

Community Urban Bee Keeping Project Dublin 8



Case Study Community Urban Bee Keeping Project

The Case Study	Characteristics	Inner-city beekeeping, community engagement in unused/under-used sites, learning by doing about bee life cycles, interdependencies and management skills, in a socio-economically disadvantaged area. Links with community garden on temporary site. The beehives are situated on community center roof for safety reasons. Timeline: October 2009–Present.
	Key Resources	Land provided by community center and Digital Hub. Funding by community project and €3000 by LA21. Expertise provided by Dublin Bee Keepers Association – knowledge developed by staff, volunteers and children.
	Key Actors	Volunteers and Staff from local community project, Children in the after school club, Digital hub.
The Process	Issues & Challenges	Challenge of resources for key people to project manage, learn, lead, sustain and grow this project here and across the city. In 2012/2013 50% of all bee stock in the country was lost. 100% of project bees lost. Analysis on why this occurred and working solutions are needed. Increased awareness of the value of such projects and stronger collaborative need generally.
	Power & Agency	The Robert Emmet Community Development Project, community project, children’s involvement, which was unplanned.
	Knowledge Gap	Considerable learning by doing curve, and safe to fail parameters here. Expert knowledge in sustainable bee keeping skills takes time to occur. Sharing the knowledge is possible if resources are provided. Analysis on bee deaths required.
The Outcomes	Outcomes	Four hives on two sites, Confirmation that bees can thrive in inner city. Two local people with preliminary training. That these methods could be replicated on other inner city derelict sites. Children became beekeepers. Production of honey.
	Social Value	New skills in area of social disadvantage, increased awareness on environmental interconnectivity. Production of honey, low cost project.
	Lessons Learnt	Needs to change: the accessibility of local authorities in supporting resilience projects such as this. Policies in inner cities on pollinator and nectar rich plants and use of insecticides. Beehives can survive in the inner city. General public can be near beehives with no risk. Unpredictability is allowed. Reclassification to Bee Sites could immediately alter public perception of derelict sites.

Introduction

The case study serves to assist in understanding the motivations and processes in realising small scale resilience projects, including interactions with local authorities and other stakeholders from the perspective of the community development project only. Community Urban Bee Keeping Project is a case study account authored by Máirín Ó'Cuireain of the Robert Emmet Community Development Project. The inquirer and the respondent are the same.

Characteristics

What is the project about?

This project is about keeping beehives in Dublin's inner city on un-used and under-used spaces. It is about providing the opportunity for members of disadvantaged communities to have exposure to 'beekeeping', the opportunity to learn about beekeeping and the bee life cycle, and develop an understanding of the impact and association between bees and the environment, even within the inner city. This project is also about finding uses for un used and under used sites in the city centre and exploring the potential for a local economy project.

Local Community Development Initiative

A local community development project manages the project based in Dublin's south west Inner City. The key target of the community project is the disadvantaged community and its core aim is finding methods of engaging that community. This project is one of those initiatives. The community project also runs heritage programmes, cultural activities and afterschool project for 20 children aged 7 to 12 years of age. The Honey Bee project was set up in 2010 with one hive.

Four Hives in the City

This project now comprises two bee hives on the roof very close to the Liffey near Ushers Quay and two hives on a derelict site in Watling Street belonging to The Digital Hub. This second site on Watling Street had previously been subject to court proceedings by an individual who claimed squatter's rights. The hives are maintained by staff in Robert Emmet Community Development Project (RECDP) with support from the secretary of Dublin Bee Keepers Association. Numbers of people associated with the community project engage with the project vary from time to time but as yet no one has taken full responsibility for the hives. The children in the afterschool run by the project are hugely involved in caring for the bees and extracting the honey.

What size is it?

The project has developed from one to four hives on two sites in Dublin 8. The area covered is approximately 3km² encompassing mainly two District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) in the inner city.

What were its aims and intentions?

Its original aim was to try a single bee hive and try to harvest honey, to see if bee hives could be sustained in the inner city with very little green space around.

An added intention of the project was to plant up spaces informally with nectar rich plants as it was assumed there would be insufficient nectar.

How long did the project take?

Month	Action	Reason
October 2009	Decision taken to try to keep bees	To create an additional element to the community garden project
December – March 2010	Motivated volunteers took part in beginner training	This is the only time of year beginner bee keeping training takes place
March – May 2010	Identifying suitable site – decision taken to place on roof	Originally intended in community garden, decision taken to place on the roof for security
May 2010	First hive introduced	Time of year for splitting hives
May – November 2010	Building up hive, feeding appropriately	Small nuke needed to be strengthened very small amount of honey
May 2011	Hive Split – into two hives	Hive swarmed
May – November 2011	Caring for two hives – visits by children to the hives started	Staff and key volunteers becoming more comfortable
November 2011	Change of personnel leading project, more training needed	Key staff left the project
January – March 2012	Beginner Beekeeping Training for staff member	Someone with expertise needed to lead out the project
May – August 2012	More visits by groups and children to hives, swarming and a lot of unusual activity in the hives	A lot of unusual activity reported around the country with bees swarming and unusual activity based on times of year
August – Sept 2012	Harvesting approximately 60lbs of honey from two hives, jarring, labelling and selling locally. Article in Sunday Times, huge interest	Honey sold very quickly, a lot of facebook activity
November 2012	Local Agenda 21 funding secured which developed the aims and objectives	€3000 to purchase equipment to develop the project
December 2012	A volunteer day with corporate company where team assembled the newly purchased hives	This can take 2–3 hours to carry out
January – February 2013	Both hives lost, despite seeming strong in Jan 2013	50% hives wiped out in the country after wet summer. No investigation done into exact reason
April – July 2013	Sourcing new bees – four hives secured from 2 different sources	To replace lost stocks, took some time after such widespread losses in the country
May – July 2013	Negotiating a licence agreement for new site in Watling Street	To ensure access and insurances all in place and positive PR for the Digital Hub
July 2013	Two new hives established	
Autumn 2013	Feeding and routine care – visits by new volunteers and children	As required
Nov 2013	Bees observed dying over period over 2 days	Unclear – suspected use of insecticide
Spring 2014	One hive lost on Watling Street	Reason unclear, there was a steam vent which may have caused it, but the bees were exceptionally viscous so there may have been underlying issues
May 2014	three hives thriving	Excellent sources of nectar and pollen

What is the cultural context of this project?

Background

This initiative started after the establishment of a community garden in the area on an undeveloped 2 acre site. The garden itself developed organically, hens were introduced among other initiatives and introducing bees was about creating an additional features and seeing if it could be done. It was perceived as something which is manageable, didn't need much space and required a small financial investment. Originally, it had been intended to place the bee hives on this open site, but it was later agreed it would be safer to have the hives away from the public and they were placed on the roof of the offices of the community project.

Bee Keeping and Environment

There is no 'culture' of beekeeping in the city or among the target group of the community project. There is a perception that there is little regard for environmental issues.

Unused Sites

There are a significantly high number of unused sites in the area in the catchment and in neighbouring areas. In this area anti-social behaviour including dumping, drugs misuse and rough sleeping would be associated with unoccupied sites. Access, lease and licence arrangements are fraught in the community in negotiating access for any reasons.

Sustainability and Resilience

The community would in the main tend to have limited appreciation and understanding of sustainability or resilience but would have an inherent appreciation and understanding of community capital in how lives or lived, particularly in the local authority housing. Most families have lived in the area for generations and have strong networks in the area and immense pride in their community. The project did find in the broader community garden project that the target 'disadvantaged community' were more open and understanding of sustainability and resilience than is perceived.

Socio-economic profile

The deprivation indices based on the 2011 census, covering the area, rates the majority of the area in this study as extremely disadvantaged, despite private apartments being developed there over the past 15 years. The defined area has a population of approximately 4000 people, with almost half of this number living in local authority accommodation, with the others in privately owned accommodation, and most of this is rented accommodation. The small area statistics clearly shows the levels of employment and education increasing steeply when moving from the local authority flat complexes to the private apartments. The area reports the highest numbers of households headed by a single person with young people rapidly entering the long term unemployed statistics having failed to ever secure a job after leaving school.

The population has in the region of 10% people who are reported as born outside of Ireland. Traditionally these communities across Dublin would have had textiles and light manufacturing industries as employers and these have never been replaced for the low skilled or semiskilled workers in this community.

Key resources

Opportunities

Modest opportunities to introduce any new skills or enterprises are badly needed in this community and communities similar to it across Dublin.

Funding

Funding for staff is absorbed by the project. €3000 was awarded by LA 21 funding and has been sufficient to meet the costs to date of the project.

Land

Access to the land and site provided at no cost by the community project and the Digital Hub.

Expertise

Expertise is provided by Dublin Bee Keepers Association and the developing skills of project staff. Ad hoc support and advice provided by peers in the bee keeping community.

Different types of Knowledge

An inventory of suitable sites within the vicinity has been developed, but it would be useful to be able to easily make contact with land owners to save the time it takes to research land owners.

Was specific expert language required?

Specific Language and expertise is required for this and while it is not vast, it is impossible to progress or transfer this project without the transfer of the expertise.

Community capital

The project has not benefitted as much as was hoped from community capital and this remains an untapped resource.

Institutional Capital

Support in the form of allocation of sites has been requested from two major institutions in the area including one with a key responsibility for environmental sustainability. No acknowledgements of the requests have ever been received.

Relationships

The Digital Hub as an institution has been very supportive. This has been as a result of a chance meeting between individuals and a chance discussion.

This project has developed on the basis of the relationships developed which have developed by chance. Positive relationships with the community project and specific individuals from Dublin Bee Keeper's Association, a bee keeping supplier, members of the local community, media and others. This project might have fallen if those personal relationships and chance encounters had not taken place. Efforts at formally developing the project through written requests to institutions and private land owners have not yet yielded any results yet are time consuming.

Key Actors

Who participated?

- Volunteers associated with the community project.
- Staff in the project
- Children in the afterschool project.
- Individuals interested and taken by the project.

Who instigated it?

A volunteer and staff member in the community project.

Who are the key partners and stakeholders?

- Robert Emmet Community Development Project
- Local Community Children in the Afterschool Project
- Dublin Bee Keepers association
- Digital Hub.

Observations of specific ways of operation, of the different stakeholders the cultural context

Without a dedicated staff member with the motivation and basic skills acting on the ground, this project would not be possible.

Core beliefs and principles of the different people taking part

Those participating are risk takers and don't regard something not working as a failure but rather as a learning and a sign to try something different.

Issues, Challenges & Alternatives

Process

During the inception, development and implementation,

- The main challenge is the skill and experience of the key personnel is limited and they do not have the time available to dedicate the project. It started in an unplanned way and time has never been allowed to drive and develop the whole initiative as it could be driven;
- There is technical support, but it is unreliable;
- In 2012/.2013 50%of all bee stocks in the country were lost and 100% of the bees from this project were lost. It was a challenge to replace them;
- The project needs an intense injection of energy, with support from a third level or scientific institution, to robustly plan and measure aspects of the project and assist with explanations – e.g. does planting up with a particular nectar rich species increase yields, on the occasions where we have had unexplained deaths in our bees, to analyse what caused that;
- A dedicated worker to work with long term unemployed individuals teaching them skills and exploring the potential to expand and develop the project;

- Negotiating access to sites to place hives on and to plant up nectar rich sites has been unexpectedly challenging and difficult, with considerable time and energy spent identifying a land owner, contacting them with proposals and not receiving any response;
- Storage of equipment has been difficult and could become more difficult if the project were to develop;
- Harvesting the honey was challenging.

What was the process of participation and communication like?

The process of both participation and communication remains ad hoc, and could be improved on and does hold back the project. The communication and participation with the children from the afterschool project is very integrated in the daily programme and is yielding good outcomes among them. Again it could be robustly measured over the long-term with more resources.

Were there specific parts of the process where there was a distinction between design and implementation or was it more iterative and seamless?

The process just started as a temporary initiative and has become more structured each year. Securing the LA funding provided more structure and helped develop a vision.

What kind of conflicts came up?

No Conflicts arose.

A school group did come to visit the site in preparation for a Young Scientist Exhibition submission and one young girl was stung as the suit she was using had a tiny hole in it as it had been donated second hand. A photographer was also stung as he refused to wear a suit. While no conflict arose, it potentially could have.

How did the process move from there?

We have updated our health and safety practice, suits are checked more thoroughly.

What were the points of consensus?

The major points of consensus are the benefits to the project are:

- The community and the environment;
- The rich learning opportunity for the children;
- The quality of the honey.

What were the barriers in doing the project?

Time to work with local people.

Time to negotiate access to new sites.

Adequate time to care for the bees.

Time to market the project at all the levels it could be marketed, to replicate it, to analyse scientifically.

Knowledge about bee keeping.

Engaging the Local Authority in a meaningful way.

Access to additional sites to plant nectar rich plants even on small scale.

(Though it does appear that there is no shortage of sources for the bees all year round).

The project is too ambitious to be carried out without a dedicated person managing 10 – 15 hours per month.

Were there alternatives explored?

Currently exploring the options of taking on an intern to manage the programme.

Power and Agency

Who controlled the resource to begin with?

The community Project, Robert Emmet Community Development Project

How was the resource shared or controlled?

The resource hasn't been shared yet.

Did agency shift?

Yes, the media interest and the children developing a keen interest changed the agency of the project.

Was there a specific mechanism / knowledge that allowed agency to shift?

When the first yield of honey was harvested and an article in the Sunday Times.

How were the decisions made?

On a practical basis, time of year in the beekeeping cycle, opportunities which presented themselves and as staff or volunteers were available.

Key decisions and shifts in the project / process.

The children's engagement and involvement, this had been unplanned.

The project has never realised its ambition of planting up rich sources of nectar. It was assumed that there would be insufficient sources of nectar in the environment with virtually no trees. But the bees are active for longer than bees in rural settings most likely because of the increased temperature and such a variety of bees,

Knowledge Gaps

Questions that arise

How could you compare and measure yields of honey and bee health from different parts of the city and the country?

How could you persuade local authorities to lead an initiative like this?

Movable Hive Initiative

It would be very easy to have a number of hives which could be moved from site to site as they are no longer available as happens in commercial orchards.

This initiative could provide passive site security.

Knowledge that would have helped the project

- Harvesting honey is difficult and time consuming;
- User friendly written material with pictures;
- Programmes for children.

Any Theoretical Background that might help to understand/ support the practice?

A framework for developing an urban bee project eg. How many green sites should be included in the area?

Feasibility work done on a local economy project.

Any practical knowledge that might help to support the practice.

More capacity and skills working with people with low literacy levels.

Better support and knowledge

- Splitting hives,
- Rearing queens,
- Extracting propolis,
- Extracting and uses of wax

Wood working skills to build bee hives rather than buy them.

Precedents or other similar examples of this type of process or project

<http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/bees>

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/01/health/01iht-parisbees.16613547.html?_r=0

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-10942618>

<http://www.urbanbees.co.uk/faq/faq.htm>

Outcomes

What were the outcomes?

The outputs were:

- Four hives placed on two sites;
- A strong harvest in 2012 of 60lbs of honey from two hives;
- Two local people with preliminary training;
- Confirmation that bees can thrive in the city centre.

Are the outcomes particular to the cultural context or are any of the solutions or methods replicable?

These methods could be replicated in other areas.

Are any of the methods innovative?

The method of placing hives on unused sites to 'guard' a site and preventive dumping, etc is innovative.

Is it possible to codify any of the methods?

Further work would need to be done in an analysis of local habitats and suspension of spraying and the impacts on yields of honey in connection with a third level institution and the local authority, before methods could be codified.

What challenges were overcome?

- People's perceptions of having beehives nearby in urban areas;
- That children could be beekeepers.

Value

Access to a derelict site.

What was valued?

- The honey produced;
- The children participating;
- The media opportunities.

Who decided the value?

Peers in the community sector.

Lessons learnt

This is a low cost project which could be networked and promoted easily with a maximum impact in the city.

What needs to change?

The accessibility of the local authority to support an action like this.

Short term access to sites.

Supports including funding for long-term unemployed gain access to this experience.

Written / visual aids for people completing a project like this.

Policies in the inner cities on pollinator and nectar rich plants and use of insecticides.

What knowledge was reinforced?

That bee hives can thrive in the inner city.

That there is an unpredictable change in natural cycles in recent years (bees swarming in August).

That finding the time to find the right individual to progress initiatives can be time consuming and over whelming.

Any new understandings gained- ways of working etc.

Working with children in this context is possible and very rewarding.

It seems there is more interest in the novelty and 'photo opportunity' of the project than investing the time in developing it by some institutions.

There is greater support fro resilience and sustainability than is assumed.

What knowledge was understood that wasn't understood before?

That the general public can be very close to bee hives with no risk.

How might this case study contribute to the bigger picture of resilience – what were the barriers and opportunities to building social resilience?

None of the barriers were insurmountable. A single individual with a clear work plan for 12 – 18 months could overcome the barriers identified.

How might knowledge from this be integrated into planning knowledge or policy context?

It could be transferred locally from local authorities through existing community networks and could be in place within a 12 month period.

Any observations about how these lessons might be transferable in terms of skills or knowledge.

Unused sites could be reclassified as 'bee sites' and advertised as such – immediately public perception changes.

These sites could be available for 12 months and then a new site comes on board.

Savings would be made on reduced maintenance because of reduced spraying.

An increase in skills could be achieved in inner city areas which need semiskilled occupations badly.

A city like Dublin already has a network of community projects on the ground which could deliver this.

There exist budgets which could be diverted to deliver on this.