

## A WORD FROM THE CHAIR, MS. CAITRIONA MULLAN

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We are living in a time when population needs are becoming more complex and in need of precise, agile and focused evidence-based interventions and services. The rate at which this complexity of need has grown has an inverse variation to the availability of resources. The development of Shared Services agendas, with a dominant driver of efficiency and reducing duplication of resources, both public and private, has been one response to this. Shared services implies the transcending of organisational, administrative, interdisciplinary and interjurisdictional boundaries to achieve more effective ways of meeting shared aims and delivering on shared and desired outcomes. Successful shared services delivering successful outcomes implies the importance of creating the right conditions for this work to be successful and to be the best use of existing resources for optimal impacts.

Equally, we also live in an era when soundbites and terminology can circulate as a currency which has been decoupled from the deeper concepts, actions and benefits from which they are derived. Arguably, 'Shared Services' is in danger of being one of those concepts which is lauded as a good thing without perhaps as much focus on the 'why?' and 'for what purpose?' In this sense, and without an ethically-driven critique of purpose, and related scrutiny of efficacy and outcomes, a shared services agenda could arguably add to an existing and costly problem of duplication of investments and resources by cumbersome, bureaucratic systems which fail to meet the needs of their end users and therefore struggle, unreformed, to deliver on outcomes.

The ICLRD, in this issue of *Borderlands: The Journal*

*of Spatial Planning in Ireland*, has sought to point to evidence-bases and models which go to make up what might be suggested as good practice based on an informed response to need. In this publication we draw on the knowledge which has arisen from the testing and implementation of these models, so that those with an interest in developing shared services might apply that knowledge in future endeavours. The models and approaches featured here highlight area-based, collaborative approaches to providing sustainable solutions to shared problems. It is no accident that a considerable portion of the experience described is based on solutions found in border regions, where resourcefulness and creativity have been fostered in such matters in recent decades, through the commitment of both domestic and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) resources to support innovation.

As a praxis organisation which is committed to the value of knowledge gained through action, the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) values – and facilitates – not only the development and action-orientated analysis of structures and processes, but also the cultural and social capital which can animate these structures and processes for the greater good. In this way, the processes and models featured in this issue of *Borderlands* are also the frameworks on which deeper models of collaboration can be built. For example, while one set of partners come together to respond to the physical aspects of an environmental event such as flooding, other partners can become involved in the same system to respond to additional dimensions of the problem – such as the emotional and physical health needs of children and families affected by flooding. Shared services, based on good collaborative practice and a clear sense of purpose, can deliver forms of intervention and types of service integration which individual sectors and organisations will struggle to do – or simply do not have the remit to do-alone. Whether a shared service development is multi-dimensional, with an area-focus, such as shared environmental public service provision, or whether it is



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internal between two organisations for the management of corporate affairs such as procurement or payroll, it will only work if it has clarity of purpose, a robust purpose based on evidence of need and a holistic analysis of feasibility, and a connection throughout its lifecycle to the need or opportunity which it sets out to address.

We in ICLRD hope that this offering of studies compiled by our various associates and partners provides some reflective insight for those who are considering the development or evaluation of shared services initiatives. The ICLRD prides itself in its unique ability to combine international, peer-reviewed research expertise with innovative and experienced practitioner knowledge, and to contribute to the development and growth of both these fields which are so crucial for the development of sustainable and healthy communities and places which work well. We are committed as an organisation to the thread and reciprocal responsiveness which connects the citizen to high-level policy-making, decisions and resource allocation at local, regional, national and international level. It is in this context that we continue to make our enquiry and share the findings with you.

### **Ms. Caitriona Mullan**

#### **Chair**

#### **International Centre for Local and Regional Development**

**Ms. Caitriona Mullan is Chair of the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD), a post she has held since late 2014. She has over 20 years' experience of working in translational spaces between policy and implementation, including leading transboundary and interjurisdictional collaboration. A TCD History graduate, Caitriona is one of the few practitioners to hold a stand-alone track record in two major cross-border collaboration fields - regional development, and health and social care. She is a specialist in strategic change and applied whole systems approaches aimed at promoting equality, prosperity and stability.**

**Caitriona combines advanced stakeholder facilitation and advisory skills with a detailed applied knowledge of governance and business processes. She has successfully supported and mentored diverse interests to work together to deliver innovation and change outcomes across a range of sectors in Ireland, Northern Ireland and internationally including local government, health and social care, and social and economic development. She is committed to putting knowledge, evidence and humanitarian principles at the heart of how we plan our futures.**