

Report by Kevin Molloy on the Wheel Summit held at Croke Park Conference Centre Dublin on the 24th and 25th May 2018.

The Summit was opened by Deirdre Garvey Chief Executive Officer the Wheel.

The first day of the two-day programme focused on a series of inspiring impact stories,

There were three Parallel Sessions I choose to attend a session on Spark Change – How do we build resilient and sustainable communications. It is difficult to capture a report on all the presentations they were so varied; i e Community Growing Food, Raised Gardens, Cottage Markets, Grow It Yourself.

John Murphy Bagenalstown Co Carlow delivered a very interesting talk on the work of Beam Services and The Barrow Experience is an important initiative in preserving the wonderful rich history, folklore and heritage of the Barrow Valley.

The intricately linked series of gardens was designed in house by Director of Services John Murphy, and the finished design draws its inspiration from local history, architecture and mythology.

There are nine individual gardens within the Barrow Experience – Dinn Righ, Druids' Wood, Potager Garden, Monastic Courtyard, Convent Garden, Railway Garden, Water Garden, Co-operation Garden and the French Garden.

The gardens represent both an active, healthy environment for all to work in, and a therapeutic environment to relax in – open to the general public.

I felt this was a project which could be replicated in any community.

The second day was a discussion on participation aimed to develop understandings and stimulate participation in society. What can we do as a society to maximize participation enabling people and communities to flourish?

There were three publications open for discussion; I have given a summary of each and included the links if you wish to read any of them.

Summary - Money Matters

This report aims to develop an understanding of the extent and implications of financial exclusion in Ireland and to outline recommendations for improving the current situation. Financial exclusion relates to the process whereby people face difficulties accessing and/or using financial services such as bank accounts, current accounts, credit, savings and insurance and this has a negative impact on their ability to fully participate in the normal life in the society in which they are living. www.peoplesconversation.ie

Report available here https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-08/Money%20Matters_0.pdf

Summary - Powering Civil Society

This report makes the case that a good society based on active citizenship can be achieved for everyone in Ireland, but this requires a strong new public governance system to oblige all public agencies to foster participation, and it also requires civil society organisations to consciously take steps to redress power inequalities faced by citizens

I noted in this report that Wexford was one of the counties which had the lowest concentration of non-profit head offices per head of Population in the country. www.peoplesconversation.ie

Report available here https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-08/Powering%20Civil%20Society_0.pdf

Summary - Two - Way Street

Participation in government means interaction with public servants but the perspective of public servants is seldom taken into account in any model of participation. For over twenty years the question of public service reform has been on the agenda of government in Ireland. There is a new focus on 'customer service,' 'transparency,' 'openness' and even 'participation.' With a growth in single issue civil groups and much discussion on the nature of 'active citizenship' citizens are actively exercising their rights to free expression, assembly and association. This allows citizens to influence the shaping of public policy but they remain outsiders to the decision-making process.

www.peoplesconversation.ie

Report available here <https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-08/Two-Way%20Street.pdf>

The summit also included a unique dialogue examining the possibility of secularists and people of faith working together towards creating a participatory democracy, serving social and ecological justice and human flourishing.

The authors of the published A DIALOGUE OF HOPE were present to explore this possibility with those attending, including David Begg [former President of ICTU] Fergus O'Ferrall I [Lay Leader of the Methodist Church in Ireland] Iseult Honohan [Associate Professor Emeritus UCD School of Politics and International Relations] and Gerry O'Hanlon [Former Provincial of the Irish Jesuits].

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