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SEEDING

Social Economy Enterprises addressing Digitalisation,
Industrial relations and the European Pillar of Social Rights



CASE STUDY
IRELAND

WeCreate



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COCETA

FISE



GRUPPO
COOPERATIVO
cgm





NAME OF THE PRACTICE

WECREATE

Responsible actor	• management (with the involvement of workers)
Type of practice	• other: development of digital products and services for the local community
Challenges addressed	• automation of work
Employment impact	• job retention • skills and training • equal opportunities
Geographical coverage	WeCreate has a local, national and international focus. Locally, it assists sole traders and social enterprises to develop their businesses through the development of digital platforms. It also provides office space to individuals and businesses. It offers, laser-cutting, engraving and 3D printing services. Local school children participate in workshops based in the fabrication laboratory¹ which complements their maths and science tuition. Nationally and internationally, WeCreate delivers, training, dialogue and mentoring in sustainability. Finally, WeCreate is responsible for the co-ordination of EU projects, many of which are provided online or are enabled with digital tools.

¹. WeCreate provides a range of digital fabrication equipment based on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Fab Lab model which are designed to let people make almost anything. This equipment combined with workshop space is available to rent to makers, developers, artists and many others, giving the opportunity to create what they wish.

Sectoral coverage	WeCreate engages in range of economic sectors. These are: • The provision of working space for sole traders and businesses located in Cloughjordan and surrounding areas. • The development of digital platforms which enable local businesses (including a bakery and community farm) to virtually engage with their customers. • The operation of a fabrication laboratory. It contains a set of computer-controlled equipment such as laser cutter, CNC mill² and 3D printers, which allow students, designers, crafters, entrepreneurs to make items. • The delivery of education and awareness training programmes on topics associated with sustainability targeting primary and second level school children, third level students and adults. In relation to school children, this complements the learning that they receive in the classroom. • The promotion of how communities can become more sustainable. This is achieved through holding seminars, being a partner in EU programmes, and engaging in research initiatives (both domestic and international).
Company coverage	Established in 2000, Cultivate is a workers co-operative. Currently the company employs five individuals to maintain the operations of the WeCreate centre. All of the staff members have expertise in operating digital technology. In addition, three have expertise, in designing digital platforms (which enables businesses to trade online) and operating 3D printers. Two of the staff have expertise at moderating online training workshops. Finally, one of the staff has expertise of operating digital accounts systems. WeCreate has not engaged with trade unions and currently Cultivate staff are not members of a trade union. The Cultivate staff have extensive experience of working in the community, voluntary, private and public sectors and in engaging with state agencies. The steering committee, which governs the co-operative, holds meetings on a regular basis.
Occupational coverage	The staff have a thorough understanding of sustainable economic development. Two of the staff are expert facilitators and administrators.
Workforce addressed	The staff are comprised of individuals with third level qualifications in the arts and in electrical engineering. Staff are from Ireland and the UK. The majority of the staff are male.

ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE ACTION

Company management	Yes (WeCreate and Cultivate)
Worker members of the cooperative at large	Yes

². Computer numerical control (CNC) is programmed code for precise movements to be carried out by machines. A CNC mill operates through a computer and is similar to 3D printing.

Works councils	No
Trade unions	No
Employers' organisations	No
NGO	No
Public authority	No
DESCRIPTION	
Rationale for the adoption of the practice	The rationale for adopting digital technologies are threefold. One is to enhance the attractiveness of the WeCreate Workspace to sole traders and social enterprises as a base for their operations. Another relates to financial sustainability: the purchase of laser-cutting and engraving systems, a 3D printing system and related software has led to WeCreate securing additional traded income. The third is ideological: WeCreate is committed to contributing to the realisation of an alternative social solidarity economy which is predicated on the development of resilient, carbon-neutral and largely self-sufficient local economies.
Process of the adoption of the practice	Cultivate is governed by a steering committee of the employee/members. The steering committee of Cultivate (involving all of the worker/members) decided to adopt the practice. Concerning the ongoing process of implementation and adjustment of the practice, it is worthy to note that Cultivate employees meet on a regular basis in order to: • consider possible opportunities and threats, • examine how digitalisation could assist enterprises (both social enterprises and sole traders) that are located in Cloughjordan ecovillage³ and the town to become more financially sustainable, • develop digital products and services that can be offered to residents in the Cloughjordan area. These digital products strengthen the local economy as their local base ensures that less income leaks out of the Cloughjordan area.
Description of the practice	• The adoption of digital technology has been a pivotal factor in the strengthening of several businesses' (both sole trader and social enterprise) financial sustainability. Furthermore, these businesses have reduced the ecological footprint of the Cloughjordan ecovillage. Digital technologies have contributed to Cloughjordan achieving the lowest ecological footprint recorded in Ireland⁴.

³. Located in county Tipperary, the Cloughjordan Eco-Village is a community with commitments to ecological, social and economic sustainability.

⁴ Vangelis Papadimitropoulos. Sustainability and Resilience in the Collaborative Economy: An Introduction to the Cloughjordan Ecovillage Journal of Public Policy and Administration. Vol. 2, No. 4, 2018, pp. 49-60. doi: 10.11648/j.jppa.20180204.12.

	In addition, digital technology has enabled WeCreate to: • provide a range of services to businesses, • generate additional income from the provision of these services, • conduct training programmes on various aspects of sustainability, • initiate awareness campaigns to promote sustainable living. • Collaborate in a number of EU funded programmes aimed at the promotion of sustainable neighborhoods.
Dismissed alternatives	No alternative option was considered.
ASSESSMENT	
IMPACT OF THE PRACTICE ON:	
Job stability and secure employment	Cultivate has been trading for 20 years. Digitalisation has had a few employment impacts in the Cloughjordan area. These include: • providing access to low-cost shared office space and office units with high speed broadband. Access to low-cost space is particularly important for businesses start-ups, • developing digital platforms for a number of businesses based in the Cloughjordan area which has strengthened their financial sustainability, • enabling employment to be sustained through the delivery of on-line virtual training and blended (on site and virtual participation) sustainability and arts workshops, and other civic dialogue events. The co-ordination of a number of EU funded projects are coordinated from the WeCreate centre with the use of digital collaboration tools and platforms, • providing, a laser cutting, engraving, and 3D printing services through the WeCreate FabLab, a digital fabrication laboratory, • through the use of an open source virtual market platform 'Open Food Network', the co-operative is currently developing a Food Hub in the WeCreate centre. This will aggregate value, ensuring produce from local small producers gets to the customer, while reducing dependencies on long supply chains and strengthening the local food economy.
Skills needs and training	The staff are highly skilled. A number of them are pioneers in their areas of expertise. The Cultivate staff have extensive experience of working in the community, voluntary, private and public sectors and in engaging with state agencies.
Working conditions	The workers collectively decide on the number of hours that they work per week.

Company performance	In 2018, WeCreate generated a surplus of €11,386 and the same amount in 2017.
Overall strengths and weaknesses	The experience and expertise of staff has been critical to WeCreate assisting a number of businesses to use digital platforms. The staff are innovative. The design of the centre is conducive to operating a range of different types of economic activities as the rooms are designed for different types of activities. The relationships with EU partners have resulted in gaining knowledge of EU funding opportunities. In relation to weaknesses, the main one is that WeCreate is reliant on EU funding programmes.
Overall opportunities and threats	The positive relationships with a range of stakeholders provides an opportunity to secure resources to enhance its financial sustainability. The centre acts as a model of social innovation and enterprise. It facilitates co-operative enterprises to act as an ecosystem of value creation and add value to local economies. WeCreate and the Cloughjordan Eco-village are amongst the most pioneering initiatives leading Ireland's transition to a more sustainable form of socio-economic development, offering other communities, and policy makers approaches that could contribute to a just recovery and transition. This provides it with an opportunity to influence government policy in relation tackling climate change and building more resilient local economies. Cultivate encounters a number of threats. These are: •securing sufficient income to cover the costs of operating the WeCreate Workspace (community centre and workspace), •generating sufficient income to cover the wages of its five employees. The individualistic culture which dominates Irish society. This is a barrier to residents in Cloughjordan and surrounding areas participating in and purchasing products and services from enterprises based in the ecovillage.
Potential for social partners and collective bargaining to upscale/transfer the practice	The Congress Centre's Network, The Irish Congress of Trade Unions, could support the centres for the unemployed to examine the feasibility of developing workspaces that support the formation of social enterprises engaged in both the circular and digital economies.
Potential for public authorities to support upscaling/ transferring the practice	Local authorities, throughout Ireland, could provide land and a financial contribution towards the construction costs of community workspaces, particularly those that are focusing on the circular economy.
List of annexes, sources	Vangelis Papadimitropoulos. Sustainability and Resilience in the Collaborative Economy: An Introduction to the Cloughjordan Ecovillage Journal of Public Policy and Administration. Vol. 2, No. 4, 2018, pp. 49-60. doi: 10.11648/j.jppa.20180204.12
Company website	www.wecreate.ie

The case study was prepared by: Method Consultants (Ireland)