

A New Common Chapter

for cooperation within and between these islands

Introduction

The vision for cooperation within and between these islands by grassroots community organisations we propose below was developed in the light of our critical engagement with what had been known as the “Common Chapter”. Following the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the devolved administration in Northern Ireland gave its approval to a section on cooperation with the Republic of Ireland in the *Northern Ireland Structural Funds Plan 2000-2006*. The same text was contained in the Republic of Ireland’s *National Development Plan 2000-2006* in a section on cooperation with Northern Ireland. This replicated text – the “Common Chapter” – set out the two Governments’ priorities for cooperation and how funds (particularly European Union funds) would be used to support it. It was understood that cross-border cooperation for the island of Ireland had three dimensions:

- cooperation along the border corridor and between Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland;
- North-South cooperation within the island of Ireland; and
- East-West cooperation between the island of Ireland and Great Britain, Europe and internationally.

Within the 2000-2006 period for which these plans were designed devolution in Northern Ireland was suspended, and following the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2007 the Common Chapter was not revived.

What follows below, therefore, is the result of a sustained process of engagement by grassroots community organisations from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with the notion of cross-border, North-South and East-West cooperation, which has led to a vision of such cooperation and what it should entail.

A New Common Chapter

Recalling the “Common Chapter” on cross-border, North-South and East-West cooperation that existed in Ireland’s National Development Plan and Northern Ireland’s Structural Funds Plan, **WE HEREBY PROPOSE A NEW COMMON CHAPTER FOR COOPERATION** within and between these islands by grassroots community organisations that promotes social justice and equality, but do so:

- Acknowledging and respecting the differences that make these islands what they are, while also recognising and cherishing the relations between the communities that live in its different nations and regions;
- In the knowledge that we speak and treasure indigenous languages whose roots cross the borders within and between our islands;
- Recognising that faith traditions are organised and followed by communities within and across these islands;
- Valuing the musical, literary and other artistic traditions that have spread across the world and whose development has been assisted through relations within and between these islands;
- Realising that whilst we can compete against each other, sport and sporting organisations also unite us within and between these islands; and
- Recognising that our islands are connected by family bonds that cross the borders that separate them.

WE HEREBY PROPOSE A NEW COMMON CHAPTER FOR COOPERATION by grassroots community organisations within and between these islands which values how it can:

- Maintain family ties and friendships that cross borders;
- Allow for the cross-border sharing of local resources and services;
- Increase opportunities for the sharing of information, knowledge of policy and best-practice in the other jurisdictions, widen our cross-border evidence-base, and improve policy-making by matching it to the realities on the ground and identifying cross-border opportunities;
- Promote sustainable cross-border friendly relations between communities that give insight into the views of those from the other jurisdictions, and allow for difficult conversations to be had;
- Promote a civil society that values diversity and in which there is the ability to disagree respectfully;
- Facilitate the exploration of a community’s culture and heritage;
- Increase the protection and enjoyment of the environment;
- Encourage and develop community leadership;
- Contribute to our common safety and wellbeing;
 - Explore economic opportunities;
 - Discover tourism potentials;
 - Advocate for improved coordination of regulations within and between these islands; and
 - Engage with and support the most isolated and marginalised in our communities.

WE BELIEVE THAT FOR IT TO BE SUCCESSFUL COOPERATION WITHIN AND BETWEEN THESE ISLANDS MUST NOT:

- Be the unique preserve of any one government, agency, group or community;
- Be used for party-political purposes;
- Involve policies or projects imposed on communities and that are irrelevant to them;
- Operate on the basis of religious or cultural labelling, use assumptions about a community or group, or involve tokenism or quantitatively-driven targets;
- Be short-term, short-sighted or unsustainable;
- Be driven by the need to achieve large impacts in a way that privileges the involvement of larger institutions and organisations and dismisses the value of micro-community initiatives and their potential to contribute to significant positive change;
- Be overly theoretical, complicated or dismissive of community-led approaches;
- Be funding-led; and
- Deny equality of opportunities to people with different religious belief, political opinion, of different racial groups, ages, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, with or without a disability, with dependants or without.

WE BELIEVE THAT GRASS-ROOTS COMMUNITY COOPERATION WITHIN AND BETWEEN THESE ISLANDS CAN USEFULLY ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING ISSUES:

- Capacity-building for community leadership in cooperation, especially for young leaders;
- Improving the sustainability of community organisations and initiatives;
- Exploring the potential for cross-border tourism, especially rural tourism;
- Exploring histories and heritage that cross borders within and between these islands;
- Improving women’s representation in decision-making structures;
- The provision of affordable, accessible quality childcare and social care support;
- The promotion and support for gender equality proofing and gender budgeting;
- The provision of affordable, accessible and regular transport services, especially in rural areas and border regions;
- Facilitation of cross-jurisdictional educational opportunities, including through the removal of administrative obstacles between the jurisdictions;
- Improving the value given to and the quality of vocational and non-university paths to careers; and
- Promotion and support for rural proofing and regionally balanced budgeting and resourcing.

WE HEREBY COMMEND THIS NEW COMMON CHAPTER FOR COOPERATION WITHIN AND BETWEEN THESE ISLANDS.



South Armagh
Rural Women's
Network



MONAGHAN



A Longford Women's Link Programme