

SÍOLTA CHROÍ: OUR STORY



A Guide to Ecosystem Restoration
for Youth & Community Groups



‘Widening circles of sisters and brothers working together to create the new economy, the new healing work, the new agriculture, the new technology, the new cities, the new relationships, the new loving, the new communicating, the new intimacy, the new dying’.

-Erin Yu-Juin McMorrow,
‘Grounded: a fierce feminist guide to connecting with the soil and healing from the ground up’.



INTRODUCTION TO SÍOLTA CHROÍ

Síolta Chroí is a regenerative and educational space based in the townland of Aghacloghan in County Monaghan. The objective of the organisation is to restore Ireland's ecosystems and communities. We do this through education focused on regenerative cultures; exploring resilient and regenerative food systems; and carrying out ecosystem restoration work.

The education work is underpinned by a community development and global justice approach. Síolta Chroí staff and members have experience in working with community groups both in Ireland and overseas. It is from this intention that this guide has been produced; leaning on what is being tried and tested on the small area of land at Síolta Chroí, and exploring examples of what might be possible for a youth or community group interested in restoring ecosystems.

The organisation was established as a cooperative on land purchased by Gareth Conlon and Karen Jeffares, who also raise their young family in the house situated on the land. However thanks to Leader funding, we were in the position of building a straw bale education centre, Teach Tui (more on this later!), which is the focus point of the education activities alongside the education on the land and beyond.

Síolta Chroí translates as ‘seeds of the heart’. We were set up with the intention of regenerating people and wider nature, doing so through what we have now come to reflect on as ‘Soil, Soul, and Society’.

What we mean by this is:

- Soil:** practically restoring ecosystems both locally, across the island and linking with wider ecosystem restoration efforts globally through our participation in the Ecosystem Restoration Communities network. Soil is a key part of ecosystem restoration, and while the work we do is not limited to this topic, for us Soil is the foundation for healthy food, healthy ecosystems, agroforestry, strong seeds and the future of this work depends on healthy soil.
- Soul:** everything we do with the land is in partnership with the land, we are guided by relationship with the land, we invite in the wisdom and practices of our ancestors, we acknowledge the need for land, ancestral and societal healing, and we promote restorative approaches to healing soil, healing the human bodies and the other nature beings on this land.
- Society:** everything we do is from a social justice approach; interrogating systems that result in oppression both on this island and globally, promoting food and seed sovereignty, showing solidarity with movements that challenge injustice and taking a stand on issues that matter.



OUR SYMBOL IS A DANDELION - AS WE DO NOT WANT LEARNING NOR IMPACT TO BE LIMITED TO WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED HERE AT SÍOLTA CHROÍ. RATHER, WE WANT THIS TO BE A SPACE FOR INSPIRATION, INCUBATION, INNOVATION, AND THAT PEOPLE COULD TAKE THE IDEAS AND LEARNING AND ROOT IN THEIR OWN SPACES, AS WELL AS HOST SÍOLTA CHROÍ ACTIVITIES IN THEIR OWN SPACES. THERE ARE MANY EXAMPLES OF THIS, INCLUDING A GROWING CONNECTION WITH FARMERS IN THE NORTH WEST OF THE ISLAND WHO ARE PARTICIPATING IN SÍOLTA CHROÍ COURSES IN DONEGAL.

THE DANCING DANDELION SEEDS ARE TRAVELLING....

STORY OF THIS LAND

We are based in a townland called Aghacloghan close to the town of Carrickmacross in the southern part of the county of Monaghan.

Aghacloghan is the townland which has (like many townlands) been anglicised from the original name, Áth an Chlocháin. This translates as ‘ford of an old stone causeway’.

We are based in an area dominated by land that has been farmed by industrial agriculture. What some people see as rolling green fields in a supposedly picturesque Irish landscape, we see a green desert.





We couldn't pick a better spot to be exploring the topic of ecosystem restoration! When we first arrived on the land, it was tired. The dependency on fertiliser use was evident from the withdrawal through yellow, sick grasses over the first year we were there. It was like the land was detoxing from the poisons put on it to ensure productivity. Our role as the new custodians of this space was to bring the land back to life. We did this in many ways, some of which you will read about in this resource. Some ways included: the use of animals, permaculture and regenerative agriculture approaches to soil restoration, green manures, observation.

We are still asking this question how much life can we bring to this land? This is our question to guide us as we explore ecosystem restoration and regenerative practices.

WE ARE THE ARK



Síolta Chroí has been inspired by the work of Mary Reynolds and the We are the ARK movement. ARK stands for Acts of Restorative Kindness for the Earth.

The We are the Ark movement is something tangible that can be adopted, and if everyone who was inspired to get involved went and did something, imagine the possibilities for nature, for ecosystem restoration, and for the restoration of the humans in these ecosystems and their connection to the wider world.
wearetheark.org

We like the magic, mystery and curiosity the work incites...
We like the rootedness of the work and the non-apology to have confidence to listen to the language of the land...
We like the simplicity of what is being asked of those of us who are guardians of the land (big spaces or very small spaces) and this creates endless possibilities for homes, community groups, youth clubs, GAA clubs...

THE INVITATION

This is the offering we are making in this resource: offering accessible (as well as ambitious!) ideas that youth and community groups can play with, explore and integrate in ways that make sense for their specific space.

We are sharing with you in this resource Our Story. It is just one story, and we do not suggest that you replicate it in your context. Instead, we are sharing some of the things that we have learned over the years from books and courses, and showing how we have applied this learning in practical ways in this particular space. The hope is that our learning and application will be an example of what can work, what doesn't work, and what this might look like practically within a space such as ours at Sólta Chroí.

We invite you to engage with this resource with curiosity, noticing ideas or questions that might be raised for the space you belong to. If you can, you are also welcome to come and visit the space yourself! As nature, the land and surroundings are constantly changing, and so the challenges of making a static book for an ever changing landscape is futile.

Each section will include:
Why the theme is relevant to Sólta Chroí and wider ecosystem restoration.

Practical ideas for implementing some ideas in your space.
Ideas to integrate these themes and ideas into your Youth and Community work practice.

Snippets of inspiration and future beauty.

PERMACULTURE DESIGN

We have been influenced by a design system called Permaculture.

Permaculture originally translated as 'Permanent Agriculture' but has moved over time to refer to 'Permanent Culture' and explores how we can design all areas of our life to work with nature from food, to economy to settlements and relationships.

OBSERVING THE SPACE

Before beginning to integrate this work, consideration of the space is an important starting point. Here is a checklist of elements to consider. Rather than this being a once-off assessment, ideally this work would be done over all 4 seasons - and beyond! This is an exercise in beginning to make a relationship with the land, observing the space, noticing the elements and tuning in also with what the land is saying both physically as well as intuitively.



❖ Where does the sun rise and set?

❖ Where are the spaces that get sun, where are the spaces that are mostly in the shade?

❖ How is the soil? Is it sticky and clay-like, or is it crumbly and sandy? What colour is it?

❖ What is growing in the space already? Any weeds growing can provide information about soil health and healing that already might be taking place. Do a survey of the weeds and find out what they signify for what the land is telling you!

❖ Is the space exposed to wind or is it quite sheltered?

❖ How do the humans you work with exist in the space?

❖ Are there areas or points where people feel like being social, reflective or quiet spaces, spaces that inspire magic or mystery, spaces that could be productive for vegetable growing?

❖ How does the space see itself? Are there places where the land wants to be wild or free from much human activity?

❖ What other beings currently occupy the space, or what beings have potential to also share this space? Go out and listen to the land, use intuition to see what the space itself wants to be and to have the voice of the land as prominent as the human desires within this ecosystem.

THE (MORE THAN HUMAN) BEINGS WITH WHOM WE SHARE THE LAND

Why it's relevant to Síolta Chroí and ecosystem
restoration?

We recognise humans as being a part of the ecosystems we find ourselves in- rather than seeing ourselves as separate and thus the ecosystem restoration work as being external to us. Humans are 'affective' in these systems - affected by them and we have possibility to affect positively. And so, standing with integrity in our place in the ecosystem, we notice and pay careful attention to those other beings that are also affecting and being affected by that system.



At Síolta Chroí we recognise the participation of the more-than-human beings that share this land with us: the alpacas, chickens, pigs, frogs, spiders, worms, fairies, ancestors, even the rats and rabbits that disrupt some of our food growing have a role to play!

- Certain animals we have invited in because of a specific ecosystem function (fertilising the ground, managing the food waste, digging up and loosening/ firming the soil, food source, management of pests through the food chain hierarchy, companionship) such as chickens, alpacas and pigs.

- There are certain beings we would like to encourage and use ecosystem restoration techniques to promote their agency on the land. If there are too many slugs, it may be that we have a hedgehog deficit - rather than a slug problem!! And so, how can we encourage more hedgehogs, or introduce ducks, or other methods that can help create balance within this ecosystem for some of the imbalances we are noticing?

- Traditionally in Ireland farmers would have left a 'Hare's Corner' to grow wild. It was typically an awkward corner at the edge of the land, potentially too awkward to get animals or machinery into, however by leaving this corner of the field to grow wild, farmers were also cultivating reciprocity. It was named the Hare's Corner as hares (and many other species) get safe coverage from the long grass, as well as enjoying diverse plants and grasses from non cultivation. This Hare's Corner is a tangible example of how farmers and agriculture typically honoured and even relied upon other beings in recognition of a healthy ecosystem and how this was good for their wider field health and subsequent farming practices.

How to promote the more-than-human beings in your own space:

- Install a wildlife camera to gather an initial sense of who is already on the land, particularly at night time.
- Install bird boxes of various sizes, bat boxes and bug hotels.
 - Leave old tree stumps in the ground, and gather piles of leaves (in the autumn), logs and branches to create habitats for various species. No matter the size of your space, a nicely untidy back corner will be a haven for multiple beings to enjoy!
- Create a pond. It is one way of seeing immediate feedback in terms of an increase of species such as frogs, dragonflies, different bird species, etc.



How this might relate to Youth and Community work:

- You could explore the theme of 'diversity'.

- Diversity within nature is always more abundant and increases the health and wellbeing of the entire ecosystem. How does this compare to a more monocultural system? A garden filled only with lavender or rose bushes will not have the same bountiful life buzzing about when compared with a garden rich in diversity.

- Think about human communities. What does a community rich in diversity look like? How is diversity advantageous to the wider ecosystem of humans and community in this example? What does a more monocultural community look like? What are the implications of denying and preventing our communities from becoming more diverse?



SPACES AND STRUCTURES FOR ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

Why it's relevant to Síolta Chroí and ecosystem restoration?

Teach Tuí is the name of the educational space. It translates as 'straw house'. Teach Tuí acts as a workshop room, transformative learning environment, yoga and retreat centre, and general meeting space. This was planned as an eco build, made from straw bale.

Many people comment on the welcome that they experience when they come to Síolta Chroí. This is important for us, to create a welcoming space. Fáilte. The smell, design and natural colours of Teach Tuí, the beautiful artwork on the walls courtesy of Julian and co from Poland, keeping the space as clutter free and clean as possible - these add to the welcome as much as Gareth's big fluffy smile and the smell of Karen's delicious cooking!

For us, having a space that aligned with our values was really important. We have left a window in the wall so that people can see the materials that have been used. While this was quite an expensive initiative for us (which was possible thanks to Leader Funding), eco-builds have potential to be more affordable and people can explore cob, hemp and other natural building materials to create your own build.

When we think about the spaces and structures outside of this building, and for those of you not in a position to build a straw bale structure, here are other things we have done on the land that have promoted ecosystem restoration:

A Pond

Thanks to the input of a group of community workers and as part of an 'Ecosystem Restoration for Community Groups' course we were running, we practically demonstrated how to go about building a pond on the land. Our pond was designed to be in the shape of a huge droplet of water.

The materials we chose to line the pond we wanted to keep as eco friendly as possible. At first we attempted sealing the bottom of the pond with clay. We invited friends and neighbours to put their best foot forward, come with their nails clipped and their toes clean in a meitheal-type gathering to stamp the clay into the bottom of the pond. However, 2 attempts later and the water was still draining away. Was this due to the 'stony grey soil of Monaghan' which meant there was too much drainage? Did we not use enough clay? Were our friends and neighbours just not stamping hard enough? Our pigs' trotters were doing overtime but to no avail. It is difficult to know what didn't work over two attempts, but we had to eat some humble pie and move onto plan B...

We opted for buying a pond liner, using a natural rubber liner as the most environmental friendly option we could find.

It is possible for almost any space to have some kind of pond. Even an old salad bowl or upturned metal bin lid can host some amount of pond life. It's just amazing what possibilities a pond can create... we highly recommend!!

Water harvesting

In Ireland we are rich in water. There is really no excuse at all for gardeners and farmers to be using water from the mains tap on the land!! Depending on where on the island you are based, there will be more or less a huge amount of rainfall each year. Unless this is harvested, this is a massively missed opportunity to catch and use a vital input for the land.

Composting

Composting is something that has created much debate among the team at Síolta Chroí, debates that typically take place in the field next to overloaded compost bins filled with green material (grass cuttings and weeds) but not much else!

Our debate centres around composting: for what purpose?

Compost can be a wonderful mechanism for turning old green and brown waste from the garden into beautiful and useful compost to put back onto the land.

Compost can also be a waste management strategy for leftover food, peelings, and other materials from keeping on top of the garden.

In our case, however, the chickens and pigs would eat a lot of the kitchen waste (and so we here don't have need for waste management) and we are adopting a syntropic agriculture approach on the other hand, leaving grass cuttings, weeds, hedge and tree clippings on the land close to their origins.

We are exploring methods of building compost that is not about the quantity but the quality. We want to create compost that will improve biology and increase and enhance the soil life that can then be spread on the land and innovate all this soil food web into the soil.

Examples of approaches we have explored include Johnson Su, Elaine Ingham and Korean Natural farming.

How this might relate to Youth and Community work:

- Think of the space you are based from. How is the space? Does it align with your values? Where might the space clash with the values of your youth or community practice? What does this look like?
- What does the welcome feel like? Where is nature inside or outside of the space? How might you use the indoor and outdoor spaces to enhance nature and biodiversity potential?
- You could carry out an audit of your space. Where does your energy come from? Where does the water come from? What materials is the space made up of? Where does your waste go?
- Where are opportunities to improve? Could you build a pond, harvest the rainwater for flushing toilets or watering plants?
- How can you as much as possible keep resources within the space? This might affect what you buy (to minimise waste), doing a waste audit and developing a waste management policy, considering the reuse and recycling mechanisms on site, and what more needs to be done.



RETHINKING BOUNDARIES

Why it's relevant to Síolta Chroí and ecosystem restoration?
Nature does not recognise human-made boundaries. Ask a flower which side of the Irish border it is growing on and it will look at you with wonder. Boundaries are often human constructs. And they can often be loaded with power, privilege and to reinstate difference.

However nature does have her own boundaries and the boundary where two ecosystems meet is often the most productive and dynamic place within those ecosystems; on the edge.

We wanted to explore and embrace this 'edge effect' by being creative with how we created borders on the land at Síolta Chroí. We wanted any boundaries to have the highest ecosystem benefits as possible while still functioning as effective boundaries in their own right.

Ogham Alphabet entrance

The Ogham Alphabet was once our ancient alphabet here in Ireland, based on the wisdom and importance of our trees. It is still alive today, and each of the letters in the alphabet have a symbol relating to each of the trees. When we were lucky enough to have our garden design done by the notorious and very talented Mary Reynolds, she included an ogham alphabet entrance to honour our ancient reverence of native trees, and as a way of welcoming people to the space. And so, over the last few years we have sourced and planted all the trees in this plan. For us this is important - the opportunity to have a large diversity of trees on the land, but also the heritage significance this ogham entrance represents.

Dry Stone Wall

The entrance to Teach Tuí is framed by a dry stone wall. Look across the landscape in Ireland and you will see miles and miles of old dry stone walls. It is an art in itself, as well as being a cultural heritage skillset that is seeing somewhat of a revival. Although we were very lucky to have the support of Mubarak from Syria to bring his unique skill to the craft. The ecosystem benefits of dry stone walls are the habitat potential they hold. They can be home to many different invertebrates, some birds, and many mosses, lichens and ferns amongst other species. Dry stone walls are a low-input build, however there is a knack and skill in building them well - we invited in someone with expertise in this area to guide us and we would recommend anyone to do the same. They require little or no maintenance and we think they just look stunning!

Dead Hedge

One of our favourite pastimes in the autumn once we have clipped back our hedges and trees is to gather all the large and small branches and twigs and deposit them into a 'dead hedge'. While the name reflects the excess 'dead' material coming from the hedgerows and trees, the dead hedge actually has the potential to be brimming with life!! By gathering and organising the dead hedge between fence posts (or other structure that will be strong enough to hold them, about a foot deep), another habitat can be created that doubles up as a boundary to define areas or walkways. Multiple species will thank you for this fractal space!

How this might relate to Youth and Community work:

- Boundaries: human-made constructs, or naturally occurring patterns? Take a walk around your local area and notice boundaries, how they are defined and for what purpose?

- Discuss as a group examples of boundaries that oppress, boundaries that can liberate, the implications of power and privilege when defining boundaries. You might want to look at maps and country boundaries, places in the world that have infamous walls to separate, boundaries within communities, etc.

- Go and explore boundaries in nature; notice the 'edge effect'. Why does the most innovation and experimentation happen at the edge? What can we learn from this in terms of our own 'stretch zone' or edge? "Life happens at the edge of your comfort zone".



“IT’S MY FIELD. IT’S MY CHILD. I NURSED
IT. I NOURISHED IT. I DUG THE ROCKS
OUT OF IT WITH MY BARE HANDS AND I
MADE A LIVING THING OF IT”.

— THE BULL MCCABE, THE FIELD (1990)

‘For both the archaeologist and the native dweller, the landscape tells - or rather is - a story. It enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played a part in its formation... To perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past.’

(Tim Ingold, ‘the Temporality of the Landscape’)

FOOD AND SEED SOVEREIGNTY

Why it's relevant to Síolta Chroí and ecosystem restoration?

‘Food Sovereignty is about more than local food – it is about rights – our rights to access land, resources, seeds and knowledge. It is also about the welfare of the planet, about how low-input farming systems that feed our people while responding to the challenge of climate change. It is about democracy, about the voices of our people and about how we organise ourselves. It is about the rights of women. It is about our societies living at peace with each other and with our planet. It is about recognising our place in the generational flow that includes our ancestors and our descendants.’

— Irish Food Sovereignty Declaration – 2015

Food and Seed Sovereignty are key pillars of the work we do. We host all of our work within a social justice frame, and food and seed sovereignty is key in this narrative, asking questions about the current food systems and the historical and cultural role that peasants and peasant movements have made in feeding the world.

In a talk given by Vandana Shiva as part of a Local Food Hubs project, she called for
Living Seed
Living Soil



According to Clare O'Grady Walsh, 'those who control the seeds control the food. Those who control the food control the people' (Féile Bríde, Afri, 2019). Access to seeds has always been free and in the hands of the farmers and peasants who grew the food. However the large seed companies have actually managed to patent seeds and turn them into a commodity, undermining the rights of people to grow their own food. Advocating for Seed Sovereignty is a response to this, to reclaim the right to grow, save and share open pollinated seeds, including our heritage varieties.

So who does seed belong to?

Farmers and peasants?

Community Growers?

Pollinators?

Our ancestors?

Future Generations?

For us at Síolta Chroí:

- We support and promote regenerative and resilient local food systems.

- We are passionate about making local, nutritionally high and affordable food available to everyone.

We recognise the importance of diversification and localisation of our food systems and the benefits of this for healthy living soil, healthy food and dynamic local economies.

How this practically manifests in our work at Síolta Chroí

Food forest

We have planted out a food forest with fruit and nut varieties which will be a sustainable source of food and protein in the coming years, as well as providing habitat, diversity and roots in the soil.

Seed saving

We are members of the SeedIt Union, a collective of community growers across counties in Ireland and with connections to seed savers in the UK and beyond. Each year we are gifted seed to grow on in our space with the intention of allowing these plants to go to seed over the space of one or two years (depending on the plant) and investing the seeds we harvest back into the SeedIt Union. This gives us the opportunity to talk about heritage and open pollinated seed with those who visit. It also gives the additional benefit of allowing us to taste delicious food, often from old or forgotten varieties, and to feel solidarity as a part of a movement that is beyond the growing space of our land.

More Trees Now!

We have made a connection with Dutch organisation, MEER Groen, who advocate for getting more trees for free onto the land. The approach taken looks at lifting trees that otherwise would not survive, such as brown sites about to be developed, or in bogs that are trying to rewet themselves. These 'Tree Rescue operations' have resulted in us hosting hundreds of trees each year, which we are then able to gift on to farmers, community groups and other land guardians as a way of rehoming these resilient, native and very locally grown trees!

Practical 'how to' info on replicating the idea in your space:

- Get seed saving! Make sure the seeds are open pollinated, and ideally from growers or distributors such as Irish Seed Savers or local seed networks such as the SeedIt Union. Growing strong healthy plants will ensure healthy strong seeds for the coming year. And in the spirit of solidarity, share and exchange and gift on seeds to keep this informal economy thriving!
- Plant a tree! The best time to plant a tree was 50 years ago. The second best time is now! Speak with us about rehoming one of the Rescue Trees, come along and assist us in the Tree Rescue operations, or grow your own from seed, a cutting or sapling.
- Support local food economies. Buy from and use local producers and small businesses as much as possible when sourcing food for events and other procurement possibilities, and promote local and short supply chains with those you work with.

How this might relate to Youth and Community work:

- Seeds are political; food is political. Explore where people get their food from, the origins of where that food was grown, and Food as a social justice issue.
- What could a resilient food system look like? What would need to change to make this happen? How can we ensure that any changes to the food system bring everyone with it, not just making food better and more accessible for the few?
- Discuss food growing and seed sowing. Are there any growers in the group? Anyone know is connected to a community garden? You could organise a seed sowing and saving workshop, or start food growing as a group.

HEALING THE LAND, RESTORING THE SOUL

Why it's relevant to Síolta Chroí and ecosystem restoration?

This land is sacred. She has agency, she has dreams and she looks out for all the beings on the land. This land has also had sadness. She is in need of healing. As custodians and guardians of this land, we do our best to listen to her. We show her love by restoring soil, by gentle regenerative practices to work in partnership with her, by growing food that brings life to us and brings life back to the land itself. She is fertile, she is giving, she is coming back to life.

The trilogy from which we get so much inspiration: Soil, Soul, Society can refer to the soul of humans at this time and on this land. But it also refers to the soul of the land. The land in Ireland has been harmed by decades of extractive industrial agriculture. The land holds the trauma of famine, colonialism, patriarchy and the Catholic church. The land has capacity to heal; to heal herself and to heal those of us that find ourselves on this beautiful island and the wider beings with whom we share the space.

So how to heal the land? We have gone about this from different approaches.

- By detoxing from fertiliser use and by promoting beneficial soil biology we have helped to bring back soil life;
- The decision to have animals on the land and choices around what to grow has additionally supported life to come back to the soil;
- We dance, sing, meditate, pray to the land, knowing that she is listening, giggling, enjoying our activity;
- We explore decolonial approaches to the disconnect present at a cultural and societal level, the implications of this and ways to overcome these in our education work;
- We recognise the need for trauma healing for the humans and the land we stand on. We are on an ongoing journey as to how to go about this, but we are open to listening to the land and learning from experts in this field.

Banging the Boundary

Mary Reynolds refers to banging the boundary in her book, 'The Garden Awakening'. Twice a year we will do this; we get our handmade drum, take off our shoes, gather people around us, and we go onto the land with intentions clear. Our barefoot walk around the boundary is to honour the relationship between us and the land. We are defining the boundary to clarify the perimeter of land in our care (while still caring for and sending love beyond this boundary!). We are awakening any stuck or stagnant energies lying under the surface of the land through our songs, drumbeats and the vibrations of our bare feet on bare ground. We feel that this is healing both for ourselves, for our connection with this land and hopefully for the land itself.

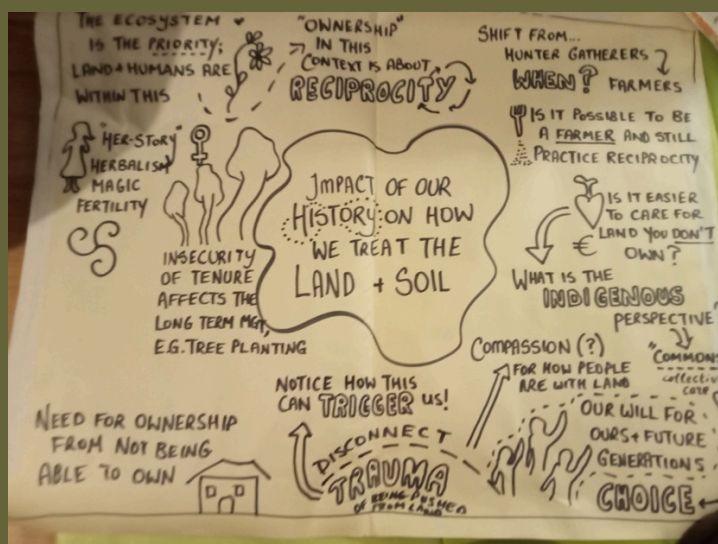
Symbols on the land

Symbols are a powerful way to communicate something to the land; and likewise for communication with others who come to visit the land. We have already discussed the symbol of a water droplet as the design for our pond. There is a fairy garden in front of the house where offerings can be made to keep the fairy folk of this land happy.

Along with a group of people through the Soil, Soul, Society project, we constructed a giant triskele on the land. The triskele is a strong feminine symbol, and in creating this large and loud and clear on the land we hoped to honour the feminine energies of the space.

The symbol of the triskele was created in the form of a hugelkultur bed. A hugelkultur bed is like a no-dig bed based on rotting and decaying materials that form the base layer, and so heat up in their decaying state which creates heat, holds moisture and enables growing angles that can be advantageous to maximising slope benefits. Due to all that wonderful life and heat and femininity, our bed builds heat and promotes fertility. The increased surface area created maximises the growing area for the space. We love hugelkultur beds!!

When the design was done and the beds built up with soil, we sowed the triskele with wildflower seeds, sowing our intention to bring back the wildness to what had previously been a more domesticated and well-behaved field!



Practical 'how to' info on replicating the idea in your space
Do some research on symbols that you would like to promote on your land.

Some ideas might include:

Taking inspiration from the curves and spirals of Mary Reynolds' designs included in her book 'We are the ARK'.

Exploring the name of the townland within which you are based and taking inspiration for what the name of the land could tell you about what used to be there and what could be brought back.

At the beginning of springtime each year (on Imbolc or Brigid's Day) take a walk around the perimeter of your space. If you feel like it, go barefoot, bring a drum or stones to beat, hum or sing, do this on your own or invite others. The main thing is to go with the intention of establishing (or continuing) a relationship with the land you walk on.

Develop a deeper understanding of decolonial approaches (see Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures) and bring ideas into your educational practice.

How this might relate to Youth and Community work:

- Do you discuss issues of an Gorta Mór (sometimes referred to as the 'Irish Famine'), colonialism, patriarchy, within your youth and community work practice? If so, what resources you and how do these issues land with the groups you work with? If you don't currently explore these issues, what is holding you back? Are they relevant? What supports would enable you to lean into uncomfortable issues?
- You could do an inquiry into the theme of 'connection'. What does connection feel like? What does connection with the land feel like? What does connection within ourselves feel like? If we could draw the feeling of inner and outer connection, what would this look like? What about the disconnect that exists between people and wider nature? What does this feel like? How has this come about? What are the systems, events, lifestyles that have contributed to this disconnect? Does the disconnect with nature have any impact on our inner connection with ourselves? What brings back connection in this context?



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