A new sport is about to hit the town of Westport - street orienteering, which is a suburban version of the popular running sport orienteering.
As in all forms of orienteering, participants are given a map with a number of marked locations and a score card with your name and 20 numbered squares.

Participants must visit a given number of sites and record the fact they've been there before returning to the start, with the first back the winner.
This is a sport for everyone, aged eight to 80, and if you're fit enough to walk to the shop you can take part. It's a great way to improve your navigation skills, experience orienteering without having to attend an actual event or to just make a walk that bit more interesting.

Obviously one needs to be able to read a map and run (or walk in the power-walkers section). More advanced competitors will look at much more than the street layout between one control and the next; within minutes of starting they've planned a route that minimises the distance they have to run and the hills they have to climb.

It is envisioned the primary usage in Westport will be by tourists visiting the town, as it will provide an opportunity for families to walk and explore the course, which will bring them around the town. If required the facility may be used for staged orienteering events, with evening time or Sunday morning highlighted as the best times for events when traffic and the town is quieter. The principle users will be scouts, second level schools, tourists and locals.

Westport Town Council is supporting the initiative. The local authority will host a copy of the map in a PDF format on their website and a copy of the control card on their website. The council will also promote the facility in association with the Chamber of Commerce and tourism interests so that it will be used. Mapping will be undertaken by the outdoor education department in GMIT and given to the council and any other businesses willing to host the maps on their website.

GMIT will update the courses on the map every four months, ensuring the resource may be utilised repeatedly.
The college will also take responsibility for mounting the controls around the town. A map with suggested locations will be sent to the council before any work is undertaken.

Support is also required from local businesses as some of the control markers may need to be mounted at different locations around the town.

Councillors at their monthly town meeting heard the only cost involved will be the cost of the controls, which are estimated at €350. The cost to participants is the cost of printing two pages, and if street orienteering is promoted by local hotels or other facilities it is hoped they may provide the printouts to participants.

A similar initiative is already up and running in Cork where the city council has four permanent courses in city parks.