



## LUDGATE HUB – A CO-WORKING SPACE IN RURAL IRELAND

### Skibbereen, Ireland—

- Ludgate Hub is a co-working space in Skibbereen, a town in County Cork, Ireland, that aims to build digital capacity and capability, facilitate innovation and learning, and create 500 new knowledge jobs in the region.
- The hub has raised 4 million EUR through funding and donations, created over 450 new jobs in the region, made the region more attractive for (young) people and businesses, and helped improve the digital skills of its population.
- Ludgate's core strengths are a robust organising board, access to capital, and community support.

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- **Geographic scale**  
[City / metropolitan area](#)
- **Keyword**  
[Future of work](#) | [Place-based revitalisation](#) | [Innovation](#)
- **Theme**  
[Economic and community development](#) | [Local employment and skills](#)
- **Countries**  
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### What are the objectives?

**Skibbereen is a market town with a population of 2 700 located in the County of West Cork, Ireland.** Due to its remote location and rural character, the town and broader rural region of West Cork are facing a number of challenges related to shrinking population, lack of knowledge jobs and emigration of highly trained or qualified people.

**To address these challenges, a board of eleven local people operating on a pro-bono basis launched Ludgate Hub in 2015.** Ludgate Hub is a co-working space that strives to attract businesses, start-ups, entrepreneurs, creatives and artists. Ludgate Hub is a not-for-profit social enterprise located in a refurbished building in the centre of Skibbereen (former cinema and bakery). The main goal is to enable 500 sustainable knowledge jobs in the region and transform Skibbereen and its rural surroundings into a hotspot for startups, SMEs and multinational remote workers to locate and prosper.

## How does it work in practice?

**Ludgate Hub was developed by a steering group consisting of local entrepreneurs, digital ambassadors and business owners.** The board, created in November 2015, felt it was important that the initiative came from the “bottom up” and for this reason engaged the local community from the very early stages of the hub creation.

### **The main activities of the Hub include:**

- **Offering office and co-working spaces** – the hub has meeting rooms, a training space and state of the art video conference facilities.
- **Providing business services** – these cover networking activities, peer learning and skills sharing, mentoring and advisory, as well as specific initiatives such as eStreet (a project to increase the online visibility of local retailers).
- **Providing services for the local community** – the hub facilitates digital literacy for all age groups aimed at bridging the digital divide, supporting women to re-enter the workforce, and training young people in coding and developing websites to prepare them for the “jobs of tomorrow”.
- **Re-branding the rural area** – encouraging banks and service providers (accountants, solicitors etc.) to make their services “start-up” friendly and particularly focused on supporting young people returning to the area. As part of the re-branding activities, the hub also created Ireland’s first National Digital Week and digital conference. Skibbereen was selected as a pilot for the first Irish rural town to get 1GB of broadband connectivity, on par with globally leading cities such as Singapore.

**The hub has a strong track record in raising capital:** 95% of the projects are privately funded through donations or corporate sponsorships. Activities are self-sustainable in the sense that the income generated through desk and room rental, video conferencing rental and services compensates for the monthly running costs. However, it is essential for the hub to maintain a continuous stream of seed fund capital to further encourage start-ups to relocate to Skibbereen. It is also essential to maintain a stream of mentors to encourage and support start-ups in the Ludgate Hub.

## What has been the impact?

**Evidence suggests that Ludgate Hub has made strides in boosting the local economy and creating new jobs.** Ultimately, Ludgate Hub and its operations is estimated to have contributed 4 million EUR to the local economy, directly created 457 new jobs, and attracted tourism to the region. For example, it has attracted highly skilled remote workers as well as start-ups from LA, Chicago, London, South Africa, Spain and world-wide. Moreover, the hub achieved important results in supporting local businesses. The e-commerce platform eStreet gained national and EU

recognition for its solution to help local retailers combat rural disadvantage and economic decline via a multi-pronged digital strategy.

**The Hub has contributed to Skibbereen being acknowledged as the Digital Capital of Ireland.** Its National Digital Week in 2016 drew in 1 600 attendees to West Cork, hosting over 80 national and international speakers, and showcasing the potential of rural digital hubs to embrace technology.

**The Hub has also delivered an array of classes on coding, digital innovation, web development, and iPad training to people of all backgrounds and age groups.** Additionally, it has taken over 40 secondary school students annually for training and work experience, thereby contributing to the development of the next generation of digital professionals.

## What can other communities learn from this example?

**Ludgate's core strengths are a robust organising board, access to capital, and community support and engagement.** This includes engaging the younger generation to show them that a future exists for them in these types of rural communities.

**Other communities interested in similar projects must dedicate adequate time to planning and identifying their unique niche and selling points.** They need to consider what will attract people from urban areas to move to rural areas, package those offerings, and market them accordingly. For example, the experience of Ludgate suggests that 30MB of internet connectivity is insufficient for rural areas, and that a 1GB-10GB vision is necessary.

**Finally, the project has also shown the importance of a diversity of offers to support rural economies through digital hubs.** This includes supporting co-working spaces, enabling smaller businesses digitally, and incubating start-ups.

## Further information

- [The Ludgate Hub | Co-working space in West Cork](#)

## OECD resources

[The future of teleworking: A place-based toolkit for local development](#)