

### A Word from the Chairman, Dr. Tim O'Connor



We are very pleased to be presenting another edition of *Borderlands*. It is now over ten years since the first conversations took place which would lead to the establishment of the International Centre for Local and Regional

Development (ICLRD). The rationale for bringing together the diverse grouping of stakeholders and practitioners involved – or simply interested – in the broad regional development and spatial planning space from an island and international perspective remains as compelling today as it was then over a decade ago. The ICLRD has become a valued part of the architecture of the island of Ireland in terms of the policy response, nationally, regionally and locally, to the challenges of planning for a better future. The conflict in Northern Ireland, which was the initial reason for the coming our way of the “Two Wise Men from the East” (Francois Vigier and John Driscoll, then based at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and heavily involved in Eastern Europe), was a major part of the focus of our work at the outset. The journey in that regard of course continues, and the controversy in Northern Ireland over recent months around flags and symbols simply underlines – in a graphic way – that peace-building is indeed a marathon, not a sprint.

Since the ICLRD was established as an organisation of its time, aimed at providing a forum which in a bespoke way addressed the issues facing regions and communities coming out of conflict, we have sought over the years to ensure that it has retained that ability to evolve with the context it sought to address and serve. I have often recalled the memorable observation of our Department of Environment, Community and Local Government colleague, Niall Cussen, when first briefed about the thinking behind the proposed establishment of the ICLRD that “it was the answer to a question not yet asked”. We have tried along the way to ensure that as the “Question” evolved, so have we in terms of the Answers we have sought to develop.

And so now, as we gratefully acknowledge the award of the latest round of INTERREG IVA funding from the Special EU Programmes Body, we look forward to the next iteration of our work and contribution. Under CroSPlan II, the ICLRD will further develop its executive training and animation programme; continue to hold workshops, seminars and conferences on topical issues as they relate to spatial planning and local and regional development; map and analyse the results emanating from Census 2011 in both Ireland and Northern Ireland; and investigate the potential for progressing the shared services agenda in frontline and specialised services in the Irish Border Region. As always, we rely hugely on a whole community of people and organisations whom we seek to support. Our goal has been and always will be to assist and be relevant – and to do that, we remain in constant dialogue with our stakeholders about ensuring that our work is indeed aligned with their needs. In that regard, our focus in the coming months, among other things, will be how we can support the huge changes which are going to be faced by Councils in Northern Ireland in the context of the next phase of the Review of Public Administration (RPA), including in particular those which have a border dimension. In terms of the South, in addition to working with those County Councils affected by the RPA, we look forward also to making our contribution to the challenges which are emerging around the reform of local and regional government, including the movement towards a comprehensive system of Municipal Districts which will integrate town and county governance; the greater emphasis being placed on economic development and enterprise support; and the shift towards local funding of local services through initiatives such as a local property tax.

More broadly, the ICLRD wants to remain a space which is there to be drawn on by the two Administrations (our continued thanks to colleagues in the Joint Secretariat of the North South Ministerial Council for their sustained interest and support), the local and regional authorities, the academic community, and the NGO and private sectors in terms of support and capacity – and not least a

place where people can come together to think through the things which are changing, or the things which are not changing at all, or not fast enough. As we make our way through this decade of powerful centenaries, and grapple with the issues they throw up, such a place will continue, we hope, to be essential. We look forward to serving and being of value in any way we can.

Before closing, can I also mention two other projects close to my heart – the Gathering Ireland 2013, the Advisory Board of which I have the honour to chair and the Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013, on whose Corporate Engagement Team I sit – two iconic and positive initiatives on the island of Ireland, and both of which I hope will be huge successes. The Gathering is aimed at deepening the engagement between Ireland and its global community and, as I write, over 2,500 individual Gatherings have registered with our website, [www.thegatheringireland.com](http://www.thegatheringireland.com). The City of Culture project is an exciting demonstration both of the transforming power of the arts and of the resilience of a community that has shown itself to be truly “LegenDerry” in its capacity to tackle the legacy of the past head-on, and begin in earnest the journey

toward, in the words of its Great Son, Seamus Heaney, the ‘Far Side of Revenge’. We hope to see a huge number of visitors from around the world coming to Ireland this year – both parts – to participate in both the Gathering and City of Culture. In particular, our hope is that the legacy of both projects will be a deepening of the understanding between us here on the island of Ireland, as the ‘Keepers of the Home Place’, and our people from both parts of the island who are scattered around the world but who continue to cherish the bonds which bind us all together. These two flagship initiatives are of critical relevance and importance as we on the island of Ireland seek both to complete the journey of economic recovery, and reinforce our shared commitment to peace and reconciliation. And in respect of both of those challenges also, the ICLRD looks forward to playing our full part.

**Dr. Tim O’Connor**

**Chairman**

**International Centre for Local and Regional  
Development**