Understanding pride of place, community empowerment and collective action

Historical roots, contemporary challenges and future pathways for pride of place as a catalyst for community cohesion and environmental stewardship

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Abstract

This research explores how pride of place - people's emotional and cultural attachment to their locality - can be cultivated and supported to drive sustainable, community-led change in Ireland.

Drawing on case studies such as the *Ballymun is Brilliant* initiative and other community projects in Ireland, the paper shows how local pride can mobilise initiatives for climate action, social cohesion and democratic renewal, but also how it can become a source of tension when it is exclusionary or contested.

The guiding question for this research project is:

How can pride of place in Irish communities be intentionally and inclusively cultivated to translate emotional attachment into sustainable, community-led social and environmental change?

Drawing on existing research and selected case-studies in Ireland, this paper examines the relationship between place identity, cultural transmission and community empowerment, showing how emotional attachment to place can generate social capital that supports climate action, strengthens social cohesion and enables participatory regeneration.

Most urgent global challenges require community-level behaviour change, yet we lack effective frameworks for mobilising local action. This research shows that pride of place, when cultivated carefully and inclusively, can bridge the gap between individual motivation and collective transformation.

The paper suggests three areas of particular relevance to society:

1. **Climate action**: Leveraging community attachment to place encourages local engagement and support for sustainability initiatives and community climate action.

2. **Social cohesion amid diversity**: Building inclusive, place-based identities can counteract exclusionary nationalism and support harmonious integration.

3. **Democratic renewal**: Local, place-based organising can strengthen civic participation, build trust and enhance collective agency.

Purposefully selected case studies and regeneration projects across Ireland illustrate both the potential and challenges of place-based mobilisation. While pride of place can inspire stewardship, volunteering and intergenerational engagement, it can also become contested, with development conflicts, exclusion or hatred undermining a sense of shared belonging.

Introduction

Pride of place is an idiom meaning the position of highest honour or esteem (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2025); it also represents the pride people feel in belonging to and contributing to a particular community. It reflects the emotional significance that individuals attach to cultural belonging; knowing that their roots, shared history and participation contribute to something greater than themselves.

Pride of place manifests through traditions, festivals, local projects and voluntary work that reinforce identity and mutual support. When people take part in community activities, care for their natural surroundings or celebrate their cultural heritage, they are both expressing and deepening this pride: People's involvement builds a reciprocal relationship.

The community contributes to an individual's sense of identity, while individuals invest in the community and its collective future, strengthening solidarity across generations and socio-economic divides.

In Ireland, "Pride of place" is also the name of a long-running all-island competition that celebrates local community groups who demonstrate exceptional civic engagement and environmental stewardship (Co-operation Ireland, 2023). Beyond the competition itself, pride of place has become a powerful expression of attachment and community identity across Irish society.

This sense of belonging is deeply rooted in Ireland's postcolonial history, where pride in local culture, landscape and the Irish language became symbols of resilience and self-determination (Ní Bhroin, 2021). As Tuan (1977) suggests, the meanings people attach to places form a vital part of identity and emotional wellbeing.

Place, identity and community are connected in Irish life. Community festivals, local sports activities, storytelling, the preservation of Irish place-names, and more recently the Tidy Towns initiative, link local pride, community action and cultural heritage. Together, these efforts show how place, identity and community care remain deeply intertwined in Irish life, and create a connection between people and their environment.

In recent decades, many organisations have tried to build on this heritage, promoting active citizenship, community involvement and local pride. The logic is that when people feel good about their local area, it strengthens their sense of identity and belonging, which in turn helps build self-esteem and a belief that local actions matter.

A recent example of such a project is the *Ballymun is Brilliant* project, funded by the Creative Climate Action Fund and delivered by GAP Ireland, Axis Ballymun and the Rediscovery Centre. The project aimed to use creativity to highlight and celebrate pride of place, and turn personal confidence into climate action.

However, pride of place as a sentiment is not without tension. While it can strengthen local identity and drive sustainability, it can also be co-opted by exclusionary or nationalist narratives, particularly in economically marginalised areas (Ní Bhroin, 2021).

Understanding how NGOs and local groups navigate these opportunities and risks provides important insight into how pride of place can support inclusive, secure and sustainable futures in Ireland.

This paper explores a number of aspects of the pride of place concept, and explores the interplay between place-based identity, environmental behaviour and participatory sustainability efforts in the Irish context.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this desk-based study is to explore how pride of place operates as an emotional and cultural asset within Irish communities, and how it can be utilised to support collective action for environmental and social wellbeing.

The research seeks to bridge conceptual understandings of place identity with practice-based insights from community development, in order to illuminate how local attachment and belonging can generate empowerment, stewardship and sustainable community outcomes

This desk-based study has three core objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between pride of place, personal confidence and community identity within Irish community contexts and to understand how emotional attachment to place strengthens belonging, cohesion and shared identity.

2. To identify how confidence grounded in pride of place translates into collective action for environmental and social wellbeing at the local level, including how communities use social capital, internal resources and local leadership to create change.

3. To analyse how creative and inclusive community projects leverage pride of place to empower residents and foster sustainable, climate-conscious development, with a focus on various participatory approaches such as arts, environmental education and community-led initiatives.

This research also aims to provide a deeper understanding of how pride of place can serve as a practical foundation for local empowerment and sustainable development, offering insights for policymakers, community organisations and practitioners seeking to enable community-led transitions.

1.   Historical and Cultural context in Ireland

The concept of pride of place in Ireland has deep historical and cultural roots. It is not merely an emotional connection of the people with their locality, but a reflection of Ireland's complex relationship with land, language and identity.

Throughout history, Irish communities have drawn strength and meaning from their attachment to place, seeing local landscapes as both physical and symbolic expressions of belonging. This sense of rootedness is particularly significant in a postcolonial context, where local identity has often served as a means of resistance to cultural erasure and political domination (Ní Bhroin, 2021).

Following centuries of colonisation, the reclamation of Irish cultural identity became intertwined with the preservation of local traditions and landscapes. Movements such as the Gaelic Revival of the late 19th and early 20th centuries emphasised Irish language, music and games as embodiments of community spirit and national pride.

Organisations like the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) played a pivotal role in promoting local pride through sport, using county and parish identities to strengthen social cohesion and cultural resilience (Maume and Cronin, 2000). The GAA remains one of the most visible and enduring expressions of pride of place in Ireland today, linking local representation to national belonging.

Scholars such as Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and Edward Relph (1978) have interpreted how people attach to places and connote different meanings which form an essential part of their identity and social life. In the Irish context, these ideas are vividly evident in rural landscapes, towns and urban neighbourhoods that carry generations of cultural memory.

As Foley (2014) notes, Ireland's landscapes are imbued with symbolic values, acting as repositories of history and collective emotion. The rural countryside especially, has often been romanticised as a space of magic, purity and authenticity, reinforcing the notion that protecting one's local environment is a moral as well as cultural duty.

Irish place-names often reflect deep layers of myth, history and belonging, as detailed by Piotr Stalmaszczyk (2009) and Daniel Kirkpatrick (2025). As documented by McDonough (2019) there is a strong connection between the Irish landscape and folk beliefs. Sites like the Hill of Tara and the Hill of Uisneach are important in Irish life, because they bring people together to celebrate their shared history, celebrate where they came from, and take part in community traditions. These special sites help people remember their roots and keep a sense of identity and connection, linking each generation to their local heritage and to each other

In contemporary Ireland, pride of place continues to evolve, now encompassing not only heritage and identity but also sustainability and community development. Initiatives such as the Pride of Place Awards, established by Co-operation Ireland and IPB Insurance, celebrate communities across the island that demonstrate creativity, inclusivity, and environmental stewardship (Co-operation Ireland and IPB Insurance, 2019). Likewise, long-standing civic movements such as Tidy Towns embody local pride through voluntary environmental action, blending aesthetic care with ecological awareness (Department of Rural and Community Development, n.d.).

These cultural traditions and community programmes illustrate how pride of place functions as a social glue in Ireland, binding people together through shared care for their environment and collective identity. However, this same attachment to a place can also generate tension when national development or sustainability policies appear to threaten local heritage, or when exclusionary narratives seek to define who truly belongs. This dimension is discussed further in section 3.3

2. Conceptual frameworks

2.1 Place identity, attachment and pride of place

To understand how pride of place shapes community action in Ireland, it is important to examine how people connect emotionally and culturally to the places they inhabit. These connections, expressed through concepts such as "place identity" and "place attachment", form the foundation for pride of place, which in turn motivates collective action and care for local communities and environments.

Place identity refers to the process by which individuals internalise the meanings and values of a location into their sense of self, while ***place attachment*** describes the emotional bonds people form with places that hold cultural, historical or personal significance. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) defines ***place*** as a space given meaning through human experience, transforming physical surroundings into centers of value and identity. Edward Relph (1978) emphasises that places provide essential feelings of belonging and continuity, supporting both individual and community stability. In Ireland, these connections are deeply influenced by historical experiences, postcolonial cultural resilience, and local traditions, making landscapes, neighbourhoods and cultural practices powerful markers of identity.

Building on these foundations, ***pride of place*** reflects a positive attachment to locality that encourages belonging, cultural identity and collective esteem (Bonaiuto et al., 2020). This pride motivates stewardship, encouraging residents to care for, improve and preserve both their communities and their environments. It nurtures social cohesion, intergenerational solidarity, and reciprocal relationships in which communities and individuals reinforce each other's sense of purpose.

Understanding how these dynamics develop also requires attention to several related sociological concepts. ***Hegemony*** refers to the ways in which dominant cultural groups shape norms, values and shared understandings within a society. In community contexts, it influences which identities and narratives become centred within place-based pride and which voices risk being marginalised.

Social cohesion, meanwhile, describes the strength of relationships, trust and solidarity among community members; conditions essential for collective action and shared environmental responsibility. Finally, ***cultural belonging*** captures the sense of acceptance, recognition, and identification individuals feel within a community. It emerges when residents see their values, histories and identities reflected in local spaces and practices, strengthening their emotional investment in the place they call home. These intertwined processes such as identity formation, emotional attachment, cultural belonging, social cohesion and the negotiation of dominant narratives shape different ways in which pride of place emerges and influences community action in contemporary Ireland.

2.2 Community empowerment and social capital

Pride of place not only encourages individual connection but also supports community empowerment and the development of social capital.

Community empowerment refers to the process by which communities leverage their shared strengths, social networks and local resources to lead and sustain change from within. It emphasises local decision-making and self-determination enabling residents to shape initiatives that reflect their own values and priorities.

Social capital describes the networks, trust, cooperation and leadership that emerge from interpersonal relationships. These social bonds enable communities to translate shared attachment and local pride into collective action, reinforcing resilience and strengthening their ability to respond to challengesIn relation to these dynamics, participatory regeneration refers to the processes in which residents are involved in taking decisions, planning priorities and designing improvements which can be done in their neighbourhood, as a collective effort.

Unlike top-down regeneration models, *participatory regeneration* centres local knowledge, shared ownership and democratic engagement, embedding community voice into the physical and social transformation of place (Dublin City Council, 2007; Lima, 2024).

Similarly, *community confidence* can be understood as the collective sense of capability, agency and belief that a community can influence change. It grows through repeated experiences of successful, locally driven action and contributes to greater civic participation, stronger leadership and enhanced social cohesion (Dushkova and Ivlieva, 2024).

Community empowerment models, such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), focus on mobilising local assets like volunteering, leadership and cooperation rather than relying on external aid. Pride of place strengthens personal confidence and a sense of responsibility, which can transform individual motivation into collective action. Methods such as Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), which emphasise deep listening, co-sensing and participatory engagement, help unlock residents' creative potential.
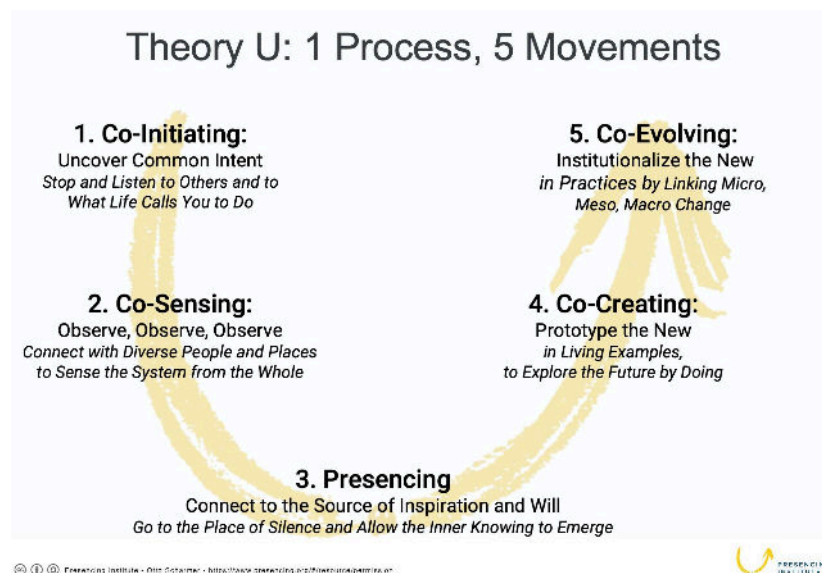

Fig.1. Theory U representation (Presencing Institute, 2018)

In Ireland, examples like GAA clubs (MacConiomaire & Murphy, 2024) or initiatives by NGOs such as GAP Ireland (*Ballymun is Brilliant*) and *The People's Transition* show how communities use shared attachment to place to inspire leadership, volunteering, cooperation and sustainable community development. Participatory arts, storytelling and environmental projects enable residents to reinterpret their relationships with local spaces, becoming active custodians of cultural and environmental heritage.

2.3 Environmental stewardship and pride of place

A critical outcome of pride of place and community empowerment is **environmental stewardship**: the tangible care and responsible management of local environments driven by collective action.

Environmental psychology research links pride of place with pro-environmental behaviour, showing that emotional attachment to a locality motivates people to protect, enhance and

nurture their surroundings (Bonaiuto et al., 2020). In this sense, stewardship emerges when place identity and pride of place translate into shared responsibility for the health, appearance and ecological wellbeing of a locality.

Within community contexts, **community gardens** offer a clear example of this process. These are shared, community-managed green spaces where residents collaboratively grow food, cultivate plants or enhance biodiversity. Beyond their practical ecological function, they operate as social and cultural infrastructures that build relationships, strengthen local identity and create inclusive opportunities for environmental learning. They transform emotional connection into visible, collective action, reinforcing both pride of place and community cohesion.
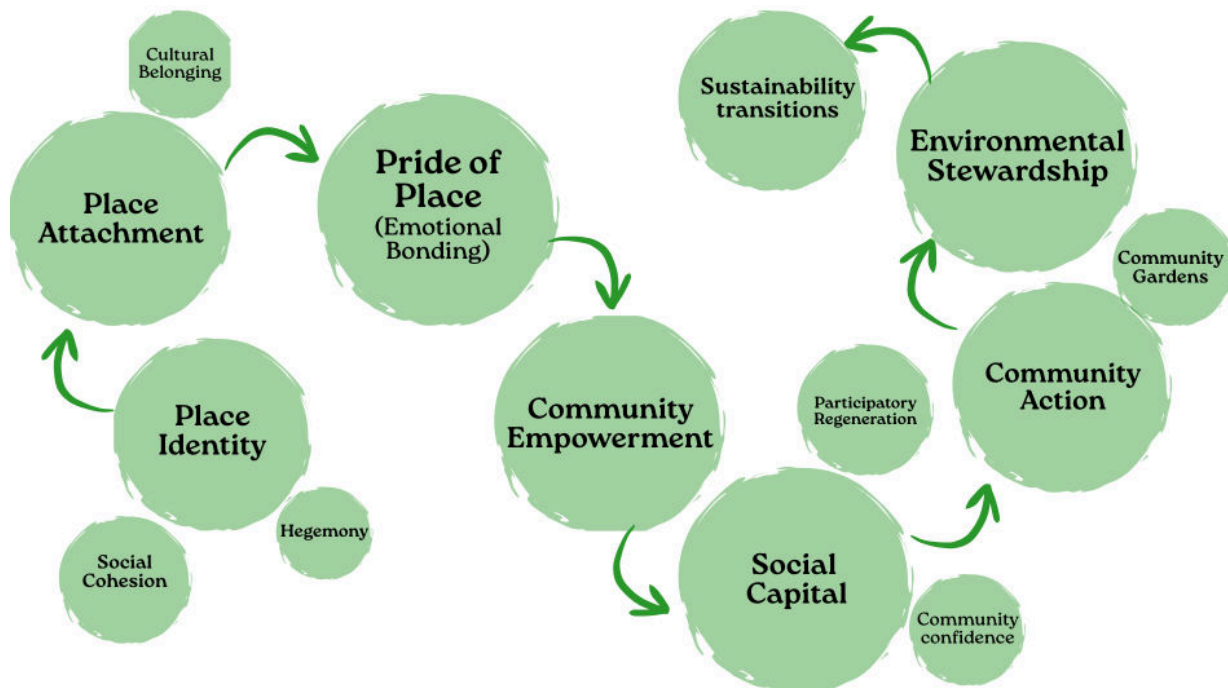

Fig. 2. Causal Loop Model, illustrating reinforcing cycles: Successful initiatives reinforce pride, social bonds and further change. Source: GAP Ireland

Similarly, the term **sustainability transitions** refers to long-term, systemic shifts required to move societies toward environmentally responsible and socially equitable ways of living. Crucially, these transitions depend not only on technological innovation or policy change but also on cultural identity, local participation and community empowerment. When residents feel a sense of belonging and ownership over their environment, they are more inclined to participate in practices that support sustainability goals, enabling grassroots contributions to transition processes that would otherwise remain abstract or external.

The interconnections between place identity, empowerment and stewardship are further illustrated in Figure 2, which presents a causal loop model showing how cultural attachment to a place strengthens the pride, which in turn enhances community empowerment and drives collective action. Successful environmental initiatives reinforce pride of place by creating visible improvements and strengthening social bonds, generating a reinforcing cycle in which emotional, social and environmental dimensions continually support one another.

Projects like GAP Ireland's "Ballymun is Brilliant" demonstrates how embedding environmental education and creative participation in community initiatives promotes awareness, care and collective responsibility, translating pride into sustainability outcomes.

When pride-driven stewardship is coupled with inclusive participation, it generates a virtuous cycle: active community involvement builds collective pride, which reinforces social cohesion and confidence, fueling further positive change. Thus, place identity and attachment ground this process emotionally, community empowerment builds its capacity socially, and pride-activated environmental stewardship drives its tangible, collective outcomes.This integrated framework elucidates how pride of place has shaped community action in Ireland, blending emotional, social and environmental dimensions to promote empowered, resilient and sustainable communities.

3. Case Studies

Building on the theoretical frameworks of place identity, cultural transmission and community empowerment, this section explores how pride of place is expressed and negotiated within contemporary Irish communities. A number of case studies illustrate how emotional attachment to place can be translated into collective action, environmental stewardship and social renewal.

The analysis also addresses the challenges inherent in these processes. Incidents of hate crime and social exclusion reveal the contested nature of community identity and highlight the potential tensions between inclusivity, resilience and belonging. These examples illustrate that pride of place can be both an empowering force and a site of ongoing negotiation where identity, justice and community cohesion are being defined, or re-defined.

The case studies were selected through purposeful sampling and consistent desk-based qualitative research to reflect a diversity of Irish community experiences. They encompass different geographic locations and forms of engagement, ranging from urban regeneration and community gardens to climate initiatives and participatory local projects. Each example illustrates a distinct aspect of how pride of place operates: as an emotional anchor, a platform for social and environmental action, or a lens through which inclusion, identity and local heritage are negotiated.

By examining these varied contexts, this section demonstrates that pride of place is not only an expression of attachment but also a practical mechanism through which communities address social, environmental, and cultural challenges. Subsequent sub-sections explore specific initiatives and interventions that exemplify these dynamics, offering insight into both successes and limitations.

3.1 Ballymun and GAP Ireland

Ballymun, a suburb in the north of Dublin, has long symbolised both the challenges and the potential of community regeneration. Once associated with social deprivation and urban decline, Ballymun has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent years through a Government and city-led Social Regeneration project, supported by investment in the work of local organisations, including GAP Ireland.

Funded by Dublin City Council and corporate donations, GAP's work in Ballymun focuses on empowering residents to develop their own ideas for action in their communities,

homes and even workplaces. The programme is centred on the GLAS community garden, which is a participatory green space, owned by the local parish, that functions as a social hub and also as an educational resource. In collaboration with local schools and community groups, GAP is using the garden to promote environmental literacy, civic pride, community wellbeing and cohesion.

This work operates as part of the broader Social Regeneration Framework, which prioritises local participation, community empowerment and inclusive development. By embedding sustainability education within everyday community life, GAP aligns environmental stewardship with social renewal, transforming pride of place into an expression of empowerment.

Another GAP-led project, *Ballymun Is Brilliant*, suggests that creative expressions can also strengthen environmental awareness and civic pride. Art-based initiatives like this involve residents in designing murals, swap shops, community exhibitions and sustainability-themed events that celebrate the area's unique identity. Through participatory workshops, GAP empowers residents to reflect on how their environment represents both their struggles and aspirations, thereby fostering a form of eco-identity. (GAP Ireland, 2024)

This approach reflects the Theory U principles of co-creation (Scharmer, 2007) and the Asset-Based Community Development model (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), in which communities become co-authors of their transformation. Ballymun's experience illustrates that pride of place, when channelled through inclusive participation, can catalyse social renewal and environmental stewardship simultaneously.

3.2 Ballyfermot: Environmental heritage and development conflict

In contrast, Ballyfermot, another Dublin suburb, illustrates the tensions between local pride and national sustainability policy. Dublin City Council's BusConnects project, intended to promote low-carbon transport, faced opposition from residents concerned about the planned removal of mature trees along Ballyfermot Road. Locals viewed these trees as integral to their neighbourhood's environmental and historical identity. Protests and petitions highlighted the emotional and symbolic value of these landscapes, perceived as essential to community pride (Donohoe, 2024; Libreri, 2025).

This conflict demonstrates how competing place attachments, between preservation of local heritage and pursuit of broader sustainability objectives, can strain community relations. It underscores the need for inclusive consultation and co-design, aligning with Scharmer's (2009) Theory U, which emphasises deep listening and co-sensing. Policymakers therefore have to balance technical solutions with cultural understanding, recognising that sustainable development is not only infrastructural but also emotional and social.

The Ballyfermot case highlights that pride of place is quite double-edged: it motivates environmental protection but can also resist change when local communities feel unheard. Addressing this tension requires governance models that integrate emotional belonging with systemic transformation.

3.3 Anti-immigration action, exclusion and the fragility of belonging

Across Ireland, hate crimes and anti-immigrant actions have posed challenges to local social cohesion, undermining the sense of safety, inclusion and belonging essential to thriving communities. While pride of place often acts as a unifying force, recent incidents across multiple localities suggest that pride of place can also be used to mobilise forces that undermine social cohesion.

A series of incidents in recent years have exposed the fissures created when inclusion and security are compromised. In 2023 and 2024, numerous areas, particularly within the Dublin region, reported significant increases in incidents involving racial and nationality-based motives. In Dublin, Local Policing Forums noted a marked rise in hate-motivated violence and intimidation incidents, with reported cases rising sharply year-on-year. These acts targeted migrant and minority populations, reflecting persistent vulnerabilities across urban communities (Kent, 2025).

Similarly, regions across eastern and southern Ireland recorded hate crimes that disrupted community cohesion, with victims expressing fear and exclusion from what should be safe local environments. Anti-immigrant sentiment also surfaced prominently, exacerbating tensions and fracturing social ties. (Devlin, 2025)

The impact of these incidents is profound: they erode the shared emotional bonds that underpin pride of place, weakening trust and cooperation necessary for environmental stewardship and community action. When communities are divided by fear or discrimination, the vital social glue of belonging is compromised.

In response, various local civic organisations, councils and policing bodies have launched inter-community dialogues, cultural awareness programs and targeted engagement initiatives to promote inclusivity and resilience (Devlin, 2025). These efforts aim to reaffirm that diversity is integral to community strength and that all residents, regardless of background, religion or nationality, should feel safe and valued.

This overview of multiple localities across Ireland highlights the ongoing threat that hate and anti-immigrant actions pose to social cohesion, calling for sustained, multi-level responses that combine legal enforcement, community empowerment and inclusive cultural engagement to restore trust and unity.

3.4 Connecting Cabra: Climate action and participatory empowerment

The Connecting Cabra project represents an evolving model of community-led climate engagement in the region. Through a combination of biodiversity initiatives, energy-efficiency retrofitting, mobility projects and social education, the project aims to translate local pride into environmental action (Connectingcabra.ie, 2024). It is supported by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, 2024, it has implemented a biodiversity action plan, planted trees and hosted planting and green-infrastructure events to strengthen local environmental identity.

In 2023, the project launched "Community Roots", a shared garden program that pairs residents with unused garden space with those without access to green areas but interested in growing food. The initiative builds on the ethos of pride of place by promoting shared ownership, food security and intergenerational connection. Recognition through the Dublin City Council (2023) *Neighbourhood Awards* and media coverage by RTÉ and The

Irish Times highlight how local innovation rooted in community values can inspire wider engagement (Cleary, 2023).

Connecting Cabra's approach embodies participatory empowerment; instead of seeing sustainability as an external policy, it emerges organically from the residents' shared sense of belonging and care.

3.5 Community gardens: pride through collective place-making

Across Ireland, community gardens serve as examples of pride of place. These are spaces where shared efforts and environmental care reinforce identity, belonging and confidence. Community Gardens Ireland (CGI) highlights that gardens across the country function as hubs of local engagement, where residents collaboratively grow food, exchange knowledge and build supportive social networks. CGI emphasises that community gardens consistently strengthen neighbourhood connections, empower residents to take ownership of shared spaces, and contribute to improved environmental stewardship (Community Gardens Ireland, 2023).

TU Dublin's study on community arts and gardening practices found that community gardens act as powerful platforms for place-making, enabling residents to co-create meaningful environments that counteract social isolation and enhance neighbourhood pride (Doyle, 2022).

The study observed that community gardening fosters both intrapersonal benefits (such as improved mental well-being and confidence) and interpersonal benefits (including trust-building, strengthened social ties and a shared sense of purpose). Importantly, residents noted that seeing the physical transformation of their surroundings, and being recognised for their contribution, generated a renewed pride in their community and challenged negative external stereotypes about their neighbourhoods (Doyle, 2022).

These findings echo broader theoretical perspectives on place-making (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1978), which argue that meaningful places emerge through lived experience, shared practices and emotional investment (Dublin City Council, 2018). In this sense, community gardens exemplify pride of place as an embodied social practice. Through collaborative gardening, residents cultivate not only food and biodiversity but also belonging, ownership and agency, qualities which are essential to long-term community sustainability and resilience.

3.6 Regeneration and local empowerment in Irish estates

Across Ireland, several major regeneration projects, such as Knocknaheeny (Cork), Dolphin House (Dublin) and Moyross (Limerick), illustrate how pride of place can drive social renewal when residents are placed at the centre of decision-making. These initiatives demonstrate that lasting regeneration is most effective when it builds upon existing community assets and strengthens local capacity for participation.

In Knocknaheeny, regeneration efforts have deliberately integrated resident consultation into urban design, prioritising liveability, public space improvements and community-focused infrastructure.

Knocknaheeny is part of the Cork Northwest Quarter Regeneration (CNWQR), a major multi-phase project started over a decade ago involving demolition of around 450 houses

and construction of over 600 new units. The project was designed with resident consultation and community-focused infrastructure, aligning with Asset-Based Community Development principles (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) as described in evaluations by University College Cork researchers and Cork City Council reports. By involving residents in shaping the future of their estate, the project promotes a shared sense of ownership, achievement and pride (Cork City Council, 2024; Cultivate, 2025).

The project has faced scrutiny regarding its pace of delivery, with reports that Phase 2c housing development on Kilmore Road was halted due to contractual disputes, costing Cork City Council €2.5 million before resumption under a new contractor began in summer 2025. This has caused delays and ongoing resident challenges, with construction of some homes requiring demolition and retendering works. More recent updates indicate ongoing construction and progress towards delivery of specific phases, with continuous resident engagement being a critical component of the complex project (O'Sullivan et al., 2024)

In Dolphin House, resident-led committees have played a central role in guiding regeneration priorities relating to safety, education, health and recreation. These efforts strengthen social capital and foster collective confidence among residents who have historically experienced socio-economic marginalisation (Dermody et al., 2014, Libreri, 2025). Such developments align with Bonaiuto et al. (2020), who highlight that pride of place emerges from emotional connection and active participation in improving one's environment.

A different model of empowerment is evident in the Tipperary Community Power Project, which advances *energy democracy* by enabling communities to co-own renewable-energy infrastructure (Orla, 2020). By participating directly in the energy transition, residents strengthen both environmental stewardship and local economic resilience. This example highlights how *pride of place* can extend beyond physical regeneration into domains of climate action, collective ownership and community-led sustainability.

3.7 Community Climate Coaches

The Community Climate Coaches (CCC) project provides another example of how pride of place can be expressed and mobilised within local communities, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of place identity, cultural transmission and community empowerment. (Cultivate, 2025)

The CCC project places a strong and deliberate emphasis on encouraging attachment to nature, as a core element of community empowerment and climate action. At its heart, the project seeks to cultivate not just a cognitive understanding of environmental issues but an emotional and experiential "nature and place connection." This connection is nurtured through guided observation exercises, dialogue walks and facilitated appreciation activities that invite participants to engage deeply with local ecosystems and living systems. Such processes aim to transform abstract climate concerns into personal and collective experiences of care, stewardship and reciprocity with the natural world. (Crowley et al., 2025)

The project's methodology aligns with emerging research in nature-based coaching which demonstrates that active, experiential engagement with nature builds compassion, meaning and a sense of oneness that motivates pro-environmental behaviour. By helping people to re-connect with nature, CCC cultivates introspection, empathy and agency, and explicitly aims to support community members to become stewards of their local

bioregions. This intentional emotional engagement provides a critical motivational bridge closing the gap between values and sustained environmental action. (Mullally et al., 2022; Mulqueen, 2025)

While the CCC model has been replicated in various European contexts, questions remain about how the depth of nature connection achieved in the Irish pilot scales across diverse socio-ecological landscapes and cultural settings. Additionally, systemic barriers such as resource constraints and communication challenges complicate transforming nature attachment into consistent community action. Nonetheless, by embedding nature connection as central to its facilitation framework, the CCC project advances an important narrative: that pride of place and climate resilience are deeply entwined with fostering reciprocal, compassionate relationships between people and the natural world. (Mullally et al., 2022; Mulqueen, 2025)

This emphasis on nature attachment enriches academic discussions on community climate agency by highlighting that encouraging affective bonds to place and nature is not simply symbolic but foundational to practical and transformative environmental stewardship. (Cultivate, 2025; Crowley et al., 2025; Mullally et al., 2022; Mulqueen, 2025)

4. Discussion

This research demonstrates that pride of place is a powerful and multifaceted asset within the island of Ireland and its communities, shaping social cohesion, environmental action and community empowerment.

As a desk-based study, the analysis draws on existing literature, secondary case-study material and publicly available documentation to identify patterns across diverse community initiatives. The paper offers a broad synthesis of how pride of place operates as a social, cultural and environmental resource.

Across the cases examined, ranging from creative regeneration in Ballymun and community gardening initiatives to climate-action programmes and area based regeneration schemes, pride of place consistently emerges as a driver of positive social transformation.

Emotional attachment to a place, shaped by cultural identity and shared history, can be effectively mobilised to support inclusive, sustainable and resilient communities. A central finding is that residents feel connected to their locality, they are more likely to participate in collective activities, support neighbourhood initiatives and build trusting relationships. This sense of belonging fosters social stability and enhances community resilience, particularly in areas undergoing change or regeneration.

A second key finding is that pride of place acts as a catalyst for environmental engagement.

Community gardens, biodiversity projects and climate workshops show that when residents identify strongly with their environment, they are more inclined to protect, enhance and take responsibility for it. Emotional connection reinforces environmental stewardship and motivates long-term care for local spaces. Another observation relates to community empowerment. Initiatives that actively involve residents through participatory art, youth engagement, co-design processes, or community-led governance structures help cultivate confidence, capacity and agency. When communities are empowered to

shape their environment, pride of place becomes not only an emotional sentiment but a practical tool for guiding local development and sustainable transitions.

Taken together, these findings respond directly to the study's aims and objectives: Pride of place strengthens personal confidence and shared identity by reinforcing positive self-understanding, cultural belonging and interpersonal trust, addressing the first objective on confidence and community identity. It also demonstrates how confidence grounded in local pride can translate into collective action for environmental and social wellbeing, as residents become more willing to volunteer, organise and participate in local projects, speaking to the second objective on collective action and social capital.

Finally, the case studies show that creative, inclusive community projects – from arts-based initiatives to community gardens and climate coaching – can leverage pride of place to empower residents and foster climate-conscious development, thereby addressing the third objective focused on participatory, creative approaches.

Future work should focus on documenting and evaluating successful models to support wider adoption of best practices. Further research could explore how pride of place operates across different cultural groups, age cohorts and migrant communities, particularly in contexts of demographic change. Longitudinal studies would also provide deeper insight into how pride of place evolves over time and contributes to sustained community resilience, empowerment and environmental stewardship.

5. Conclusion

This research shows that pride of place - how people feel about their community and its unique identity - can function as a powerful force for social, environmental, and civic outcomes in Ireland.

When people feel proud of where they live, it can help bring communities together, inspire action for the environment, and empower residents to actively participate in their local surroundings to bring positive changes.

The main finding of the study is that pride of place is more than just feeling good about your neighbourhood; it also creates a sense of belonging that leads to real action. Strong emotional connections to a place increase the likelihood that residents will collaborate and care for their shared environments and one another through periods of change or challenge. This sense of pride can grow stronger through inclusive activities, such as community art, gardening and environmental projects, which help everyone feel involved and valued.

Importantly, the findings also highlight that pride of place operates within broader social and cultural power structures. Dominant and hegemonic narratives about a place, often shaped by economic context, media attention or political discourse, can further marginalise certain groups and even forms of belonging. Community-led initiatives have the great potential of challenging these hegemonies by enabling the residents to redefine local identity on their own terms, lived experiences, diversity and shared efforts.

For policymakers and practitioners, this means that supporting community-led initiatives is key. By investing in local projects that celebrate culture and local heritage, protect the environment and encourage participation, leaders can help build stronger, more resilient

communities. It's also important to make sure that everyone, regardless of background and ability, feels included and has a chance to contribute.

Looking ahead, greater attention should be given to documenting and sharing successful local projects in order to support learning and expanding the adoption of effective approaches which can benefit other communities.

Further research exploring how pride of place works in different places and among different social groups, such as young people, older adults and migrant communities, will help ensure that this approach remains adaptable and continues to grow with Ireland's ever evolving social landscape.

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