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Retrospect and Prospects for Cross-Border Cooperation on the Historic Environment

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INTRODUCTION

This paper identifies opportunities for cross-border cooperation on the historic environment on the island of Ireland. The policy context to support such cooperation is relatively favourable. For example, the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation for the Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland* endorses the 'careful conservation and enhancement of shared natural and cultural heritage assets' on a cross-border basis (DRD and DOEHLG, 2013, p.28), thus providing a 'strategic entry point to further cooperation under the umbrella of spatial planning' (McClelland, 2016, p.96). In the past decade, several research reports have focused attention on heritage-related issues across the island, including the survival of thatched structures and future training needs in traditional building craft skills (Consarc Conservation Architects *et al*., 2005; NHTG, 2009). These initiatives explicitly recognised the merits of a cross-border and all-island approach to addressing shared challenges for mutual benefit.

However, the prospects for a strategic approach to cooperation in this space are relatively underexplored. No sustained focus is evident on the historic environment to compare with the in-depth work on shared services, evidence-informed planning and rural regeneration, amongst other topics (see, for example, ICLRD, 2006; Creamer *et al*., 2009; Peel *et al*., 2011). Recent changes to the structure of public administration in Northern Ireland make this as opportune moment to explore the opportunities for cooperation, particularly given the 'alignment of operations occurring between both jurisdictions' (Rafferty and Lloyd, 2014, p.13). The uncertain political climate following the UK's decision to leave the EU (henceforth Brexit) further reinforces the necessity for the local heritage sector to collaborate on a cross-border basis on emerging and recurring challenges.

WHY HERITAGE MATTERS FOR CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION?

There are several compelling arguments for a sharper focus on the historic environment in cross-border cooperation initiatives:

- Heritage diplomacy

Heritage is important to our sense of identity and has the capacity to bring people together and drive them apart, with contestation and cooperation essentially representing 'two sides of the same coin' (Winter, 2015). The growing body of literature on 'heritage diplomacy', 'border heritage' and 'heritage beyond borders' attests to the increasing emphasis being placed on the role of heritage in diplomatic relations between peoples and states (Winter, 2015; Prokkola and Lois, 2016; Clarke, 2017). For example, heritage can play a constructive role in reconciliation and the mediation of conflict within Northern Ireland through facilitating the renegotiation of problematic local histories while pluralising existing identity constructs (Breen *et al*., 2015). Additionally, cross-border conversations can conceivably foster shared understanding of the past and its contemporary resonances while contributing towards maintaining a 'thin' border on the island post-Brexit (McClelland, 2016).

- Cross-cutting impact

Heritage has impact in a range of public policy areas and is regularly mobilised within regeneration and place making initiatives. Moreover, its economic contribution is routinely promoted in relation to cultural tourism and this aspect features prominently in reports underlining the economic value of the historic environment on the island (Ecorys and Fitzpatrick Consultants, 2012; Eftec and RSM McClure Watters, 2012). None of the North South Implementation Bodies specifically focuses on heritage. However, the crosscutting nature of the discussion and suggestions below evidences its relevancy to cross-border organisations, including Waterways Ireland, InterTradeIreland and Tourism Ireland.

- Shared heritage

The built heritage on the island of Ireland essentially represents a shared history and common resource with distinct regional and other variations based on a diversity of historical, cultural, economic and even geological factors independent of jurisdictional borders. Indeed, the legislative and institutional basis for heritage conservation emerged from a common root in the *Irish Church Act* of 1869, which included provisions for the safeguarding of what were termed 'national monuments', such as disused churches, high crosses and other ecclesiastical structures (Fry, 2003). The treatment and interpretation of that shared heritage, therefore, is a common concern enriched by the ongoing development of collaborative perspectives.

LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

The principal historic environment legislation currently operating in Ireland and Northern Ireland are shown in Figure 1, while the distribution of certain conservation functions across central and local government is indicated in Figure 2. Jurisdictional divergences are apparent in the location of two critical functions: inventorying and designation[1]. Firstly, inventorying is foundational to the management of the historic environment as inventories provide the resource from which the state selects and confers official heritage protections (Council of Europe, 1985). Secondly, the recognition and official designation of something as heritage signifies its perceived value to society and typically determines what is worth keeping in the management of changing urban and rural landscapes.

Insofar as jurisdictional divergences are concerned, several points are worth making in contextualising Figure 2:

- The recent devolution of planning powers to local councils in Northern Ireland has diluted the monopoly previously held by the Department of the Environment (DOE) since the mid-1970s, in the process bringing the balance of heritage competences between central and local government into closer alignment on both sides of the border.

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[1] Divergent terminology denotes different categories of heritage in Northern Ireland and Ireland. For example, 'listed building' and 'protected structure' represent equivalent terms.

▪ However, local councils in Ireland retain a greater degree of autonomy over the historic environment than their counterparts across the border, principally due to the reserved powers of local councillors in relation to the inclusion of properties on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) via local development plans.

▪ Public administration reforms in Northern Ireland have created a degree of fragmentation in the departmental location of key powers, now shared between the Department for Communities (DFC) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). In contrast, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA) in Ireland oversees a triumvirate of state services exercising the equivalent functions, albeit the Office of Public Works is responsible for National Monuments in State care and National Historic Properties.

▪ Alignment rather than divergence has occurred in relation to the decanting of heritage agencies from departments with responsibility for planning. Thus, the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) oversees strategic planning and policy development in Northern Ireland, minus the heritage functions previously retained by the DOE. This essentially mirrors changes previously implemented in Ireland at the turn of the decade.

▪ Finally, no equivalent organisation to the Heritage Council exists in Northern Ireland. Equally, the National Trust (Northern Ireland region) and Heritage Lottery Fund, both underpinned by legislation, have no counterparts operating at a similar scale in Ireland.

Figure 1: Principal Historic Environment Legislation in Ireland and Northern Ireland

	Ireland	Northern Ireland
Architectural heritage	Planning and Development Act 2000 Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) and Historic Monuments (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1999	Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
Historic monuments / archaeology	National Monuments (Amendment) Act 2004	Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
Landscape and other	Heritage Act 1995	Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985

(Source: Author, 2017).

Figure 2: Distribution of Certain Historic Environment Inventorying and Designatory Functions across Central and Local Government in Ireland and Northern Ireland

	Ireland			Northern Ireland	
	DAHRRGA			DFC	DAERA
	National Inventory of Architectural Heritage	**National Monuments Service**	**National Parks & Wildlife Service**	**Historic Environment Division**	**Northern Ireland Environment Agency**
Central Government	Protected Structures (invent & recomm only)	Historic Monuments (invent & desig)	National Parks (invent & desig)	Listed Buildings (invent & desig) Historic Monuments (invent & design) Historic Parks etc. (invent & desig)	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (invent & desig) National Parks (invent & desig)
Local Government	Protected Structures (desig) Architectural Conservation Areas (invent & desig)			Conservation Areas (invent & desig) Areas of Townscape / Village Character (invent & desig) Building Preservation Notices (desig)2	

(Source: Author, 2017)

PAST CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION ON THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Cross-border linkages have traditionally existed between organisations focused on the historic environment on the island of Ireland, most visibly in civil society where past cooperation manifested in joint events and publications (see, for example, Garner, 1978). In part, this reflects the deliberate definitional fluidity of several key organisations whose defined geographic boundaries of operation do not mirror jurisdictional borders, including the Irish Georgian Society (IGS) and the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society (UAHS). Moreover, influential people in the development of the local conservation movement, whose interests and networks extended across the island and elsewhere, were instrumental in shaping a positive history of cooperation during the twentieth century.

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2 Note that local councils in Northern Ireland also have the power of 'local listing'.

For the purposes of this discussion, past and ongoing cross-border cooperation is categorised into five broad thematic areas:

1) <u>Professional bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and cross-border networks</u>

Numerous heritage organisations, networks and professional bodies operate or cooperate on an all-island and/or cross-border basis, including, but not limited to, the following:

- International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Ireland
- The Heritage Council
- Irish Walled Towns Network
- Institute of the Archaeologists of Ireland
- Building Limes Forum Ireland
- Irish Landmark Trust
- Follies Trust
- Foyle Civic Trust
- Ulster Architectural Heritage Society
- Irish Georgian Society
- Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) Ireland
- An Taisce

2) <u>Private sector interaction and the provision of commercial services on a cross-border basis</u>

Individual consultants and professional practices (including architects, surveyors, historians, engineers etc.), contractors, craftspeople and materials suppliers routinely provide goods and services across the island. The IGS's *Traditional Building Skills Register*, UAHS's *Directory of Traditional Building Skills* and the National Heritage Training Group's (NHTG) *Skills Needs Analysis of the Built Heritage Sector in Ireland* evidence such commercial interactions on a cross-border basis.

3) <u>Representatives on statutory advisory councils, boards and committees</u>

Many individuals historically traversed the border to serve on boards, committees and advisory councils such as the Northern Ireland Historic Buildings and Monuments Councils, the Heritage Council and the Irish Architectural Archive. Important figures in the local conservation movement also held prominent positions in organisations specifically mandated to progress cross-border cooperation in a number of thematic areas, most notably Charles Brett, the founder-chairman of the UAHS in 1967 and the first chair of the International Fund for Ireland from 1986-1989 (Harte, 2013).

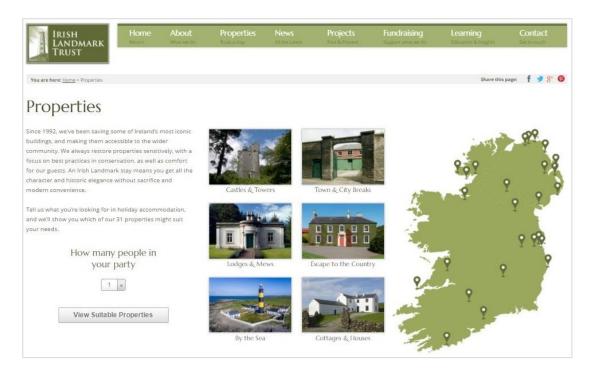4) <u>Conservation projects and other initiatives</u>

Numerous conservation projects and other initiatives have included cross-border elements. In addition to those referenced earlier, notable examples include the cross-border traditional building skills training element of the Mourne Homestead Scheme (managed by the Mourne Heritage Trust), the Great Lighthouses of Ireland all-island tourism initiative (developed by the Commissioners of Irish Lights), and the Foyle Landscape Project 2011-2013 (managed by the

Foyle Civic Trust). Furthermore, the number of physical conservation projects undertaken by organisations operating on an all-island basis has grown substantially in the last two decades. By way of illustration (see Figure 3), the Irish Landmark Trust's portfolio of historic buildings converted into holiday accommodation expanded considerably since its creation in 1992.

5) Joint governance arrangements for cultural heritage sites

Taking a broader perspective on heritage and cultural landscapes, the longstanding arrangements between Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Cavan County Council concerning the management of the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark is a pertinent example of shared cross-border governance structures involving local authorities (McClelland and Driscoll, 2010).

Figure 3: Screenshot of the Irish Landmark Trusts Website Showing Location of Completed Conservation Projects
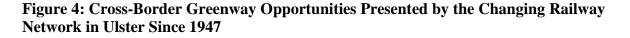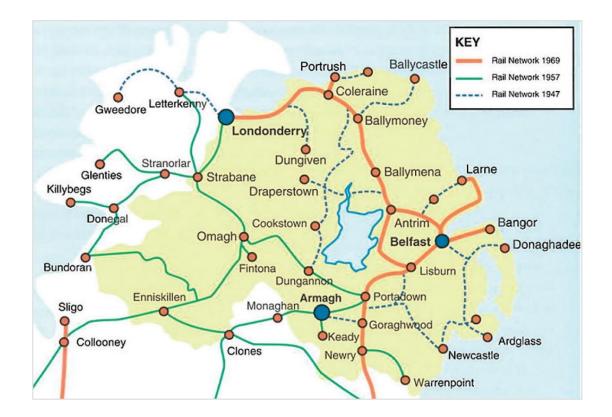

FUTURE COOPERATION OPPORTUNITIES ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

The previous section provided a selection of past and ongoing interactions concerning the historic environment, which, taken together, represent a significant amount of cross-border activity. Nonetheless, individuals and organisations largely advanced these initiatives on an informal, piecemeal, and project-by-project basis, rather than emerging from an overarching strategic approach or highly institutionalised setting. The four thematic areas identified below offer scope to progress cross-border cooperation in a more coordinated manner.

- Shared digital platforms

Technological developments have superseded the static nature of paper-based heritage inventories in recent years, with many inventories now web based, GIS-mapped and fully searchable from home (McKeague and Thomas, 2016). In 2013, Cooney (2013, p.68) argued that digital technologies could readily link heritage inventories in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Heritage Council's *Heritage Maps* spatial data viewer has partially achieved this aim, drawing together a comprehensive range of cross-border heritage-related datasets on the island of Ireland. However, Heritage Maps represents a third party mapping of existing datasets rather than the sort of shared digital platform increasingly seen elsewhere, such as that jointly developed by heritage agencies in Scotland and Wales (McKeague24340 and Thomas, 2016). Indeed, free and open-source platforms such as the Arches Heritage Inventory and Management System can potentially network disparate heritage inventories fragmented across central and local government, including on a cross-border basis (Carlisle and Lee, 2013).[3]

Figure 4: Cross-Border Greenway Opportunities Presented by the Changing Railway Network in Ulster Since 1947

(Source: Railways Taskforce, 2000)

- Strategic infrastructure projects

The development of redundant railway lines and canal towpaths for greenways and cycling/walking routes is a means of conserving the historic environment while providing tourism and transport infrastructure (see Figure 4). For example, their creation may involve the reuse of old canal stores, lock houses, railway stations and other structures, in the process generating economic activity to pay for their continued upkeep, while attracting additional high-spending tourists to new or existing visitor attractions nearby (Lumsdon, 2000). Such developments are already proceeding on the island of Ireland as exemplified by the Ulster Canal Greenway and the proposed North West Greenways Network (SEUPB, 2016). However, potential exists to expand this network further in the Irish border region with an added emphasis on the promotion of heritage as an integral component (McClelland, 2014).

- Cultural heritage tourism

Heritage is a critical component of cultural tourism and the historic environment regularly features in the marketing and other promotional activities of tourist agencies. Indeed, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board provided substantial financial assistance to heritage-led regeneration projects in Derry~Londonderry under their 'Walled City Signature Project' (NIEA, 2010). However, the dates of the largest heritage-focused annual events, Heritage Week in Ireland (usually last week in August) and the European Heritage Open Days in Northern Ireland (usually every second weekend in September), are not currently synchronised. This represents a clear opportunity for closer collaboration in the future. Additionally, the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018 offers further scope for cross-border cooperation, particularly given its emphasis on shared cultural heritage.

- Traditional building skills

Traditional building skills are fundamental to the maintenance of historic resources yet the heritage sector typically experiences critical shortages in the supply of those with appropriate training and experience (Molloy & Associates, 2015). The National Heritage Training Group's 2009 *Skills Needs Analysis of the Built Heritage Sector in Ireland* emphasised the importance of adopting a cross-border approach to tackling skills deficits through coordinated action and partnerships. Recently, the principal heritage agencies in England, Scotland and Wales, in addition to the Construction Industry Training Board, signed a 'Strategic Skills Partnership Agreement' aimed at sharing 'innovation, best practice and ideas' (Welsh Historic Environment Service, 2017). A similarly high-level approach is required on the island of Ireland to generate economics of scale in training provision and address the long-term skills needs of the sector.

Furthermore, continued uncertainty over freedom of movement issues in future UK-EU relations is a cause for concern as the 'two way exchange of expertise and labour is extremely important' to the heritage sector (Heritage Alliance, 2017). In particular, the policies adopted post-Brexit at the only prospective land frontier between the UK and EU will have potentially far-reaching consequences for cross-border interactions. The Heritage Alliance's *Brexit and Heritage Briefing* provides valuable insights into the possible implications for the heritage sector in England, with some applicability to the rest of the UK. A similar focus would be welcome on the island of Ireland.

OTHER COMMON CHALLENGES

Other challenges include the interlinked issues of public participation and representativeness. For instance, the changing complexion of the population in both jurisdictions in terms of religious affiliation, age, nationality and other socio-economic characteristics, raises questions about the representativeness of existing designations and 'whose heritage' is being conserved. Indeed, following research in three small Irish towns, Parkinson *et al*. (2016, p.261) concluded that heritage agencies should 'more effectively take account of non-expert values and priorities in heritage and conservation decision-making'. Transforming public participatory processes to ensure greater representativeness is a critical challenge for policymakers in the future management of the historic environment.

Two recent initiatives by Historic England point the way forward in this regard. Firstly, 'Enriching the List' is a virtual volunteering project allowing the online sharing of images and information pertaining to protected historic places in England, thereby facilitating a continuous two-way conversation with the public. Another crowdsourcing exercise recently launched, 'Pride of Place', asks people to identify places relevant to LGBTQ heritage and history on an interactive online map (Historic England, 2017). These examples neatly illustrate the use of digital technology to engage the public with a view to improving our understanding of places, while promoting inclusivity and reflecting the full diversity of the population.

Funding remains another critical issue, particularly as heritage agencies experienced substantial budget reductions over the last decade. However, potential exists for mutual learning on the contrasting approaches adopted to funding the historic environment. For instance, the predominant grant-based model for conservation projects in Northern Ireland includes the impactful example of the Heritage Lottery Fund, whereas the use of tax incentives and grants is commonplace in Ireland. Community shares, crowdfunding and other innovative mechanisms merit further exploration, especially in border areas where the possible loss of funding from Europe would be most acutely felt. The Buildings (Built Heritage) at Risk projects operated by the UAHS and An Taisce in Northern Ireland and Ireland respectively offer further scope for collaborative perspectives on funding and regeneration strategies.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper makes the case for enhanced cross-border cooperation on the historic environment on the island of Ireland. It briefly sets out the institutional location of key conservation functions on both sides of the border, outlines past and ongoing cooperation successes, and explores future cooperation opportunities under four thematic areas: shared digital platforms; strategic infrastructure projects; cultural heritage tourism, and; traditional building skills. The paper also references common challenges pertaining to public participation, the representativeness of heritage designations and funding in the border region.

Although this paper sketches out a possible research and action agenda relevant to a range of organisations, it is not prescriptive in terms of future implementation, which remains a critical element requiring further elaboration. Questions pertinent to the prospects for cross-border

cooperation in this space include the role of existing North South Implementation Bodies and the North South Ministerial Council. For instance, does a strategic approach to cooperation necessarily require a dedicated cross-border body to oversee it? Agreements between principal government departments and agencies are undoubtedly valuable in progressing cooperation, but are they sustainable in the long-term given the changes that inevitably occur over time in key personnel, political priorities and budgets? Whereas public bodies and others can seize short-term opportunities like that presented by the European Year of Cultural Heritage, such governance issues merit further consideration in constructing a long-term approach to cross-border cooperation on the historic environment.

This Briefing Paper is based on a presentation given by the author at the UAHS/IGS 'Conservation without Frontiers' Summer School in Armagh and Monaghan in June 2015. The REINVENT Project addresses several of challenges raised in this paper and directly engages with historic environment policymakers and practitioners on a cross-border basis.

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