



Bioregional Financing Facilities

Reimagining Finance to Regenerate Our Planet

Case Study 2:

The Bioregional Weaving Lab in South East Ireland



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The Bioregional Weaving Lab in South East Ireland – An Example of a Multi-stakeholder Process for Bioregional Regeneration

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About Bioregional Weaving Labs

A Bioregional Weaving Lab (BWL) is a geographically grounded, multi-stakeholder partnership process that connects place, people, and projects to regenerate bioregions. It builds capacity and supports local Changemakers and their communities, including regenerative farmers, social entrepreneurs, leaders in public institutions, corporate leaders, NGOs, students, educators etc., in coordinating collective action for the required change on a systemic level. The idea is that an inclusive process leads to more local ownership and better implementation of more resilient and effective strategies to accelerate the uptake and scaling of regenerative practices – like a gro-ecology, agroforestry, seagrass restoration, and other Nature- based Solutions.

The BWL approach combines the emerging leadership practice of ‘Weaving’, with a Theory U-inspired lab process and a holistic impact framework to generate 4 Returns in the bioregions (natural, social, and financial returns, and the return of inspiration). Each BWL is led by one or a small team of dedicated ‘Weavers’, often hosted by strong local partner organizations, and supported by the international BWL Backbone Team. All the bioregional weaving teams across Europe are participating in the overarching BWL Learning Network with regular online sessions and an annual Learning Summit to catalyze peer-to-peer learning. Apart from the Learning Network, the BWL collective is building a growing portfolio of systemic, regenerative innovations and practices from all over the world– including from Ashoka Fellows – that are community- based, replicable and scalable, and can inspire and support the bioregions in their regenerative landscape development.

The Bioregional Weaving Labs (BWL) Collective is a growing international alliance that currently consists of 30+ organizations, including Ashoka and Common land, working together to mobilize one million Changemakers to restore, protect and regenerate one million hectares of land and sea in Europe by 2030. The Collective is representing hundreds of practitioners in the field, like farmers and nature conservationists, and has the ambition to grow into an international movement of regenerative Changemakers.

Since January 2022, the Bioregional Weaving Labs Collective has activated 25 Weavers facilitating 8 BWLs in 8 countries in Europe: Ireland, Germany, The Netherlands, Austria, Romania, France, Spain, and Poland.

BWL South East Ireland

The BWL in South East Ireland, was one of the first ones to be established and has since facilitated a series of place-based trust-building activities as well as regular multi-stakeholder

workshops with farmers, local institutions and social innovators in the bioregion. The workshops are designed to look at systemic and mindset changes needed for landscape transformation through collective action, and have proven to be a space where isolated initiatives find strength in numbers and a sense of belonging.

The South East of Ireland is dominated by intensive agricultural practices, mostly dairy and beef, supplying a major export market, with smaller areas of upland features along the northern edge of the bioregion, and a craggy coastline to the south facing out to the Celtic Sea and the Atlantic beyond. The effects of extractive business practices and broken food systems are becoming increasingly visible in this superficially green and thriving corner of Europe. Water quality is poor in many of the rivers, dairy farming has reached a point where the carrying capacity of the land and soil is exceeded, and communities are detached from nature, and each other, due to urban growth and shifts in social connections in rural settings. There is an increasing awareness of the fragility of the situation and the harmful effects of such systems. There is also an increasing determination to do something that will restore and regenerate the region, but there is little access to knowledge or demonstrations of how to make such a major change.

An early initiative in the work of the Irish BWL was to give local stakeholders ownership of their own vision for the future of their food systems - and the changes that will be needed in local natural and social structures to get there. They did this by co-writing this powerful manifesto that now guides the direction and content of the BWL work in Ireland.

The multiple activities and initiatives led by the BWL in South East Ireland represent both the tangible and intangible aspects of transformative change. The weaving staff support local projects with micro catalyst grants, and by creating shared language and sharing tools that facilitate systemic and collective change. Events have included landscape walks and artistic interventions, as well as formal workshops and seminars. Over the course of 18 months, ten concepts have emerged as being both innovative and potentially collectively impactful in their ability to achieve the shared vision in the manifesto and contribute to the overall mission of the European BWL collective. The concepts range from new kinds of regenerative farming to rural hubs, from upland sustainability through generations to unleashing the social capital of the third age¹¹⁶, and from a mission-driven geopark to stitching nature corridors together across the bioregion.

In addition, the BWL in South East Ireland is involved in a 'deep demonstration' partnership with the Irish government to test landscape approaches to the future of sustainable dairy. These activities and approaches mean that the BWL is now in a position to i) establish a new entity– the Bioregional Weaving Alliance– designed to support learning and initiatives leading to bioregional regeneration, restoration and protection, especially in the South East, and ii) offer a portfolio of emerging concepts for holistic investment.

An emerging portfolio of regeneration projects

The portfolio of concepts can be thought of as a collection of systemic innovations that together can trigger a bioregional transition to local regenerative economies as well as thriving landscapes and communities, in line with the manifesto and overall BWL mission. The portfolio was developed through residential and local workshops – including at the evocative localities of Dromana House on the Blackwater river and the Coastguard Cultural Centre overlooking

Tramore Bay. A major conference was held to consider innovative landscape and community financing using the portfolio and the support platform of the BWL and its BWL catalyst funds as a case study.

Currently the 10 concepts are in the process of being matured and developed to become fundable and investable as an integrated portfolio of critical interventions for the bioregion. The concepts are interdependent and entangled, and the local team believes that only when viewed as a whole can investment and finance flows expect to address unexpected externalities, risks beyond linear value chains, and the potential of holistic aggregated returns. The hope is that investment in such an emergent portfolio will catalyze large-scale positive change for communities and for the landscape – and generate inspiration, social, natural, and financial capital.

Both the weaving team and local stakeholders are determined to find new ways of holistically financing the regeneration of their bioregion through a support structure and emergent portfolio that is built on local knowledge and bottom-up decision-making and inclusive, equitable governance structures.

This Case Study on **The Bioregional Weaving Lab in South East Ireland** is an Excerpt from the book **Bioregional Financing Facilities: Reimagining Finance to Regenerate Our Planet**, by Samantha Power and Leon Seefeld. To see other case studies, or to buy or download the book, visit www.biofi.earth.

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