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UNDERSTANDING IRISH TOWNS CASE STUDY

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Rialtas Áitiúil Éireann
Local Government Ireland

LGMA
An Ghníomhaireacht
Bainistíochta Rialtais Áitiúil
Local Government
Management Agency

Lár Bailte ar dTús
Town Centre First

BACKGROUND

Town Centre First aims to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community.

Town Centre First (TCF) lays the foundation for each town to develop, at a local level, their own plan-led path forward. This will be expressed through a tailored TCF plan which is underpinned by a clear diagnosis of local strengths and challenges. This TCF Plan is driven by the local community and businesses as part of a Town Team who are supported by Town Regeneration Officers and technical expertise within each Local Authority.

Didobi was commissioned to investigate available data to create evaluation and modelling of Ireland's towns in support of the TCF initiative.
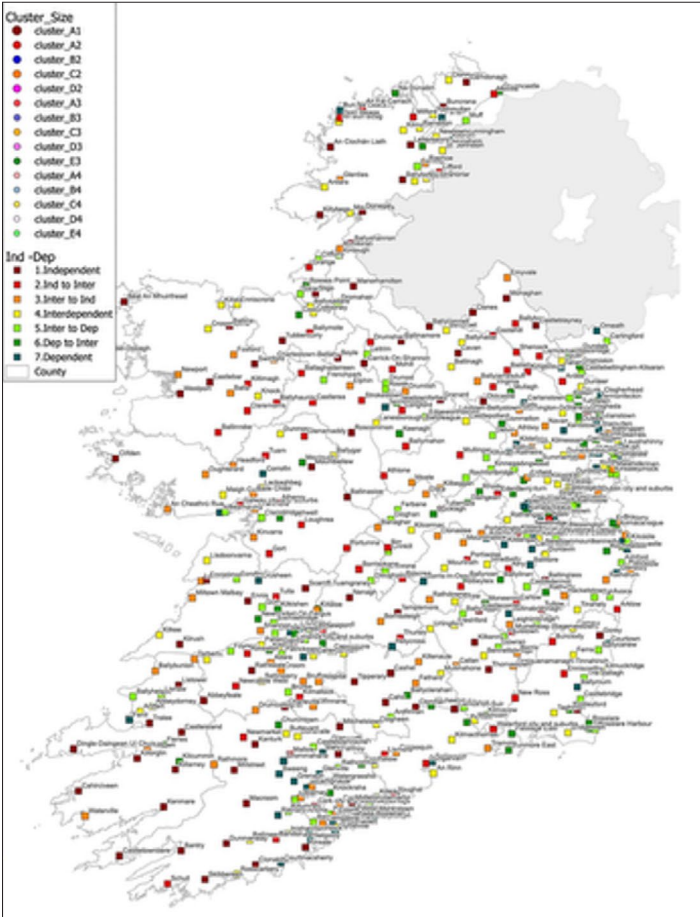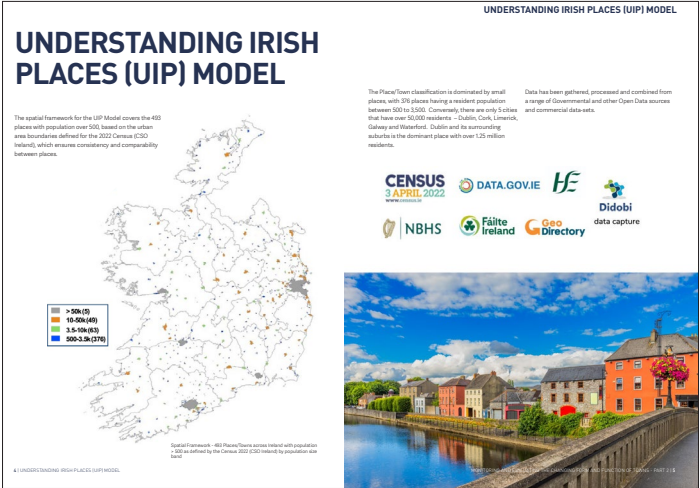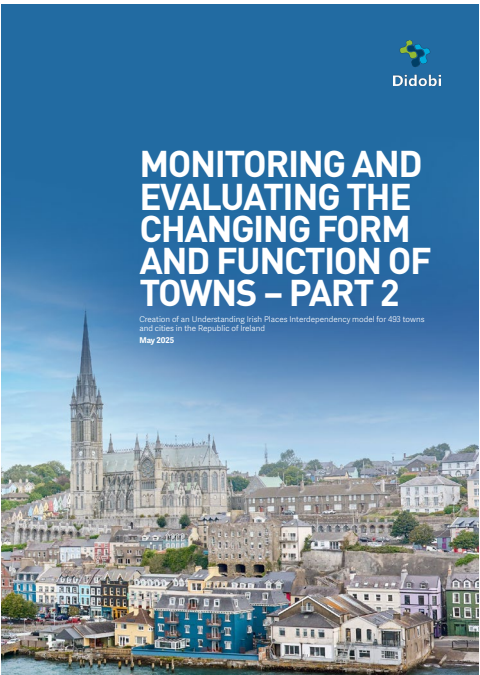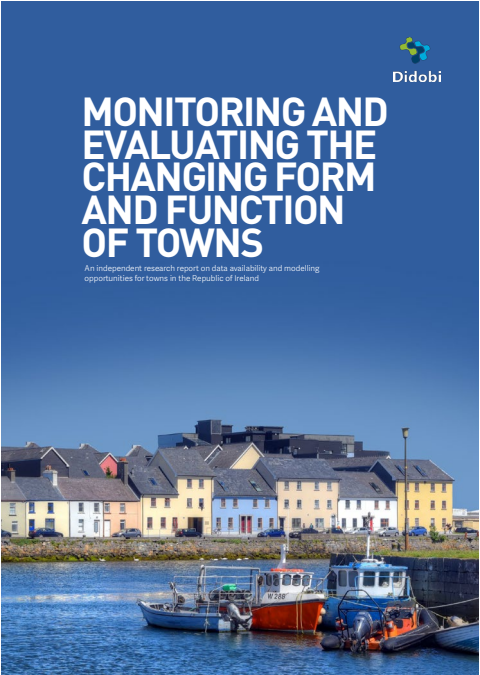
The project consisted of two main phases;

1. A review of data available in the Republic of Ireland relevant to the evaluation and monitoring of towns. This included a data workshop and visiting a number of towns to see how the data reflected reality. This data was then applied to a subset of towns in order to validate the ability to deliver an Understanding Irish Places (UIP) interdependence model based on the Understanding Scottish Places model (www.usp.scot) and the Place Standard (www.placestandard.scot)

2. Creation of an Understanding Irish Places model for 493 towns across the Republic of Ireland (places with populations of 500 plus). This included visualising the outputs on a map and creating an interactive data workbook along with an overview report summarising the findings and recommendations for further development..

SERVICES AND SUPPORT DELIVERED

The project was split down into a number of sequential and concurrent phases;

*   Literature review

*   Data review

*   Workshop with key stakeholders

*   Town visits

*   Data SWOT analysis

*   Application of the Understanding Scottish Places model to see how an Understanding Irish Places model can be built

*   Application of the Place Standard

*   Creation of an initial report of our findings along with recommendations and conclusions aligned to the objectives of the TCF policy objectives

*   Creation of a UIP model across all towns with a population of 500 or more (493 towns)

*   Delivery of a report to summarise the outputs along with an interactive map and UIP interactive data workbook

MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE CHANGING FORM AND FUNCTION OF TOWNS

An independent research report on data availability and modelling opportunities for towns in the Republic of Ireland

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MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE CHANGING FORM AND FUNCTION OF TOWNS – PART 2

Creation of an Understanding Irish Places Interdependency model for 493 towns and cities in the Republic of Ireland

May 2025

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UNDERSTANDING IRISH PLACES (UIP) MODEL

The spatial framework for the UIP Model covers the 493 places with population over 500, based on the urban area boundaries defined for the 2022 Census (CSO Ireland), which ensures consistency and comparability between places.

The Place/Town classification is dominated by small places, with 376 places having a resident population between 500 to 3,500. Conversely, there are only 5 cities that have over 50,000 residents – Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. Dublin and its surrounding suburbs is the dominant place with over 1.25 million residents.

Data has been gathered, processed and combined from a range of Governmental and other Open Data sources and commercial data-sets.

- > 50k (5)
- 10-50k (49)
- 3.5-10k (63)
- 500-3.5k (376)

Spatial Framework - 493 Places/Towns across Ireland with population > 500 as defined by the Census 2022 (CSO Ireland) by population size band

Cluster_Size
- cluster_A1
- cluster_A2
- cluster_B2
- cluster_C2
- cluster_D2
- cluster_A3
- cluster_B3
- cluster_C3
- cluster_D3
- cluster_E3
- cluster_A4
- cluster_B4
- cluster_C4
- cluster_D4
- cluster_E4

Ind >Dep
- 1.Independent
- 2.Ind to Inter
- 3.Inter to Ind
- 4.Interdependent
- 5.Inter to Dep
- 6.Dep to Inter
- 7.Dependent
- County

CLIENT COMMENTARY

"Working with Didobi Ltd has been an absolute pleasure. The quality of the research, the speed in which it was delivered, and the value in both output and financial terms has been outstanding.

As Ireland embarks on its first concerted effort to deliver effective placemaking in action, Didobi's analysis of data gaps in understanding Irish places, the consolidation of relevant available data, and development of an easily understood reporting tool has been instrumental in the effective delivery of Ireland's ambitious Town Centre First initiative across all our villages, towns, and cities, which will see our 500+ villages/ towns and indeed cities becoming more vibrant, viable, and attractive places for people to live, work, invest in, and visit.

Through Didobi's research and work with the National Town Centre First Office in Ireland, local authorities in collaboration with communities across the country are now empowered to make evidenced based decisions to shape the future development of our villages, towns, and cities in a positive and outcome focused way through the whole of Government Town Centre First initiative.

On a personal level, Matthew's professionalism, skill, and experience have been key to the successful partnership between the National Town Centre First Office, Ireland and Didobi. His approach to understanding Irish places has been a game changer for the National Town Centre First Office.

I highly recommend Didobi."

Mairead Hunt,
National Co-Ordinator,
Town Centre First Office,
Local Government Management Agency.

The two phases of this project were delivered in February and June 2025

For further information on how we help you audit your town please get in touch;
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ABOUT DIDOBI

Didobi is a 'swarm' of highly experienced specialists who deliver independent, innovative and clearly written research, insights, reports and content to public and private sector clients for the built environment. These include data science, data quants, research, placemaking, communications and strategy. This unique combination of experience and knowledge has earned Didobi a reputation for distilling data into practical advice and knowledge that enables better strategic decisions and problem solving. We work directly and collaboratively with our partners to meet the specific challenges and needs of our clients as a consortium.

Since its launch in 2018, Didobi has worked with a diverse range of clients including Amazon, the Investment Property Forum, Coal Pensions Trustees, The Duchy of Cornwall, The Isle of Man Government, the Urban Land Institute in both Europe and Asia Pacific, Vinci plc, the Greater London Authority and many local authorities across the UK.

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