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An effective BluePrint for Flood Risk Communication

Collaborative art approaches to climate resilience in Northern Ireland

“In at Midnight and Away by Morning: The Uninvited Guest” is a sound and light installation that weaves together local knowledge and climate data to highlight the impacts that communities in Northern Ireland face from flooding, amplifying local voices in decision-making processes.

Key Learnings

- **Multistakeholder collaboration:** Involvement from local communities, government, artists, and scientists offered a range of perspectives and helped to bridge the gap between information, policy and practice.
- **Collaborative art processes:** Artistic practice created a safe space and new channels for dialogue, fostering open communication around a challenging topic. This enabled participants to share their personal experiences of flooding more constructively and positively.
- **Enhanced awareness:** Community members not directly impacted by flooding became more aware of the long-term effects these events had on their neighbours' well-being, who were directly affected. The community also learned about the need for increased climate resilience.
- **Jointly developed risk communication:** Active community participation led to tailored flood risk communication, combining scientific insights with personal experiences. The outputs amplified community voices at a decision-making level. Emotionally connecting with policymakers and elected officials made them directly aware of citizen concerns, highlighting the impacts of flooding on their community and the need for building climate resilience.

About the region

The villages in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area in Northern Ireland experience a temperate maritime climate. Eglinton, home to about 3,500 residents, is to the north-east of Derry/Londonderry City along the Atlantic Ocean. The village is vulnerable to pluvial, fluvial and tidal flooding due to the influence of the Castle and Muff rivers and Lough Foyle. Newtownstewart, with around 1,700 inhabitants, lies in County Tyrone at the foot of the Sperrin Mountains. Its proximity to the Strule River makes it particularly susceptible to fluvial flooding.

Climate Hazards

Flooding

Sector

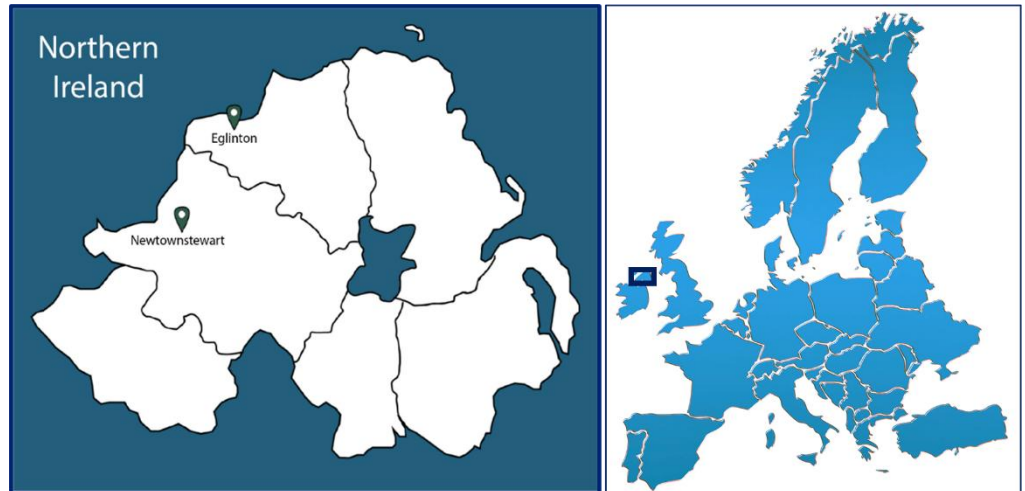
Disaster Risk Reduction,

Water Management

Key system

Health and Wellbeing

Water Management



Climate Threats

The low-lying villages, Eglinton, Newtownstewart, and other areas across Northern Ireland primarily face the threat of coastal and inland flooding due to intense and persistent rainfall and powerful storms. Urban developments, increasing surface run-off and reducing infiltration and drainage capacity exacerbate the flood risk in Eglinton. Direct damages from flooding to residential properties in Northern Ireland currently reach £21.3 million (about EUR 25.7 million) annually ([ClimateNI, 2021](#)), an amount likely to increase. Flooding threatens the safety and well-being of local communities and negatively impacts infrastructure, businesses, and livelihoods – flooding events in 2017 and 2022 particularly devastated residents in both villages.

Initiating collaborative art to raise awareness about flood risks

In response to the flood risks, the [BluePrint](#) project, funded by [Creative Ireland](#), uses collaborative art methods to communicate flood risk and effectively engage with society. In Eglinton and Newtownstewart, a collaborative process with sound and performance artist Sara (Sally) Walmsley helped understand the communities' experiences of flooding and the impacts of these experiences on citizens' personal lives. Sharing personal experiences helped cope with fears, develop ways of dealing with the effects of flooding and being prepared for potential future events, increasing community resilience. This project brought together art practitioners, researchers, and local authorities to support meaningful engagement and collaboration with communities and provided various perspectives to better understand the risk of flooding.

A series of 15 participatory activities occurred over eight months, involving 35 participants from the two flood-affected communities. These included interviews, sound walks, and creative workshops. Using sound as a medium, the process encouraged open discussions and reflections on climate risks, adaptation and resilience. A learning exchange workshop with another flood-affected community in Crossmolina, County Mayo, in the Republic of Ireland, complemented the process. This workshop allowed all three communities to engage with the arts to discuss and process their shared – and sometimes traumatic – experiences of how flooding has affected them individually and as a community.



Figure 1: Creative workshop with Newtownstewart community participants in July 2024. Image Credit: University College Cork.

Some community members, who had not engaged in such a way before, initially met the artistic process with scepticism. The artist's flexibility and commitment to adapt and meaningfully engage all participants created a safe space for them to share their experiences. The supportive environment was instrumental in helping them fully embrace this new approach. By the end of the project, these participants became strong advocates for the creative process, emphasising its value in sharing personal experiences and finding solutions to strengthen community resilience.

"It's amazing what music and poetry have done for different areas and what can be done if we bring that to areas like ours [Crossmolina, Co. Mayo] ... if we had that facility after the flooding, it would have brought the community together in a way that we would never have imagined."

Cllr. Michael Loftus, Ballina, Mayo

Access the video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6GQ_2Z-WA.

The Power of Local Narratives in flood-risk Communication

The collaboration between community participants and project partners added insights and experiences from various perspectives and helped bridge the gap between scientific data, local knowledge and governance challenges. The central flood-risk communication output was a sound and light installation entitled “In at Midnight and Away by Morning: The Uninvited Guest”, which weaves together the voices and sounds that tell the stories of two devastating flood events that affected the people and places of Eglinton and Newtownstewart in 2017 and 2022. Set against the backdrop of Ireland’s rapidly accelerating climate impacts, this project features the sonification of historical rainfall data and future worst-case projections for the region based on datasets from the [UK Met Office](#) and [Met Eireann/Translate](#) project. This work amplifies the voices of the key actors in a devastating flood – the victims, the community responders, and even the river itself – alongside those striving to adapt, finding hope and strength in their communities’ resilience and creativity.

Access a three-minute extract of the sound installation [here](#). The installation features a choir piece, jointly produced with Newtownstewart residents (listen in full [here](#)), and a poetry piece, collaboratively developed with Eglinton residents (listen in full [here](#)).

These art pieces powerfully capture the realities of flooding and the need for climate resilience, offering a relatable way to engage broader audiences, including decision-makers. The transdisciplinary nature of the BluePrint project team allowed access to a wide range of connections, including:

- Art organisations and community forums, showcasing creative works and promoting climate awareness.
- Scientific audiences, highlighting the benefits of different approaches to communicating complex climate information.
- Policymakers and politicians, responsible for climate adaptation planning and action.

“That’s my first-time hearing that, and it’s powerful. For me, it’s the local accent; it’s real people singing in their words. I’m struggling to get people to listen at other governmental levels. I keep saying we need to put the heart and soul back into conversations. It’s not just about finance and stats. And that does it for me – it’s amazing.”

Cathy Burns, Derry City and Strabane District Council



Figure 2: Eglinton poetry performance at the launch of the Derry & Strabane Sustainability and Climate Commission in October 2024. Image Credit: University College Cork.

Summary

Across the island of Ireland, the population is experiencing ever more frequent and severe rainfall and storms as climate change accelerates. Flooding disrupts daily life, damages the environment, and poses growing health and well-being challenges. The [BluePrint](#) project utilised a creative, joint development approach to engage flood-affected communities in Northern Ireland, facilitate exchanges in the Republic of Ireland, and collaboratively develop flood-risk communication materials, amplifying the voice of personal experiences. While the artistic process celebrates the hope, inspiration, and creativity these communities have shown when facing climate challenges such as flooding, they also sound a note of urgency. And so, the project invites audiences not just to listen but to act and to leverage change locally, driving broader community resilience.

Further information

The work presented in this adaptation story is part of the BluePrint project.

- <https://www.marei.ie/project/blueprint/>
- BluePrint Toolkit: https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2025/04/BluePrint-Toolkit_Final.pdf
- BluePrint Report: <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2025/04/20250401-UCC-Final-Final-Report-External-1.pdf>
- Creative Ireland website: [Publications - Creative Ireland Programme](#)

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References

Climate Northern Ireland (2021) Evidence for the third UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA3) Technical Report: Summary for Northern Ireland. Accessible at:

<https://www.ukclimaterisk.org/publications/type/national-summaries/>



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