conservation. It encompasses a transformation in how we interact with one another, addressing the processes where decisions that affect more than just ourselves are reached, and fundamentally, who is granted a voice in these decisions (Holloway 2010; Prilleltensky 2014; Stein 2019).

Echoing previous work by Hall et al. (2010) the importance of empowering individuals and communities in order to affect real change is underlined by the findings in this study. As Wamsler and Riggers (2018) outlined, existing policy approaches exhibit several notable shortcomings. Firstly, they often lack diversity and inclusivity, failing to adequately represent a broad range of perspectives and voices. Additionally, these policies tend to take the form of isolated, standalone interventions, lacking a comprehensive and integrated approach. Based on

the findings of this study, an integrated approach that supported meaningful actions by local communities is necessary. In order to achieve this, organisations facilitating such an approach, such as Burrenbeo, need also to be supported. Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of non-financial tools and mechanisms to support financial strategies, limiting the effectiveness of these approaches. Moreover, current policies provide limited guidance and support for taking complementary actions that consider institutional and individual perspectives, knowledge, and capacities. This lack of flexibility can hinder the adaptation and implementation of policies in diverse contexts. Furthermore, individual adaptations that have organically emerged outside the purview of existing policies often receive minimal support and recognition. Lastly, a notable issue lies in the omission of non-material factors, such as emotions or 'non-rational' behaviours, that are crucial components of human decision-making and behaviour but are typically overlooked in policy design and implementation. Addressing these shortcomings is essential for crafting more effective and inclusive policy approaches where real and meaningful change can be achieved.

8.6. Limitations of the Research

While this research has provided valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The following observations occur in this regard. It should also be noted that some of these limitations are both strengths and weaknesses of the study as described further below.

8.6.1. Capacity to deliver at scale

While one of the central research questions identified, and the focus of Chapter 5 is the scaling-up of the Heritage Keepers initiative, the future of the initiative is currently limited by the capacity of the team to deliver the programme, and particularly to fund the micro-financing element and provide ongoing support to groups as they complete their projects. Scaling-up initiatives like these requires careful consideration of resources, funding, and the availability of trained professionals. This scalability challenge is particularly pertinent for smaller, underfunded organisations.

8.6.2. Study length

While this study allowed for longitudinal research given the time frame in question (2018 – 2023) as well as the researchers existing knowledge of the organisation, there is still a significant amount that could be done as follow on research if there was more time available. Particularly, more in depth interviews with participants to provide greater insights into their experience and follow up research over a number of years to determine whether participants continued to be active citizens having completed the Heritage Keepers programme. However, conversely, maintaining interest and involvement over an extended period can be challenging, potentially affecting the research outcomes.

8.6.3. Open call leading to less than representative sample

The open call for participation in this research may have led to a less-than-representative sample. This could influence the generalisability of the findings to broader populations. If subsequent studies were to be conducted on Burrenbeo Trust initiatives it could warrant

identifying and then specifically targeting some of the less well represented groups within the organisations audience.

8.6.4. Dependence on Organisations such as Burrenbeo Trust

While the embedded nature of this research has been central to its success, there is also a risk that the research's dependence on an organisation like Burrenbeo Trust could introduce bias or limitations related to the organisation's specific goals and resources. Ideally, future research could explore a more diverse set of organisations and contexts.

8.7. Key Strengths of the Study

This study provides a range of important contributions to knowledge in this field. The main contributions are listed below:

- This study adds to the literature around the role of evaluation in programme development. It provides a unique insight into the opportunities for meta-evaluation in organisations working in the place-based learning space. Consideration of evaluation and impact measurement were central to addressing the first research question and the key findings from this are presented in Article 1.
- The experience of scaling-up an initiative from a local to a national context and the relevant learnings are a significant addition to the knowledge on this topic. Scaling-up and transfer of Burrenbeo initiatives to wider geographic audiences is the focus of the second research question and the key findings are presented in Article 2.
- Perhaps of most significance is the establishment of a framework for the process of community stewardship. The potential impact of an increased community stewardship presence in Ireland (and elsewhere) could be very significant and this evidence based framework is informative in this regard. The details of this are fully outlined in Article 3. This discussion and findings answer the third research question associated with this study as well as the final research objective.
- Another key strength underpinning all of the above is the distinctive positionality of the researcher undertaking this study. The embedded nature of the practitioner research provides a unique and practical insight that, with the support of literature can be applied across a range of settings. The findings associated with this are discussed in detail in the Chapter 7, the discussion section of this thesis.

8.8. Future Research

In light of the insights gained from this study, several avenues for future research emerge.

Given the importance of socialisation in place-based learning, community stewardship and the deep attachment that people feel towards a particular place, future research could delve deeper into social environmentalism as an essential aspect of place attachment. This could encompass actions relevant to both public and private domains, with a focus on nurturing a sense of connection and belonging to local environments. These findings would further inform the important considerations around the role of emotional connection in fostering community stewardship behaviours. Returning to the work of Toomey (2023), facts will not change minds

around conservation issues and if we want to see the necessary change in how we engage with our places and environments, social networks, emotions and connection are fundamental.

As previously stated, a follow up study that examines these initiatives from the perspective of less well represented communities and that determines the degree that the actions are dependent on the existence of the programme and related staff supports would be essential to determine whether, as suggested by Steg et al. (2014) and Bennett et al. (2018), that having taken the first step for some on an active citizenship or stewardship journey that people were more likely to continue to take action. The Heritage Keepers model looks to upskill and empower, supporting participants to find the information for themselves but it was beyond the scope of this study to follow up over time to determine whether this was in fact the case.

In conclusion, this research has shed light on the potential of place-based learning programmes to foster community stewardship and has important policy implications. Despite its limitations, it provides a foundation for further exploration and underscores the significance of grassroots initiatives in achieving global sustainability goals. Ultimately, it calls for a more inclusive, pluralistic, and community-centric approach to local stewardship and sustainability policy.

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Bird, Á. (2023) ‘Place-based learning initiatives in the Burren’, in Smith, E. R., & Pike, S. (eds.) *Encountering ideas of place in education: Scholarship and Practice in Place-based Learning*. Routledge, pp. 65-77

Introduction

For over 15 years, Burrenbeo Trust (‘Burrenbeo’), an independent landscape charity, has worked to facilitate community stewardship in the Burren region of Counties Clare and Galway, in the west of Ireland. Through a series of place-based learning initiatives for schools and the community, participants learn about, in and for their local places and are supported to carry out projects that enhance and protect their local built, natural and cultural heritage.

Place-based learning is focused on using local resources to teach and learn for the benefit of both participants and places, taking a holistic view of place (incorporating the multiple layers of a place and its interconnections), and including learning in formal and informal settings for people of all ages. The focus of this chapter is threefold; firstly, we explore place-based learning from a Burrenbeo context; secondly, we outline some Burrenbeo place-based learning programmes and their impact and thirdly we provide examples of activities which can be applied in education settings based on our experience and learnings.

The Burren

This chapter examines place-based learning initiatives developed in the unique Burren landscape. On initial consideration of the Burren, people often ask where the Burren is. And what the Burren is. Neither question is particularly easy to answer and depending on who you ask you may get a different response. A geologist might speak of a karst limestone landscape, an ecologist of the species diversity – orchids, gentians, invertebrates and more, a farmer of the upland pastures where cattle graze and the stone walls and an archaeologist has much to consider with the vast array of monuments left behind by previous generations. It is a place where writers, artists and creatives find inspiration, but what of the local community living, working and making a living in this place? What, if any, meaning does the place hold for them and do the young people, the future custodians of this place, have opportunities to consider their connection to and role in the future of this internationally significant place? Essentially, the Burren is all these things and more, it is something different to different people and considering the above questions is central to the work of Burrenbeo.

At its core, the Burren (from the Irish word Boireann, ‘place of stone’) is a living landscape of international importance with a unique natural, built and cultural heritage, as shown in Figure 5.1. This distinctive limestone region covers approximately 720 km² of Ireland’s mid-western coast (Burren Programme, 2022). With its mixture of exposed limestone pavements, hazel woodlands, species-rich grasslands and lakes, the Burren is home to over two-thirds of Ireland’s native plant species and is now a refuge for many plant and animal species which are

rare elsewhere in Ireland and Europe (Burrenbeo Trust, 2022). Alongside this, the fascinating archaeological record maps almost 6,000 years of human habitation, and the role of traditional farming practices on what is sometimes referred to as ‘the fertile rock’ (Dunford, 2002).



FIGURE 5.1 Burren landscape with wildflower meadow in foreground and limestone plateau to the rear.

Burrenbeo

The story of Burrenbeo begins in 2001 when Burrenbeo Teoranta was set up by Brendan Dunford and Ann O’Connor, initially as a website to help inform people about the Burren and the role of the local community, particularly farmers, in its care. In 2003, the Ecobeo initiative was introduced to Burren schools, aimed at investing in the upskilling of the future guardians of the Burren. The programme involved up to 12 visits to local primary schools by local geologists, botanists, ecologists, farmers, musicians and others to share their perspective on the Burren with the schoolchildren and their teachers. Up to the end of 2022, a total of 2,113 young people had graduated from Burrenbeo education programmes – representing a significant investment in the future. Further developments followed, including monthly walks and newsletters until it was decided to reconstitute Burrenbeo as a membership-based charitable trust in 2008. This signalled a significant expansion of Burrenbeo’s work to its current 26 programmes, all based around a model of community led conservation or stewardship. Today, Burrenbeo is a thriving, inclusive organisation dedicated to shaping a brighter future for the Burren, its communities and all those who love this special place.

The name Burrenbeo speaks to the approach and aims of the organisation. While the Burren is undoubtedly a place of limestone, biodiversity, monuments, stories, legends, music, art and

more, it is a living landscape. Beo is the Irish word for living, alluding to the evolving nature of this place. And just as the first farmers shaped the landscape 6,000 years ago by clearing the trees, establishing pastures for their livestock and building megalithic monuments, the current community continue to shape and influence the place which they call home and are central to the development of their place. Providing opportunities, through place-based learning initiatives in schools and the wider community, can serve to enhance the sense of agency where communities can act to enhance their places into the future.

While Burrenbeo was originally established as an information-sharing portal, it has evolved and adapted, and now also has a national reach and programmes which were developed locally have been shared with schools and communities around Ireland. Burrenbeo has also provided training to 192 teachers interested in applying similar programmes in their own setting. Today Burrenbeo is a company limited by guarantee, has a board of voluntary directors, reports to the Charities Regulator and currently has just over 850 subscribed members, comprising individuals, couples, families, schools and businesses who are local, national and international.

Burrenbeo and place-based learning

We live in what many are referring to as the Anthropocene (Whitehead, 2014), a period where human activities are exerting increasing impacts on our environment, a time of crisis – loss of biodiversity, climate change, persistent institutionalized inequality and the increased risks of war. With these realisations come, for some, a desire to act. While many can feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the issues we face, Burrenbeo's approach facilitates local actions to build feelings of empowerment and agency. Working under the theories of community stewardship and place-based learning, a range of programmes have developed to this end. Burrenbeo define place-based learning as learning about place, in the place, for the place. To understand how this definition was arrived at it is useful to consider some of the literature and research around place-based pedagogy. The following discussion will outline some of the benefits to this approach, before outlining ways in which it could be adapted and employed by teachers in a wide range of settings.

Combining elements of various theories, academic approaches and educational concepts, place-based pedagogies echo strongly with the thinking of Dewey (1915). He called for schools to function more like communities, rather than places in isolation from the normal lives of students. Dewey felt that as schools lost their local focus, children lost their curiosity or desire to learn the skills of respected adults in their family or community, which was once a primary motivation for learning. Dewey also argued that children should see themselves as individuals with a responsibility in and for their communities, with the ability to engage with others on ideas and options for the enhancement of their futures. Equally, Piaget's (1973) theory on students' inner motivation to learn and his contention that children learn best when they are active are key to a place-based approach.

These and other theories speak to the ideas behind place-based pedagogy, which has been defined by Sobel (2004, p. 7) as 'the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language, arts, mathematics, social studies, science and

other subjects across the curriculum'. While this alludes to a more formal, curriculum-based learning setting, Sobel goes on to speak of how the approach utilises hands-on, realworld learning experiences, something which has been central to the Burrenbeo education programmes. He also mentions that a place-based approach, 'helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens' (Sobel, 2004, p. 7). This is another key feature of Burrenbeo education programmes, as initiatives support wider community engagement and facilitate active stewardship behaviours in schools and communities. As Lewicki (1998) explains, place-based pedagogies can unite schools and communities on a shared journey – considering first local and then building to regional, national and international concerns.

Many teachers frequently use local environments and communities as a context for learning (Woodhouse, 2001). However, in Ireland, the conscious adoption of place-based pedagogy and engagement with all elements of the concept is not currently widespread (Pike, 2011). Adopting a place-based approach effectively means using a place-based pedagogy to deliver the existing curriculum rather than viewing the local learning elements as an 'add on' to the existing provision. In practice, this might mean looking first to learn about history through local stories and monuments or considering the local landscape features first when studying geography. Equally, learning about local plants and animals rather than more exotic species from further afield and taking on locally relevant civic engagement projects would be deemed place-based. There are also opportunities to perhaps read local poetry or prose, use local examples to highlight concepts from maths, physics or other subjects or using local inspiration for art projects. However, as will be considered later in this chapter, for teachers to employ this approach, appropriate support is required.

In his 1992 book, *Ecological Literacy*, David Orr, the political scientist and environmental activist, outlined the important role place could play in reversing the environmental destruction and damaging cultural trends of our time. Orr (1992) argued that we are not currently only putting our environment at risk but also humanity itself. In this respect, Sir David Attenborough said that 'the wild world is becoming so remote to children that they miss out, and an interest in the natural world doesn't grow as it should. Nobody is going to protect the natural world unless they understand it' (Attenborough, 2008, cited in Cassidy, 2008, p. 1). Alongside this, there is increasing literature and documented commentary arguing for children to reconnect with the natural environment through direct experiences outdoors (Louv, 2005; O'Malley, 2014). Through adopting a place-based approach, educators have the potential to enhance future generations' connection to place and develop future environmentalists and conservationists (Place, 2016).

Humans are inextricably linked to, and dependent on our environments (for food, energy and other resources, as well as our own wellbeing) and the balance between the two is finely tuned. Place-based pedagogy plays a role in ensuring this balance is maintained by reinforcing our awareness of this connection. Equally, the role we all play in securing the future of our places

and planet more broadly is central to the approach. This brings us to the idea of stewardship, a well-recognised concept, of environmental management. A review of environmental stewardship literature found three key dimensions in successful stewardship initiatives; care, knowledge and agency (Peçanha Enqvist et al., 2018). Essentially, for people to take action locally they need to see relevance and feel some connection to the place i.e. the care dimension. People also need to be supported through knowledge provision that is appropriate to their level and setting, the knowledge dimension. Finally, structures need to be in place to support the actions, the agency dimension. The other element which led to successful stewardship practices was a feeling of collective action, also a key feature of Burrenbeo's approach. While it could be argued that fostering stewardship behaviours in students is beyond the general remit of teachers, with the growing threats to our environment, heritage and places, for many, the potential to impact positively cannot be ignored.

To further develop the notion of stewardship and caring for a place, consideration of the concept of place and human relationships with place more generally is useful. The concept of place is covered in literature, from the study of physical place to considerations of place attachment and place identity (Devine-Wright, 2009; Lewicka, 2011). While consensus is hard to come by, it is generally accepted that place is differentiated from ideas such as space or environment as it allows for the inclusion of the range of meanings and emotions that individuals or groups associate with the place (Tuan, 1977). What may begin as merely a space can become a place, as we get to experience and know it and attach emotions in the process. One of the suggested outcomes of a place-based approach is impact on participants' sense of place and place attachment (Devine-Wright, 2013). As outlined in the opening of this chapter, how people relate to a place varies hugely and this will then have implications for how people want the place to be into the future (Anton and Lawrence, 2014).

Enhanced place connection and place identity can be motivating factors for people's stewardship behaviour, something which can be ignited through education and developed over the years. The Nature Connectedness research group at the University of Derby (Richardson, 2018) looked at humans' relationship with the natural world and developed methods for measuring a person's nature connectedness as well as identified ways that this can be enhanced (Lumber et al., 2017). Where this connection becomes important in terms of actions and behaviours is when considered alongside Otto and Pensini's (2017) study of 255 children which found that while 2% of their pro-environmental behaviours could be attributed to environmental knowledge, 69% was attributed to nature connection, that is, related to feelings, emotions and connections. Similarly, Mackay and Schmitt (2019) found in a review of 75 studies involving 27,120 participants that not only was there an association between nature connection and pro-environmental behaviours but there was also evidence that nature connection causes pro-environmental behaviour. The potential for educators to enhance learners' nature connection is worthy of further investigation, particularly when the focus is not on knowledge but rather the sense of connection which results in conservation actions.

The literature illustrates why Burrenbeo have adopted a place-based learning methodology and makes a case for why other educators might consider taking a similar approach. The

intersection of place connection and conditions supporting stewardship are fundamental to the approach and warrant consideration by teachers looking to implement similar initiatives.

Burrenbeo programmes

Burrenbeo have developed, delivered and coordinated a wide range of programmes over the years. For the purposes of this chapter, three of these will be outlined including some questions and suggested activities which may be useful for implementing similar approaches across a variety of education settings.

Heritage keepers

Burrenbeo's education programme has been through several iterations. It began as Ecobeo, as described previously, before evolving to Áitbheo which had ten school visits, but which were all delivered by the same tutor and saw a move to secondary school settings. Both versions also included a fieldtrip. The newest development and current education programme which Burrenbeo deliver is Heritage Keepers, a free programme for schools or communities to work together to discover their local heritage. The programme is entirely replicable, requires little background knowledge on the place being considered and can be delivered in person or online.

Heritage Keepers takes learners on an exploration of their local geology, landscape, archaeology, culture, biodiversity and customs, traditions, land use practices and conservation. Using engaging and interactive learning methodologies and online resources, the programme culminates in a project where participants identify, plan and complete a local action, for example, the development of local biodiversity trails, research and creation of a local heritage map, building a wildlife pond, a large-scale oral heritage recording project and a celebration of a local historic figure. The projects are supported both financially and with mentoring from the Burrenbeo team. As one participant commented, 'I feel more confident that I could help make my place better. I feel more interested in my place and that I can help out more'. The approach taken through the Heritage Keepers programme is supported by recent research reviewing how education programmes can promote civic engagement (Ardoin et al., 2022), an increasingly important dimension of learning for all young people given the global challenges we face.

Walks and talks

Burrenbeo's heritage walks are held on the first Sunday of every month, in various locations and cover themes on natural, built and cultural heritage of the region. The focus of the walks is on information sharing rather than covering long distances. The walks are often led by the landowner, who is also often a farmer and provides an opportunity for the public to access what is generally private land. The story of the place is shared from different perspectives – farmer, archaeologist, ecologist and others. The walks have also resulted in the creation of a community of attendees who come regularly and feel connected to each other and the Burren through attendance.

Tea Talks are another long-standing Burrenbeo initiative. These talks are held in a local village hall during the autumn and winter months and bring the community together to meet and share a cup of tea before providing an opportunity to hear a talk. These are always relevant to the

heritage of the local area – whether an academic research project, a local artist or musician, or a member of the community sharing their story, the topics provide local insights as well as facilitate a sociable gathering of the community. Up to the end of 2022, there have been a combined attendance of 10,487 people at the walks and talks.

Community celebrations

Burrenbeo's approach is to focus on celebrating and recognising where positive action is happening rather than starting from a negative and highlighting the fear of obvious issues faced by humanity (Hafenscher and Jankó, 2022). To this end, Burrenbeo facilitate community celebrations, with two major events in the annual calendar – Burren in Bloom and the Burren Winterage Weekend. Burren in Bloom is held in early summer and heralds the return of the Burren's world-renowned flora and fauna while the Burren Winterage Weekend is held over the October Bank Holiday weekend, coinciding with the ancient pagan festival of Samhain as well as Halloween and celebrates the ancient farming traditions of the region, which continue to this day, and which ultimately have resulted in the Burren's current biodiversity. Both events include a range of walks and talks aimed at the whole community as well as events for families and other more specialised learning opportunities for young and old. Up to the end of 2022, Burren in Bloom and the Winterage Weekend combined have attracted 21,022 people to learn about, in and for the Burren.

When working with Heritage Keepers schools and groups, the potential for similar events in any setting is emphasised – encouraging people to look for the people, places or things that make their area unique and to celebrate them as a community. Groups have undertaken projects researching and celebrating local heroes, learning local songs, revisiting local traditions and folklore and carrying out 'Place days' where the unique features of their area are explored and celebrated as a community.

Table 5.1 outlines some activities adapted from Burrenbeo programmes which could be applied across a broad range of education settings.

TABLE 5.1 Activities for place-based learning

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Possible activity to answer these questions</i>
How do you feel about your place?	In pairs, students interview each other to identify what they like and dislike about their local place. This not only lets them express their feelings but also consider the perspectives of others. Theme the responses and identify any conflicts, that is, some may love that it is quiet while others may dislike this.
What is your landscape? How did it come to be?	Drawing on the work of O'Regan (2008), using either online or paper maps consider a circle of approx. 3 km ² (use a smaller area in urban setting) and identify the landscape features – hills, waterbodies, woodlands, historic sites and so forth. Students list elements they were not aware of before looking at the map. Students could develop this further by creating their own map with places of significance to them.
What are any threats to elements of your place?	Identify the key elements of your local built (archaeological sites, historic buildings etc.), natural (flora, fauna, related habitats etc.) and cultural heritage (traditions, practices, artistic expression etc.). List any threats (known or potential) to each. Identify possible areas for a local action project which could address some of these threats.
What are the interesting places or people in your local area?	Starting within the school community, are there any land or building owners that would be willing to facilitate a visit? Is there anyone that has an interesting story to tell that could be invited into the school? Does anyone in the local community have an interest in built, natural or cultural heritage? Reassure them that their own story and information is all that is required. Work and research to build on the information gained can be done subsequently in class.
What are local traditions, cultures, events, practices or features, that are unique?	Starting with a small in class or school celebration, look to share the unique elements with a wider audience. It may be an annual event and broaden by including the wider community. There is great scope for using artistic and creative expression to communicate these stories, for example, through song, music, dance, painting and re-enactment.

Learnings to date and where to next

While still a relatively young organisation, Burrenbeo has learnt a considerable amount around engaging schools and communities with their local places, and more recently with the conditions needed to encourage action to protect those places. The following observations resulting from the work of Burrenbeo, supported by research engagement, could inform others interested in applying similar approaches in their education programmes.

Community and collective action

Central to Burrenbeo's vision for heritage conservation are engaged and sustainable communities. The organisation works to ensure people have opportunities to know, experience and share their local heritage but equally for community sustainability (both economic and social), a healthy landscape is essential. These elements inform each other and underpin the approach taken but this focus on a community approach also has additional benefits as people are facilitated to establish or strengthen their sense of community and connection to their place. There is also the very powerful feeling that engaging with the work of Burrenbeo (and perhaps for some that do not engage, even knowing the organisation exists) provides a sense that there is positive action being undertaken on a wider scale as opposed to dependence on the actions of individuals. This is worth noting from a school's perspective, where working with networks or existing initiatives around similar projects could be worthy of consideration. The Heritage Keepers programme follows this approach.

Supporting the action

Whether working with teachers, landowners, communities, volunteers or any of the other groups Burrenbeo engage with, the need for supporting those that are expected to take actions has been very apparent. This support comes in the form of information (in a format that is most appropriate to particular groups) and where necessary finance. However, finance is often not the limiting factor, rather that people want the confidence to know they are doing the right thing – whether teaching to children or making changes for biodiversity on their land. For teachers in particular, a feeling that they themselves do not have sufficient knowledge to go on to teach about local heritage may impact on their engagement. However, if the purpose of the activity is to enhance people's connection to their local place (and their positive behaviours in relation to that place) the earlier findings of Otto and Pensini (2017) highlight that providing opportunities for connection and enhancing the connection could be more beneficial rather than focusing on knowledge alone.

Care

Based on observations and research over the years of Burrenbeo practice, perhaps the most important consideration for anyone looking to engage in place-based learning initiatives is care, the third element identified by Peçanha Enqvist et al. (2018). As mentioned previously, their study found that the factors present in situations where stewardship occurred were care, knowledge and agency. The knowledge and agency elements are addressed already but the notion of care is one that Burrenbeo is continuing to work on and develop. Essentially, we are asking why and how do people feel love for and connection to their place, can we encourage and facilitate that and once established can this be harnessed so that people protect and improve their place into the future. As previously outlined, schools and teachers can play a very important role in fostering this connection to and love of place in their students at a focal period in their development as both students and citizens. Burrenbeo will continue to work to this end in the Burren and hope that others might look to do the same elsewhere.

Appendix 2 Participant Recruitment Information

Exploring Place

Communities coming together to learn, experience and enhance local places

What: Building on the experience and work of Burrenbeo Trust, this research engages collaboratively with local communities to develop and deliver initiatives that encourage pride of place, connection and active local engagement to the benefit of communities and places. The process (and resulting initiatives) will aim to be sociable, active and fun – reflecting findings from research on the successful elements of Burrenbeo Trust programming.

Participants will work with Burrenbeo Trust practitioner and researcher Áine Bird to develop, enhance and implement local place-based learning initiatives focused on suggested themes of learning and celebration. Sample programmes may include initiatives such as a local walks and talks series, local learning programmes and local community celebrations (while acknowledging that adapting to and addressing local interest and need is central to a place-based approach). The experiences gained from this process will inform a PhD study conducted by Áine in collaboration with the Burrenbeo Trust and NUI Galway.

Why: Place-based learning involves learning in, through, and for local places. We are currently faced with multiple complex issues for our places and communities including climate change and biodiversity loss. By adopting a more localised approach that enhances our connection to the natural world and our understanding of our interconnectedness, we can try to address these and other issues. Burrenbeo Trust have been involved in the delivery of place-based programmes for over 10 years, and this research project has already uncovered some of the positive impacts that these programmes have had on the places and communities where they have been delivered to date. We are now keen to share these findings and approach with others.

How:

Ideally groups of 5-8 people from each community will commit to attending five workshop sessions. The workshops will be delivered to each community group individually (with the potential to include opportunities for networking between participant communities). Each session will last no more than 90 minutes. Sessions will be delivered online. The interactive sessions will supply stepping stones to local place-based learning implementation. The workshops will address the following themes;

- What does the Burrenbeo Trust's experience tell us?
- What is the current situation locally?
- How do we learn more about the local area?

- What we would like to see happening locally?
- How are we going to make it happen?

Participants will be asked to work together to develop and implement local initiatives.

Ongoing support will be provided by Burrenbeo Trust during the process. Participants will complete two short workshop questionnaires (before and after) and each participant will subsequently be asked to complete one final questionnaire after a period of approximately 6 months.

When:

Workshop Sessions: January – March 2021

Local initiative implementation: April – September 2021

How: Complete the Expression of Interest form found [here](#). All who complete the form are eligible for selection.

Appendix 3 Pre-programme Survey - Pilot Phase

Exploring Place

Please complete the following questionnaire before taking part on the Exploring Place programme. There is further information on the study which the programme is part of here (<https://aine72.wixsite.com/exploringplace/participant-information>). Please read before completing this questionnaire - you will be asked to indicate that you have read and understood this information.

Section 1 includes 6 questions which relate to your consent to participate on the programme. Section 2 includes 15 questions and should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. This second section relates to your opinions, feelings and ideas around the topics which form part of the programme.

* Indicates required question

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information. *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected. *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

4. I am satisfied that my name and other identifying features will not be used anywhere in the PhD report and other publications. *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

5. I consent to the Zoom workshops being recorded. I am aware that the recordings will only be viewed by the researcher. *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

6. I agree to take part in this study. *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

The following 15 questions will ask you to give your opinion on your expectations from the workshops, your feelings on your local area, your knowledge around local heritage topics and your involvement on local heritage issues.

Note: In this context heritage refers to a broad range of local elements including landscapes, historic places and sites, old buildings, wildlife and biodiversity, local traditions, folklore and practices amongst others.

7. What (if any) are your expectations from this programme? *

8. How do you feel about your local place? *

9. What changes (if any) would you like to see happening in your local place? *

10. What (if any) challenges do you see engaging local communities with their places, the environment and heritage? *

11. Please rate how familiar you are with the following? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Not at all familiar	Slightly familiar	Moderately familiar	Very familiar	Extremely familiar
Local heritage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local community initiatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community engagement initiatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local learning or education programmes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local festivals or celebrations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. What (if any) local initiatives focused on place, heritage or environment are you familiar with? If any listed, do you participate in (or deliver) these programmes? *

13. What do you think might encourage communities to take action (or take more action) on local heritage or environmental issues? Please select all that apply. *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Funding
☐ Time
☐ Skills Training
☐ Peer group involvement
☐ Education
☐ Community Organisations
☐ Logistics ie. Transport, timing, weather, etc
☐ None of the above
☐ Other: _____

14. Please indicate how you feel about the following statements. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am concerned about local heritage and environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel able to take action on local heritage and environment issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that my own personal behaviour can bring about positive local change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel positive about my local place	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that my own personal behaviour can bring about positive global change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that local place-based learning programmes would increase community stewardship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I care about my local heritage and environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time is the strongest determining factor in my taking action on local heritage or environment issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowledge is the strongest determining factor in my taking action on local heritage or environment issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel connected to my local place	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My local place is part of my identity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Please indicate whether you have organised or participated in any of the following activities and if so how regularly. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Never participated or organised	Participated once or twice	Participated regularly	Organised once or twice	Organised regularly
Litter pick or clean up	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conservation work on heritage or environmental site	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campaigning or advocacy on a heritage or environmental issue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local heritage or environmental event	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biodiversity monitoring	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Habitat improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Climate Strike	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education or information sharing on environment or heritage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fundraising for heritage or environmental organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Please choose which best describes where you live. *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Urban
☐ Suburban
☐ Rural

17. What gender do you identify as? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Prefer not to answer
☐ Other: _____

18. What age are you? If you don't want to answer please enter 0. *

19. How long are you living in your current area? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Less than 6 months
☐ 6 to 12 months
☐ 1 to 3 years
☐ 4 to 6 years
☐ 7 years or more

20. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ No formal education
☐ Some Primary Education
☐ Primary Education
☐ Some Secondary Education
☐ Secondary Education
☐ Trade/Technical/Vocational training
☐ Bachelor's Degree
☐ Master's Degree
☐ Ph.D. or higher
☐ Prefer not to say

Appendix 4 Exploring Place Consent Form



NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

burrenbéotrust
connecting people and place

Consent form

Participant Identification Number:

Title of Project: 'Exploring Community Stewardship through Place-based Learning: evaluating impact and potential for knowledge transfer'.

Name of Researcher: Áine Bird

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information. ☐
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected. ☐
4. I am satisfied that my name and other identifying features will not be used anywhere in the PhD report and other publications. ☐
5. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature