

Fostering Mutual Benefits in Cross-Border Areas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Challenges and Opportunities in
Connecting Irish Border Towns and Villages

This publication is an Executive Summary of the report published by ICLRD on *Fostering Mutual Benefits in Cross-Border Areas: The Challenges and Opportunities in Connecting Irish Border Towns and Villages*. Reflecting the style of the main report, this Executive Summary is made up of three parts. Part I sets the context by outlining the characteristics and dynamics of the Irish Border region and the theory and practice behind rural development in a border setting. It also considers the role of EU policy in the promotion of endogenous development at the local level. Part II reviews the social, economic and cultural experiences of a number of Irish Border towns and villages, which, for the purpose of this study, have been organised into 'clusters' based on traditional natural hinterlands. For each case study micro-region, the emergence of collaboration, together with its focus, players, impacts and future potentiality are considered. Part III builds on the experiences of the case study clusters by outlining the processes, structures and factors necessary for establishing successful cross-border and cross-community cooperation; and puts forward a number of 'soft linkages' that stakeholders at the micro-region believe are essential in moving from bridging and cooperation to collaboration, networking and finally, integrated policy and action.

This is an expanded version of the executive summary contained in the main report; it has been developed for use as a stand alone document. The main publication, *Fostering Mutual Benefits in Cross Border Areas: The Challenges and Opportunities in Connecting Irish Towns and Villages*, is available through ICLRD (email info@iclr.org) or through selected book stores.

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Background

The Border region on the island of Ireland remains a contested space – no longer in a political sense (as a result of the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement, 1998 and the St. Andrew's Agreement, 2006); but rather physically and mentally as many citizens perceive the Border as being inconsistent with local economic, community and social linkages and patterns. For decades, the dominant trend has been for people on both sides of the Border to live 'back-to-back' and, as a result, areas along the Irish Border remain characterised by many problems: peripherality from Dublin and Belfast; a lack of joined-up action and spatial planning; an infrastructure deficit; the decline of traditional economic activities such as farming, forestry and textiles; and high unemployment/under-employment. In economic terms, towns and villages along the Border have been cut off from their natural trading and retailing hinterlands. Furthermore, while the violence associated with the Troubles and associated political objectives has largely abated and security measures have been considerably reduced, work remains to be done in terms of promoting inter-jurisdictional and inter-religious collaboration.

Yet, a range of cross-border relationships exist – both formal and informal – and these vary in both their intensity and level of stakeholder participation. In those Border towns and villages which are located within a short distance of each other, there is evidence of increasing cross-border mobility in the areas of employment, education, retail and housing. This has meant that once insular bodies have become more open to the idea of, and mechanisms involved in, cross-border collaboration.

Key Research Question

The key research question addressed throughout this study was:

What is the current level of connectivity (leading to mutual benefits) and future 'potentiality' between the selected small cross-border connected towns and villages? And can this be enhanced through collaborative spatial planning?

Methodology

- Selecting the case studies
- Phase I: Examining the level of connectivity
 - Designing the survey instrument
 - Conducting over 80 interviews with representatives of local government, the community and voluntary sector, private sector, public service providers, dedicated cross-border agencies and funding bodies
 - Analysis
- Phase II: Making communities border effective
 - Developing the research tools
 - Workshops – one per case study cluster and each attended by between 15-25 participants
- Interim & final report

The methodology employed was purposely flexible and pliable; thus meaning that as the research programme progressed both in terms of its roll-out and time, each step of the methodology employed could be – and was – revisited to ensure it was appropriate to the direction of the study and supported the objectives of that phase of the research.

Setting the Context

Part 1

Introduction

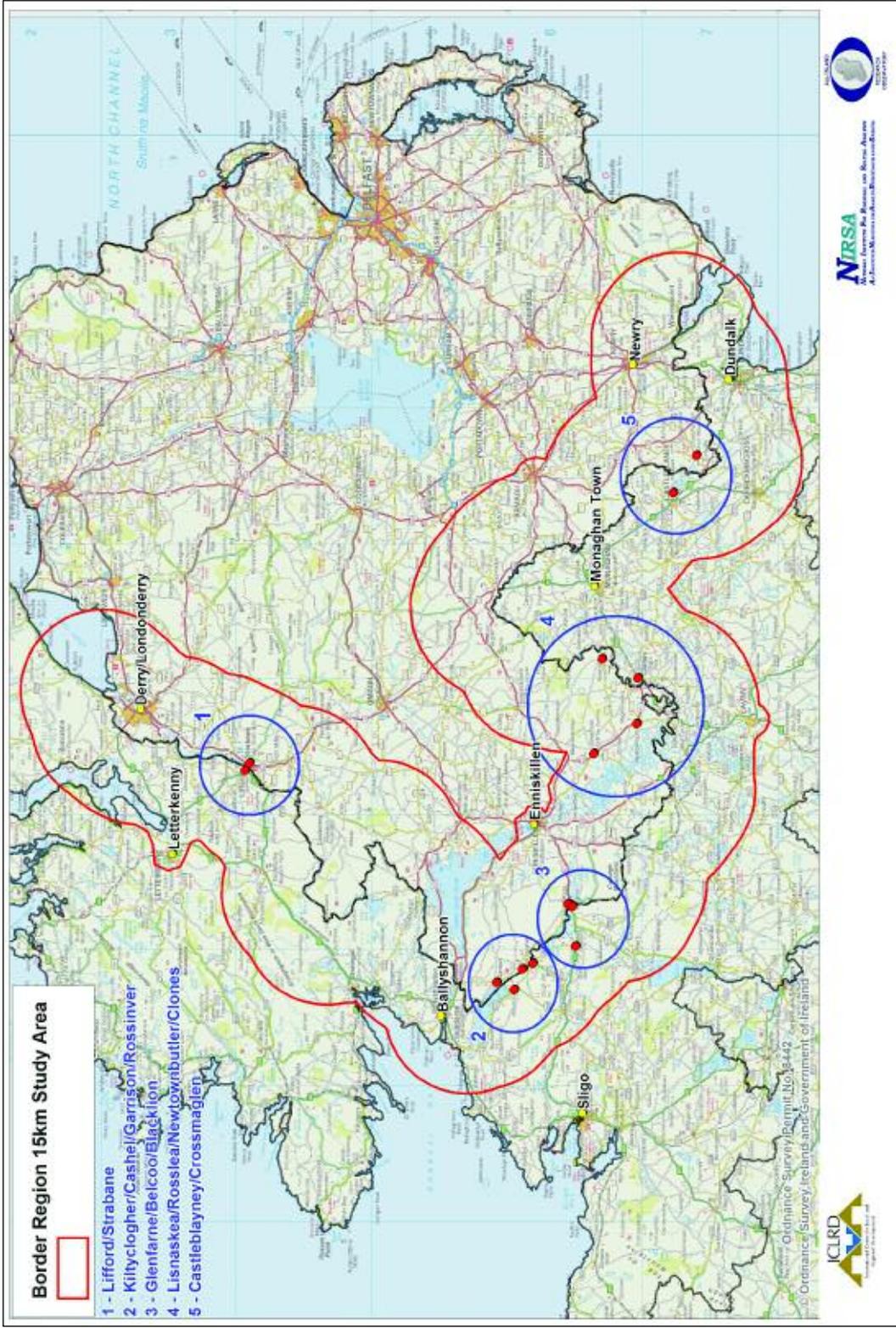
Up until the 1990s, areas adjacent to the Border between the Republic of Ireland (from hereonin referred to as 'Ireland') and Northern Ireland were synonymous with socio-political conflict and tensions and socio-economic stagnation and decline; all largely associated with Partition and the Troubles. Today however, communities along the Irish Border are strong advocates of cross-border collaboration. As this report shows, such collaboration is serving to redress the decades of socio-economic and physical decline experienced in this region and to promote innovations in economic development, improved access to local services, social progress and ecological conservation. Such micro-level inter-community collaboration has helped to drive the Peace Process forward; while the St. Andrew's Agreement in October 2006, the devolution of power from Westminster back to the Northern Ireland Assembly in May 2007, and the forthcoming publication of a non-statutory all-island collaborative framework by both governments all serve to provide a supportive context in which cross-border collaboration and the development of sustainable communities can thrive.

This study, undertaken by the International Centre for local and Regional Development (ICLRD)¹, considers the nature and level of connectivity that exists between a number of small cross-border towns and villages (i.e. micro-regions) together with the mutual benefits and success factors for these processes of cooperation and collaboration, including the role of spatial planning. These issues are being examined in five case study 'clusters' in the Irish Border region; the Irish Border region being defined as the geographical area located 15km each side of the actual Border (see Figure 1 overleaf).



¹ A registered charity based in Armagh, Northern Ireland, the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) is a North-South-U.S. partnership. Established in 2006, the Centre explores and expands on the contribution that planning and the development of physical, social and economic infrastructures can make to improve the lives of people on the island of Ireland and elsewhere. The partner institutes currently include: the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth; the School of the Built Environment at the University of Ulster, the Institute for International Urban Development in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh; and the Athlone Institute of Technology (see www.iclrd.org).

Figure 1: Defining the Irish Border Region and the Case Study Areas



Prepared by AIRO, 2008; ©Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland Copyright Permit No. MP006608

The selection of the case studies was based on, among other things, their variation in scale (whether village, small town, medium-sized town); the distances between them; and their typology (if classified as rural, peri-urban, marginal, structurally weak). As highlighted in Figure 1, the case study areas selected were:

1. Lifford-Strabane
2. Kiltyclogher-Cashel/Scribbagh-Garrison-Rossinver
3. Glenfarne-Blacklion-Belcoo
4. Clones-Rosslea-Newtownbutler-Lisnaskea
5. Castleblayney-Crossmaglen.

Cross-Border Collaboration – Context, Theory and Practice

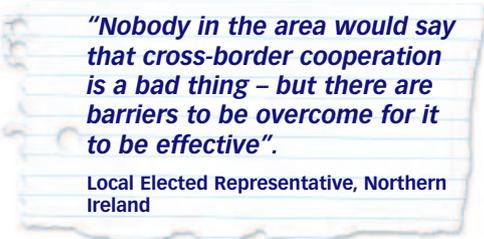
Cross-border collaboration on the island of Ireland has emerged in the context of post-productivist approaches to rural development since the early 1990s, enhanced cooperation between the member states of the European Union, and evolving European, national and regional development policies which increasingly emphasise the spatial over the sector and advocate horizontal and vertical coordination between agencies and between local, regional and national-level decision-makers. Across Europe, frontier regions were historically associated with peripherality, economic decline and structural weaknesses. In the immediate post-war period (i.e. 1945 onwards), dominant economic perspectives and policies tended to associate rural areas generally, and frontier rural areas in particular, with backwardness and under-development. Centre-periphery and locational models of economic development emphasised investment in urban centres, while rural development equated with the modernisation of agriculture and the intensification of food production. As a consequence of these centralised and exogenous (top-down) approaches to territorial organisation, and the reduction in the resources available for inter-regional transfers due to macro-economic pressures and policies during the 1970s and 1980s, spatial imbalances throughout Europe tended to intensify. As a result, many rural areas, and most notably frontier rural areas, experienced profound economic decline, social exclusion, public service depletion and demographic weaknesses.

On the island of Ireland, rural decline was most clearly manifest on the western seaboard and along a 30km corridor on both sides of the inter-jurisdictional border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. These parts of the island suffered considerably from reductions in public service provision over many decades, and in particular the closure of railways during the 1950s and 1960s and the amalgamations of schools and health services during the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, communities along the Irish Border had to contend with the artificial economic, monetary, legal and institutional barriers created as a result of Partition in 1921. Many small towns lost their natural economic hinterlands, and the consequent cross-border disconnect was further intensified by the emergence of distinct and back-to-back approaches to spatial planning, economic development, infrastructure and service provision and social policy; with agencies in the Northern and Southern states operating without reference to one another. This institutional disconnect severely disadvantaged the Irish Border corridor; it discouraged internal investment and hampered economic development and social progress.

Despite the 'official' disconnect, local communities managed to maintain family, social, religious, farming, sporting and cultural linkages across the Border. However, the advent of the Troubles in the late 1960s, the political / paramilitary violence and the intensification of the state security apparatus, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, severed many of these cross-border linkages and severely disrupted the flow of people in both directions. This resulted in the development potential of many rural communities, villages and small towns on both sides of the Border been smothered. Thus, while areas along the Irish Border corridor experienced many features of peripherality in common with other remote and frontier locations, their relative disadvantage was compounded by the negative institutional and political context that pertained on the island of Ireland up to the commencement of the Peace Process in the mid-1990s.

The Peace Process has ushered in an era of optimism for Irish Border communities. It has made possible huge improvements in Anglo-Irish and North-South relations; it has diffused much political volatility; it has dismantled restrictive security barriers, thereby enabling people to cross the Border without fear or inhibition; and it has consequently opened up prospects for inward investment, economic renewal and social advancement. Since the commencement of the Peace Process, community and voluntary groups have been very much to the fore in the promotion of cross-border linkages on the island of Ireland, and the models of collaboration that have emerged generally reflect a strongly endogenous (bottom-up) leaning. Cross-border community networks represent the springboard for many of the more successful and durable of the current collaborative structures. Today, civil society continues to be the most proactive agent in the promotion of collaborative and joined-up governance.

The progress towards collaborative governance has been strongly enabled and facilitated by access to EU supports, including the Programme(s) for Peace and Reconciliation and cross-border initiatives such as INTERREG. EU support for community development along the Irish Border represented a positive signal from the top-down, and this has encouraged community groups to engage in partnership with local government and the state sector in promoting area-based approaches to economic and social development. At a more macro-level, deepening European integration and the completion of the EU internal market in 1993 considerably diluted the economic significance of the Border. Thus, the parallel advancement of European integration and the Peace Process has nurtured favourable conditions for cross-border collaboration and for locally-based development approaches.



"Nobody in the area would say that cross-border cooperation is a bad thing – but there are barriers to be overcome for it to be effective".

Local Elected Representative, Northern Ireland

In more recent years, the publication of the *Regional Development Strategy* (for Northern Ireland) and the *National Spatial Strategy* (for Ireland)² has provided a framework for joint approaches to spatial planning, thereby encouraging collaborations between local and regional authorities on both sides of the Irish Border; although persistent inter-jurisdictional differences in terms of the roles and scope of local government continue to hamper the optimisation of collaborative spatial planning. The St. Andrew's Agreement, which enabled devolution to the Northern Ireland Executive, and the establishment of inter-ministerial and inter-

² Published in 2001 and 2002 respectively.

departmental linkages between both jurisdictions, have provided renewed impetus towards cross-border collaboration. The positive working relations between the two governments - North and South - is delivering benefits and promoting linkages in areas such as agriculture, transport and culture. Inter-government collaboration and the current power-sharing arrangements in Northern Ireland are serving to enable greater participation in locally-based cross-border projects on the parts of state agencies and persons and politicians of a unionist persuasion.

The following flow-diagram synthesises the factors and conditions that have led to and nurtured the emergence and evolution of current cross-border structures and processes. It shows how Partition, back-to-back institutional operations and the Troubles led to, and compounded, a disconnect between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and how this disconnect exacerbated peripherality and rural decline in border communities (see Figure 2). By the same token, their common experiences of economic and social deterioration strengthened the resolve of communities to pursue innovative, locally-based and cross-border solutions to their problems.

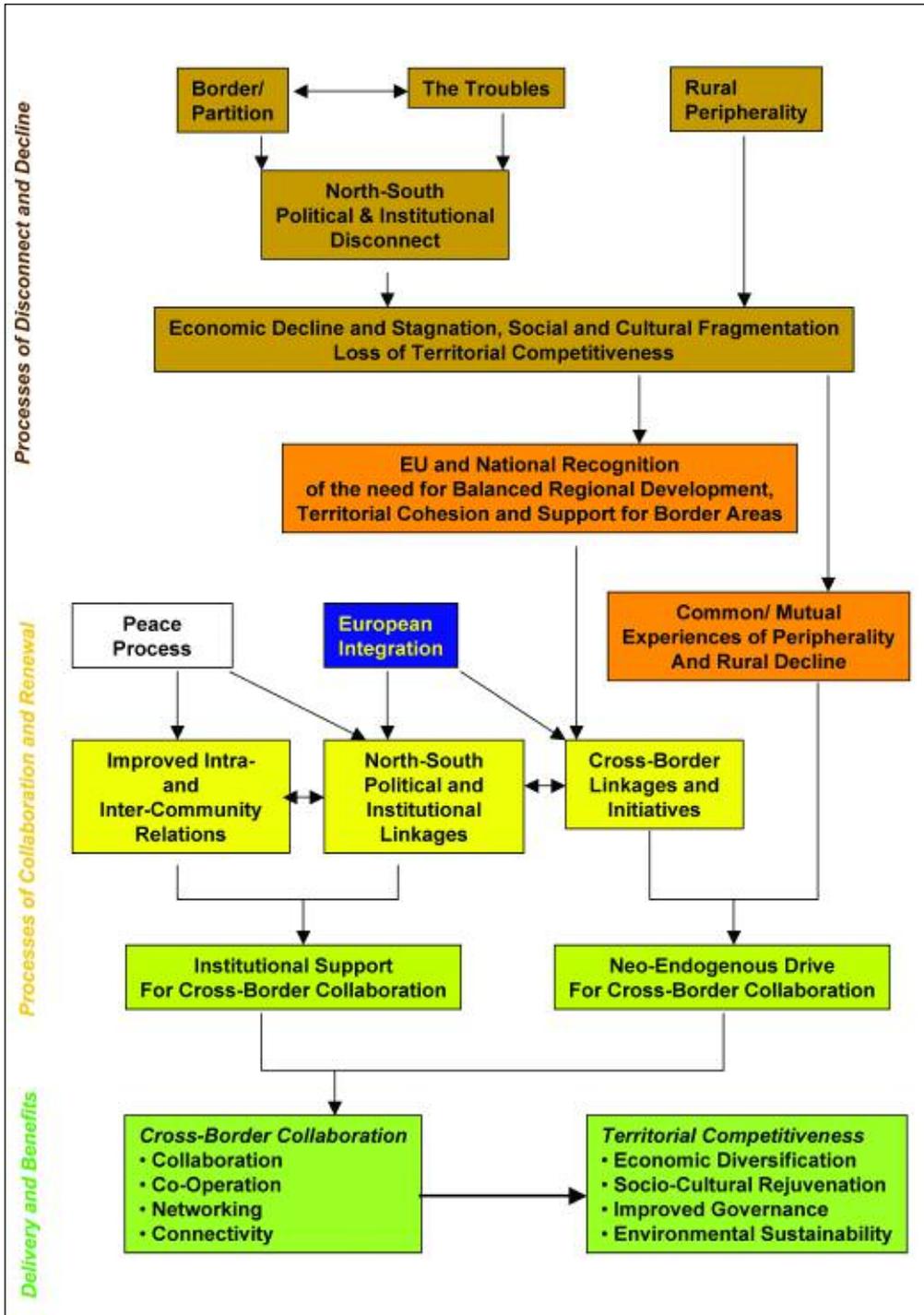
The Peace Process and deepening European integration have served as catalysts to the consolidation of a number of cross-border community-led partnerships, while the new and emerging political climate on the island of Ireland is enabling greater participation in local governance on the parts of state agencies and political representatives. The flow-chart identifies a number of levels of connectivity which can be attained on a cross-border basis. The most basic level – *connectivity* – refers to the re-connection of physical infrastructure, thereby enabling economic growth and social interaction. The next level – *networking* – refers to the emergence of more formalised contacts and arrangements between community groups, the productive sector and local government, while the more advanced levels – *cooperation* and ultimately *collaboration* - refer to area-based, multi-sectoral and inter-agency working-together to enhance the competitiveness of all locations and to optimise their development potential. As this report shows, varying levels of connectivity have been realised in each of the case study locations, and as a result, achievements and sustainability vary accordingly.



Mapping Characteristics of the Irish Border Region

The Irish Border region experiences considerable structural challenges. These include demographic weaknesses and, in particular, an ageing population; low population densities; a weak urban network; limited connectivity; poor quality public services; and low educational attainment (with those that do go on to third level education tending not to return home upon completion of their studies). Together, these factors have implications for the type of employment available locally and the attractiveness of the region to potential investors. Addressing these deficits is dependent on recognising and tapping into assets, opportunities and potential at the local, county and regional levels; and this can best be achieved through greater collaboration and joint programmes of action on a North-South basis. The effectiveness of such a collaborative approach, however, is determined by the extent and quality of the evidence-base on which action programmes and policy are based.

Figure 2: Cross Border Collaboration: Processes, Features and Impacts





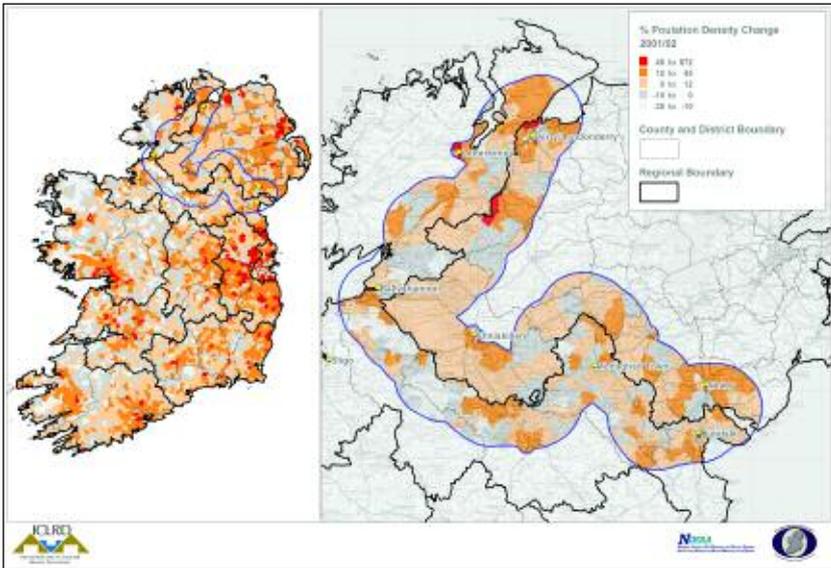
Through the work of the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO), based in NUI Maynooth, the possibilities for mapping the implications of policy emanating from both jurisdictions is being developed (see www.airo.ie). As a research unit and interactive spatial data portal, AIRO acts as a single point of access to a wide variety of spatial data and information about the various regions and sub-regions of the island of Ireland and it collects, analyses and provides evidence that can be used to support policy- and decision-making.

Figure 3, highlighting population density in the Irish Border region, emphasises the rural character of the Irish Border corridor. These maps reveal that population decline, associated with rurality and peripherality, is a significant challenge for border areas, particularly those of West Cavan, West Tyrone, South and East Donegal and parts of Monaghan and Leitrim.

Figure 4 portrays the numbers employed in commerce as a proportion of all employees. This map shows a very clear spatial pattern, with employment in the commercial sector being much more prevalent in and around the urban centres of Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Limerick than in other parts of the island. Northern Ireland's strong network of middle-tier towns has succeeded in enabling the development of commercial activities over a relatively wider area than is the case in the South. Thus, along the Irish Border corridor, the proportion of the workforce employed in commerce is notably higher in Northern Ireland, with a small number of exceptions (mainly centred on Dundalk).

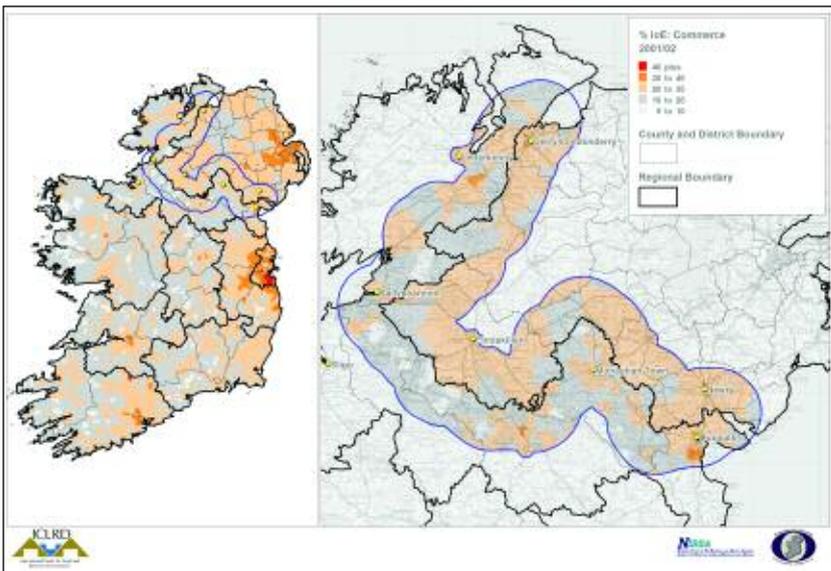
These, together with a range of other issues - such as commuting patterns, age profile, dependency on agriculture, unemployment - will have to be addressed as the Irish Boder region moves to build on its potentiality and achieve balanced and sustainable regional and territorial development.

Figure 3: Population Density – Number of persons per square kilometre at ED level (RoI) and Ward level (NI), 2001/02



(Prepared by AIRO, 2008; ©Ordnance Survey Ireland/Government of Ireland Copyright Permit No. MP006608)

Figure 4: Commercial Employment – Persons employed in commerce as a proportion of all employees at ED level (RoI) and Ward level (NI), 2001/02



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The Case Studies

Cross-Border Collaboration in Lifford-Strabane and Surrounds

The towns of Lifford and Strabane lie right on the Irish Border between counties Donegal and Tyrone. Less than 1km apart, both towns grew as a result of their strategic position as a 'gateway' linking Ireland and Northern Ireland. Both counties are essentially rural in character – and therefore face similar challenges around rural restructuring and diversification. Strabane, with a population in 2001 of nearly 13,500 people, is by far the largest of the case study towns. Once a significant market town and the main shopping and industrial employment centre for its hinterland, the onset of the Troubles, together with the global economic downturn, resulted in the fortunes of the area going into 'freefall'. The County Donegal town of Lifford, with a population of 1,448, is much smaller in size. As was the case in Strabane, the Troubles brought economic decline and employment loss to the area. Both towns are currently experiencing growth; but in the case of Lifford, its proximity to Strabane, the twin towns of Ballybofey/Stranorlar and the rapidly expanding 'Gateway' of Letterkenny has meant that it remains challenged in terms of defining an identity and niche that will attract potential investors and businesses.



The Emergence of Collaboration

In recognition of the many common traits and challenges shared by this inter-jurisdictional micro-region, a wide range of organisations – community, local government, health – have been working together on a cross-border basis, albeit to varying degrees, for many years. While many of the cross-border initiatives and partnerships have – and continue to – focus on the towns of Lifford and Strabane, a large number tend to focus on the whole of Donegal County and Strabane District –



thus ensuring that it is not only these two key settlements that benefit; for example the HEART (Heritage, Environment, Art and Rural Tourism) Project. Initially, much of this cooperation would have been on an informal basis; for while it was recognised that a more formalised and integrated approach on a cross-jurisdictional and cross-agency basis was needed, the commitment and necessary resources to make this a reality have not always been in place. For the respective Councils – Donegal County Council and Strabane District Council – both of which are now actively developing their cross-border agendas, a big challenge has been – and

remains – matching ‘like-with-like’; that is, matching council departments with the same or similar remit and matching personnel with the same or similar job description in two different administrative systems. This challenge applies to all local councils on a North-South basis.

Collaboration in Practice

One organisation which has focused specifically on Lifford-Strabane for most of its lifetime has been the Strabane Lifford Development Commission (SLDC). Established in 1993, the Commission was, in effect, the marriage of two bodies; the Lifford Commission and the Strabane Commission. In establishing itself as a European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), the Strabane Lifford Development Commission could (a) apply for EU regional funding and (b) undertake joint initiatives to the benefit of both towns and/or initiatives which would address the priorities of each town. Between 1993 and 2006, the Commission pumped €25million into a number of development projects in this inter-jurisdictional area; including the Wider Horizons Programme, Outward Bound, the Centre without Walls Project, arts and cultural initiatives, social housing developments and restoration of part of the Strabane Canal. Its current funding is coming to an end and because it is not self-sustainable – as an EEIG it is not intended that it make a profit – the organisation is trapped in an unending cycle of having to source short-term funding based on short-term plans.

Potentiality

The communities of Lifford and Strabane are becoming ‘business saavy’ in terms of moving forward. There is a growing realisation that the area as a whole must ‘think outside the box’, ‘break moulds’ and ‘create new paths of cooperation’. This cross-border area recognises that it needs to jointly market itself as a place to come to live and work – and the message must be positive. Together with tourism development, business linkages centred on the ‘Gateway’ of Letterkenny and Derry/Londonderry are regarded as potential areas of growth in economic terms for this cross-border region. Going forward, there is widespread agreement that all future cross-border projects and partnerships should be made up of a mix of local stakeholders. The emphasis should no longer be put on the communities or Councils in terms of ‘driving’ physical, social, economic, cultural and environmental cooperation. Rather, there is an increasing role to be played by both the private sector and councillors in terms of developing connections and adopting a strategic, cross-border vision in the provision of complementary services.

Cross-Border Collaboration in Kiltyclogher-Cashel/Scribbagh-Garrison-Rossinver

The case study area of Kiltyclogher-Cashel/Scribbagh-Garrison-Rossinver represents the most remote and rural of the case study areas in this report; with each settlement having a population of between 250 and 380 persons. As a result of Partition and the Troubles, the peripherality of this micro-region has been accentuated; and its decline propelled. The road closures during the Troubles not only physically separated this cluster of cross-border settlements, but also severed the social and cultural ties between these communities. Today, the area continues to suffer from a high level of dependence on small-scale agriculture, poor public service provision and a consequent weak demographic structure. It is an area whose traditional manufacturing industries are all but gone and, therefore, the settlements in this area are at risk of becoming dormitory towns and villages for the larger urban settlements in the wider region.

The Emergence of Collaboration

Building on the long-held tradition of neighbour helping neighbour (irrespective of jurisdictional boundaries), the local communities in this micro-



region have been coming together since the early 1990s to formalise their cross-border relationships / partnerships. Old friendships have been rekindled and natural hinterlands restored. Much of the cooperation and collaboration that has taken place is socially-based and socially-driven - but heavily dependent on funding from outside sources (although in many instances, the groups in question wish that this was not actually the case). These bottom-up initiatives range from those with a socio-economic focus to those that have a socio-cultural or environmental focus. For example, the Rossinver-Belleek Partnership has an economic and training focus and is known informally as 'Communities on Line'; the Cross Border Opportunities Project involved Leitrim County Council and Fermanagh Local Strategy Partnership working together to bring potential project partners together on identified local needs and priorities; and the Green Box promotes and markets this first designated cross-border eco-tourism region on the island of Ireland.

Collaboration in Practice

The KiltyCashel Project is wholly dedicated to promoting cross-border and cross-community cooperation through the development of social, economic and cultural capital. Established in 2001, the communities of Kiltyclogher and Cashel recognised that, by working together, they could achieve far more for their respective communities and surrounds than they could by working alone. All activities stem from an identified local need and there is a small dedicated team of staff in place who not only oversee and implement project activities but who, like the Project, have become an integral part of this cross-border community. A lot of the work that has been undertaken by the Project to date has involved increasing the

employability of local people; for example through computer training, job clubs and addressing social and mental health issues. Other areas of activity include tourism development and promotion, cultural celebrations and engaging with the youth of the area. To date, this cross-border body has been involved in over 40 projects, engaged with over 20 agencies and secured over €1.25million in funding for the area; the funding coming from programmes such as LEADER, PEACE and INTERREG. Going forward, strengthening and sustaining state support for endogenous development and promoting collaborative efforts that involve a wider range of stakeholders are essential to the continued growth and development of this micro-region.



Potentiality

There is broad consensus – both at a local and policy level – that the future for this cross-border area is tourism, and in particular eco-tourism, and associated activities. The quality of its landscape – both natural and built – is its core asset; and to date this endogenous potential has been under-developed and under-exploited. In addition, this area is already well-known as a retreat for artists and craft workers – a reputation that has not yet been exploited to its full. There is much potential to promote arts and crafts holidays and training programmes. The strong civic spirit in this cross-border region, together with the high level of community development that has emerged in the past twenty or so years, will be a major strength in moving forward. The communities willingness to engage with other key stakeholders such as local businesses and development agencies, together with the capacity of local community leaders to play an increasingly prominent role in cross-border collaboration and cooperation, will ensure that this cluster of settlements continue to work together to capitalise on the areas ‘potential’.

Cross-Border Collaboration in Glenfarne-Blacklion-Belcoo

The central border area within the Irish Border region is a predominantly rural area, with the majority of the population living in small towns and villages. This third case study area is comprised of the villages of Glenfarne-Blacklion-Belcoo; representing the counties of Leitrim, Cavan and Fermanagh. While the three villages would once have been linked by a narrow-gauge railway, they are now linked by the N16/A4 road and their location on, or near to, the shores of Lough McNea. While not affected by direct road closures during the Troubles, this micro-region did experience economic decline as a result of the installation of customs posts and border patrols. The three villages each currently have a population of approximately 230-300 people and, when considered as one unit, they provide local and



surrounding populations with a good range of services. However, because of administrative and jurisdictional boundaries and restrictions it is not always possible for the residents of these communities to access the service that is in closest proximity to them. The area is characterised by small farms made up of mixed quality land. There are few other employment opportunities locally so the majority of the population tend to commute to the nearby larger urban centres for work; for example Manorhamilton, Carrick-on-Shannon (County Leitrim) and Derrylin, Enniskillen (County Fermanagh).

The Emergence of Collaboration

There is a strong local community spirit within, and generally between, each village. Community and voluntary groups have been coming together to promote inter-generational projects, active ageing groups, arts development and rural transport provision in this micro-region since the early 1990s. Cultural and heritage initiatives have included the Cathal Bhui Festival and the Lough McNea Sculpture Trail, both of which have played a key role in celebrating the history and traditions of the area. There are a number of nationally recognised institutions and initiatives already in place (for example, the Marble Arch Caves, Bréifne, The Green Box) which form a platform for launching and lobbying for increased investment in tourism-related activities – provided that these communities can come together around a joint plan of action. There is no sense that an inter-jurisdictional border still exists between these communities; the two currencies – Euro and Sterling – are, for example, used interchangeably in the villages of Blacklion and Belcoo.



Collaboration in Practice

Increasingly, the initiatives promoted in this area have an educational or economic development focus. Community Connections, working in West Cavan, North Leitrim and West Fermanagh and established in 1991, concentrates on the identified social needs of the area and building social capital with its programme of activities rolled-out on a local, cross-county, cross-border and inter-generational basis. The on-going West Cavan/Fermanagh Economic Development Programme aims to implement a strategic economic development programme in this cross-border area which will redress the high levels of economic and social disadvantage in existence. Focusing specifically on the case study areas, the Lough McNea Tourism Initiative was a three-year funded economy building initiative which centred on tourism development and promotion in this unique landscape. Much of the work undertaken as part of this EU-funded initiative was cross-border in nature and involved community and business sector representatives working together. However, since its conclusion, this micro-region has yet to determine if, and/or how, it will collaborate in the future.

Potentiality

The community groups within this case study area have, in their own right, an abundance of experience, knowledge and skills in local development. While there remains an emphasis on increasing social capital through education and capacity building, there is a growing tendency towards the promotion and roll-out of economic and environmental development programmes; as demonstrated by the

many recent dedicated cross-border initiatives been either council- or enterprise board-led. There is general consensus among all stakeholders in this cross-border micro-region that its future lies in the areas rich heritage and the promotion of this; particularly through eco-tourism programmes. The challenge now is to build on the successes of the Lough McNea Tourism Initiative and ensure that this micro-region remains 'visible' and continues to widen the range of products it has to offer the eco-tourist. However, the community groups in each village have yet to find a 'space' in which they feel confident collaborating with each other on an on-going basis (and which will lead to equity in growth); and until they do so, it will not be possible to (a) negotiate a plan of action for moving forward and (b) agree on a structure for overseeing and driving that plan.

Cross-Border Collaboration in Clones-Lisnaskea-Newtownbutler-Rosslea and Surrounds

The catchment area for this case study includes the towns of Clones in County Monaghan and Lisnaskea in County Fermanagh, each of which has a population of



about 2,500. It also encompasses the adjoining villages of Rosslea and Newtownbutler, as well as the surrounding countryside. The advent of the Border in 1921 posed a number of difficulties for this micro-region; the arbitrary delineation of the Border cutting through traditional parish and community boundaries and dividing farms. Events between the 1950s and 1980s accentuated the difficulties caused by the Border. The areas economy was badly affected by Partition and the Troubles, with Clones being cut off from most of its natural hinterland in County Fermanagh. This micro-region and its local residents suffered considerably as a result of paramilitary violence and an intense

security presence. Rural decline, the contraction of the areas industrial sector and severe cutbacks in public service provision, most notably the closure of the railway lines, exacerbated peripherality and stymied growth in this cross-border area.

The Emergence of Collaboration

As in most areas along the Irish Border, collaboration emerged from the bottom-up and out of a sense of local frustration with the actual and perceived neglect on the part of central government in both jurisdictions. A drive among local communities to redress decline and to promote locally-tailored development initiatives led to the formation of a number of inter-community, cross-border structures during the 1990s; namely the Clones Community Forum and the Sliabh Beagh Partnership. The objective of both networks was to promote and provide local economic and social development; particularly through the valorisation of local assets. The successes of these community-led organisations in promoting community development, inter-cultural celebrations, tourism projects and micro-enterprise development were among the main factors that encouraged a coming-together of the areas three local authorities to form the Clones – Erne East Partnership (CEEP) in 2003.

Collaboration in Practice

The CEEP comprises the elected councillors from Clones Town Council and from the local divisions of Monaghan County Council and Fermanagh District Council. Its linkages with the statutory sector are helping to stimulate top-down agencies to respond to issues that have been articulated from the bottom-up. The Partnership is one of a very small number of bodies that have managed to put in place a working model that coordinates bottom-up and top-down actions on a cross-border basis; although, the functional and temporal differences between local government in both jurisdictions continues to pose difficulties for, and militate against, collaboration. Nevertheless, the Partnership has formulated a multi-sectoral, multi-annual strategic plan and is promoting several projects in community development, skills training, rural tourism and infrastructure development. Activities to date include providing technical support to local groups, community associations and leaders in brokering resources, enhancing public service provision and improving local infrastructure and amenities; establishing a Shadow Youth Partnership to engage second-level students in community development projects; and developing a local website to showcase the potentiality of the area. Moreover, the CEEP actively promotes inclusion in its projects and activities by members of all religious churches and traditions. The Partnership works closely with Border Action, and while it pursues a long-term and strategic approach to development, it has had to rely on short-term and programme-led funding arrangements.



Potentiality

There is a strong sense of optimism locally that bottom-up and partnership-oriented approaches are serving to redress the severe legacies of decline suffered by this area. Since the commencement of the Peace Process, inter-community relations have progressed from being project-led initially to being concerned with a range of economic, social, cultural and environmental issues today. However, there are also very acute concerns locally regarding proposed cutbacks in public service provision, and in particular, the suggested amalgamation of rural primary schools in Northern Ireland. The re-opening of the Ulster Canal is expected to contribute to local economic regeneration; while the promotion of strong bilateral linkages and cooperation between the towns of Clones and Lisnaskea – which have not yet been established – would also serve to promote economic competitiveness.

Cross-Border Collaboration in Castleblayney-Crossmaglen

Castleblayney-Crossmaglen is the most easterly of the five case study areas presented in this report. Castleblayney, with a population of 3,124, is the larger of the two towns in the study area. Located on the N2, this east Monaghan town has benefited from its improved connectivity to Dublin over the past five years. The town now serves as a service and employment centre for the surrounding agricultural area. Crossmaglen is the largest town in South Armagh with a population of 1,459. It is situated 2km north of the Border with the Republic on the B30, between Newry and Carrickmacross. Until recently, Crossmaglen was rather isolated but the accessibility of the town has significantly increased due to the



construction of the M1 between Dublin and Newry. The dominant land use in this largely rural area is agriculture – the town established originally as a trading centre for the surrounding farmers. The current opportunities presented by all-island economic cooperation stand in stark contrast to the situation in both towns prior to the Peace Process. During the height of the Troubles, South Armagh in general, and Crossmaglen in particular, became synonymous with republican paramilitary activity. The area was frequently stereotyped as a haven for lawlessness, smuggling and subversive activity and while many representations of South Armagh were overly negative, the area was the scene of some of the bloodiest

encounters of the Troubles. Despite Partition and a strong state security presence, local people maintained vibrant family, social, community, sporting, cultural and religious linkages across the Irish Border.

The Emergence of Collaboration

The areas relative cultural and religious homogeneity and shared political perspectives have underpinned the development of the main cross-border structures in South Armagh and East Monaghan. Bottom-up and community-led organisations, such as RoSA (Regeneration of South Armagh) and the Castleblayney Enterprise Group, engaged in cross-border projects in the areas of IT training, cultural resource development, youth development and gender equality. These projects were supported through INTERREG and PEACE. In recent years, the areas local authorities have become important drivers of cross-border cooperation projects. Informally, members of the Newry and Mourne District Council, Monaghan County Council and Castleblayney Town Council have been coming together since the early 1990s to discuss relevant cross-border cooperation issues. In 2003, this led to the formal establishment of the Castleblayney South Armagh Partnership (CASA).

Collaboration in Practice

CASA's current priorities for rural development and diversification are spelt out in the *South Armagh / Castleblayney Linkage Development Plan*, which was published in December 2004. The Partnership secured INTERREG IIIA funding and it has spearheaded a number of projects in heritage, angling, cross-border festivals, territorial marketing and economic diversification. The work of CASA is overseen by a Steering Committee which, as well as involving officials and councillors from the three partner councils, also includes representatives from relevant local agencies such as the East Border Region, the Castleblayney Enterprise Centre, Newry & Mourne Enterprise Agency, Monaghan County Enterprise Board, Castleblayney Community Enterprise Ltd., Monaghan Community Network, Monaghan Tourism, Newry & Mourne LEADER and the Ulster Farmers Union. The programme as a whole has greatly enhanced confidence



within this cross-border region; an area that was once characterised by fractured relationships and an overall sense of isolation. The success of the cross-border programmes can be attributed to multiple factors including appointing a full-time officer, addressing identified local priorities/needs and establishing a true working partnership based on trust.

Potentiality

This micro-region has a long-established track record in cross-border cooperation and over recent years it has successfully formalised collaborative structures that bring together a broad range of actors and agencies. Thus, there is the potential to lever supports and to target resources towards specific local development needs and potentials. While current structures are broadly-based, funding arrangements are less than satisfactory and the short-term nature of current arrangements detracts from long-term and vision planning. The area has much to offer in terms of tourism – natural beauty (Lough Muckno, Lough Ross and the Ring of Gullion), Irish legends and over forty golf courses within a one-hour radius. These attributes are not currently being exploited to the extent they could be in terms of attracting visitors to the area. However, there is widespread agreement that the area should not pin its future economic development on tourism alone as this is a market in flux. Rather the economic base of the area needs to be broadened to include the knowledge economy. In this respect, the area is well positioned to avail of spin-off benefits accruing from the enhanced connectivity and collaboration between the ‘twin cities’ of Newry and Dundalk and the on-going improvements to transport connectivity on the east coast of the island of Ireland.

Observations of Cross-Border Cooperation in Other Selected Areas

Truagh-Aughnacloy on the Monaghan-Tyrone border and Pettigo-Tullyhummon-Kesh on the Donegal-Fermanagh border are located in close proximity to the previously mentioned case study areas. Both these cross-border areas, and in particular Pettigo-Tullyhummon-Kesh, have actively pursued an agenda of cooperation and collaboration since the Peace Process came into effect; both areas have been successful in drawing down funds in support of social, economic, cultural and environmental initiatives; and in both cases, this activity has been driven by the community and voluntary sector. It is at this point, however, that their paths diverge. The cross-border communities of Truagh and Aughnacloy are still hungry for further collaboration; it has become an integral part of who they are and it is ‘real’. On the other hand, within the cross-border area of Pettigo-Tullyhummon-Kesh, the level of activity has fallen off; despite the local cross-body partnership – Association for the Development of Pettigo and Tullyhummon (ADoPT) – still being regarded as a key organisation in the area. Of the three settlements in this cluster, only Kesh is experiencing any growth.

Truagh-Aughnacloy

The parish of Truagh (including the villages of Ballyoisin, Carrickroe, Clara and Mullan) and the town of Aughnacloy are different in many ways: scale, make-up, age-profile, confidence levels and, albeit not to the same extent as in the past, commitment to cross-border cooperation. The community of Truagh has long advocated the need for cross-border cooperation on social, economic, cultural and environmental grounds – and it is only in recent years that it has started to bring the community of Aughnacloy with it on this journey. But rather than leading to an imbalance in this cross-border partnership, the ‘coming together’ of both areas has led to a very interesting dynamic whereby both communities find themselves on a path of discovery, learning and exchange. While



decimated by the impact of the Troubles (socially and economically), the reopening of the border roads has meant that this cross-border community is now benefiting from its strategic location on the main North-South / East-West road transport corridors (i.e. the Derry-Dublin and Sligo-Enniskillen-Armagh routes). Cross-border initiatives to date have included rural transport and broadband schemes, a cross-border schools project with an emphasis on joint programmes of study and their delivery through ICT; and, in terms of capital build, the development of the Blackwater Valley Community Learning, Cultural, ICT and Peace Centre which addresses issues of high levels of illiteracy, low educational attainment and socio-cultural conflict - all of which are a barrier to attracting investment to this micro-region.

Pettigo-Tullyhummon-Kesh

The small rural villages of Pettigo-Tullyhummon-Kesh are experiencing mixed fortunes in terms of balanced development and growth. A report in the *Irish Times* on 3 October 2001 noted that "In the Border Town of Pettigo, people feel they face the worst of both worlds, north and south. They have no Bus Eireann service, the banks have pulled out and they have no doctor's surgery of their own". This cross-border area was badly affected by the Troubles and the ensuing road closures. Natural hinterlands in counties Donegal, Fermanagh and Tyrone were severed resulting in social and economic decline; services were withdrawn, investment



declined, unemployment rose and emigration became common. In response to this, the communities have activated themselves and the area has benefited from investment by the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the PEACE programme. The cross-border agenda has to date been driven by local politicians and, as a result, developmental work with the various stakeholders has become an important part of the process of cross-border cooperation. Connections were created within this micro-region but it is only now that real community engagement is starting to take place. Politically, this case study is a success. Strong links were developed between Donegal County Council and Fermanagh

District Council; thus nurturing a bottom-up approach. The cross-border villages of Pettigo and Tullyhummon have benefited from a strong and active community development organisation, the Association for the Development of Pettigo and Tullyhummon (ADoPT); its objective being the social and economic development of this cross-border community. It has been involved in a number of environmental initiatives, FAS Community Employment (CE) schemes and the provision of services to meet local needs. The Kesh Development Association has been in existence for much longer; yet many of the issues and challenges it was set up to address then still apply today. In recent years, the Association has been involved in a number of capital build projects, all of which have been aimed at the physical improvement of the area – through environmental improvements and the development of a marina on the old quay.

Potentiality

The experiences of Truagh-Aughnacloy and Pettigo-Tullyhummon-Kesh demonstrate that project funding can have a long-lasting impact on upskilling and community confidence which are essential ingredients for the sustainable development of settlements. However, capital expenditure on new or improved facilities does not automatically lead to economic development. Both micro-region 'clusters' continue to face economic development issues going forward; the solution to which is based on (a) the development of identified endogenous potentials and (b) exchequer investment which is both flexible and creative so as to address the viability and other challenges facing these border communities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Enabling Cross-Border Cooperation

The evidence garnered from these case studies, together with observations based on Truagh-Aughnacloy and Pettigo-Tullyhummon-Kesh, show that despite some local difficulties, cross-border collaboration is working and that a culture of collaboration is emerging among stakeholders on both sides of the Border. Community and voluntary groups have been energised as a result of the Peace Process, and support bodies such as Border Action, the regional cross-border networks, LEADER Local Action Groups and Area/District Partnerships have played an important role in facilitating and enabling bottom-up development, as well as dialogue between the endogenous and exogenous actors. Communication between local government bodies, North and South, has improved considerably – despite cross-border spatial planning lacking a common institutional framework. Local authorities generally take account of each others' objectives and consult with one another more frequently; cross-border projects provide a forum through which interfacing can take place. Thus, cross-border collaboration is becoming an integral element of local government and community development practice; with the agreed objectives of:

- **I**dentifying mutual benefits for the participants involved
- **D**eveloping connectivity on the basis of socio-economic development
- **E**mphasising relationship building and understanding of each other
- **A**dopting a common sense and strategic approach.

The main aim of cross-border collaboration is to reduce, and ultimately to eliminate, the significance of a border as a barrier to economic development, social cohesion and/or environmental conservation. It has a role to play – through the Peace Process – in addressing societal divisions and also in enhancing the capacity of communities in the Irish Border region to advance socio-economic development. The focus of cross-border cooperation must, therefore, be on securing mutual benefits for all stakeholders involved; pragmatically described as meeting the needs of people “on the ground”. In the context of the Irish Border region, this has involved the mobilisation of local communities in local decision-making, the development of local amenities and promotion of rural tourism and the acceleration of infrastructural development and connectivity between both jurisdictions. More recently, increasing emphasis is being placed on widening the collaborative stakeholder-base; that is embedding national and regional agencies and the business community in cross-border initiatives. The range of areas covered by cross-border programmes is also being extended; thus reflecting changing concerns and issues – training, conflict resolution and heritage and enterprise development. In moving forward, it is important to continue to recognise the role of the community and voluntary sector in cross-border cooperation and invest in building their capacity to manage

“The time has come to stop talking about cross-border development – but to actively engage in it. And the frameworks are currently being put in place to facilitate this”.

Local Government Official, Ireland

projects; particularly in the context of the changing emphasis of funding programmes. Both governments need, therefore, to ensure that communities are adequately resourced to grow and sustain current projects and develop new ones in an innovative and creative manner.

Adopting a micro-level approach to cross-border collaboration optimises the opportunities for mutual benefits – as evidenced, to varying degrees, in all of the case studies. For example, cooperation has led to:

- Improvements in relations between neighbours from different political backgrounds
- Greater cultural diversity
- Enhanced local amenities, facilities, community venues and resource centres
- Improved, and in some instances, new local services
- Improved dialogue and shared information between local authorities, leading to joint projects.



An emerging cross-cutting theme across all of the case study areas is the issue of service provision. An overview of a range of services – banking, doctor’s surgery, post office, A&E, public library, fire services and second level education – demonstrates that a key challenge facing the Irish Border region going forward is the clear anomaly in respect of being able to access the closest available service irrespective of jurisdiction. While a greater analysis is needed of service provision and accessibility in the Irish Border region, the tentative findings from this short review make a strong case for service provision to be based on

proximity rather than on one’s jurisdiction of residence/nationality. The provision of quality and accessible services, together with community and infrastructure initiatives, are an essential element in increasing the potentiality of these, and other, cross-border micro-regions.

Yet, while efforts at initiating and progressing cross-border cooperation and collaboration at the micro-regional level have been extensive (and generally successful), local actors continue to face a number of barriers. Most notable in this respect are the:

- The changing focus of some, and the imminent cessation of other, funding programmes
- The increased levels of ‘red tape’ involved in the drawing down and accounting for monies received through various sources
- Disparities in respect of local government remits and responsibilities and variations in approaches to public service delivery.

Greater collaboration between statutory agencies, North and South, and where feasible an alignment of functions, would ‘facilitate’ a more favourable institutional context for the development of micro-regions, the roll-out of programmes (and preferably the funding of projects for a period in excess of three years) and the enhancement of public service delivery. Through collaboration, the range of resources, common knowledge and expertise available for project development and spatial planning are maximised; and this, in turn, contributes to improved territorial cohesion and all-island competitiveness.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As evidenced through the micro-regions profiled in this report, there is much good practice emanating from the Irish Border region on which to build. Previous cross-border initiatives – whether successful or not – have all informed the process of inter-jurisdictional and cross-community cooperation. The case studies highlighted in this report demonstrate good practice in, among other things:

- Establishing a gender balanced board of management: the KiltyCashel Project
- Recognising all stakeholders: the Castleblayney South Armagh Partnership
- Taking the initiative: the Strabane Lifford Development Commission
- Putting the emphasis on local needs: the Strabane Lifford Development Commission and the Cross Border Opportunities Project
- Engaging in evidence-informed practices and responding to local opinion: the West Cavan/Fermanagh Development Project and the KiltyCashel Project
- Developing trust: Community Connections.

While each cross-border micro-region is distinctive in terms of issues, challenges and opportunities, all of the above examples of good practice are transferable processes and procedures which can be adapted to suit local needs and potential. By learning from the experiences of others, future partnerships will save time, energy, effort and expense in the initial stages of set-up and throughout the implementation of area-based approaches to development. The experiences from all the case study areas underscore the importance of local collaborative governance; a strong bottom-up orientation and an emphasis that valorises local assets and resources contributes to the effective delivery of projects. The case studies demonstrate the relevance and potential of the micro-region as a spatial unit in strategic planning and project development and they point to the need for policy approaches to be supportive of inter-jurisdictional micro-regional development and polycentric networking between rural communities.

Based on their vast experiences, the interviewees and workshop participants have put forward a number of recommendations as to how the processes of cooperation and collaboration can become more strategic in their focus and effective on the ground. This includes the preparation of cross-border integrated plans for identified micro-regions, improved vertical and horizontal integration between spatial policies North and South and improved North-South and East-West infrastructural links. Collaborative vision-planning involving local government, planning authorities and infrastructure providers from both jurisdictions is essential in redressing the very significant gap in transport and communications that currently exist between border areas and the rest of the Island. There is a growing awareness across all sectors of the important role that regional and spatial policies now play in the development of both jurisdictions. A step-change is taking place whereby joined-up thinking and planning, which leads to the creation of a better 'fit' between different border cooperation activities across geographical scales as well as increased connectivity (infrastructure, telecommunications, energy) and critical mass, is evolving into inter-jurisdictional plans and collaborative frameworks.

In addition, a number of practical 'soft linkages' are being promoted, including the development of a civil society forum as promoted by political leaders under the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement, 1998 and the St. Andrew's Agreement, 2006; a cross-border councillors forum – as part of the already existing British-Irish Council; and the development of business networks at micro-region level (possibly based

around clusters of micro-enterprises). By networking, groups and associations can develop 'common causes' and can find solutions that would not be possible were a group to pursue an isolationist approach. Such forums would facilitate the exchange of information and provide spaces for joint cooperative action – not only North-South but also on an East-West basis.

Cross-border cooperation and collaboration faces challenging times ahead. Funding programmes are changing direction while some schemes are coming to an end. With the changing number and scale of funding programmes supporting cross-border cooperation, there are increasing calls for central government, North and South, to commit further resources to the development and growth of cross-border relationships. Such resources – primarily financial – should support, among others, the establishment of the aforementioned Networks and Forums. Any such Exchequer programme should be creative and flexible so that it not only responds to the constituent base applying for funding (whether community, private sector or local government) but also takes account of the sustained investment needs of the area and/or organisation in question.

There is a huge commitment to cross-border and cross-community cooperation and collaboration throughout the Irish Border region; with community and voluntary groups, business leaders, politicians, some local authorities and a number of



regional and national bodies – both North and South – demonstrating huge commitment to micro-regional development and cross-border collaboration. Rural communities, development agencies and policy makers are increasingly advocating that the sustainable development of rural areas cannot be advanced by trying to compete with urban centres to attract external capital – particularly as globalisation gathers pace. Instead, sustainable rural development requires a valorisation of local assets and the implementation of interventions to unleash the development potential (recognised and latent) of rural resources. For the Irish Border region, this necessitates working on an inter-jurisdictional basis. There is an

increasing awareness that future collaborative projects must be strategic in their focus, address local needs and 'fit' with wider policy and regional/local plans. The realisation of balanced development between regions requires exogenous interventions – in particular from local, regional and central government and other state agencies (including all-island bodies such as *InterTradeIreland* and the North South Ministerial Council).

As this report shows, current projects and structures represent more than a bank of knowledge and personal commitment; they are the foundation on which more broadly-based and better-supported frameworks for economic development, social inclusion and peace and reconciliation can truly be built. Partnership approaches, based on collaborative local governance and local flexibility, are essential in enabling micro-regions in border areas to overcome their peripherality and develop their potentiality.

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