



TIONSCADAL GEOPHÁIRC

Dhúiche Sheoigheach & Lochanna an Iarthair

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT



Joyce Country & Western Lakes Geopark Project

2020-2025



Facilitated by
TINA O'DWYER
THE TOURISM SPACE
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Rialtas
na hÉireann
Government
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040



Geological Survey
Suirbhéireacht Gheolaíochta
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www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie



Introduction & Overview

An application process for UNESCO Global Geopark status for the Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark region is currently underway, with the aim of achieving the designation in 2023. The application is based on the geology of international importance found in the region, with the complete rock record of the opening and closing of the Iapetus Ocean, the world famous Connemara Marble, the only fjord in Ireland at Killary, one of the fastest flowing spring complexes in the world at Cong, and Lough Carra as one of the most significant marl lakes in Europe.

OUR MISSION

Through achievement of UNESCO Global Geopark status for the Joyce Country and Western Lakes region, the communities, businesses and education providers in the area will be empowered to better inform about its attractions, promote the use of the Irish language and draw more visitors to experience in a sustainable way its rich geological, historical and cultural features, resulting in more confident and resilient local communities, enterprise and jobs.



What is a UNESCO Global Geopark?

A UNESCO Global Geopark is a place where outstanding geological heritage is used to support sustainable development through conservation, education, interpretation and sustainable tourism.

GEPARKS IN THE WORLD

The first Geoparks were ratified in 2004 - **17 in Europe and 8 in China.**

2015 was a milestone year for Geoparks when the 195 member states of UNESCO ratified the creation of a new label: the UNESCO Global Geopark.

Since July 2020, there are **161 UNESCO Global Geoparks** in 44 countries around the world.

GEPARKS IN IRELAND

There are currently **3 UNESCO Global Geoparks** on the Island of Ireland: the cross-border Marble Arch Cave in counties Cavan and Fermanagh, Burren & Cliffs of Moher in Co. Clare and Copper Coast in Co. Waterford. Besides Joyce Country & Western Lakes, there is one other Aspiring Geopark in Mourne Gullion Strangford in counties Down and Armagh.

THE JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT

The Project is the culmination of a community-led, volunteer initiative that started in 2010.

The Project formally got underway in January 2020, thanks primarily to funding through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and further funding support from a multi-agency partnership.

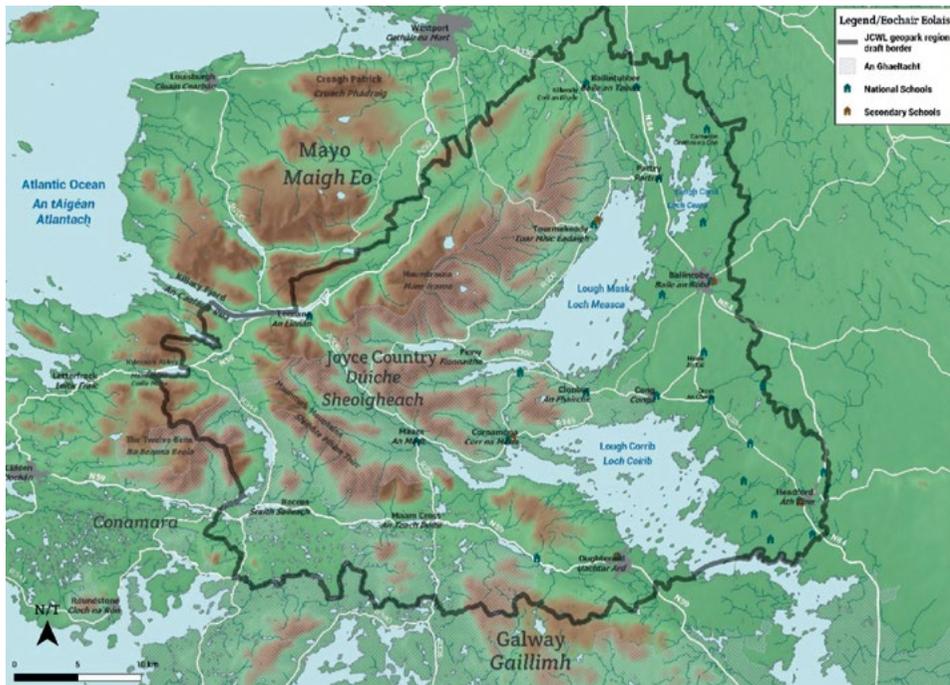
With 3 full-time and 1 part-time staff, the key aim of The Project is to put in place resources and structures to achieve UNESCO Global Geopark Status.

Snapshot of the aspiring geopark¹

The Joyce Country and Western Lakes aspiring geopark currently includes the area surrounding Joyce Country on the Galway-Mayo border and towns and villages both sides of Loughs Mask, Carra and about half of the Corrib. Other smaller lakes include Loughs Inagh, Derryclare, Glendollagh and Nafooy plus numerous localised lakes. The Partry Mountains, Maumtrasna and the Maumturks are the standout mountain ranges. The area touches the Wild Atlantic Way at Leenane. Around half of the region is Gaeltacht.

The population of over 18900 is spread across 15 villages and three towns in an area covering of around 1500km². There are 27 national schools and 5 secondary schools, plus an outdoor education and training centre. A map of the Fáilte Ireland-registered businesses in the region can be found in *Appendix 1*.

“The population of over 18900 is spread across 15 villages and three towns in an area covering of around 1500km²”



▲ The border indicated on this map serves to illustrate the general geography of the aspirant Geopark, and will be subject to discussion and consultation over the coming years as part of the Geopark Status Application Process.



ADDITIONALITY

Should the project successfully achieve UNESCO Global Geopark Status, it would confer the following additional and complementary benefits to the existing tourism offering in the region:

- ▶ A UNESCO designation within Co Mayo and Co Galway.
- ▶ A strong new dimension for the Gaeltacht and the Irish language through the global UNESCO designation, with a geo-based offering appealing to learners and tourists that can be experienced in Irish as well as English.
- ▶ A community-led, community-focused approach to tourism development that can act as a flagship sustainable and regenerative project for the region.
- ▶ A beacon of thought and action leadership in the area of climate change education and adaptation.



VISION 2020 - 2025

Achieving UNESCO Global Geopark designation for the Joyce Country & Western Lakes region is the foundation stone of our vision to 2025. The process of achieving and maintaining the Geopark designation is a connector and motivator for all stakeholders. Once achieved, it stimulates and leverages further sustainable development. This page shares what success looks like for The Geopark Project in 2025. This vision is built on commitment to community, education, conservation and sustainable tourism.



INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED DESTINATION OF DISTINCTION

Our region is part of a select network of special destinations around the world that have achieved UNESCO Global Geopark status as a testament to our outstanding geological heritage. Key stakeholders at community and institutional levels came together to achieve this outcome, and strong,

effective working relationships are a positive legacy of that Geopark status application process.

LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Our Geopark plays an active role in facilitating progress within our counties and on the island of Ireland towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development

Goals. We raise awareness of the potential impact of climate change on the region, and provide local communities, businesses and visitors with information and ideas to mitigate and adapt to its potential effects, harmonised with other environmental sustainability initiatives. We empower people to live, work and visit in a way that honours and conserves the environment in this very special place for current and future generations.

COMMUNITY

Communities led the initiative to establish our Geopark and we have provided inclusive frameworks for connecting communities across the region. Thanks to the educational events and resources created, our communities are proud of the UNESCO Global Geopark status, value what it stands for and know why their place is worthy of this designation. Communities have strengthened both their individual

identities and their collective identity and there is a tangibly strong sense of pride of place amongst those who live and work in The Geopark region.

BUSINESS

We recognize the value of sustainable and profitable businesses in supporting and enhancing our communities and our region. Tourism is one of our primary industries and is

characterized now by a diverse range of providers who enjoy a longer season that enables year-round opening. Other businesses in the region benefit from increased footfall and activity through tourism. Members of the Geopark Tourism Business Network amplifies their positive social and economic contributions and enthusiastically explores ways to reduce any potential negative ecological impacts that may arise.

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

The Irish language and Gaeltacht culture is celebrated, and is a defining and differentiating characteristic of our Geopark. They are a living and natural part of our day-to-day lives, are integrated into our visitor experiences and are reflected daily in our engagement with locals and other stakeholders.

GEPARK EXPERIENCE

We have excelled at creating visitor experiences that truly reflect our place and culture and the values of the Geopark. A range of flagship experiences are built on our key differentiators of language, culture, ethos, community and ecology. Our experiences are designed to connect visitors and locals alike, and to give our visitors a deeper understanding of local geology, the environment and their influence on the people living here.



Swot analysis of tourism in the geopark

STRENGTHS

- ▶ Geology of international significance.
- ▶ Pristine and breathtaking natural environment.
- ▶ World-class opportunities for angling, walking, cycling, cultural immersion.
- ▶ Existence of quality visitor experience infrastructure within the Geopark territory - The Western Way, the Tóchar Phádraig, 1 National Cycling Trail with 4 in the greater area, 11 National Walking Trails with 18 in the greater area, quality fishing and angling lakes and rivers.
- ▶ Established hospitality sector including some internationally recognised high-end services
- ▶ Location on the Wild Atlantic Way
- ▶ Financial support of stakeholder

agencies to date: Geological Survey Ireland, Galway County Council, Mayo County Council, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Coillte.

- ▶ In-kind support from stakeholder agencies to date, including Fáilte Ireland, IFI and NPWS.
- ▶ Project Ireland 2040 (RRDF) funding 2020-2021 and demonstrated ability to leverage funding opportunities.
- ▶ Attractive and informative website linked with active social media presence promoting the features and experiences of the region
- ▶ Strong, expert management team and cross- community representation committed to the long-term vision and active on-the-ground in the Geopark territory.

WEAKNESSES & VULNERABILITIES

- ▶ Insufficient economic activity to sustain employment and communities.
- ▶ Weak sense of connection between towns, villages and communities of the Geopark area.
- ▶ Underdeveloped collaboration between businesses and visitor experience providers within the Geopark area.
- ▶ Uncertainty around future funding and resourcing of the Geopark idea.

- ▶ Lack of knowledge and awareness among locals and visitors of the geological heritage of the area and what the UNESCO Global Geopark designation means.
- ▶ Modest level of community engagement in the Geopark Project.
- ▶ Lack of identity as a destination or proposition in the Galway/Mayo area.
- ▶ 'Gaps' in the current tourism offering including hospitality and activity services, well-informed guides and communities, information infrastructure and signage.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ▶ Strengthening of the Irish Language & Gaeltacht culture.
- ▶ Become an exemplar of sustainable tourism and community-led tourism within Galway, Mayo and the country.
- ▶ Capitalise on emerging visitor demand for places of escape and retreat and opportunities to connect with nature and with local culture.
- ▶ Capitalise on the diversity of learning opportunities for students and visitors through experiencing the landscape and local stories.
- ▶ Leverage national and international funding opportunities that the Geopark

is uniquely positioned to avail of.

- ▶ Develop food/drinks tourism and agritourism as an expression of Geopark heritage and culture.
- ▶ Develop visitor experiences that are built upon the Irish language and Gaeltacht culture e.g. sean-nos dancing and singing, language immersion, storytelling and integration across other activities by guides and other experience providers.
- ▶ Potential to engage and enthuse local communities, to elevate further their pride in place and to empower them to share this with visitors and each other.
- ▶ Growing international awareness and appeal of the Wild Atlantic Way.

- ▶ Development of 'turning-point infrastructure' including digital information panels, signage, (satellite) visitor centres, walking and cycling trails, greenways, etc.
- ▶ Development of stand-out events promoting the geopark including festivals & commemorations.
- ▶ Proximity to 'hook' experiences such as Kylemore Abbey, Mayo Dark Sky Park and Connemara and Ballycroy National Parks.
- ▶ Well-targeted promotion of the geopark in key national and international markets.
- ▶ Take a lead role in facilitating progress towards the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals.



THREATS

- ▶ Economic recession and potential depression arising from the 2020 Pandemic.
- ▶ Greater loss of the Irish Language and Gaeltacht culture.
- ▶ Slow return of international tourism in the coming decade.
- ▶ Population decline in towns and villages of the geopark area.
- ▶ Failure to achieve Geopark Status by 2023.

- ▶ Failure to successfully brand and promote the JCWL geopark as an attractive destination in the face of intensifying other national and international competition.
- ▶ Failure to engage local businesses and tourism development bodies to adopt sustainable and ecologically responsible approaches to tourism development.
- ▶ Withdrawal of monetary and in-kind support by any of the stakeholder

agencies.

- ▶ Failure to engage local communities including farmers/landowners in the Geopark idea.
- ▶ Fears and apprehensions of landowners with regard to future designation and land access issues.
- ▶ Destructive forces of Climate Change and other environmental threats including potential damage to landscapes, habitats and service infrastructure.





Covid-19 and emerging visitor trends

The Covid-19 Pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on travel and tourism worldwide. There is widespread consensus that travel and tourism will resume again once the world is better equipped to live with Covid through measures such as vaccines, rapid testing, airport procedures. The questions and uncertainties relate more to the level at which tourism will return, the speed at which it will return and the changes in visitor attitudes and desires that will shape the future of the visitor offering.

- ▶ **Sustainability:** a greater sense of personal responsibility and a heightened awareness of the impact of personal choices in creating a more sustainable world.
- ▶ **Community:** a perceptible and likely enduring increase in interest of the average person in community health and wellbeing.
- ▶ **Nature:** a significant increase in our ability, opportunity and desire to connect with nature in our day-to-day lives and particularly during our leisure time.
- ▶ **Safety:** a greater concern about being in congested places.
- ▶ **Global Wellbeing:** a greater awareness of how connected the world is and how care for our planet and nature is a global priority.

The JCWL Geopark is very well positioned to respond to these emerging visitor attitudes and beliefs.



Geopark charter for community & tourism

In line with our vision to 2025 and the principles of UNESCO Global Geoparks, the following Charter has been developed to communicate what our Geopark stands for. This is a set of principles which guides our partnerships with businesses, communities and other stakeholders, all of whom are also asked to subscribe and uphold these principles in the development of The Geopark.

GRADAM

WE SHOWCASE OUR
OUTSTANDING LANDSCAPE

Our geoheritage is of international significance and we proudly showcase our diverse geology, landscape, culture, history and built heritage.

BUAN

WE FACILITATE PROGRESS
TOWARDS GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS

We support and encourage best practices in relation to the unique habitats and biodiversity of our lakes, mountains and valleys, recognising the fundamental role played by farmers and other landowners in this. We promote responsible management of resources in our communities and businesses. We champion approaches that energize our traditions and customs and foster a flourishing environment and community. *See Appendix 2*

TEANGA

WE CHAMPION OUR GAELTACHT
CULTURE & LANGUAGE

We are proud to have a Gaeltacht in the region, and promote and embody the richness and use of the Irish language and Gaeltacht traditions in our events and daily experiences. We create opportunities for communities, businesses and visitors to live in, learn and share the Irish language and Gaeltacht culture.

POBAL

WE EMPOWER OUR
COMMUNITIES

We work to ensure that our Geopark communities can fully embrace and appreciate the global significance and importance of their place. We share knowledge and learning opportunities that foster a shared Geopark identity and pride across the region. We strive to make services available to the widest possible audience.

GNÓ

WE CELEBRATE/NURTURE
RESPONSIBLE AND ROBUST
BUSINESSES

We value the role of businesses in creating a thriving community, economy and destination. We nurture collaboration between businesses and support them in growing skills in business start-ups and management, job creation, tourism development and sustainable tourism practices.

FÁILTE

WE ENGAGE AND
IMPRESS OUR VISITORS

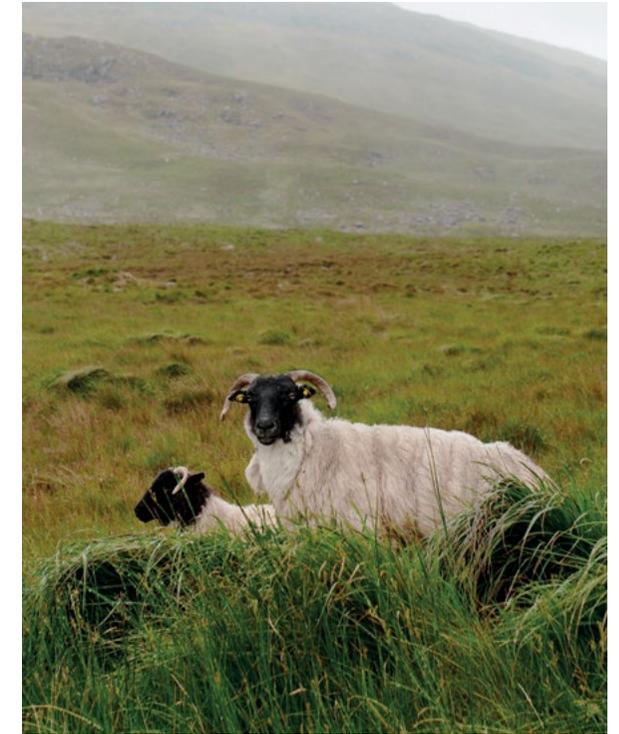
We invite our visitors, holiday-makers and learners to immerse themselves in our exceptional geological heritage and our distinctive culture and way of life. We open possibilities to become part of our community, even if only for a short while. Our Geopark Experiences are fun, educational and memorable.

MEITHEAL

WE PARTNER WITH OTHERS AND
WORK TOGETHER

We actively work with all stakeholders to enhance our shared ability to create and maintain a vibrant and flourishing destination, economy and community. Our stakeholders include local authorities, Údarás na Gaeltachta and other national statutory agencies, educational bodies, local communities and businesses.





Strategic objectives for tourism development 2020-2022

1 Grow awareness of the JCWL Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark among local hosts and potential visitors as a truly distinctive destination offering a unique sense of place.

Gradam, Fáilte

2 Develop and deliver sustainable, world-class visitor experiences, that are unique to JCWL Geopark and its people, and that share distinctive attributes of our geology, language, landscape and food.

Fáilte, Teanga, Buan, Pobal, Gnó

3 Create greater educational, recreational and leisure opportunities that act as compelling attractors for the destination.

Fáilte, Gnó, Pobal

4 Integrate the Irish language and Gaeltacht culture into the overall Geopark Visitor Experience.

Gnu, Pobal, Teanga, Meigheal, Buan, Fáilte

5 Support job creation and the local economy through investment in the networking, collaborative and business management skills of tourism and tourism-dependent businesses.

Gnó, Meitheal, Pobal

6 Empower host, business and visitor responsibility around use of resources, behaviour in the landscape and engagement with the community.

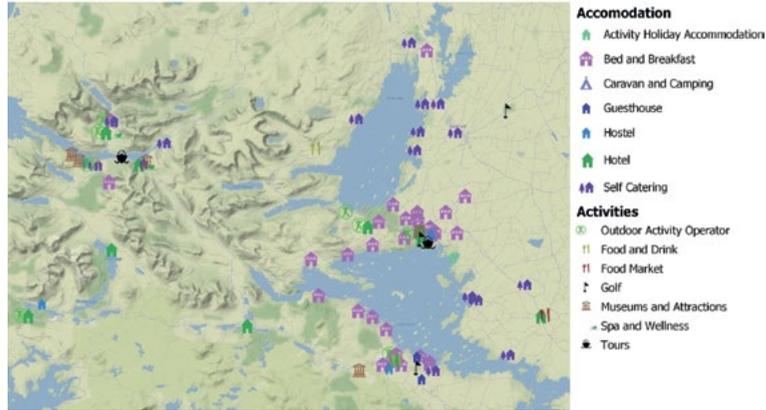
Buan, Meitheal

Key Actions 2020 - 2025

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	KEY ACTIONS
<p>1 Grow awareness of the JCWL Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark among local hosts and potential visitors as a truly distinctive destination offering a unique sense of place.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Achieve UNESCO Global Geopark Status for the Joyce Country & Western Lakes region. ▶ Create a visitor-facing destination brand and visual identity aligned with the Wild Atlantic Way national brand. ▶ Develop and resource a destination marketing and storytelling strategy that leverages our natural competitive advantages in the areas of language, culture, food and geoheritage.
<p>2 Develop and deliver sustainable, world-class visitor experiences, that are unique to JCWL Geopark and its people, and that share distinctive attributes of our geology, language, landscape and food.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identify and communicate the defining hallmark characteristics of JCWL Visitor Experiences e.g. ▶ Accessible geological heritage ▶ Up-close with the landscape ▶ Bi-lingual ▶ Engagement with locals ▶ Taste & Geofood ▶ Develop a Geopark Visitor Experience Programme to empower stakeholders, businesses and communities to present and deliver this distinctive JCWL Experience to the visitor. ▶ Align this programme with existing and evolving experience development initiatives for Connemara & The Aran Islands, the Wild Atlantic Way, Mayo Tourism, Galway Tourism and tourism development in the Gaeltachts, leveraging marketing, networking and learning opportunities that arise from same.
<p>3 Create greater educational, recreational and leisure opportunities that act as compelling attractors for the destination.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Support and promote investment in world class visitor opportunities such as blueways, greenways, walking and cycling trails, geosite interpretation and angling. ▶ Invest team resources in identifying suitable funding and grant opportunities that will enable investment in destination products and infrastructure. ▶ Develop a bilingual signage, waymarking and visitor orientation plan for The Geopark.
<p>4 Integrate the Irish language and Gaeltacht culture into the overall Geopark Visitor Experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ As part of the Geopark Visitor Experience Programme, create tools and resources that empower businesses and communities to use access to Gaeilge, Gaeltacht and Geology as key selling points. ▶ Ensure a Geopháirc le Gaeilge programme that ensures availability and access to fully bilingual visitor orientation, information materials and events at all levels within the destination. ▶ Partner with the Gaeltacht Language Plan Officer to develop local courses and Ciorcail Chomhrá for the visitors and local communities alike.
<p>5 Support job creation and the local economy through investment in the networking, collaborative and business management skills of tourism and tourism-dependent businesses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Facilitate the establishment of a Geopark Business Network. ▶ Resource training, networking and business development opportunities for members of the Geopark Business Network. ▶ Enable businesses and communities to work together to create destination experiences such as a Geotrail, local food, drinks and Food Trail, Heritage Trail and immersive language experiences.
<p>6 Empower host, business and visitor responsibility around use of resources, behaviour in the landscape and engagement with the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Communicate Geopark Standards in the area of sustainable management of resources (waste, water and energy), and deliver appropriate supports for Geopark homes and businesses. ▶ Empower businesses and communities to positively influence visitor understanding of and engagement with the landscape, language and local community. ▶ Actively monitor and respond to visitor behaviour and visitor impacts in the Geopark.

APPENDIX 1

Map of Fáilte Ireland registered businesses in the Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark Project



APPENDIX 2

UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030

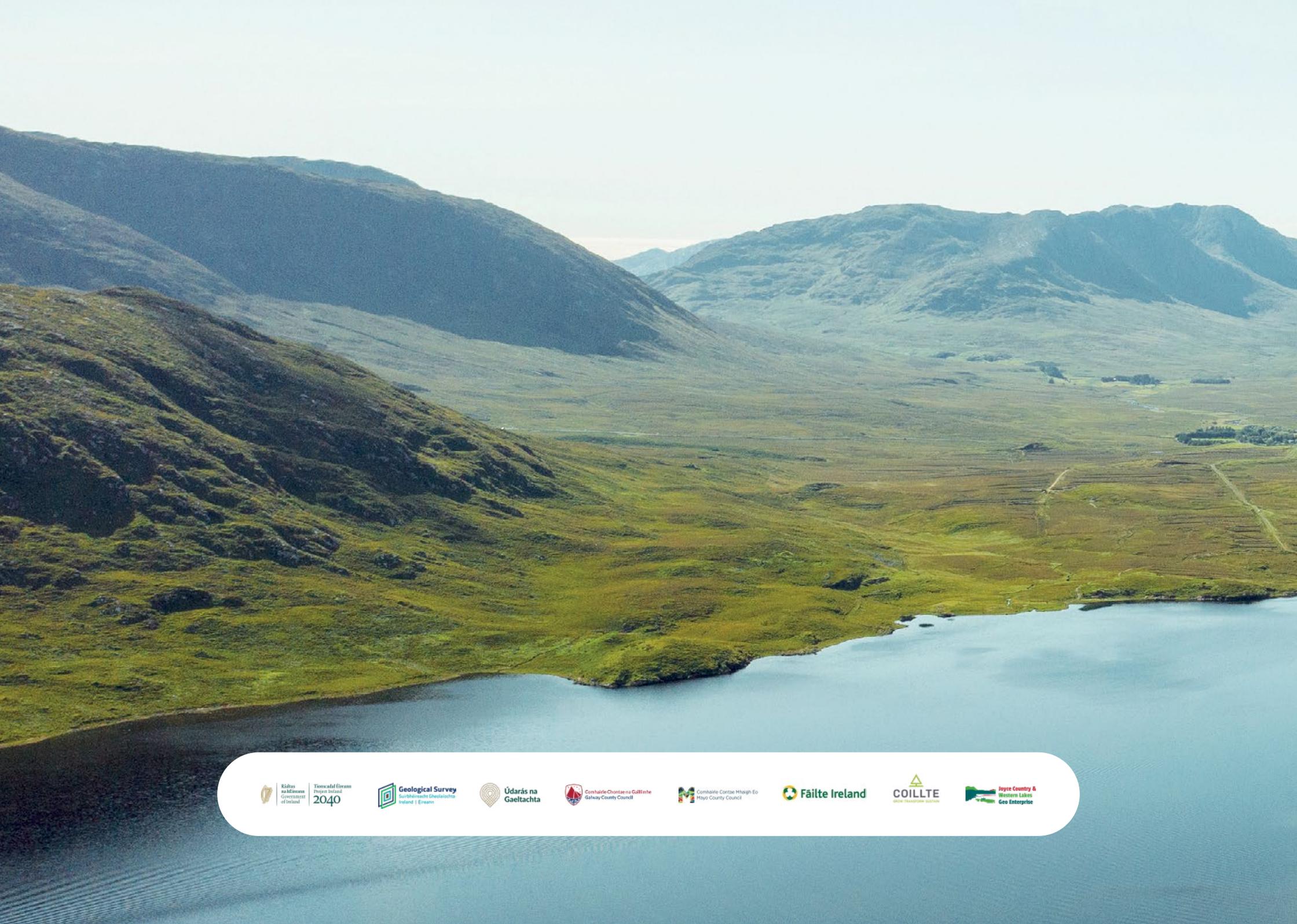
The Division for Sustainable Development Goals within the United Nations Department of Social & Economic Affairs states:

“The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth - all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.”

Source <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>







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Údarás na
Gaeltachta



Comhairle Contae na Gallíne
Galway County Council



Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo
Mayo County Council



Fáilte Ireland



COILLTE
Ireland's Woodlands Network



Rogee Country &
Western Lakes
Geo Enterprise