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The Centre for Cross Border Studies

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FOREWORD

Dr Helen Johnston
Chairperson, Centre for Cross Border Studies



This special edition of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* marks the twentieth anniversary of an organisation I am proud to be associated with as Chairperson of its Board: the Centre for Cross Border Studies.

While the Centre has witnessed significant shifts in political, economic and social fortunes on the island of Ireland, these islands, and Europe since the organisation's founding in September 1999, it has remained faithful to its core mission of promoting and supporting cross-border cooperation as an integral part of the ongoing peace and reconciliation process on the island of Ireland. The health – the intensity – of cross-border, North-South, and East-West cooperation is also a sign of the health and degree of intensity of the ongoing implementation of the interrelated strands of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Whatever the challenges ahead the Centre for Cross Border Studies will continue to pursue its core mission, as not to do so would be to withdraw its contribution to the lifeblood of the 1998 Agreement, and to the framework of relations within and between these islands it represents.

The Centre would not have been able to do what it has done over the last two decades, and what it will continue to do, without the consistent support and generosity of the Irish Government, and in particular the Department of Education and Skills, through its provision of core funding. On behalf of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, I would like to express our gratitude. We are also grateful to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Reconciliation Fund for once again providing funding for activities to be undertaken by the Centre's flagship Border People project,¹ and for a new project for the Centre – "Collaborating for Common Success: North-South Cooperation from 1999 to 2039". But what I said in my Foreword to the 2018 edition of this *Journal* remains true in 2019: "We look forward to a changed political landscape in which the work of the Centre for Cross Border Studies receives public funding from both sides of the border and we very much appreciate the support we have received from political parties in both jurisdictions for our efforts in this regard". Those efforts will continue.

It is also important to recognise the invaluable support of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, which since 2014 has funded the "Towards a New Common Chapter" project, which is now coming to an end.² Given the sparse funding landscape for genuine cross-border cooperation projects undertaken by small organisations like the Centre, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust's presence has been a welcome source not just of financial support, but also of inspiration to continue with our work in maintaining relations and encouraging cooperation between communities within and across these islands. We also give our thanks to the Community Relations Council Northern Ireland, and to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Reconciliation Fund, who also contributed funding to this project.

Brexit

The context in which the Centre is currently operating continues to be one of continued uncertainty occasioned by the unresolved question of Brexit. As for so many other organisations in the community and voluntary sector, as well as for businesses, public bodies and citizens, the ongoing and agonising “process” of the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union continues to bring with it significant challenges and place enormous demands on resources.

In 2019, as in the years since 2013 when it began to respond to the UK Government’s changing attitudes to the European Union,³ the Centre for Cross Border Studies has striven to provide its analysis of Brexit and its potential impacts, particularly on North-South cooperation, while simultaneously remaining attentive to underlying needs and opportunities that could easily be forgotten in the present maelstrom. This year (at the time of writing) our research and analysis of the implications of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU has seen the publication of two Briefing Papers and submissions to a range of Brexit-related inquiries and consultations,⁴ with our Border People project also providing information to citizens through its dedicated “Brexit Hub”.⁵ Our research and analysis of the potential consequences of Brexit has also meant the Centre has continued to be called upon to take part in a range of events, providing various organisations and groups with information relevant to them.⁶

I have no doubt the Centre’s expertise on Brexit will continue to be sought after as the ultimate fate of the UK’s relationship with the EU is decided, with all that will mean for North-South cooperation. However, I also have no doubt the reason the Centre will remain a valued source of information on the potential consequences of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU is because its analysis is informed by twenty years of knowledge gathered on the development of North-South and cross-border cooperation, and what that cooperation requires in order to be effective.

Beyond Brexit

Despite the energies it has devoted to Brexit, 2019 has also seen the Centre for Cross Border Studies ensuring it did not become fixated on the tortuous twists and turns of the negotiations over the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. Most recently, for example, the Centre made a submission to the Houses of the Oireachtas’ Working Group on Parliamentary Privilege and Citizens’ Rights, providing it with its views on how to ensure Committees’ interactions with citizens are undertaken in a manner “protective of citizens’ constitutional rights, encouraging individuals and organisations to contribute to Committees’ work by providing information in a context whose limits are predetermined, recognised by citizens and members, and safeguarded by Committee Chairs”.⁷ It also responded to consultations on regional strategies, highlighting any potential opportunities that could be exploited through cross-border cooperation.⁸

This year has also seen the drawing to a close of the “Towards a New Common Chapter” project, which began in late 2014, and started its engagement with community groups in early 2015. Well before Brexit entered popular consciousness, a range of groups from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland started a discussion on the value of cross-

border cooperation and what it could achieve for communities that would result in the New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands.⁹ Inevitably, as the referendum on the UK's membership was announced, the question of Brexit would at times attempt to impinge on the groups' conversations, but it was recognised that issues that could be addressed by cross-border cooperation existed before EU membership, during the UK's membership of the EU, and will continue to exist following the UK's withdrawal.

The vision for cross-border, North-South and East-West cooperation at grassroots community level developed on the island of Ireland was taken in 2019 by representatives of the participating groups to Scotland (Glasgow), Wales (Cardiff) and England (Liverpool), where it was presented and discussed with community organisations, before the New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands was agreed by representatives from across these islands in an evaluation seminar in Belfast.¹⁰ The final stage of the project has seen the Centre and representatives from the participating groups promoting the New Common Charter to politicians, including presentations to Oireachtas Committees,¹¹ the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly,¹² and to MPs in the House of Commons.¹³ These efforts have been made to ensure, whatever circumstances face us, political representatives across these islands guarantee structures and resources that will allow communities to maintain relations and cooperate with one another on the matters of interest to them.

Another initiative led by the Centre for Cross Border Studies that involved intense activity in 2019 was the "Bringing the Agreement Home: In all its parts" project. Although its initial impulse was the negotiations over the UK's withdrawal from the EU, and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement's position within them, this project's objective was to inform and engage community organisations on the island of Ireland about the provisions of the 1998 Agreement and subsequent related agreements and the institutions and bodies they created. After a series of workshops in different locations in Northern Ireland and Ireland, the project's implementation concluded with an "All-Island Dialogue" in March.¹⁴ Among the core issues raised by groups taking part in the project was the lack of civic society platforms for dialogue and exchanges after the disappearance of the Northern Ireland Civic Forum, and the inability to create an all-island consultative forum as had been proposed by the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and called for by the 2006 St Andrews Agreement.

The nature of this work, and other initiatives led by the Centre, is characterised by our ongoing efforts to learn from examples of best practice from the past in the implementation of cross-border, North-South and East-West cooperation on the ground, and in terms of the policy context that encourages and supports that type of cooperation. We are also concerned with the active participation of communities in not only the act of cross-border cooperation itself, but also the design of policies and strategies that either involves cross-border cooperation, or where that cooperation would bring further benefits to border communities. From our work with community organisations in projects like the "Towards a New Common Chapter" and "Bringing the Agreement Home", it is clear there is a thirst in civil society to be more directly involved in the decisions that affect their communities, and to cooperate within and across these islands on a number of issues and

opportunities that were there before Brexit, and will still be there beyond Brexit. This is why, while it will continue to follow closely the ongoing negotiations, the Centre for Cross Border Studies will remain attentive to where cooperation will help people on the island of Ireland and these islands face potential challenges lying ahead in the next twenty years.

Indeed, the Centre is in a privileged position to witness the sustained desire for cross-border and North-South cooperation through its provision of secretariat services to two all-island networks: Universities Ireland and the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS).¹⁵ While the Universities Ireland Council, made up of the Vice Chancellors and Presidents of all the universities on the island of Ireland, voiced its commitment to continued North-South collaboration between their institutions, it once again provided a number of North-South Postgraduate Scholarships and two History Bursaries. The latter, aimed at supporting postgraduate study on a topic relating to the 1912-1923 period on the island of Ireland, is related to Universities Ireland's "A Decade of Remembrance" programme, which includes a cycle of annual history conferences. This year's conference, which took place in Trinity College Dublin on the 7th of September, explored the theme "1919 – Building Foundations in Post-War Instability".

SCoTENS devoted enormous energy to a number of North-South activities, including the provision of seed-funding to five research projects involving teacher education institutions from both jurisdictions, and its continued support for a highly successful Student Teacher Exchange programme. Preparations are well underway for the SCoTENS annual conference, which this year will take place in Ballyconnell, and is devoted to the topic "Leadership across Boundaries: Challenges for Educators and Teacher Educators".

Beyond these islands

Despite all the uncertainties surrounding the UK's relationship with the European Union, which is causing particular difficulties to organisations like ours based in Northern Ireland, in 2019 the Centre continued to share the knowledge it has acquired on cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland with those from other EU border regions, and in turn to learn from their experiences. Central to these activities has been the Transfrontier Euro-Institut Network (TEIN),¹⁵ a partnership now involving 15 partners from nine border regions, and of which the Centre was one of its founding members in 2010.

As a result of the Centre's membership of TEIN, it is one of nine partners of the network involved in the TEIN4Citizens project, whose underlying aim is to "enable citizens not only to deepen their understanding of the EU but also voice their opinion about current trends and EU policy making processes".¹⁶ The first of five "forums" across five different border regions was organised by the Centre, and took place in Belfast in March of this year. With 78 participants coming from both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, Austria, France, Germany and the Czech Republic, this forum looked at the question of what it means to be an EU citizen, focusing on the theme of "Human Rights, Civic Rights, Entitlements and Obligations".¹⁷ In the same month the Centre's Acting Director, Anthony Soares, took part in the "Castle Talks" in Strasbourg, organised by another TEIN partner, the University of Strasbourg, where he made a presentation entitled "Bordering on Brexit, Brexit and Bordering: Lessons for Europe?". We are grateful to our TEIN partners for their continued

support for the Centre, and their interest in what can be learnt from the experience of cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland.

It is as a collaboration between TEIN and another of its members – Maastricht University’s Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross border cooperation and Mobility (ITEM) – that the fourth edition of the Centre’s annual policy seminar in Brussels is taking place later this year. On the theme of “Assessing Impact across Borders”, the 2019 seminar will precede the first annual conference of TEIN at the Brussels campus of Maastricht University.¹⁸ As we recognise that whatever outcome results from the ongoing Brexit negotiations, policies developed in Brussels will continue to affect the operation of cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland, and between the island and Great Britain, and so the Centre intends to sustain this annual event at the heart of the European Union. Moreover, where possible, representatives from the Centre will also maintain its productive relations with other European organisations, as was the case when our Acting Director took part in the 10th anniversary conference of the Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives (CESCI), which took place in April in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest.¹⁹

Treasuring the past to face the future

This special edition of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* stands as a small but precious reflection of what the Centre and many of its friends and collaborators have done in the field of cross-border and North-South cooperation over many years, and their contribution to the ongoing peace and reconciliation process. Within these pages we have republished a selection of articles and interviews from previous editions of the Journal, with reflections from some of their original authors looking back in 2019 to their views on cross-border cooperation and North-South relations. Thus, this special edition provides us with an opportunity to chart the fortunes of cross-border cooperation and to consider what the future may hold in store, or even how we are to shape that future. Indeed, one of the pieces included in this special edition, accompanied by a reflection by Michael D’Arcy, is an interview with Sir George Quigley, originally published in 2013. His views on the economic and social benefits of North-South cooperation, and what it can accomplish in reconciling the island of Ireland, are invaluable. His legacy has been marked by the Centre for Cross Border Studies by instituting the Annual Sir George Quigley Memorial Lecture, which this year saw its fourth edition with a lecture entitled “Northern Ireland’s economic future: Building the economic and political relationships across the two islands”, given by Angela McGowan, Director of CBI Northern Ireland.²⁰

We can only offer a small selection of the many wonderful and insightful articles published over the years in the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland*, which is why I would urge you to revisit them.²¹ The Journal is not only a repository of articles on cross-border cooperation; it also records the activities of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, which had already been in existence for seven years before its first edition in 2006. By that time, as the first edition notes, the Centre had launched the PEACE II-funded online database, *borderireland.info*, in order to “provide an electronic gateway to a comprehensive range of North-South and cross-border research and development materials, publications, individual contacts, organisations, funding opportunities and other information opportunities available in Ireland” (p.78). This was to respond to the “significant growth

in cross-border co-operation on the island over the past 20 years [which] has produced an ever increasing amount of uncoordinated and fragmented information” (p.77). The 2006 edition of the Journal also reflects intense EU-funded cross-border activity in relation to education, involving early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary levels, as well as teacher education.

Pouring over the pages of subsequent editions of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland*, I cannot fail to be amazed (and I am sure many others will share this sentiment) at how the Centre for Cross Border Studies, even at times of significant challenge (like the present ones), has been involved in such a diversity of cross-border, North-South and European cooperation initiatives, and at the amount of high-quality research it has produced. And I am proud to be a part of this incredible journey, along with all those who are or who have been fellow members of the Board which I now chair.

But of course none of this would have been possible without the vision and courage of its founding Director, Andy Pollak, and the institutions that supported the Centre’s creation: Dublin City University, Queen’s University Belfast, and the Workers’ Educational Association. The continued support of these two Universities (with the WEA sadly no longer in existence) has been invaluable, as was the energy and determination of Andy Pollak’s successor, Ruth Taillon, who took on the mission of promoting and supporting cross-border cooperation, until her retirement in March of this year. I’d also like to acknowledge the contributions of long standing staff member Mairéad Hughes, as well as Eimear Donnelly and Milena Komarova who moved on from the Centre this year, and to wish them all the best in their future endeavours. I particularly want to thank Acting Director Anthony Soares and his staff team of Annmarie O’Kane, Tricia Kelly and Mark McClatchey for their exceptional work in difficult and uncertain circumstances over the course of the year.

Thanks are also due to the Centre’s Board for their oversight of the work of the Centre and for their guidance and support. Unfortunately, we said goodbye to Michael Curran due to his untimely death. Michael was a ‘border man’ and brought much practical advice to the Board. We welcome Teresa O’Doherty and John Garry who joined the Board in 2019, and look forward to their contributions.

Once again, on behalf of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, I express our gratitude to the Irish Government, and in particular the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Their steadfastness in supporting us is a clear and resolute recognition of the importance of North-South cooperation, and of the Irish Government’s role in upholding the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and the contribution the Centre is able to make in improving relations within and across these islands. It is a contribution the Centre will continue to make in the years ahead of us, learning from the past in order to face the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Notes

- ¹ For further details on the work of the Border People project and its objectives, see borderpeople.info/.
- ² For more on this project, see crossborder.ie/towards-a-new-common-chapter/.
- ³ Examples of this early work include the Centre's 2014 response to the public consultation on Cohesion Policy Review, part of the UK Government's Review of the Balance of Competences between the United Kingdom and the European Union (crossborder.ie/ccbs-responds-to-uk-govt-review-of-eu-competences/), and evidence submitted in 2015 to the House of Lords' EU Select Committee Inquiry on EU reform (crossborder.ie/ccbs-submits-evidence-to-the-house-of-lords-eu-select-committee-inquiry-on-visions-of-eu-reform/).
- ⁴ Brexit and the UK-Ireland Border *Briefing Paper Series*, "Briefing Paper 5: The Impact of Brexit on Devolution in Northern Ireland" (January 2019), crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Devolution-Briefing-Paper-Final-2.pdf; "The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and (post-Brexit) cross-border environmental cooperation" (June 2019), crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CCBS-Briefing-Paper-The-GFA-and-cross-border-environmental-cooperation-June-2019.pdf; "Submission to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Inquiry: Implications of the EU Withdrawal agreement and the backstop for Northern Ireland" (January 2019), crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CCBS-Submission-to-NIAC-Inquiry-23-Jan-2019-1.pdf; "Response to Prosperity UK Alternative Arrangements Commission Consultation on Interim Report" (July 2019), crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CCBS-Response-to-Prosperity-UK-Alternative-Arrangements-Commission-Consultation-on-Interim-Report.pdf; "Submission to the House of Lords EU Internal Market Sub-Committee's inquiry on Discontinuing seasonal changes of time" (August 2019), crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CCBS-Submission-to-the-House-of-Lords-EU-Internal-Market-Sub-Committee.pdf.
- ⁵ See borderpeople.info/brexit.
- ⁶ See, for example, "CCBS Director presents to students from the American University at Rome" (March 2019), crossborder.ie/ccbs-director-presents-to-students-from-the-american-university-at-rome/; "CCBS discusses Brexit with young people" (April 2019), crossborder.ie/ccbs-discusses-brexit-with-young-people/; "Brexit info workshops for Citizens Advisors" (March 2019), borderpeople.info/events/brexit-info-workshops-for-citizens-advisors.html.
- ⁷ "Submission to the Working Group on Parliamentary Privilege and Citizens' Rights" (September 2019), crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/CCBS-Submission-to-the-Working-Group-on-Parliamentary-Privilege-and-Citizens.pdf.
- ⁸ "Submission to the Public Consultation on the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region" (January 2019), crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CCBS-Submission-to-the-Public-Consultation-on-the-Draft-Regional-Spatial-and-Economic-Strategy-for-the-Eastern-and-Midland-Region.pdf; "Submission to the Public Consultation on the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region" (February 2019), crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CCBS-Submission-to-the-NWRA-Draft-RSES-Final.pdf.
- ⁹ It is important to note that although the project is entitled "Towards a New Common Chapter" [emphasis added], and early drafts of the document produced by the participating groups also carried the title "A New Common Chapter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands", groups opted for the word "Charter" in the final version. You can access the New Common Charter here: crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/A-New-Common-Charter-FINAL.pdf.

- ¹⁰ See crossborder.ie/towards-new-common-chapter-evaluation-seminar/.
- ¹¹ crossborder.ie/the-towards-a-new-common-chapter-project-engages-with-politicians/, and crossborder.ie/call-for-political-representatives-to-support-new-common-charter-for-cooperation/.
- ¹² crossborder.ie/call-for-political-representatives-to-support-new-common-charter-for-cooperation/.
- ¹³ crossborder.ie/the-new-common-charter-goes-to-the-house-of-commons/.
- ¹⁴ crossborder.ie/bringing-agreement-home-parts-island-dialogue-event/.
- ¹⁵ For more on these two networks, visit universitiesireland.ie/ and scotens.org/.
- ¹⁶ For more information on TEIN, see www.transfrontier.eu/.
- ¹⁷ For details of this project, see www.transfrontier.eu/tein4citizens/.
- ¹⁸ crossborder.ie/mean-eu-citizen-human-rights-civic-rights-entitlements-obligations/.¹⁹ crossborder.ie/centre-for-cross-border-studies-annual-brussels-policy-seminar-assessing-impact-across-borders/.
- ²⁰ crossborder.ie/ccbs-acting-director-invited-to-cescis-10th-anniversary-celebrations/.
- ²¹ crossborder.ie/sir-george-quigley-memorial-lecture/. Previous speakers were **Edgar Morgenroth** (crossborder.ie/centre-cross-border-studies-invite-3rd-annual-sir-george-quigley-memorial-lecture-given-professor-edgar-morgenroth-professor-economics-business-scho/), **José Luis Iparraguirre** (crossborder.ie/2nd-annual-sir-george-quigley-memorial-lecture-economics-helping-to-make-us-human/), and **Frances Ruane** (crossborder.ie/ccbs-hosts-the-inaugural-sir-george-quigley-memorial-lecture-competitiveness-on-the-island-of-ireland/).
- ²² All editions of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* are available to download from crossborder.ie/publications/the-journal-of-cross-border-studies-in-ireland/

Introduction

Dr Anthony Soares

Acting Director, Centre for Cross Border Studies



This special edition of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* was conceived as a means to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, and to remind ourselves of the passionate insights into cross-border and North-South cooperation contributors to the Journal have generously shared over the years. The Journal – now in its 14th edition, and preceded by six editions of a Yearbook – has always striven to be a platform for the dissemination of critical thinking, learning, and imagining, and to contribute to the often challenging venture to promote and strengthen cross-border cooperation as part of the ongoing peace and reconciliation process on the island of Ireland.

In doing so, it has not only sought out those with direct experience and knowledge of the policies and practice of cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland, it has also reached out to others in border regions in Europe and further afield, bringing to light commonalities in terms of progress made and (at times) sources of frustration, as well as the particularities that make each border region distinct and that call for different approaches to cross-border cooperation. As such, the Journal has embodied two essential components to the act of cooperation: curiosity and generosity. The desire to discover what is happening beyond our own frontiers – which can take many forms – and the willingness to share with others our concerns, hopes and knowledge. When these impulses – curiosity and generosity – are given life, they can help overcome the peripherality often associated with border regions, and resist the temptation of isolation, protectionism and insularity.

Going somewhat against the grain, however, this special edition of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* focuses essentially on the island of Ireland. Nevertheless, although the articles and interviews reproduced in this special edition speak of the local, the context of the island of Ireland is always inextricably a result of the web (often contested) of internal and external relations, not least due to the interlocking nature of a Belfast/Good Friday Agreement whose co-guarantors saw it as the expression of their common desire to “develop still further the unique relationship between their peoples and the close co-operation between their countries as friendly neighbours and as partners in the European Union”.

What we have in this special edition, then, are a number of key assessments of the progress of the close cooperation envisioned in the Good Friday Agreement, originally published in the Journal between 2006 and 2013. Crucially, each of the articles or interviews reproduced here is followed by a reflection on the original piece by its authors or, where this was not possible (in the case of the interviews with Martin McGuinness and Sir George Quigley),

by someone closely familiar with the original subject. Unsurprisingly, the reflections are written a time of enormous doubt as to how the close cooperation at the heart of the 1998 Agreement will continue in light of the United Kingdom's imminent departure from the European Union. But whereas these reflections are imbued with uncertainty as to the future, that sentiment is also frequently present in the original articles, along with an often felt sense of frustration. However, while it may be easy to interpret such frustration and doubt as purely negative feelings of despair, they should instead be read as arising from the knowledge of the successes borne of cross-border and North-South cooperation (many instances of which are referenced by the authors), and of the enormous potential yet to be exploited, but which may be under threat due to what seems to be an increasingly unfavourable political environment.

Much of this is present in the first article to be reproduced in this special edition, written by Liam O'Dowd, and which first appeared in the opening edition of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* in 2006. Entitled "The Future of Cross-Border Cooperation: Issues of sustainability", and written at a time before the St Andrews Agreement would restore devolution to Northern Ireland, O'Dowd's article noted how the likelihood of a diminishing flow of EU funds to Ireland, combined "with the continued impasse over the full implementation of the GFA, it might be hypothesised at least that the environment for sustaining cross-border co-operation has deteriorated". The question of the sustainability of cross-border cooperation was at that time "an issue which is now looming large for many practitioners as funding sources decline and the political momentum engendered by the Good Friday Agreement has diminished, if not stalled". With an uncanny reminder of the present situation, O'Dowd described how in 2006 "On the political front, the continued suspension of the N.Ireland Assembly and the North/South Ministerial Council, and the increased polarisation of Northern Ireland politics, have created a political environment less conducive to the strategic development of North-South co-operation into the future".

However, in his 2019 reflection piece entitled "Back to the Future?" for this special edition, while he refers to how political shortcomings and disengagement in part led to "the failure to build on the opportunities for [cross-border cooperation] built into the Good Friday Agreement", O'Dowd also describes how "since 2006, something else was happening which was impossible to visualise back then – the meaning of the border itself was changing". "Even more significantly, perhaps", O'Dowd notes, "both nationalists and unionists seemed to accept and even actively support an open and invisible border, even during times when bickering and mutual vetoes disrupted and incapacitated the Executive in Stormont". In his view this "outcome was one of the more hopeful and benign outworkings of the GFA", but one that has now been placed in doubt due to Brexit, which "will put into historic reversal both the evolution of an open and invisible border, and the limited formalised [cross-border cooperation], which has evolved through the four Peace Programmes and INTERREG initiatives".

And yet, O'Dowd concludes with a note of hope: the possibility that "the headlong rush to a no-deal Brexit will stimulate a countervailing movement within NI, at intergovernmental level, in the EU and the US that will seek to combat the historic reversals inherent in a 'hard' Brexit". The potential outcome would be twofold: "Firstly, it could throw into ever sharper relief the toxic threat to the most benign and organic outcome of the GFA – the

redefinition of the meaning of the Irish border in the everyday life of people over the last three decades. Secondly, it might help illuminate, and seek to address, many of the issues outlined in my 2006 article, the startling underdevelopment of formalised cross-border co-operation – the minimal level of funding, the opportunities missed, the degree of institutional inertia and apathy, and the failure to actively promote sustainable cross-border cooperation to peace and reconciliation”.

The second article reproduced here was written by Andy Pollak (the Centre for Cross Border Studies’ founding Director), under the title “Educational Co-operation on the Island of Ireland: Are the good years ending?”, and was also originally published in the first edition of the Journal in 2006. Noting how “Education has been a ‘core value’ for Irish people – North and South, Protestant and Catholic, unionist and nationalist – for at least two centuries”, the author quotes the Irish educationalist John Coolahan reflecting on the consequences of partition, and how in the Republic of Ireland of the 1960s, “as far as education in Northern Ireland was concerned it could have been Timbaktu. There was no reference to it, no mention of it – it was just out of one’s consciousness.”

However, Pollak’s 2006 article goes on to chart a remarkable reversal to this situation, beginning in the mid-1980s with the European Studies Project, which showed that “by 1999 193 secondary schools (94 in Northern Ireland and 99 in the Republic of Ireland) were involved”. There was, as the author describes, an “extraordinary growth in North-South school exchanges which occurred in the decade between 1995 and 2005, when generous EU Peace funding and other funding linked to the Northern Ireland peace process was made available”. Andy Pollak goes on to assess three North-South education initiatives in particular – “Dissolving Boundaries”, “Civic Link”, and “Education for Reconciliation” – as well as the “Wider Horizons” training programme for young people, and how they may have contributed positively to reconciliation within Northern Ireland, and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. His article concludes by referencing one of the recommendations made in a 2005 report by the North South Exchange Consortium, which was that the “embryonic North South Exchange Consortium should be developed into a new body, the North South Exchange Trust”, but “in their endorsement of the report’s proposals, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland, make it clear that ‘in the current political context it is not possible to establish such a body at this time, but it is hoped that in the future conditions might arise when the establishment of an independent north south exchange Trust will exist’”. “In other words”, Pollak highlights, “until there is agreement on returning power to devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, there is no possibility of setting up a formal North/South body in the area of education and youth exchanges”.

Andy Pollak’s reflection piece on his 2006 article begins on a sobering note: “The unfortunate fact is that by 2019 the prophesy contained in the title of this 2006 article has largely come true. The flood of North-South educational cooperation in the early years of this century has become a small trickle”. One of the principal reasons for the ending of what he characterises as a “golden age” of North-South cooperation in education was “that the Departments of Education, North and South, missed a huge opportunity to make this brief flowering into something more sustainable”. Echoing the feeling of intense frustration felt by other contributors to this special edition of the Journal, arising not from a sense

that nothing has been done in terms of cross-border and North-South cooperation, but that so much more could have been achieved, Pollak laments how “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for education to make a major contribution to the Northern Ireland peace process was lost”.

The third article to be republished here is Brian Harvey’s “Community Development along the Border: An instrument for the development of the cross-border region?”, from the 2010 edition of the Journal. In it he recalls how “With the introduction of the EU PEACE programme in 1994, there was a substantial investment in voluntary and community organisations in the border counties”, and that “The border region went from having one of the lowest levels of investment in community development to, over a very short period of time, one of the highest in the island”. His article provides a detailed overview of the community development landscape, and is informed by a mapping exercise undertaken by the Centre for Cross Border Community Development at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT). In terms of cross-border cooperation and community development, it is worth highlighting here an important conclusion drawn by Harvey:

“One of the key findings was the key role played by individual leadership, although such ‘leaders’ were universally modest people who played down their own significance. It was apparent that many of these projects were initiated and subsequently driven by one person, who had a vision of and passion for cross-border work and cross-border development and was prepared to commit considerable time and energy to such a venture, some a lifetime. These were not misty-eyed visionaries, but people with a hands-on appreciation of the practical difficulties of bridging gaps and differences. Often they appeared to be motivated by a combination of the desire for reconciliation between the nationalist and unionist communities, the ideal of economic and social integration between North and South, and the aspiration for improved socio-economic conditions for their locality, county or region”.

The leadership found at community level in the cross-border cooperation landscape was not always replicated at higher levels. Reflecting on the DKIT mapping exercise, Harvey describes how “although voluntary and community organisations had now learned to work across the border – indeed, it was no longer ‘news’ for the local press – governments had not”. This situation was reflected in administrative and legislative obstacles hindering cross-border initiatives, which were “Not only [...] operational obstacles to voluntary and community activity and contrary to the imperatives of European integration, but they negatively affected the quality of life and efforts to turn the region into a desirable place in which to live”. Moreover, Harvey points out: “What was more frustrating still was that voluntary organisations were rebuffed when they suggested to statutory authorities that they should get their act together and try to sort out these difficulties”.

In relation to the issue of non-EU funding, Harvey remarks on “the absence of a commitment to cross-border cooperation by voluntary and community organisations from the two governments”. This leads to the following conclusion, which may have added importance for the current context facing cross-border cooperation in 2019:

“Ninety years after partition, the two governments had still to work out strategies to support cross-border cooperation by civil society organisations. Many voluntary and community organisations voiced the suspicion that so long as European funding was there, they could comfortably postpone facing the issue”.

Coupled with what he sees in his 2010 article as the lack of direct funding from the two governments on the island of Ireland, Harvey raises the question of the “continued absence of a formal civil society dimension in cross-border cooperation”, which “remains a point of extraordinary weakness in the Irish cross-border relationship”. For the author the paradigmatic illustration of this absence was the continued failure to implement the recommendation contained in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement to form “an independent Consultative Forum appointed by the two administrations, representative of civic society, comprising the social partners and other members with expertise in social, cultural, economic and other issues”. In a postscript to his article, Harvey gloomily notes how the “idea of a North-South Consultative Forum failed to progress even when the other institutions of the Good Friday Agreement were restored”, and “On the funding side, the situation went backward as the INTERREG III programme’s promise of Civic and community networking turned out to be a false dawn”.

That gloom is not lifted in Harvey’s 2019 reflection piece – “Back to the ‘dreary steeples’” – where he begins by suggesting “the early years of the 20th century may be seen as the zenith of cross-border community development, a tragically false dawn”. Harvey describes an increasingly difficult environment for the community and voluntary sector in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, and how “With Brexit looming, voluntary and community organizations anticipated that cooperation with their counterparts across the border or the south as a whole would become more difficult, their benefits less evident and funding less certain, so by 2018 had well scaled back their investment”. Adding to the challenges posed to community-led cross-border cooperation by the immediate context on the island of Ireland (to which the austerity measures driven from London have been an ingredient), Harvey also identifies a diminished interest from the European Commission in supporting civil society, community development and cross-border working. This, according to the author, translated into PEACE and INTERREG programmes that differed substantially from the initial programmes, so that “Both programmes were massified, with little to promote community development across the border on the smaller scale on which such projects are routinely organized”. Once again, like other contributors to the Journal, Harvey concludes by venting frustration at what more could have been done: “The history of the island of Ireland is full of *What ifs...?* and things that could have happened, but did not, making this the most recent addition to a sad list”.

In stark contrast, whilst not ignorant of the challenges, there is a much more positive assessment of North-South cooperation by Martin McGuinness, which was first published in the 6th edition of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* in 2011. In the interview he gave to the Journal, the then Deputy First Minister begins by declaring that “North-South cooperation has made a major contribution to peace”, and how “the big success story of the North-South relationship has been the comfortable position that all Ministers now find themselves in at North South Ministerial Council meetings, and the important relationships that are being built on an ongoing basis”. Nevertheless, his conclusion that

North-South cooperation had largely been a story of success is made in recognition of the underlying political challenges to such cooperation. For McGuinness the principal source of those challenges was the concerns of unionists “that to further develop North-South cooperation is something that undermines the Union”. Those concerns, in his view, had prevented a more rapid development of North-South cooperation:

“I’m conscious that we could be making much more progress if we had a situation where unionist Ministers recognised that there could be considerable gains for their departments and the people they represent if they were to seriously examine how further benefits might be achieved by working on a cross-border basis with departments in the South without any way damaging their constitutional position”.

At the time Martin McGuinness gave this interview Ireland was in the midst of an acute recession, contrasting sharply with the earlier period of the so-called “Celtic Tiger”. Notwithstanding what could be viewed as a context calling for retreat on the North-South cooperation front in order to reduce government spending, McGuinness’s conclusion was “it’s all the more imperative that we do it now”, and that “even at a time of recession what people think is not doable is eminently doable, and there are opportunities to be gained from North-South cooperation”.

As well as suggesting North-South cooperation in the area of health could be intensified (which it subsequently has), McGuinness also expressed his support for and expanded remit for the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC). Before going on to list a number of additional areas that could be taken on by the NSMC, he began by focusing on a particular issue with increased relevance for our present context:

“I think a major case in point is the issue of energy and renewables. There are major challenges facing the administrations, North and South, against the backdrop of the huge difficulties the planet is facing around the need to discover, exploit and store renewable energy. I would make this argument not only in the context of our need to work on a North-South basis, but also in the context of needing to work with other regions as well, like Scotland and Wales, and others within our ambit of responsibility. So it’s not just that we want to do this on an all island basis – in the future we could be exporting energy to Europe, for example.”

What follows the republication of Martin McGuinness’s interview in this special edition of the Journal is a powerful personal reflection by Martina Anderson MEP of what he represented for her. In it she stresses his role as a leader who “took steps that were difficult for many, not least himself”, and – as “a Derry man” – a man always connected to his local roots, with an understanding of “the connective thread between Derry and Donegal”. This, according to Anderson, made him “a strong advocate of Strand 2 of the Good Friday Agreement, the all-Ireland strand and indeed all the provisions of that agreement”.

Martina Anderson also highlights McGuinness’s concerns and reactions to the UK’s decision to withdraw from the European Union. She notes how “Martin knew the damage that Brexit will do to Ireland and he saw that disaster clearer than most”, and how he “undertook a diplomatic offensive to protect Ireland in the wake of Brexit”.

But she also recalls the more personal side of the former Deputy First Minister; how “he knew when to approach you, put his arms around you, tell you to stay strong and to carry on”. What his absence means to Marina Anderson is clear when she declares “I find working the corridors of power in the best interest of people harder to do so without the power, the strength, the ideological purity and the experience of our lost leader Martin McGuinness”. But she concludes her reflection by declaring “Martin is gone, but he is no doubt his influence lives on”.

Our special edition continues with the republication of Michael Farrell’s article, from the 2011 edition of the Journal, entitled “Keeping up with the neighbours: Human rights protection, North and South, since the Belfast Agreement”. It begins by recalling the author’s work with and admiration for Stephen Livingstone who, along with others, “worked very hard and with some success to try to ensure that human rights protections formed a key part of the Northern Ireland peace negotiations and the eventual Belfast/Good Friday Agreement”.

When the 1998 Agreement, with its section on ‘Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity’, was achieved, according to Farrell it came to represent “a vision and an ideal of a society throughout the island that would be based on a culture of human rights, with laws and institutions to deliver and protect those rights”. However, in terms of its pathway to an equivalence of rights, North and South, the author notes how the direction of travel at that time was one where the Republic of Ireland was playing “catch-up” with Northern Ireland where the protection of rights and equality was seen to have progressed at an impressive pace. The 1998 Agreement also made provisions for a Joint Committee of the two Human Rights Commissions, North and South, which Farrell recalls – citing the Agreement directly – was, among other things, to consider establishing “a charter... reflecting and endorsing agreed measures for the protection of the fundamental rights of everyone living in the island of Ireland”.

Farrell’s 2011 article describes what the author saw as the slow progress of the Irish Government in delivering on its human rights and equality commitments flowing from the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement:

“Sadly, when the euphoria over the signing of the Agreement subsided, successive Irish governments showed little enough enthusiasm about delivering what they had pledged. While the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was established promptly, the Irish Human Rights Commission was not set up until 2001, three years after the Agreement. And even then there was a major controversy when the Government rejected most of the recommendations of its own selection committee for members of the Commission. It had to subsequently back down and appoint the rejected nominees as well. And it never allocated a budget that was sufficient to allow the Commission to carry out all its functions”.

Lack of adequate resources, according to Farrell, also affected the ability of the Joint Committee to progress its North-South work. “With both Commissions regularly underfunded”, he concludes, “they could not spare the money or the staff to make the Joint Committee a serious body with its own, even seconded, staff and resources, without

which it could not be effective". As a result, "the Charter of Rights for the whole island, which could have provided a blueprint for realising the vision of an all-island zone of human rights, has withered on the vine, a victim of the delays and obstacles put in the way of the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and the chronic lack of funding of the two Commissions". The economic crisis that came to hit the Republic of Ireland would, in the opinion of the author, only come to exacerbate the underfunding by the Irish Government of what were then the separate bodies of the Equality Authority (whose budget was "slashed" by 43%) and the Irish Human Rights Commission (suffering a cut to its budget of 32%). With the Irish Government making these budgetary reductions, Farrell draws the conclusion that "no thought was given to the wider vision of an all-island culture of human rights, to the specific commitments in the Good Friday Agreement, or to the knock-on effect that undermining key human rights bodies in the Republic might have on the UK Government's attitude to the equivalent bodies in Northern Ireland".

In contrast, in his 2011 article Farrell declares that "There has undoubtedly been substantial progress in human rights terms in Northern Ireland since the Agreement", noting among other developments reforms to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the impact of the 1998 Human Rights Act, and the inclusion of equality legislation through Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act, as well as the establishment of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission. Notwithstanding these positive developments, Farrell does not fail to point out the continued failure in 2011 to implement a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland envisioned by the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. This "contempt for the whole process and for a key part of the architecture of the Agreement" that undermines the progress of a rights and equality agenda in Northern Ireland was seen by Farrell as potentially compounded by the introduction of measures already experienced in the Republic of Ireland, with a "proposed 25% cut in the budget of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, following the example set by the Irish Government, and the arbitrary refusal to allow the Commission to accept philanthropic support for specific projects". However, in his 2011 article Farrell is clear that the frustrations he is voicing are made in the context of the potential to make further progress rather than none have being made at all: "this was never going to be easy and a great deal has already been achieved – in both jurisdictions. And it is a lot better in a cold climate to be defending and seeking to build upon gains that have already been made, than having to start off afresh".

Reflecting in 2019 on his 2011 article (in a piece entitled "Keeping our eyes on the prize: Still protecting human rights, North and South"), Michael Farrell begins by highlighting how the direction of travel in terms of the equivalence of rights and equality, North and South, has changed radically. Whereas in 2011 he had criticised successive Irish Governments for failing to ensure at least an equivalence of rights with Northern Ireland, in line with the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, his 2019 assessment is markedly different:

"Things have changed quite a bit since then with the introduction of same sex marriage in the Republic in 2015, passing a more liberal law than the UK on recognising Transgender persons in the same year and ending the constitutional ban on abortion in 2018. And the Republic now has an openly gay Taoiseach who recently walked in the huge 2019 Pride parade in Belfast".

It is now Northern Ireland that – under the principle of equivalence set out in the 1998 Agreement – is expected to catch up with the Republic of Ireland, but in a context where, according to Farrell, “the whole *“Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity”* section of the Agreement, which was and is crucial to the new dispensation it promised, is under serious threat from Brexit”. This leads the author to suggest what is needed to face this threat:

“It seems now that a similar coalition is needed to try to preserve the legislation and institutions that protect Human Rights and Equality in Northern Ireland, to keep the Border open – and on another issue, to oppose any attempt to force the Republic to implement new highly restrictive immigration controls that are likely to be introduced by a post-Brexit UK government”.

This special edition of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* concludes with the reproduction of a joint article by Aoibhín de Búrca and Katy Hayward, and an interview with Sir George Quigley. In “The Agreement Generation: Young people’s views on the cross-border relationship”, first published in the 7th edition of the Journal in 2012, de Búrca and Hayward set out to explore the premise that “it is not necessarily the case that the benefits of peace will be translated by the ‘Agreement Generation’ into more amicable cross-border relations”. Crucially, the sustainability of the framework of interconnected relations established by the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement rests on how its legacy “will be determined by those who were young children at the time of its conception – a generation whose views on the subject of the border and the ‘other’ across it remain relatively unknown”.

The authors highlight changing attitudes in the Republic of Ireland to partition – where “unification is not an immediate objective, and the commitment and support to it is not always wholehearted” – and how Irish nationalism and identity are conceived. Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, although young people may be thirsty for change, the “Agreement Generation is made vulnerable to conflict by [...] persistent sectarianism, together with [...] the institutionalised segregation of the education system”. This situation, according to de Búrca and Hayward, places young people in Northern Ireland in an invidious position where they are burdened with the hope they may bring about change, while simultaneously blaming them for occasional sectarian disorder, robbing them of the ability to be active citizens.

Information gathered by de Búrca and Hayward through focus group discussions with young people on both sides of the border and questionnaires explored a number of core themes that are analysed in this article. The core themes were: generational difference; familiarity with the 1998 Agreement; interpretation and significance of the Agreement; cross-border relations and perceptions; and the future. Among the findings discussed by the authors, those relating to North-South relations include how “respondents generally agreed that progress in Strand Two is stymied by suspicions over the motivations for this North-South dimension”. However, the presumed motivations attached to North-South cooperation were clearly distinct according to the respondent’s jurisdiction:

“Whereas those in Belfast saw engagement with the South as directly related to religious or political affiliation, Southern students said the objective of cross-border cooperation was to promote investment and trade for mutual benefit, and was thus driven by financial considerations rather than any nationalist ideology or solidarity”.

These differing perspectives on why North-South cooperation may be undertaken were, perhaps, linked to how the young people questioned in the authors’ research viewed each other’s jurisdiction, and how they relate to one another. Southern respondents, for example, saw “more affinity with London than Belfast, due not only to its cultural diversity and size but also to a sense of simply not understanding Belfast”. There was, according to de Búrca and Hayward, clear evidence from their research that “Northern and Southern respondents view one another, and the ‘other jurisdiction’, in quite different terms”.

Reflecting on her joint article of 2012 with Aoibhín de Búrca, Katy Hayward begins by noting how “many things that seemed fairly secure three years ago [...] now seem quaintly outmoded”, and that the Agreement Generation “will be the one set to deal with the consequences of the UK’s decision to withdraw from the European Union”. For Hayward, while the British and Irish Governments have repeatedly restated their commitment to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, this has not prevented them from adopting very different positions in terms of Brexit, meaning that the “Agreement Generation holds its breath”. Comparing the position of young people in 2012 to current attitudes, Hayward also suggests views of British-Irish relation have changed among young people in the Republic of Ireland, and that Brexit has brought discussions over Irish unity into the mainstream, whereas it had been a topic generally avoided or of no significant interest seven years ago among the respondents to the study informing de Búrca and Hayward’s 2012 article.

De Búrca’s 2019 reflection begins by positing the present political dissonance as a failure of one of the co-guarantors of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement to be attuned to what she and Katy Hayward had heard from young people in 2012:

“If the Irish government had consulted with our focus groups on Brexit messaging, it would have been confident to go with the approach it did: prioritising peace on the island of Ireland and protecting the Good Friday Agreement. However, the current British government would have had a different experience”.

The author also highlights how the young people interviewed in 2012 were realistic about the 1998 Agreement, and “recognised that realising the potential of the Agreement would require a huge amount of work, and that the political reforms required would not come easily”. However, she reflects on the current context’s potential ability to put excessive strains on questions of identity and relations between North and South on the island of Ireland that had found some accommodation in the Good Friday Agreement, noting how “a no-deal Brexit places the current arrangements under threat”.

As a sign of the Centre for Cross Border Studies’ attentiveness to developments in the political and policy environment with implications for North-South cooperation, and in this case the particular acuity of Andy Pollak, the Centre’s founding Director, in the interview

with Sir George Quigley published in 2013, Sir George was asked the following: “But what if the UK exited from the EU? Would that imperil the North-South project? Surely it would in effect reinforce the border?” The answer deserves highlighting here, and needs to be read in the context of the vision, knowledge, openness and, above all, ambition in achieving the best for these islands that runs through the rest of the interview:

“First of all, I don’t think it is likely that the UK will leave the EU. To decide to go it alone in what is likely to be increasingly a world of competing continents would be a huge leap in the dark. On its own, the UK’s bargaining power on trade issues, for example, would be slight. Moreover, more than 50% of its trade is with the EU and it is problematic what terms it could negotiate from outside the Single Market. The pressures to remain in from business and those fearful of job losses will be immense”.

Sir George’s response was borne from a context where the “growing friendship between the UK and Ireland has been a vital feature of the architecture of peace”, leading him to the conclusion “Keeping it in good repair and where possible enhancing it (as for instance was demonstrated by the Queen’s visit to Ireland in 2011) therefore makes good sense”.

In his reflection on Sir George’s interview, Michael D’Arcy is in no doubt that “confronted by Brexit Sir George would be vigorously defending his vision for an island economy and its now proven benefits that are underpinning the Belfast Good/Friday Agreement (B/GFA) and helping to embed peace”. D’Arcy goes on to offer what he suggests may have been Sir George’s responses to the UK’s departure from the EU, which does not mean the author provides answers to the questions that arise from Brexit in the name of Sir George, but instead that, having known him, he considers how Sir George would approach looking for those answers. This includes looking to acquire knowledge from relevant experts, whether close to home or from elsewhere, and to apply that knowledge to present circumstances. That attitude is clearly visible in Sir George’s 2013 interview, where he discusses what he had learnt about economic zones from elsewhere in the world, and how this could be applied to the island of Ireland. As Michael D’Arcy says, Sir George “would have searched widely for new knowledge and insights to inform his contributions on how the unfolding consequences could, and should, be managed”. D’Arcy concludes his reflection by drawing on the man that comes through in the 2013 interview, summarizing Sir George’s potential response to Brexit and what it could mean to the all-island economy and relations within and between these islands, as one where “he would have worked with care, sensitivity and deliberation to avoid any return to our troubled past advocating we continue to work jointly to ensure sustainable growth, “a high standard of living” and disadvantage is “decisively tackled”.

That aspiration to continue to work jointly – to cooperate across borders – is the thread that runs through the articles and interviews collected in this special edition of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies* celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Centre for Cross Border Studies. It is an aspiration the Centre will continue to pursue in the years ahead, however challenging they may be, and one that will no doubt continue to be present in future editions of the Journal.

Finally, enormous gratitude is due to Andy Pollak's vision and passion not only to establish the Centre for Cross Border Studies, but also for initiating the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland*. Our thanks are also due to his successor, Ruth Taillon, who recognized the intrinsic value of the Journal and, with her energy and determination, developed it into the evolving treasury of knowledge of North-South relation and cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland and wider afield it now is. The journey continues.

The Future of Cross-Border Cooperation: *Issues of sustainability*

Liam O'Dowd

(This article was first published in 2006, in the first edition of the Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland)

The wider question of sustaining the 'peace process' and re-establishing the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive has rather obscured another key dimension of the Belfast Agreement: the promotion of cross-border co-operation. Yet there seems to be compelling evidence that the latter is at a crossroads and serious questions now arise about its future scope and sustainability. The underlying argument developed in this article is that the current phase of cross-border co-operation is coming to an end with the impending negotiations on the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland institutions and a steady diminution in transnational sources of funding.

The following discussion draws on a series of research projects which have examined cross-border co-operation using a qualitative case study approach.¹ It is not primarily concerned with the merits or demerits of cross-border co-operation, issues which have been discussed at length elsewhere.² Rather the concern here is with factors which affect the sustainability of cross-border co-operation and with what sustainability might mean across the major societal sectors: the state, the economy and the third (voluntary and community) sector. Two distinct, if gradually interwoven factors have driven cross-border cooperation over the last two decades. The first has been the search for a political settlement of the conflict which developed the notion of inter-locking strands (involving Strands One, Two and Three of the 'peace process'). Beginning with the emergence of a sustained British-Irish inter-governmental partnership formalised in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, by the mid 1990s a more inclusive process had emerged involving all the Northern Ireland protagonists. The second influence has been the thrust toward closer European integration which emanates from a rather different source: the creation of the Single European Market (1986- 1992) and the European Union at Maastricht (1992). However the two influences gradually became interwoven, and from 1994 onwards the search for a political settlement accelerated, supported by an active, transnational funding regime.

The scale of formalised cross-border co-operation since the mid-1980s contrasts dramatically with the previous sixty years of largely 'back to back' state-building dating from partition.³ Tannam⁴ argues that the key drivers of this upturn have been increased political co-operation between the British and Irish governments rather than spillover from European economic integration. Certainly, since the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985), both governments have created a broad political framework for co-operation culminating in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and the resulting North/South Ministerial Council and implementation bodies. This framework has been given substance by funding from three main sources: the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), the three INTERREG initiatives and

the two Peace Programmes. The EU has contributed to the first and has directly sponsored the other two. Since 1994 all three funds have been operative simultaneously, thus providing unprecedented support for cross-border co-operation. A huge number of diverse projects and activities have been initiated involving both states, and business and the voluntary and community sectors in both jurisdictions.

The GFA appeared to put North-South links (Strand Two) on a firm footing, embedding them within a broader complex of relationships linking the two N.Ireland communities and the island of Ireland with Britain. The outworkings of the Single European Market provided a rationale for co-operation to improve economic competitiveness on the island. Although the funding regime has been transnational from the outset, most of the projects generated have been confined within the boundaries of each state on the island. Nevertheless, over time the INTERREG initiatives have become more focused on genuine cross-border projects, and 15% of Peace Programme funds have been allocated to the cross-border dimension.⁵

The GFA represents a particular institutionalisation of three sets of relationships within a constitutional agreement that formally recognises the border and specifies that a united Ireland can only come about with the consent of a majority within Northern Ireland. Strand One covers cross-community relations within Northern Ireland; Strand Two involves North-South relationships; and Strand Three represents relationships between Britain and Ireland. Within Strand Two, a distinction may be made between co-operation involving both jurisdictions in Ireland generally, and co-operation confined to the 12 northern counties of the island which have been effectively defined as a border region by the EU INTERREG and Peace programmes. It must also be noted that, in practice, Strand Two co-operation frequently involves both cross-community co-operation within Northern Ireland as well as Strand Three relationships.

The GFA marked the high water mark of a policy framework for both resolving the N.Ireland conflict and promoting cross-border co-operation. While the relationship between the British and Irish government remains close at several levels, it would be wrong to assume that it necessarily translates into an effective and dynamic environment for developing cross-border co-operation on the ground. Likewise, with enlargement, the priorities of the EU are changing and the flow of funds to Ireland will certainly diminish.⁶ Combined with the continued impasse over the full implementation of the GFA, it might be hypothesised at least that the environment for sustaining cross-border co-operation has deteriorated. It is against this background that we undertook our latest case studies during 2005.

Case Studies

These case studies range over different areas such as tourism, health, energy, economic development, training, local authority networks, women's issues, sport and rural development.⁷ While each area raises specific issues of its own, our aim has been to identify the generic factors which shape cross-border co-operation. One such factor is the question of sustainability – an issue which is now looming large for many practitioners as funding sources decline and the political momentum engendered by the Good Friday Agreement has diminished, if not stalled.

As cross-border (and cross-community) co-operative projects have developed, they have generally revealed the deep-rooted nature of divisions within Northern Ireland as well as the problems of linkages between two separate jurisdictions. There is a keen awareness among practitioners at all levels that the underlying sources of division, tension and conflict will not be tackled effectively by short-term expedients or projects. Andy Pollak⁸ has even raised the prospect that effectively promoting peace and reconciliation through the educational system may take centuries rather than decades. Research on cross-border co-operation in the early 1990s reveals the extent to which even localised economic co-operation across the border was slow to get underway. The first INTERREG initiative stimulated much talk about co-operation but little practical activity that was genuinely cross-border. Nevertheless, talk about co-operation was an important counterbalance at a time when there was also much debate over the ongoing conflict, the military fortification of the border, the periodic closure of the Belfast-Dublin railway line and the struggle over the closure of border roads.

Threats to Sustainability

Promoting cross-border co-operation goes ‘against the grain’ in many respects. There is a powerful institutional inertia rooted in the consolidation of partition over a long period, the development of two separate states, and associated with this, the creation of separate mindsets, agendas and priorities.⁹ Partition, in this sense, represents not so much a historical event as an ongoing process of separation. Deep-rooted communal divisions pre-date partition of course, and have been exacerbated by periodic violent conflict, most notably in the period 1969 to 1994. A widening cross-border gulf has been integral to deepening divisions within N.Ireland. In this context, promoting cross-border co-operation is a matter of ‘running to stand still’. Without pro-active and sustained policies aimed at promoting such co-operation (including cross-communal interaction within N.Ireland), there is a likelihood that the process of North-South divergence will accelerate.¹⁰

At present, however, a complex of factors is emerging that threatens the sustainability of the programme of cross-border co-operation that has been gathering pace since the mid 1980s. Firstly, viability is under threat from the scaling down and possible ending of two key funding initiatives, the International Fund for Ireland and the EU Peace programmes. While the EU’s cross-border INTERREG programme will survive, it may be diminished by the diversion of funding to Eastern European border regions and by pressure to re-nationalise EU Structural Funds.

On the political front, the continued suspension of the N.Ireland Assembly and the North/South Ministerial Council, and the increased polarisation of Northern Ireland politics, have created a political environment less conducive to the strategic development of North-South co-operation into the future. Peter Smyth¹¹ has noted how the lack of ministerial direction has inhibited progress particularly in the areas of cooperation as designated under the GFA, while the North/South implementation bodies have survived on a ‘care and maintenance’ basis. While John Coakley¹² has advanced a number of reasons why the implementation bodies will survive (i.e. because of human resources committed, the policy niches they fill, and the political cost of ending them), his analysis scarcely envisages a strategically dynamic future for these bodies either.

Scope and Sustainability

Of course, the field of cross-border co-operation is much broader than that covered by the implementation bodies, or by political and administrative institutions narrowly construed. It includes:

- The state sector – politics and administration
- The profit motivated economy/ business sector – private companies, corporations and market transactions between individuals
- The social economy/third sector – non-governmental organisations such as charities, community and voluntary groups, credit unions and co-operatives

In a general sense, each sector has different implications for sustainability. Given the stability of state institutions on either side of the border, the state sector provides, potentially at least, the most durable basis for long-term cross-border co-operation from an institutional and financial perspective. While, as Tannam, Smyth and others have pointed out, political direction is crucial in advancing co-operation, the ‘short-termism’, territorial constituencies and conflicting political ideologies of elected representatives can inhibit or preclude effective cross-border co-operation.

Electoral politics as currently practiced in Northern Ireland tends to mobilise communal division rather than encourage co-operation. Excessive bureaucratic regulation and centralisation, especially when combined with institutional conservatism, is also a formidable obstacle to co-operation. The evolution of two separate administrations on the island since 1920 has generated a huge legacy of ‘back to back,’ rather than co-ordinated cooperative activity that has become ingrained in the culture of both sets of state institutions. Of course, this culture of division does not exist in a vacuum – it represents, institutionalises, and often exacerbates deep divisions in popular culture and politics.

The profit-motivated economy promises an underlying rationale for co-operation which is ‘outside’ politics and ‘blind’ to communal divisions. It is particularly attractive to those who are wary of politicians’ involvement in cross-border co-operation or of the political implications of co-operation. The measuring stick of profitability and economic self-interest provides an inbuilt guide to sustainability, although a tension remains between short-term profitability and long-term strategic considerations.

The Joint Business Council (JBC) of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and the N.Ireland branch of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has co-operated to put pressure on the two governments to improve the general business environment in relation to telecommunications, energy, waste management, business education linkages, transportation, supply management, logistics, and cross-border labour mobility. One of our interviewees in the JBC noted that for individual companies, the issue was less cross-border co-operation per se – rather the aim was increased competitiveness on the island and internationally. The extent of this kind of co-operation can be limited by the imperatives of competition and the vagaries of local, national and global economies. Nevertheless, advocates of social capital and the value of embedding economic

relationships in co-operative relationships continue to insist on the mutual interdependence of co-operation and competition.

Finally the third (community and voluntary) sector has the potential to mobilise cross-border co-operation at grass-roots level and to identify practical projects which are of mutual benefit to groups on either side of the border. The third sector is capable of responding to gaps in social provision by the state and identifying the consequences of market failure. Its relative distance from the state and business sectors has led it to take the lead in directly tackling issues of peace-building and reconciliation. Its flexibility and mobilising potential is limited by the constraints of uncertain funding; the difficulty of maintaining core funding; duplication and overlap of projects; the capacity of volunteers to commit their time and effort, and the extent to which the third sector itself mirrors the communal divisions in civil society and the different orientations of both jurisdictions.¹³

While each of these sectors may be distinguished analytically as having its own internal dynamic, in practice cross-border co-operation to date has involved a partnership between some or all of these sectors. Thus, for example, the third sector and the state have worked closely together on EU funded programmes with periodic involvement of the business sector. Similarly, much funding has been directed to partnerships between government and the private sector. Two key concepts have been central to cross-border co-operation: partnership and networking. These have operated at a variety of levels and have been largely fuelled by funding from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), INTERREG and Peace.

At the other end of the spectrum to this co-operation is the institutionalised emphasis on territorial sovereignty and accountability by politicians and civil servants alike. The existence of two states ensures the sustained importance of the territorial dimension of policy, politics and identity. On the other hand, transnational networking and partnership have a tendency to be more transient, project or task oriented, short-term and funding dependent.

Any overview of the plethora of cross-border projects and initiatives cannot fail to be struck by their varied and unsystematic nature. Some projects have been noticeably dynamic, others much less so. This has led organisations like Co-operation Ireland to call regularly for a more coherent, strategic policy framework for such co-operation. The Good Friday Agreement and the resulting North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC), cross-border implementation bodies and 'areas of co-operation', were aimed at providing a supportive and integrated framework for the great variety of cross-border projects. The subsequent stalling of the GFA, combined with the uncertain future of EU funding, threaten existing projects while raising the question of long-term sustainability. More generally, lack of political direction, threats to funding, institutional inertia and poor institutionalisation of existing co-operation all undermine the prospects for sustainable co-operation in the medium and long-term.

Key factors

A preliminary analysis of the context of cross-border co-operation and of our case studies to date suggest a number of factors that impinge on sustainability.

- 1 Political, administrative and funding contexts. One of the overarching factors affecting sustainability is the orientations of both national governments (and the N.Ireland Assembly, should that be re-established). Here the priority and commitment accorded to cross-border co-operation is critical, as is the extent to which both governments will compensate for the decline in EU and IFI funding.
- 2 Nature of the project – the extent to which it is distinctive, innovative, and meets or creates an ongoing demand for its services or outputs.
- 3 Effectiveness and relevant experience of project personnel and of personal networks.
- 4 Degree and nature of institutionalisation – measured by consolidation of funding arrangements, mainstreaming of co-operative activities, embeddedness of cross-border agencies in wider networks of institutions on either side of the border, and declining reliance on individual ‘champions’ of cross-border co-operation.
- 5 The degree to which cross-border co-operation is underpinned by durable grassroots relationships capable of generating trust and viable, fundable projects.

The following section illustrates the effects of these five factors from a number of our completed case studies.

1. Political and Administrative Contexts

At a general level, many respondents singled out the Good Friday Agreement as improving the environment for cooperation, noting the generally encouraging attitude of both administrations. One of our respondents saw politicians as an obstacle to cross-border co-operation in the period prior to the GFA, but acknowledged that the political climate had improved subsequently. Nevertheless he observed: “The best bet is to keep the politicians out of it. As soon as they are involved, the argument of politics or religion is put...it is doomed”. In the health sector, he saw administrative co-operation between the health boards and hospitals on either side of the border as the best way forward (Co-operation and Working Together interview). In most of our case studies, participants typically maintained an arms length relationship with politicians beyond local authority level, while acknowledging occasional support from them.

On the other hand, a Southern respondent from Greenbox, a relatively new cross-border eco-tourism project, emphasised that ministerial direction was crucial to cross-border co-operation, suggesting that very few government or semi-state agencies have succeeded in bringing forward effective cross-border projects without been told to do so by a government minister or ministers. He complained about excessive administrative regulation and centralisation as inhibiting effective co-operation, and argued that senior managers, policy makers, chief executives of agencies or secretary generals of government departments have low expectations of cross-border projects. They have “a very patronising view ...they do not expect them to deliver”. This respondent felt that few cross-border projects had been really successful and laid the blame on institutional culture:

[It is] the conservative short sighted, very reactionary constipated culture of so many institutions, both north and south, that has really inhibited any form of

genuine healthy engagement, or exploration of synergy between north and south. There is a huge impediment there – that impediment is the cultures within individual organisations, within government departments, within development agencies. It's culture, culture, culture.

Interestingly, this respondent was himself a development agency employee promoting an innovative project involving local networks. Not all our respondents were as critical of state administrations. Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT), a cross-border health project representing an established area of social provision, emphasised the importance of practical administrative co-operation on the ground. Our CAWT respondents saw the interest of both governments as benign, but felt that the actual ideas for co-operation were developed at a local and regional level among the four health boards involved. They suggested that health provision in the border area was not a top priority for the Dublin and Belfast administrations, but welcomed indirect official endorsements via the INTERREG initiative, the cross-border local authority networks and the Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

In all cases, we were struck by the extent to which very different partnerships and networks were dependent on IFI or EU funding, and the degree to which the initiation of cross-border networks depended on the availability of such funding. Obviously the disappearance or elimination of such funding sources will seriously test the survival capacities of many projects.

2. Nature of the projects

The more high profile and durable projects we examined were those which had developed a niche role for themselves. For CAWT, their niche was responding to the demands of border residents (especially in the north west) on health-related issues. For Border Horizons, a sub-sector of the IFI Wider Horizons programme, it was to address in an innovative way the training needs of young people who had underachieved in the formal education system of both states.

The Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) has sought to forge a role for itself as a “strategic broker and facilitator for development within the (mid-border) region and for the allocation of resources within the region” (interview). In acting on behalf of 10 local authorities in the mid-border region, it has complemented the two other cross-border local authority networks. Its structure spans elected representatives, officials, business interests and the third sector, and its co-ordination activities cover a wide remit from broadband access to fisheries boards, water maintenance, independent living for people with intellectual disabilities, and cultural heritage. It has developed extensive partnership links in its region with government agencies and the EU Commission. Given the prospect of local government reform in Northern Ireland and the possibility of a reduction in the number of local authorities, these networks may prefigure an amalgamation of groups of local councils in the future.

The eco-tourism rationale of Greenbox represents an innovative approach to promoting marginalised rural areas close to the border. The project combines an organic farm and shop with training courses for NI and Rol participants, the promotion of bed and breakfast

provision and cross-border cycle tours. As such it has linked a variety of diverse activities in a novel way. However our Greenbox respondents suggested that continued government support would be necessary for a number of years before the project could rely on market demand for its survival. One estimated that a realistic goal would be that it would become 70% self-funding.

3. Effectiveness of project personnel and personal networks

Our most active and durable projects were those which contained active champions of cross-border co-operation, with experience of working in, or with, both jurisdictions, and with personal networks which spanned the state, market and third sectors. In this respect, the cross-border co-operation activities of the last 15 years have produced a considerable human resource of individuals with experience of working in and across both jurisdictions.

The persons involved in the initiation of the more active projects are generally well linked to various sources of power and support. Those involved in the initiation and further development of ICBAN, CAWT, Border Horizons and to a limited extent Greenbox originated from highest levels of the statutory bodies that fund the organisations and their activities. For example, Derry Well Woman Centre has in retrospect benefited from the work of the manager of its cross border project who went on to be elected as the Chair of the Western Health Board. The development and design of the Greenbox project has been ascribed to an individual with a long track record in many cross border projects and with experience of working in both jurisdictions. One of our respondents underlined the importance of personal networks, seeing them as vital to successful co-operation:

When it comes to cross border co-operation (...) it really has to do with personal networks. I know people, people trust me, I trust them. I know what I am capable of doing. I know if I want a problem solved, or if I want to propose an idea, I just have to phone them up, and I can talk it through with them – and if it is to our mutual benefit, we would do it. So it is all to do with personal networks. If there is any message to get through to you today – it is that the key asset that will drive cross border co-operation is the ability of individuals on the ground to network effectively with counterparts in the other jurisdiction.

4. Degree and nature of institutionalisation

Personal networks or the existence of a cadre of cross-border workers, however, cannot not be sustained over the medium and long-term without effective institutionalisation. The latter may be measured by the existence and/or consolidation of core funding arrangements, the routinization or mainstreaming of co-operative activities, and the embeddedness of cross-border agencies in wider networks of institutions on both sides of the border. Perhaps the most significant example of successful institutionalisation is InterTradeIreland, established as one of the North/South implementation bodies under the Good Friday Agreement. Its remit involves improving the business environment on an all-island basis and it has taken up and developed many of the concerns of the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council.

The weakness and uncertain future of the funding base is the overriding factor which affects institutionalisation of cross-border co-operation generally. Much co-operation still constitutes niche activity for the organisations involved. As such it tends to be marginal

rather than central to institutional priorities, an ‘add-on’ because of the availability of funding, which will be dispensed with when funding runs out. On the basis of our work to date, we would hypothesise that cross-border co-operation ranks higher on the agendas of Northern than Southern organisations. While political commitment to co-operation is reiterated regularly at the highest political levels in the South, the institutional arrangements there for cross-border cooperation are less impressive. One of our respondents in a Southern government agency involved in cross-border co-operation sharply articulated this issue in pointing out that cross border co-operation was outside the mainstream interests of the agency as a whole:

So it can hinder your career development. You are on a sidewalk, you are in a backwater, and nobody really knows about what goes on in this (cross-border) unit.

In some respects, the differential emphasis of northern and southern organisations on cross-border cooperation is understandable, given the relative size of the two jurisdictions, and the fact that funding for cross-border co-operation is relatively more significant in the North.

Our interviews with projects dealing with women’s issues demonstrated the other side of the ‘niche’ problem. Women’s issues span a broad spectrum both in terms of general policy and day to day concerns. Therefore they could hardly be termed niche issues. On the other hand, weak institutionalisation of these concerns on each side of the border limits the scope and sustainability of cross-border co-operation.

In one such project in Derry, one of our respondents pointed out that she been successful in raising consciousness of women’s issues at the beginning of the project, but over time organisational commitment waned. She also pointed to the problem of the personnel changes within organisations creating problems of continuity in cross-border co-operation. Expertise in cross-border co-operation is frequently tied to particular individuals with strong interest and experience in the area. When they change jobs or leave the organisation, this weakens organisational commitment and capacity to engage in cross-border co-operation. Again, this is an indication of weak institutionalisation affecting sustainability

5. Durable grassroots relationships

In the last two decades there has been a mushrooming of cross-border projects, networking and organisations across a broad spectrum of activities at local, regional and national levels. It remains difficult to estimate the degree to which such co-operation has influenced popular perceptions and promoted durable grassroots relationships capable of generating trust and viable cross-border projects in the future. It is at this level that the political impasse over the Good Friday Agreement has had most effect in creating a less than benign environment for sustaining cross-border co-operation. The question of the popular legitimacy of cross-border cooperation is analogous, and not unrelated to, the legitimacy of European integration generally. It generates a constituency of committed networkers and participants, but has difficulty engaging the awareness or positive support of those not directly involved. Clearly too, grassroots support is far more important in some areas of cooperation than others, notably in projects predicated on engaging large numbers

of participants in cross-border activities. For example, promoting peace and reconciliation through cultural or educational co-operation is more dependent on popular support and legitimacy than inter-firm co-operation.

Conclusions

As the funding for cross-border co-operation declines, many cross-border projects face a major crisis of sustainability, a crisis foreshadowed in the gap that developed between the end of the Peace 1 programme and the beginning of the Peace 2 programme. The preceding discussion has only begun to highlight the factors which will determine the survival or otherwise of cross-border co-operation activities. Our case studies illustrate the extent to which IFI and EU funding has sustained cross-border projects across all sectors – with the decline in funding such projects are at serious risk.

It would appear that those activities capable of maintaining flexible partnerships across the three main sectors – state, business and the third sector – are better placed to survive. However, in cross-sectoral co-operation across the border, a key question is what definition or understanding of ‘sustainability’ will prevail. As suggested above, each sector accords a different priority and meaning to sustainability. For the market sector, sustainability is ultimately defined as making a profit. For the third sector, there is immediate and continuing pressure to ensure both core and project funding which can inhibit strategic long-term planning. For the state sector, core funding is seldom an issue as far as organisational survival is concerned, although the sustainability of particular projects may be subject to changing administrative and political priorities and negotiation. Where cross-border co-operation depends on partnerships across the state, market and third sectors, much depends on which definition and understanding of sustainability prevails within the partnership, i.e., short-term market criteria, the funding dependent criteria of the third sector, or the potentially more long-term standards of the state sector. The balance struck between short, medium and long-term strategies of co-operation remains a critical issue for the future.

Even then, however, much depends on the general political environment, personal networking and the capacity to institutionalise co-operation effectively. The Good Friday Agreement underpinned the preferences of the majority in Northern Ireland in constitutionally recognising the border. This has facilitated cross-border cooperation and networking on the basis of mutual benefit.

The great contribution of cross-border co-operation is that it challenges the zero-sum calculations which have bedevilled politics within Northern Ireland. It holds out the prospect of a ‘positive-sum’ politics which is outward looking and capable of revealing existing and new areas of common interest which cross the internal and external borders of N.Ireland. Over the last two decades, a small but significant human resource has developed consisting of workers with a history of commitment and experience in cross-border working. As the current phase of cross-border co-operation comes to an end, one of the main dangers is that this resource will be dissipated by the inertia of state institutions, a process of re-nationalisation within the EU, and the associated funding crises which face cross-border co-operation generally.

Notes

- ¹ This article draws primarily on research with Cathal McCall and Ivo Damkat carried out as part of an interdisciplinary research project (2004-2006) funded by the Higher Education Authority and the Special EU Programmes Body via the Peace 2 programme. The project is entitled: Mapping Frontiers, Plotting Pathways, Routes to Co-operation in a Divide Island. (For a fuller description of the project and of sustainability, see O'Dowd, L., McCall, C. and Damkat, I. (2006) 'Sustaining Cross-Border Cooperation: A Case Study Approach', www.mappingfrontiers.ie. This article also draws on research with Cathal McCall funded by the Royal Irish Academy's Third Sector Research Programme and on earlier research undertaken by the author between 1991 and 1994 funded by the Economic and Social Research Council ('Negotiating the British-Irish Border: Transfrontier Cooperation on the European Periphery', Grant Number R000 23 3053.)
- ² There is considerable literature on the potential of economic cross-border cooperation in particular. See, for example: D'Arcy, M. and Dickson, T.[eds] (1995) *Border Crossings: Developing Ireland's Border Economy*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan; Munck, R. and Hamilton, D. (1998) 'Politics, the economy and peace in Northern Ireland' in D.Miller (ed) *Rethinking Northern Ireland*, London: Longman; Bradley, J. and Hamilton, D. (1999) *Accelerating Growth and Development: Border Effects in Ireland, North and South, Report to the Border Crossing Project*, supported by the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, administered by Cooperation Ireland; Bradley, J. and Birnie, E. (2001) *Can the Celtic Tiger Cross the Irish Border?* Cork: Cork University Press and Centre for Cross Border Studies.
- ³ See for example, Tannam, E. (1998) *Cross-Border Co-operation in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland*, Basingstoke: Macmillan and Kennedy, M. (2000) *Division and Consensus: The Politics of Cross-Border Relations in Ireland, 1925-1969*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- ⁴ Tannam, E. (2005) *Cross-Border Co-operation Between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland: Neo-Functionalism Revisited*, Mapping Frontiers, Plotting Pathways (MFPP, Ancillary Paper 1, Dublin and Belfast: UCD/QUB.
- ⁵ Magennis, E., Clarke P, Shiels, J. (2006) 'Mapping Study of Funding Support for Cross-Border Co-operation on the island of Ireland, 1982-2005', Armagh: MFPP/CCBS.
- ⁶ The threat to the EU funding of cross-border co-operation is not specific to Ireland and is being experienced even in some advanced cross-border regions in western Europe (Jörg Saalbach, 2005, 'Pamina Infobest: A successful information partnership in the Franco-German border region', address to CCBS/Borderwise conference: *Crossing the Information Border: Developing an all-island agenda for cross-border information, advice and advocacy*, Share Centre, Lisnaskea, 20 September 2005.)
- ⁷ We undertook 10 case studies and carried out 35 in-depth interviews with individuals associated with these cases. The bulk of the interviewing for this project was undertaken by Ivo Damkat.
- ⁸ Pollak, A. (2005) 'Educational Cooperation on the island of Ireland: A Thousand Flowers and a Hundred Heartaches', MFPP Discussion Paper, www.mappingfrontiers.ie.
- ⁹ See O'Dowd, L. (1994) 'Negotiating the British-Irish Border: Transfrontier Co-operation on the European Periphery', Final Report to ESRC, Grant No. R000 23 3053.
- ¹⁰ We have analysed elsewhere the extent to which cross-border co-operation in the cultural sphere is a necessary complement to cross-communal co-operation in undermining the zero-sum territorialism of politics in NI (O'Dowd, L. and McCall, C. 2004, 'Escaping the Cage of Ethno-national Conflict', MFPP, Discussion Paper, www.mappingfrontiers.ie.

- ¹¹ Smyth, P. (2005) *North-South Cooperation since the Agreement*, MFPP Ancillary Paper 6, Dublin and Belfast: UCD/QUB.
- ¹² Coakley, J. (2005) *The Future of the North-South Bodies*, MFPP Ancillary Paper 7, Dublin and Belfast: UCD/QUB, p.10.
- ¹³ For obvious reasons the third sector, especially within NI, is currently much more exercised about 'sustainability' than the other two sectors. These debates about resourcing the sector reveal the extent to which third sector in NI is bounded by the latter's jurisdictional limits. There has been little discussion beyond project level about sustaining cross-border co-operation within the sector. For an exception that addresses this issue directly see Logue, P. (2003) 'Cross Border Reconciliation and Development' in Community Federation for NI, *Taking "Calculated" Risks for Peace II*, Belfast: CFNI, pp.86-91. For organisations like the Centre for Cross Border Studies, specifically established in 1999 to promote and research cross-border co-operation, the uncertainty around core funding, as distinct from project-related funding, has been a significant constraint (see evaluation reports on CCBS on www.crossborder.ie). For such organisations, sustainability pressures are a continuous concern.

Back to the Future?

Liam O'Dowd

Thirteen years ago, the sustainability of cross border cooperation (CBC) was facing some major obstacles, many of them profiled in my 2006 article reprinted above. The overall picture of CBC then was of a rather inchoate amalgam of state, private and voluntary sector projects and initiatives with multiple funding sources but lacking any overall strategic direction. The initial surge in such cooperation owed its existence to the peace process and the boost to European integration provided by the establishment of the EU Single Market in 1992. But by 2006 the initial momentum had slowed noticeably. Most notably Stormont was in suspension; the North-South implementation bodies, limited to begin with, were in suspended animation, and the funding regime which had driven CBC had passed its peak. Moreover, even to its more enthusiastic proponents, the achievements of CBC seemed very limited although an obvious improvement on the previous seventy years of back to back development ushered in by Partition. In 2006, expenditure on CBC remained miniscule as a proportion of public expenditure in both jurisdictions (as it is today). It was difficult to find a close connection between CBC and a measurable peace dividend. As I argued in the article, CBC had not become routine, normalised or institutionalised. While many important projects had been initiated and a human resource of cross-border co-operators had developed, the contradictory meanings of, and barriers to, sustainability were much more obvious than any dynamism or momentum driving CBC forward.

A retrospect from 2019, however, does call for some re-evaluation in ways which illuminate our current situation. Cross-border cooperation between the early 1990s had been driven by a number of factors sustained by a novel, and benign, alignment of local and international forces. By the 1990s, the conflict had reached a stalemate locally; British-Irish intergovernmental cooperation was intensifying and significantly there was sustained political support from the US, and indirectly from the EU, to facilitate a settlement. In sum, the peace process in all its aspects, and the wider process of European integration were powerful drivers of a new environment with a historic potential for consolidating inter-communal and cross-border cooperation. Certainly, there were warning signs; it was proving extremely torturous to establish a sustainable Executive at Stormont. The problems engendered by this were further exacerbated by a more hands-off approach by British and Irish governments wanting to believe that the locals could and should be left to iron out their remaining difficulties. Of course, this was a fatal mistake in the context of the wider architecture of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). This disappointing disengagement partly explains the failure to build on the opportunities for CBC built into the Good Friday Agreement.

Nevertheless, while the obstacles and limitations to formal CBC identified in my article have become all too obvious since 2006, something else was happening which was impossible to visualise back then – the meaning of the border itself was changing. Here a

number of factors were crucial – the demilitarisation of the border region, the abolition of customs posts, the opening of blocked roads and above all a cross-border regulatory environment shaped by the evolution of the European Single Market. Under this regime, the actual border became invisible; convergence had replaced divergence notably in many aspects of commercial and economic life. Cross-border traffic in goods and people seemed to be burgeoning even as formalised CBC seemed relatively stagnant. Even more significantly perhaps, both nationalists and unionists seemed to accept and even actively support an open and invisible border, even during times when bickering and mutual vetoes disrupted and incapacitated the Executive in Stormont. It might be suggested that this outcome was one of the more hopeful and benign outworkings of the GFA. The emergence of a relatively frictionless border was analogous to the remarkable regeneration of Belfast as a tourist and cultural centre. The border had become more a bridge than a barrier and less a byword for illegal activities. Strikingly, the historical legacy of the border as a symbol of contested sovereignty and separation was diminishing and instead it was becoming a symbol of convergence and peaceful interaction between both parts of Ireland.

At the time of writing, however, Brexit seems about to sweep away the basis for perhaps the most promising outcome of the GFA, the increasing irrelevance of the border in everyday life. The most enthusiastic Brexiteers were clearly either ignorant or wilfully oblivious to the consequences for the Irish Border. The rights of a voting majority in Northern Ireland enshrined in the GFA were simply ignored despite the majority for 'remain' in NI being greater than the majority for 'leave' in the whole of the UK. Remarkably, Tory Brexiteers found staunch allies in the DUP who were willing to ignore both the local majority and the practical consequences of Brexit for the GFA and NI. It seems likely that the DUP (never enthusiastic EU supporters in any case) saw Brexit as an opportunity to initiate long term processes of divergence and separation which would strengthen the Union in the long term. In opposing a 'backstop' which would have recognised the special position of NI *per se*, the DUP pursued a zero-sum approach – rejecting the possibility of maintaining special links to the EU in a post-Brexit UK.

To the surprise and irritation of the English Brexiteers, the Irish border quickly became a major sticking point in the negotiations. All sides paid lip service to keeping the border 'soft' and 'open'. However, the meaningless nature of this discourse became all too apparent when the 'backstop' became a critical obstacle to supporters of 'Leave' and the border question began to loom large in UK-EU negotiations over a withdrawal agreement. The ludicrous and disingenuous notion that the whole issue could be resolved by new forms of technology completely ignored the wider and more complex fabric of cross-border relationships which had culminated in the emergence of an open, invisible border over the previous three decades. Accordingly, it now seems likely that Brexit, especially of the no-deal variety, will put into historic reversal both the evolution of an open and invisible border, and the limited formalised CBC, which has evolved through the four Peace Programmes and INTERREG initiatives. Instead, as the Brexit debate intensifies, the border has been re-constitutionalised and weaponised into a clash of national sovereignties – the very core issue that the GFA sought to ameliorate and circumvent.

There is perhaps one hopeful, if tenuous, possibility that the headlong rush to a no-deal Brexit will stimulate a countervailing movement within NI, at intergovernmental level, in

the EU and the US that will seek to combat the historic reversals inherent in a 'hard' Brexit – the prospects of a burgeoning black economy, loss of jobs, enhanced peripheralization of the border counties and a further diminution of formalised CBC. Such a reaction could have two consequences in the short term. Firstly, it could throw into ever sharper relief the toxic threat to the most benign and organic outcome of the GFA – the redefinition of the meaning of the Irish border in the everyday life of people over the last three decades. Secondly, it might help illuminate, and seek to address, many of the issues outlined in my 2006 article, the startling underdevelopment of formalised cross-border co-operation – the minimal level of funding, the opportunities missed, the degree of institutional inertia and apathy, and the failure to actively promote sustainable cross-border cooperation to peace and reconciliation. Without the formulation of more strategic and integrated plans for funded CBC, particularly within Strands Two and Three of the GFA, the Irish border will once again assume its historically malign role in nationalist-unionist relationships. Most tragically of all, the Brexit imbroglio, will have swept aside the often unacknowledged and, remarkable, acceptance for the last three decades of an open, invisible border on the island among those who see themselves as British, Irish or both.

7 August 2019

Educational Co-operation on the Island of Ireland:

*Are the good years ending?*¹

Andy Pollak

*(This article was first published in 2006, in the first edition of the **Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland**)*

Education has been a ‘core value’ for Irish people – North and South, Protestant and Catholic, unionist and nationalist – for at least two centuries. Both the 9,000 ‘hedge schools’ in the 1820s and the 7,000 state-supported national schools which succeeded them were part of a genuine all-island system, with a great deal of teacher mobility.

And then came partition, and education in Ireland, coming from a common root, sprang apart like a child’s catapult and stayed apart, with an almost 100% ‘back to back’ separation. The distinguished Irish educationalist, John Coolahan, has said that he trained twice a teacher in the Republic of Ireland in the 1960s, and “as far as education in Northern Ireland was concerned it could have been Timbuktu. There was no reference to it, no mention of it – it was just out of one’s consciousness.”²

Any serious thought of renewed educational links between the two parts of Ireland would have to wait until the late 1980s. The political contexts for this involved the British and Irish governments working together to seek common solutions to the problems of Northern Ireland, while on the continent of Europe old enemies came together in the European Union, stressing education as a way of fostering and promoting a common sense of European heritage and unity.

This European emphasis led to a multiplicity of exchange programmes – Erasmus, Socrates and Comenius – linking students, teachers and education officials, and bringing together schools and other educational institutions to do joint projects and research. In Ireland the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement led to the initiation of the first major North-South educational programme, itself firmly embedded in the wider European context: the **European Studies Project (ESP)**.

The ESP was generously funded by the Departments of Education in Northern Ireland, Ireland and England in a way that no school-based educational exchange programmes were in the later ‘peace process’ period from the mid-1990s onwards. In its first six-year phase it had a £3.2 million budget and six fulltime field officers in the North, the South and England. It had a junior programme for 11-15 year olds, with schools linked through ICT and occasional visits for the study of history, geography and environmental studies (themes which were common to the curricula of the three jurisdictions); and a senior programme based around the study of contemporary European issues, cultural, social, political, technological and economic.

The ESP's firm foundations were shown by the fact that by 1999 193 secondary schools (94 in Northern Ireland and 99 in the Republic of Ireland) were involved, and its website in 2006 still shows 67 Northern Irish and 56 Irish participating secondary schools plus schools from England, Scotland, Wales and 21 other European countries. One of the ESP's strongest values is that it has allowed Northern Protestant schools to be involved in a North-South link alongside East-West links with Britain and continental European countries – "it takes in the wider, safer environment" in the words of one senior Education and Library Board official.³

An extraordinary growth

The European Studies Project presaged a remarkable flowering of North-South relationships in the educational sector by non-governmental organisations and individual school groupings. The first organisation into the field was Cooperation North (now Cooperation Ireland), which in the late 1980s organised exchanges between 200 schools and youth groups.⁴

An article of this length can only give a flavour of the extraordinary growth in North-South school exchanges which occurred in the decade between 1995 and 2005, when generous EU Peace funding and other funding linked to the Northern Ireland peace process was made available. A Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) scoping study for the Departments of Education in Belfast and Dublin in 2000 estimated that nearly 540 schools on the island – 261 in the North and 276 in the South – were by then involved in a wide range of cross-border programmes and projects, involving either face-to-face or ICT contact.⁵

A 2000-2004 study by the North South Exchange Consortium (made up of Léargas, the British Council and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland) of both school and youth exchanges showed an even more dramatic increase in activities: it concluded that during this five year period nearly 3,000 school and youth groups had been financially supported, involving more than 55,000 young people.⁶ Nearly two thirds (64%) came from the formal education (i.e. schools) sector with one third (36%) from the informal (youth work) sector. In the formal sector, 57% of those involved came from secondary schools and 25% from primary schools. The NSEC study bore out the somewhat surprising conclusion of the earlier CCBS study that participation by Northern schools and youth groups from a Protestant background was broadly in line with their proportion of the population of Northern Ireland as a whole.⁷

This paper will now look briefly at three successful cross-border projects in ICT, citizenship and reconciliation education. One of the few largely funded by the Departments of Education North and South has been the ICT-based programme, **Dissolving Boundaries**, which is managed and co-ordinated by the University of Ulster and National University of Ireland Maynooth. This project received nearly 1.2 million from the Departments between 2000 and 2004. It began in 1999 with 52 primary, secondary and special schools, taking part in computer conferencing, video-conferencing and e-mailing on subjects like local history, geography, literature, art, drama, sport, human rights, and the developing world. By 2004 the number of schools who had participated had grown to 172, with 121 schools active in that year. Unusually 66% of the schools involved in Dissolving Boundaries are primary schools.

Another significant programme has been **Civic-Link**, which has also been one of the best funded, with 1.44 million from the Departments of Education and 1.6 million from the US Centre for Civic Education. It grew out of a commitment given by President Clinton's Education Secretary, Richard Riley, to support an Irish cross-border adaptation of a US citizenship education initiative, Project Citizen. Civic-Link involves second level students working with their teachers to identify and explore local community problems, and then to devise an action plan to present to policy makers. Unlike in the US, this work is not focussed in one locality but involves the students using ICT and face-to-face meetings to share their ideas with partner schools and youth groups across the Irish border. Over 160 Irish schools and youth groups have gone through the Civic-Link programme since it began seven years ago.

The European Studies Project, Dissolving Boundaries and Civic-Link are all examples of what one pioneer of North-South schools co-operation, Aidan Clifford, director of the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) of the City of Dublin VEC, calls the "indirect model", where schools come together to work in areas of mutual interest that are not directly related to issues of Irish conflict and identity. The more difficult "direct model" is rarer: it is where teachers and students take on, in the classroom, the social, political and religious issues which divide Irish people. Both approaches have value and should work alongside each other, Clifford believes.⁸

Education for Reconciliation, a highly innovative citizenship education project conceived and managed by the CDU, is an example of the latter. It also provides an example of the financial insecurity experienced by many trail-blazing smaller projects. It brought together over 30 secondary schools, North and South, to train teachers to deal with the 'hard topics' of reconciliation through the citizenship programmes for 12-15 year olds in both jurisdictions (Civic, Social and Political Education in the Republic, and Local and Global Citizenship in the North), and to research and develop a reconciliation module for those programmes.

Unusually, it has been funded by all three EU Peace programmes since 1999, making it something of a model project. Its 2004 evaluation said it was characterised by "excellent leadership, high motivation by the participating teachers, and a courageous effort to grasp one of the most difficult 'nettles' of the post-conflict period in Ireland, the demands of reconciliation".⁹ However despite several such glowing evaluations, it had to endure gaps in funding in 2000-2002 and 2005-2006 which led to a dispersal of its participant schools and loss of highly skilled and experienced staff. On the other hand it has recently overcome one key barrier faced by all EU Peace-funded projects – Brussels' bar on involving all but a few schools in the Republic outside the Southern Border Counties – by being awarded grant assistance from the Irish Department of Education and Science.

Despite this barrier, EU funding has been crucial in supporting a very large number of smaller North-South educational exchanges. The North South Exchange Consortium study confirms that funding for cross-border education work in Ireland comes overwhelmingly from overseas governmental and EU donors. Funding from such external sources accounts for 80% of the more than £69 million invested in cross-border exchange and co-operation activity between 2000 and 2004. The International Fund for Ireland invested over 38 million

of this (largely in the Wider Horizons youth training programme – see below), and another 20.7 million came from the EU Peace Two programme. Only 13% of funding (or 20% if the 25% governmental contribution to the EU Peace Two programme is taken into account) came from the three education departments in Ireland: the Department of Education and Science in the Republic and the Departments of Education and Employment and Learning in the North.

Measuring the Impact

If the funding for cross-border cooperation in education is sometimes erratic, evidence of its impact on peace-building, creating mutual understanding and moving towards that elusive concept, reconciliation on the island of Ireland, is even more problematic. This is a difficult area. Inside Northern Ireland, where cross-community work has been going on for far longer than work across the border, there is little measure of its impact on community relations. Almost from the outbreak of the Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’ education has come under scrutiny as a possible agent of social change and improved community relations, with considerable research on the segregation of schooling and experimentation with cross-community contact schemes and other initiatives. The 1989 Education Reform (NI) Order included a range of measures which institutionalised the new concept of Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU), formalising joint activities between mainly Protestant (controlled) and Catholic (maintained) schools in the North.

However although EMU and its related area Cultural Heritage were now statutory, there was no requirement for actual joint activities involving pupils from the two sides. Cross-community contact was encouraged and some funding for it was made available, but schools could, if they wished, teach these themes entirely within their own classrooms.¹⁰

Alan Smith and Alan Robinson, the principal researchers in this field, believe that there is only limited empirical evidence to support the thesis that increased contact and interaction between groups is likely to lead to a reduction in conflict. They believe that one reason why it is difficult to establish causal links between inter-group contact and attitudinal change range is the possibility that attitudinal changes only emerge over a long period of time. They suggest that there may be merit in following a significant cohort of young people who have gone through a variety of educational and reconciliation programmes over a 25 year period to see “whether certain formative events are more likely to lead to positive intergroup attitudes than others.”¹¹

Wider Horizons

There is no cross-border educational programme that goes back anything like 25 years. However there is one training programme for young people, Wider Horizons, started in 1987 and well-funded and managed by the International Fund for Ireland, which has been deemed successful by a series of evaluations. It is run through the main state training organisations, FÁS in the South and Department for Employment and Learning in the North, and nearly 15,000 young people, Protestant and Catholic from Northern Ireland, and all kinds from the Republic of Ireland, have passed through it. And there is at least one in-depth evaluation which examines the impact of this important initiative on the attitudes of the young participants.¹²

Like the International Fund for Ireland itself, Wider Horizons has two integrated aims – to promote employability and reconciliation through vocational preparation, training and work experience. These aims are implemented by sending religiously mixed groups of young people from the two jurisdictions abroad for periods of up to two months to countries where they can obtain relevant training and work experience – usually the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or the EU. While abroad the participants must learn to live and work together as a united group.

Since the early 1990s Wider Horizons has tended to focus on the needs of disadvantaged young people and disadvantaged areas. The programme has been particularly successful in improving the work motivation of participants, particularly those in employment ‘black spots.’¹³ A 2002 evaluation – which was conducted through questionnaires and interviews over a period of three years and involved over 700 participants, including trainees, leaders and key administrators – showed that trainees tended to move from part-time to full-time employment and from unskilled to skilled work.¹⁴

In the more difficult to measure area of reconciliation, Wider Horizons also showed some significant progress. Anton Trant says that “at a general level it can be said that bringing people together from different sides of the divide in a meaningful, purposeful and non-threatening way has been a very beneficial experience. There is plenty of evidence to show that participants in Wider Horizons projects genuinely look beyond the stereotypes they hold of each other and in many cases actually form close friendships.”¹⁵

He notes that after starting from a position where any formal reconciliation activities were largely avoided, with the passing of time four reconciliation elements have been incorporated into the programme. Firstly, as part of their preparation all project leaders are now required to take a formal leadership training course that includes reconciliation. Secondly, the normal practice is to understand reconciliation in a broad and inter-related manner which will be acceptable to young people, encompassing any issue that tends to divide people, including racism, homophobia and gender discrimination, as well as sectarianism.

Thirdly, reconciliation – and employability – are based on “the building up of the individual person. Prejudice is especially difficult to combat when the individuals concerned are themselves vulnerable, fearful and disadvantaged. Hostile attitudes and behaviours towards others derive as much from personal insecurity and low self-esteem as from ignorance and lack of contact.”

Fourthly, Wider Horizons “lends itself particularly well to what could be called institutional reconciliation.” The programme works with the training centres and community and youth organisations to which the young people belong and identify with. “Several observers of the current conflict in Northern Ireland have pointed to the close connection between the reconciliation of individuals affected by the conflict and the reconciliation of the institutions with which they identify.”^{16 17}

The 2002 Wider Horizons evaluation asked whether the programme was succeeding in its task of reconciliation by using three independent assessment measures: a) friendship and social contact between the participants; b) participants’ perceptions of each other’s

communities; and c) the internationally recognised Bogardus Social Distance Scale for measuring tolerance and prejudice.

All three measures showed positive gains. With regard to friendship and social contact, all the participating groups – Northern Catholics, Northern Protestants and Southerners – showed a clear trend of increased cross-border friendship, and at the end of the projects four-fifths of the young people were planning further cross-border visits. Cross-community friendships also increased, with, at the end of the project, over four-fifths of the Northern participants planning to make more cross-community social contacts.

With regard to measuring tolerance and prejudice, the evaluation used the Bogardus Social Distance Scale, which has been used extensively in the United States as a means of measuring racial prejudice, and well as in a number of Irish research studies (notably Miceal Mac Gréil's 1977 and 1996 studies of prejudice and tolerance in Ireland).¹⁸ The scale measures seven levels of closeness, ranging from 'part of my family, for example through marriage' and 'close friend' to 'visitor only to my country' and 'expel from my country.' Using this scale, from 1 to 7, the perceptions of participant groups to each other were measured before and after their involvement in Wider Horizons.

The results showed that all social distance ratings reduced (i.e. improved) following the Wider Horizons experience: there was a "significant" change (meaning that there was a 95%+ probability that the change being measured was the result of the Wider Horizons experience) in Northern Protestant participants' perceptions of people from the South; and a "highly significant" change (a 99% probability that the change was the result of Wider Horizons) in Northern Catholic perceptions of Northern Protestant, and vice-versa.¹⁹

Trant concludes that "the Wider Horizons formula has proved over the years to be a simple, practical and very powerful force for co-operation and integration." Its uniqueness lies in the way the programme integrates its twin aims of reconciliation and employability, so that vocational training and work placements are the vehicle through which people come to know and trust one another – it is because the vocational training element of Wider Horizons is perceived to have no ideological threat, that it can be used as a bonding and integrating activity."²⁰

It is invidious to compare Wider Horizons with any other North-School programme involving young people because it is so hugely well-resourced. Up to 2005, Wider Horizons had received £67 million in International Fund for Ireland funding, and its annual budget was running at around £4.5 million, largely explaining why the recent North-South Exchange Consortium study found that IFI had provided 55% of all funding for North-South school and youth exchanges.

Civic-Link

However for the purposes of this article, it is necessary to take one of the better funded and longer-running schools-based programmes so as to compare its impact, as measured by evaluators using similar methods, with the impact of Wider Horizons. One of the best resourced programmes involving schools (with a few youth groups) has been Civic-Link, started in 1999 with funding from the US Department of Education, the Irish Department

of Education and Science and the Department of Education Northern Ireland.

Civic-Link, which is managed by Cooperation Ireland, is a pilot initiative that aims to:

- Promote values of mutual understanding, respect and acceptance of diversity; and
- Empower young people to action these values by assuming responsibility for and participation in civic action and community building for the mutual benefit of all people on this island, North and South.²¹

Between 1999 and 2002 the number of schools and youth groups involved in Civic-Link's programme of exploring community problems with cross-border partners grew from 30 to 120. The programme drew on two pedagogical approaches: an action learning, public policy focus promoted by the US Centre for Civic Education, and Co-operation Ireland's own North-South relationship building model. The former encourages and supports students to explore community problems and then devise an action plan to present to policy-makers. The latter emphasises personal contact as a means of tackling inter-group conflict, stereotyping, mutual distrust and prejudice. It is grounded in what is known as the 'contact hypothesis' developed by social psychologists working on issues of prejudice and ethnic relations in the 1950s and 1960s. At the risk of some over-generalisation, this proposed that inter-group prejudice and conflict derive from a lack of knowledge and therefore misinformed stereotypes between members of groups engaged in inter-group hostility and conflict. The solution proposed to such ignorance, and therefore prejudice, is to provide forms of contact that will enable individuals to learn about one another and to realise that they have much in common.

Using the same Bogardus Social Distance Scale as the Wider Horizons evaluation, a 2003 evaluation of Civic-Link²² found that for the majority of students completing pre- and post-programme questionnaires, there was no significant change in social distance between Northern Catholics and Northern Protestants. The only statistically significant change was among Southern Catholics, who reported improved (i.e. reduced) social distance towards 'Protestant people' and 'people from Northern Ireland'.²³

Another finding was that the main positive effect of Civic-Link participation was among students from non-disadvantaged schools. The evaluator pointed to the value of "deepening the engagement" of students from Northern Protestant schools in particular and disadvantaged schools in general.²⁴

The evaluator also stressed that attitudinal changes were more marked among Civic-Link participants – and particularly those from the Northern Protestant community – who had experienced two residential exchanges rather than among those who had gone on one or no exchanges.²⁵ The importance of longer-term exposure to young people from the other Northern Irish community or the other Irish jurisdiction was thus stressed.

Three levels of co-operation

The picture painted of North-South cooperation involving school students and young people in this paper is necessarily only a snapshot. However three distinct levels of co-operation are already apparent.

On its own, at the top, is Wider Horizons, generously funded over a 19 year period with funding currently running at around Stg£4.5 million per year, with around 800 young people passing through its programmes every year. Its evaluators believe it is a model of good practice in working towards its joint aims of employability and reconciliation. In the words of one programme manager: “Wider Horizons is too valuable to be let go easily. It represents a unique blend of reconciliation and labour market considerations. In the present situation in Ireland, such a programme must be preserved.”²⁶

Trant compares Wider Horizons to the Franco-German Exchange, a generously-resourced youth exchange programme not dissimilar to WH in its concern to promote co-operation and mutual understanding. This was set up over 40 years ago with the hugely ambitious aim of effecting a fundamental cultural change in the way the future citizens of those two formerly warring nations would view each other. Trant cites evidence²⁷ that this programme “has made a substantial contribution towards promoting good relations between the two countries, but this was only discernible after a generation of young people had been given the experience of participating. The lesson for Wider Horizons is clear: if the programme is to make a serious contribution towards reducing prejudice and sectarianism in Ireland, then it must prepare for the long haul.”²⁸

Some informed commentators wonder about the likelihood of the International Fund for Ireland continuing in existence for the 15-20 further years necessary for Wider Horizons to make a similarly discernible impact. Recent cuts in IFI’s funding from the US government and a general reduction in funds to Irish programmes from the EU – as well as the smaller numbers of disadvantaged young people due to the prosperity of recent years in both parts of Ireland – would suggest that this is by no means a certainty. Another danger, according to its evaluators, is of the agencies delivering the programme – FÁS and the Northern Ireland Training and Employment Agency (now part of the Department for Employment and Learning) – neglecting its central reconciliation aim in favour of its much more deliverable employability element, which, after all, is their core business.²⁹ If it were ‘mainstreamed’ into a post-IFI phase, the danger of such a ‘loss of direction’ (the evaluators’ phrase) would be far more likely.

Similarly, the evaluators point to one of the problems of Wider Horizons “from the very beginning - how to link up effectively with the mainline educational and training schemes.”³⁰ If the gold-plated Wider Horizons programme faces problems of sustainability, mission drift and mainstreaming, then how much more serious is the situation facing the second group of North-South educational programmes – the few relatively well-funded schools programmes like Civic-Link, the European Schools Project and Dissolving Boundaries – and, at the bottom of the feeding chain, the multitude of one-, two- and three-year projects kept alive largely by EU Peace funding and unpaid voluntary work.

One obvious way to longer-term sustainability for schools-based programmes is for some incorporation of ‘good practice’ materials and methodologies learned from them into mainstream practice in the two jurisdictions, and particularly into the development of teachers. The kind of active teaching and learning methodologies which are common to many of these innovative cross-border projects are now seen as international best practice by the OECD and Education Ministries all over the world.

Some might argue that this is unrealistic, pointing, for example, to the marginalisation of even a general, single jurisdiction citizenship programme such as Civic Social and Political Education in the South. Similarly Tony Gallagher, the internationally-regarded Queen’s University-based researcher on citizenship education, has noted the long struggle in Northern Ireland to achieve a higher status and priority for work in education aimed at promoting reconciliation. He believes that as long as “schools are held to account primarily for academic achievement through base-lining, targets, inspection and development planning, then citizenship education is always going to come lower down, perhaps much lower down, the pecking order.”

Aidan Clifford of the City of Dublin VEC Curriculum Development Unit points out that in a highly prescribed and structured school curriculum and assessment process there are limited methods of entry for innovative curriculum ideas or methodologies – in one Irish jurisdiction, let alone across a contested border between two. He feels that in the future North-South innovators will have to put more energy into bringing about change in the system, e.g. through the policy documents of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. However this painstaking, long-term kind of movement towards sustaining innovation might not be to the liking of funding bodies, most of whom view sustainability in crude terms of “take away the funding and the course will continue in the schools anyway.”³¹

Conclusions

A major problem in identifying both good practice in North-South education co-operation and ways in which such co-operation might be sustained has been its extraordinarily rapid growth over the past decade. The 2005 North South Exchange Consortium report highlighted a number of features which have emerged from this luxuriant but unsystematic growth. Among its findings were:

- Programmes and projects are funded in very complex ways, and funding routes are unclear (in the Northern Department of Education, six different sections are involved in the funding of cross-border projects). This lack of clarity does not help the efficient or effective transfer of resources to target groups on the ground.
- Core funding to sustain organisations is very limited.
- The requirement of the two largest funders, EU Peace Two and the International Fund for Ireland, that funding must go to Northern Ireland and the six Southern border counties (other than in exceptional circumstances), has “negatively affected wider north-south activity.”
- There is “a perception among some sections of the Protestant or Unionist community that the focus of peace building efforts in this specific region is an attempt to soften or blur the border.”
- There are few organisations promoting east-west activities between schools and youth groups in Britain and Ireland (only a tiny 1% of funding goes to such programmes).

- There are overlaps and duplication between programmes, with the result that some schools and youth groups are participating in several programmes, while the majority are not involved in any activity.
- There is a need for more institutional involvement (less than 10% of cross-border activity is currently through institutional linkages). “Personal relationships developed between group leaders alone cannot sustain a project.”
- “Proper policy making structures are needed to provide clarity for future programme development”, particularly as funding becomes scarcer, in order to meet the need for a more coordinated, transparent and effective system of oversight and funding.³²

The report’s key policy recommendation is that the current, embryonic North South Exchange Consortium should be developed into a new body, the North South Exchange Trust. This new body would “coordinate and manage the north south programme framework by identifying priority areas for funding, delivering programmes through tenders, developing an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework and developing a corporate plan.”

However in their endorsement of the report’s proposals, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland, make it clear that “in the current political context it is not possible to establish such a body at this time, but it is hoped that in the future conditions might arise when the establishment of an independent north south exchange Trust will exist.”³³ In other words, until there is agreement on returning power to devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, there is no possibility of setting up a formal North/South body in the area of education and youth exchanges. An obvious question follows from this: If and when devolution happens, will the sizeable funding – most of it from abroad – brought about by the generous international response to the Irish peace process, have run out?

It is also worth remembering that this difficult work has already been going on for a very long time indeed. In his address to mark the opening in 1814 of the Royal Belfast Academical Institution, the distinguished Belfast radical Dr William Drennan spoke passionately of the desire of the new school’s board that “all pupils of all religious denominations should communicate by frequent and friendly intercourse in the common business of education, by which means a new turn might be given to the national character and habits, and all the children of Ireland should know and love each other.”³⁴

The difficulties facing educationalists even in the ‘good years’ of the past decade indicate that it may be the best part of another two centuries before that noble aim is realised.

Notes

- ¹ This article [was] based on a longer discussion paper for the *Mapping Frontiers, Plotting Pathways* project, available at www.crossborder.ie/pubs/mfpaper4.pdf 2.
- ² From paper by John Coolahan, North-South School, Youth and Teachers Exchange Conference, Armagh, 18 October 2001. Available on www.crossborder.ie/pubs/exchangefinal.pdf.
- ³ *Cross-Border School, Youth and Teacher Exchanges on the island of Ireland* (unpublished). Andy Pollak, Ciarán O Maoláin, Zena Liston and Sheena McGrellis. Centre for Cross Border Studies (for the Department of Education (NI) and the Department of Education and Science), November 2000, p.32
- ⁴ *A Model of Managed Co-operation: an evaluation of Co-operation North's School and Youth Links Scheme*. Helen Ruddle and Joyce O'Connor, Irish Peace Institute, 1992.
- ⁵ *Cross-Border School, Youth and Teacher Exchanges on the island of Ireland*, p.6
- ⁶ *Research on the Current Provision of North South School and Youth Exchange and Cooperative Activity 2000-2004*. Rodney Green, Ian White, Sean McGearty and Tony Macaulay for the North South Exchange Consortium, p.1 7
- ⁷ *Ibid*, p.47
- ⁸ Interview with Aidan Clifford, City of Dublin VEC Curriculum Development Unit, 23 May 2005
- ⁹ Evaluation of the Education for Reconciliation (Phase Two) Project – Annual Report 2003-2004, Michael Arlow, Andy Pollak and Tony Gallagher, pgs. 2, 11 & 14
- ¹⁰ *EMU in Transition*. Alan Smith and Alan Robinson. Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster. 1992
- ¹¹ *Education for Mutual Understanding: The Initial Statutory Years*. Alan Smith and Alan Robinson. Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster. 1996, pp.77-78
- ¹² Evaluation of the Wider Horizons Programme of the International Fund for Ireland (unpublished). Anton Trant, Shaun Trant, Deirdre Fitzpatrick and John Medlycott. January 2002
- ¹³ "Promoting Peace in Ireland through Vocational Training and Work Experience". Anton Trant. *International Journal of Vocational Training and Education*. Vol 11, Number 1. 2003, p.87
- ¹⁴ Evaluation of Wider Horizons Programme of the International Fund for Ireland, Trant et al. 2002
- ¹⁵ Promoting Peace in Ireland through Vocational Training and Work Experience, p. 88
- ¹⁶ *Paths to Settlement in Northern Ireland*. S.Farren and R.Mulvihill, Colin Smythe, Gerrard's Cross, Buckinghamshire. 2000, pp. 103-119
- ¹⁷ Promoting Peace in Ireland through Vocational Training and Work Experience, pp. 88-89
- ¹⁸ *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland*, CIR, Dublin, 1977; *Prejudice in Ireland revisited*, St Patrick's College Maynooth Survey and Research Unit, 1996
- ¹⁹ Promoting Peace in Ireland through Vocational Training and Work Experience, pp 90-91
- ²⁰ *ibid*, pp. 92-93
- ²¹ 1 Civic-Link Resource Pack, 2001
- ²² *Learning to Live Together: An Evaluation of Civic-Link* (unpublished). Tom Ronayne, WRC Social and Economic Consultants. 2003
- ²³ *ibid*, pp. 8-11
- ²⁴ *ibid*, p. 48
- ²⁵ *ibid*, p. 46
- ²⁶ Evaluation of the Wider Horizons Programme of the International Fund for Ireland, p.89
- ²⁷ 7 Report on the Franco-German youth office (OFAJ). Mary-Liz Trant. City of Dublin VEC

Curriculum Development Unit. 1994

- ²⁸ Promoting Peace in Ireland through Vocational Training and Work Experience, p 92
- ²⁹ Evaluation of the Wider Horizons Programme of the International Fund for Ireland, p 108
- ³⁰ *ibid*, p. 107
- ³¹ Interview with Aidan Clifford, 23 May 2005
- ³² *Research on the Current Provision of North South School and Youth Exchange and Cooperative Activity 2000-2004*. Rodney Green, Ian White, Sean McGearty and Tony Macaulay for the North South Exchange Consortium, pp 40-41 (funding conclusions) & 51-60 (qualitative findings)
- ³³ *Research on the Current Provision of North South School and Youth Exchange and Cooperative Activity 2000-2004*, preface.
- ³⁴ From paper by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, North-South School, Youth and Teachers Exchange Conference, Armagh, 18 October 2001. Available on www.crossborder.ie/pubs/exchangefinal.pdf

Educational Co-operation on the Island of Ireland:

Are the good years ending? Update note

Andy Pollak

The unfortunate fact is that by 2019 the prophesy contained in the title of this 2006 article has largely come true. The flood of North-South educational cooperation in the early years of this century has become a small trickle. A 2010 study from the Centre for Cross Border Studies estimated that up to 2009 around 150,000 young people had engaged in such cooperation, funded by nearly €70 million from the EU PEACE and INTERREG programmes, the International Fund for Ireland and the administrations in Belfast and Dublin.¹ Equivalent numbers involved and funding today would be a tiny fraction of those amounts.

Such cooperation worked best where relatively sustainable networks were set up in key educational areas: vocational training for young people; European Studies, ICT and citizenship education in schools; teacher education and educational research.

In a 2017 book chapter I listed six examples of outstanding successes in these areas:²

- Wider Horizons, an extraordinarily well-funded project (over €30 million in 2000-2004 alone) to develop employability and reconciliation through vocational training and work experience abroad for around 18,000 mostly disadvantaged young people from both Irish jurisdictions;
- the European Studies Project, which involved nearly 200 secondary schools and an estimated 70,000 students, North and South, along with schools from 25 other European countries;
- Dissolving Boundaries, which brought 300 Irish schools from both jurisdictions (primary, secondary and special schools) together across the border through ICT and face-to-face contact. Its 2012 inspection report said that 99% of participating schools strongly agreed or agreed that it had led to greater “open-mindedness, acceptance, self-confidence, empathy and curiosity” among participating pupils.
- Education for Reconciliation, a project run by City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee’s Curriculum Development Unit to introduce the difficult subjects of conflict resolution and reconciliation into the citizenship education curricula in secondary schools, which was funded through an unprecedented four phases by the EU PEACE programme.
- the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS), which brought those involved in teacher education on the island together through research, conferences and exchanges, seed-funded 114 cross-border research projects and organised many hundreds of students to do part of their teaching practice in the other jurisdiction.

- the Centre for Cross Border Studies itself, which has been highly praised for its cross-border research and development work in education, health, community development and other areas by successive taoisigh.

It is striking that of these six pioneering projects, the four involving schools and disadvantaged young people have now ended: Education for Reconciliation in 2012; Wider Horizons in 2013; Dissolving Boundaries in 2014 and the European Studies Project in 2015.

I draw two main conclusions from the ending of this short ‘golden age’ of North-South cooperation in education. Firstly, that the Departments of Education, North and South, missed a huge opportunity to make this brief flowering into something more sustainable. They commissioned no fewer than four reports into this subject between 2001 and 2010, but did little or nothing to implement any of their recommendations, which were united around the need for some coordinating structure. In the words of the 2005 report,³ this would be a body to “coordinate and manage the north-south programme framework by identifying priority areas for funding, delivering programmes through tenders, developing an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework, and developing a corporate plan.”

This is all academic now that both programmes and funding have largely run out. But more fundamentally, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for education to make a major contribution to the Northern Ireland peace process was lost. As this researcher concluded in his 2010 report to the two Departments: “This must be the largest cross-border movement of young people for the purposes of education and mutual understanding anywhere in the world in recent memory. This movement affects not only the students themselves, but their teachers, their families and their communities. There is a great opportunity here for consolidating the present peace and future reconciliation of Ireland by continuing to work with the more open minds of children and young people. This must not be lost by lack of foresight on the part of the leaders and planners of the island’s educational systems. If the gains of the extraordinary explosion in North-South educational cooperation of the past 10-15 years are allowed to peter out, what will the people of Ireland say in 10 or 20 or 50 years?”

It saddens me greatly to say in 2019 this is precisely what has happened. The most depressing single manifestation of this official indifference to the success story that was North-South reconciliation through education was the recent decision by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to cancel its small annual grant to SCoTENS, perhaps the most impressive new non-governmental all-island network in any area since the Good Friday Agreement, which its Oxford University evaluator has called “an incredible achievement.”

16 August 2019

Notes

- ¹ Pollak A, Fegan T and O'Hare S, *Comprehensive Study on North-South Cooperation in the Education Sector*, unpublished report for Department of Education and Science (Ireland) and Department of Education (NI).
- ² 'Northern intransigence and Southern indifference: North-South cooperation since the Belfast Agreement', in *Dynamics of Political Change in Ireland: Making and Breaking a Divided Island*; Routledge, 2017, pp. 185-186
- ³ Green R, White I, McGearty S and Macaulay T, *Provision of North-South School and Youth Exchange and Cooperation Activity 2000-2004*, North-South Exchange Consortium.

Community Development along the Border:

An instrument for the development of the cross-border region?

Brian Harvey

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Community development began in Ireland in August 1891 with the formation of the Congested Districts Board for Ireland. The board used community development as a tool to improve the economic and social conditions of communities living along the west coast of Ireland and indeed, far inland. But, just as ‘the west’ was one of the main problematic issues of the island at the end of the 19th century, the depressed conditions of the Irish border became one of the main problematic issues of the island a hundred years later, at the end of the 20th century. Despite being over sixty years old, the border region did not become a distinct area of economic and social attention until the 1980s.¹

With the arrival of the reformed EU Structural Funds in 1989, the Irish border began to attract European Union cross-border funding for economic development in the form of the INTERREG programme. With the introduction of the EU PEACE programme in 1994, there was a substantial investment in voluntary and community organisations in the border counties. The originator of the programme, President Jacques Delors, assigned a high priority to the role of voluntary and community organisations in underpinning the peace process and building social inclusion. Indeed, PEACE I saw the allocation of no less than 15,000 grants during 1994-1999, most to voluntary and community organisations. The border region went from having one of the lowest levels of investment in community development to, over a very short period of time, one of the highest in the island.

These developments prompted the Cross Border Centre for Community Development at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) to investigate, a decade later, the nature of community development along the border (this being defined as 15 kilometres on either side). In particular, it wished to address the following questions: To what extent was community development an instrument for the economic and social development of the cross-border region? What kind of organisations functioned there, who did they work with and what could we find out about them? Did they work and cooperate across the border? What were the cross-border policy issues arising from their work? Community development had been an instrument of economic and social development in Northern Ireland since the 1960s.² In the Republic, the government had introduced the Community Development Programme, subsequently considered a model of good practice across

Europe, in 1987. Little, though, was known of the specificities of community development along or across the Irish border.

The Dundalk IT investigation was based on a survey of community development organisations in the study area using databases held by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (for the North) and the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh (for the South); on interviews with stakeholders and experts; and on case studies of 20 community development organisations working across the border.³ This article describes the outcomes and the policy issues arising. Here the terms ‘Northern Ireland’ and ‘the North’ are used interchangeably purely to break the narrative, as are ‘the South’ and ‘the Republic’.

Community development organisations in the border region

The Dundalk IT mapping exercise found that there were two main concentrations of community development organisations: Derry (where the largest single number is to be found) and then Newry. There are three minor concentrations: in descending order, Armagh, Enniskillen and Strabane. There are few community development groups in parts of Fermanagh on the northern side and parts of Cavan-Leitrim on the southern side, but this reflects areas of low population density. Small parish or district-based organisations featured especially strongly on the northern side of the border, but their small number on the southern side was probably more a function of the databases used than an indication of their absence.

Most of the community development organisations in the study area were formed in the late 1980s to late 1990s. None was formed in the Republic before 1981, but two in Northern Ireland before the 1970s. Historically, they are a new phenomenon and the surge of investment represented by the PEACE I programme is evident. Most of the organisations in the Republic dated to the PEACE programme period, but some pre-dated it in the North. All the groups studied were formally constituted as organisations, with management committees or boards.

By size and funding, they comprised a mixture of small, parish-based organisations (more so in Northern Ireland, with incomes of less than £10,000 a year), medium size bodies (mainly with PEACE programme funding) and a small number of larger organisations with revenues over €1 million (more so in the North). Many groups were quite entrepreneurial, attracting not only government funding, as might be expected, but raising money through fund-raising, sales and services. The investigation confirmed earlier North-South studies which found the voluntary and community sector to be more mature in Northern Ireland than the Republic, a function of the presence of the welfare state in the North and the need for voluntary organization to deliver its social services.⁴ Community development groups in the North were better linked to ‘national’ (in the sense of Northern Ireland-wide) networks than those in the South, again indicating a higher level of development (87% in the North compared to 77% in the South).

Typical organisations had an average of 4.2 full-time staff in the Republic of Ireland and 2.7 in Northern Ireland. Many northern organisations were so small as to have no staff at all. The typical group here had 10 to 12 volunteers. In the South, Social Employment

Schemes were used by no less than three-quarters of all organisations, with an average of 6.3 employees per organization, indicating a continued, substantial use of these schemes. When asked about their target groups, most described themselves as working generically with local communities, disadvantaged and socially excluded people.

Specifically, the main target groups were, in descending order, young people, older people and unemployed people. Very few organisations were found to be working with people with disabilities or in environmental action. There were few women’s organisations, although some groups were affiliated to women’s networks. In the North, a number of groups worked in the social economy, a category absent in the South. In summary, community development organisations along the border may be typologized as a few large organisations, with substantial revenues and large staff numbers; a cluster of medium-size organisations, with staff and volunteers, this being the principal category in the Republic where Social Employment Scheme workers are used extensively; and smaller organisations, without staff, this being an important group in Northern Ireland.

Cross-border cooperation

Turning to the area of cross-border cooperation, 62% of groups in Northern Ireland and 85% of Southern groups worked across the border. The table illustrates the nature of that cooperation:

	NI	ROI
Occasional	62%	33%
Regular but informal	19%	29%
Formal partnership	19%	38%

Again, the Southern figures are higher the more intense the cross-border relationship becomes, a point we return to later. The nature of their work was studied in more detail, with case studies of 20 organisations known to be active in cross-border cooperation covering such diverse fields as ex-prisoners, arts, generic community development, peace-building and reconciliation, mental health, local development, victims of the ‘Troubles’, second chance education, women, Travellers, and the built environment. Here, the objectives were to see whether there was a ‘typical’ cross border project and to try to capture the dynamics of such a project’s relationship.

Typically, organisations were ten years old. Many had opened contacts or begun their work during the time of the PEACE I programme in the 1990s. Most projects, though, involved individuals who had longstanding cross-border contacts that went back many years before, even during the worst times of the ‘Troubles’. Groups here were typical of organisations that had received start-up money during PEACE I and benefitted from the more substantial programme grants of PEACE II (2000- 2006). Typical projects involved two staff (often one full-time and one part-time) with a committee of eight to ten activists. These were often ‘serial activists’ and involved in other community based organisations, often sporting (e.g. Gaelic Athletic Association) or educational (e.g. local schools).

One of the key findings was the key role played by individual leadership, although such ‘leaders’ were universally modest people who played down their own significance. It was apparent that many of these projects were initiated and subsequently driven by one person, who had a vision of and passion for cross-border work and cross-border development and was prepared to commit considerable time and energy to such a venture, some a lifetime. These were not misty-eyed visionaries, but people with a hands-on appreciation of the practical difficulties of bridging gaps and differences. Often they appeared to be motivated by a combination of the desire for reconciliation between the nationalist and unionist communities, the ideal of economic and social integration between North and South, and the aspiration for improved socio-economic conditions for their locality, county or region.

A second, intriguing finding was the different organisational and structural forms which cross-border cooperation took. Several forms were evident:

- **‘Twin pairs’.** Two organisations working in cooperation with one another for mutual learning, coming together purely to execute a single time-limited project, but each retaining its organisational structure (e.g. Donegal Travellers Project; Newhaven Trust);
- **‘Twin pairs’ but with joint committee.** Here two organisations worked together, but had a common working committee, drawn in equal numbers from each parent body (e.g. Riverbrooke, Mind the Gap);
- **Transboundary.** Here, an organization based in one jurisdiction expanded into the other (but without setting up another body to work in the other jurisdiction). This was a northern phenomenon, brought about when Northern Ireland-based organisations began to provide either services in the Republic (e.g. STEER in mental health services) or attracted members there (e.g. people who were victims of the ‘Troubles’);
- **Cluster.** This was an organisational form in which a cluster of organisations came together for a project, but was anchored by one organization, normally in the North (e.g. Derry Well Woman Centre in the area of women’s health);
- **Single company partnership.** This was probably the purest form of cross-border organization, with a single company and a single management, based in one jurisdiction, operating freely across the border zone. This type of body had probably the strongest commitment to integrated development and organisationally attempted to deny the border as an obstacle. Most were based in Northern Ireland and typically called themselves ‘partnerships’ (e.g. Sliabh Beagh Cross-Border Partnership, DergFinn Partnership, Tyrone Donegal Partnership).

Traditionally, the history of cross-border cooperation in Europe has been a narrative of progression from ‘first contact’ between pairs engaged in back-to-back development; to cooperation in projects that traverse borders; and finally to devolved, integrated, single company operations working in such a way as to minimize and eventually eliminate the distorting effects of land borders. The experience of the Irish border shows that these

trajectories are more complex and that there was no natural progression from ‘first contact’ to ‘pure partnership’. Moreover, the number of ‘pure’ cross-border partnerships was limited to single figures and there was little evidence of new ones in formation. Some of these partnerships were inspired by the International Fund for Ireland, but in organisational form they seem to have reached a plateau.

Although cross-border working had now become routine, this did not mean that it had become easy. Many commented on how slow it still was and that the pace was still set by the slowest partner. Northern organisations were more than prepared to work across the border now, but wanted to take one step cautiously at a time so as to bring all their members along. Courtships leading to regular or formal partnerships generally started from the South, as the above table indicates.

Cross-border working was also more expensive, the two main complaints being the cost of mobile phone calls, which even if they were only a kilometre away attracted high, cross-border rates; and the lack of helpfulness by banks in handling two currencies, with the occasional imposition of double conversion charges. All organisations found funding a big struggle. Many funding schemes provided grants for only a year or two at a time, creating a level of uncertainty that made it difficult to attract or retain staff. An additional complication was that some fields of work which attracted funding in one jurisdiction did not do so in the other, a good example being improvements to the physical environment, where there was no funding scheme for voluntary and community organisations in the Republic. One was left with the impression that these organisations had achieved much with little.

An important finding was that although voluntary and community organisations had now learned to work across the border – indeed, it was no longer ‘news’ for the local press – governments had not. Implementation of legislation was different, to the extent that (as one environmental project reported) shooting wildlife illegally on one side of the border would earn a fine or worse on one side, but no penalty on the other; and fire engines could put out a mountain fire up to the borderline on one side, but not douse the flames a metre away on the other. One statutory body might fund a cross-border housing project from the northern side, but this was no good if the southern opposite number was not interested.

Especially absurd were funding restrictions which prohibited participation from people from the one side of the border at a location on the other. Thus one men’s health cross-border project based in the North was required to turn away people with southern addresses; an arts project lost its grant for ecumenically but foolishly holding an event 250 metres ‘on the other side’; and one playgroup in the North found an official noting down Donegal-registered plates so as to question southern participants what were they doing there! These incidents might be amusing were it not that they identified such an extraordinary level of inflexibility in the bureaucratic mind and the still deadening legacy of back-to-back development.

It would be easy to portray these issues as minor irritants, but they went further than that. Not only were they operational obstacles to voluntary and community activity and contrary

to the imperatives of European integration, but they negatively affected the quality of life and efforts to turn the region into a desirable place in which to live. What was more frustrating still was that voluntary organisations were rebuffed when they suggested to statutory authorities that they should get their act together and try to sort out these difficulties.

Positively, though, there was evidence that models of good practice in one jurisdiction were successfully applied to the other. Most of the traffic was from the North to the South and was evident in the fields of mental health, volunteering and projects to improve the physical environment. Here, southern organisations began to emulate the activities and approach of organisations in the North which had experience and a track record in these areas. A weakness of the cross-border projects generally, although there were exceptions, was that few had the time to document and disseminate their work comprehensively and develop the policy issues arising. The struggle for funding took precedence, to the extent that the policy focus of projects was limited and the lessons arising were not fed into the political and administrative systems.

Staying with the funding picture, a striking feature was the limited number of funding opportunities for cross-border activity. Apart from the PEACE programmes, which included strands to fund cross-border activities, the only other significant funding opportunity was INTERREG III (2000-2006). The first two INTERREG programmes in the 1990s had been entirely governmental, but INTERREG III included an imaginative strand to fund cross-border activity for voluntary and community organisations: Priority 3 - Civic and Community Networking. This was a real breakthrough and was, unsurprisingly, oversubscribed fourfold.

Perhaps the most extraordinary feature of cross-border funding was the absence of a commitment to cross-border cooperation by voluntary and community organisations from the two governments. This might be understandable in the case of Northern Ireland, but granted the iconic significance of the border to the Republic's government, its absence was more difficult to comprehend. While the Irish Department for Foreign Affairs operated a small 'reconciliation fund' for voluntary and community organisations, it was precisely that, a reconciliation fund, not a fund for cross-border cooperation. And it was not that the government's attention had not been drawn to the issue, for Cooperation Ireland had been vocal about the problem ever since it was established. Ninety years after partition, the two governments had still to work out strategies to support cross-border cooperation by civil society organisations. Many voluntary and community organisations voiced the suspicion that so long as European funding was there, they could comfortably postpone facing the issue.

The issue is actually more profound than that, and an extraordinary example of a lost opportunity. In the case of community development, there was and is no institute to support such work in either part of the island. The border region of the island provided an unusual example in Europe of an intense level of community development in a border region coming out of conflict, one where the Irish experience could be most useful to other countries. In his masterly *Ireland 1912-85*, Lee identified as one of the most serious problems in the island's development experience our inability to develop self-knowledge and build our own intellectual infrastructure, especially in those areas in which we actually

excel.⁵ The Workers Educational Association in Belfast pressed the idea of a community development institute, one which could support such activity across the island, but the Department of Social Development there was not even prepared to enter a preliminary discussion on the topic.

Policy issues arising

The single most important policy issue was the question of how the issues arising from community development along the border could be channelled into the administrative political system so as to ensure the socio-economic development of the border region. European research has shown how good levels of cross-border cooperation, both at governmental level and at civil society level, can transform border zones from 'problem' regions into areas of prosperity, the best example being the Meuse-Rhine triangle between Germany, Netherlands and Belgium. Indeed, the investment of PEACE I programme funding from the mid-nineties onwards was such that within a few years, the border counties (with the one exception of Donegal) were no longer at the top of the list of the poorest counties of the Republic: the geographical locus of poverty shifted to the midlands and the south east. A feature of the PEACE I programme was that it included a Consultative Forum of voluntary and community organisations so that their concerns could be channelled back to their respective governments.

Unfortunately, that was as far as it got. When the PEACE II programme was ushered in, there was no Consultative Forum. No explanation was given and the PEACE II programme documents made no reference to it. It was simply airbrushed out of history, as surely as in an official Soviet history of undesirable people and events. Without such a forum, the policy issues arising from the cross-border work of voluntary and community organisations had no home where the issues could be progressed. Instead, they must be pursued separately within the two jurisdictions, whose lack of cooperation was often at the root of these policy problems in the first place. In this situation, problems will continue to be addressed in the traditional, back-to-back way by governments and statutory bodies that seem unable to act or work coherently across borders. They are channelled into the political system by border region deputies, senators and MLAs who continue to be marginal in a political process dominated by the demands of the respective capitals of Dublin and Belfast. They cannot find institutional expression.

Article 19 of the Good Friday Agreement proposed 'an independent Consultative Forum appointed by the two administrations, representative of civic society, comprising the social partners and other members with expertise in social, cultural, economic and other issues' (not be confused with the Civic Forum established under the Agreement and limited to Northern Ireland). Article 22 of the St Andrews Agreement of October 2006 renewed this commitment by stating that 'the Northern Ireland Executive would support the establishment of an independent north/south Consultative Forum appointed by the two administrations and representative of civil society'.

The continued absence of a formal civil society dimension in cross-border cooperation remains a point of extraordinary weakness in the Irish cross-border relationship. Examples from other parts of Europe show that people-to-people cooperation is given prominence, funding, permanence and institutional expression in successful cross-border relationships.⁶

Such cross-border cooperation is strongly focussed on social policy cooperation: health, childcare, older people, education, health and social services and young people.⁷ To give an example in the area of health services, several countries have developed cross-border health zones where citizens from one side of the border can use the health services of another, and on the Spanish-French border at Puigcerda in the eastern Pyrenees a cross-border hospital is opening. By contrast, health services along the Irish border remain incompatible - not just a function of the apparently intractable difficulties of integrating two different systems, but, at least as important, the lack of a forum where civil society is present and where these difficulties could be resolved. Not only that, but a related problem is the perception by both governments that cross-border cooperation should be principally around economic issues, rather than the social concerns that would come to the fore in 'people-to-people' cooperation. At the core of this is the fact that social policy is not at the heart of the North-South relationship. Neither social policy in general nor community development in particular were specified areas of cooperation under the Good Friday Agreement. Examination of the work of the North South Ministerial Council finds few activities in these areas, the closest being in the health and environmental areas.

When the two governments commissioned their most recent scoping study of North-South cooperation, their focus was on economic cooperation, science, technology, innovation, trade, tourism, investment and enterprise.⁸ Although there was a chapter on the €68 billion on infrastructure which the two governments planned to spend by 2017, this did not include a single cent for community infrastructure, nor was there any reference to social policy, community development, nor governance structures. The only social policy area where progress has been made was free travel schemes for pensioners. For all the expectation that community development groups would do the legwork of peace and reconciliation, there was remarkably little recognition of their activities in the bigger North-South debate, nor in investment decisions. The Republic's government seemed to have a limited understanding of the need for investment in 'soft' social infrastructure: 'it could find the money for subsidising Derry airport, but not for community development', said one critic. Although there was a strong focus on trade integration, business links and commercial partnerships, 'we still don't even have a common directory of voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises', said another.

Conclusion

For much of the century to the mid-1990s, the experience of the Irish border was one of conflict and ever-deepening social deprivation and isolation. The intervention of EU President Jacques Delors in bringing the PEACE programme to Ireland showed a profound grasp of history, politics and social policy in general, and the dynamic of conflicted cross-border regions in particular. His underlying assumption was that a problematic, conflicted border region would not prosper purely in the absence of violence: indeed throughout the 20th century the economic and social decline of the Irish border region continued seamlessly, uninterrupted by the earlier ceasefires of 1923 and 1963. Pro-active measures and investment are necessary to re-build conflicted border regions, and here the PEACE programme was the crucial catalyst for the regeneration of the border region generally, and for community development and cross-border cooperation by voluntary and community organisations in particular. It raised the expectations of people like social entrepreneurs who would like to turn the border region into a desirable place in which to

live, a model of reconciliation and cross-border integration, one of balanced economic, social and sustainable development.

The Dundalk IT study has enabled us to get a clearer picture of the nature, extent and characteristics of community development along the Irish border. It provided a portrait of how voluntary and community organisations cooperate across the border; the organisational forms and trajectories they follow; a sense of the issues arising; a map of the way forward, and the formidable institutional, political and mindset problems that have yet to be overcome.

Postscript: not a happy ending yet

Sadly, this story does not yet seem to have a happy ending. The idea of a North-South Consultative Forum failed to progress even when the other institutions of the Good Friday Agreement were restored. Although in October 2009 an exasperated Department of the Taoiseach convened a meeting in Dublin of interested parties to progress the idea, it became clear that it could go no further without the cooperation of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland. It seems that opposition to civil society is not just a historic phenomenon limited to the old régimes of eastern and central Europe in the 1980s. On the funding side, the situation went backward as the INTERREG III programme's promise of Civic and community networking turned out to be a false dawn. Both the INTERREG IV programme and the PEACE III programme (both 2007-2013) were governmentalized, with a diminished role for voluntary and community organisations, the bulk of funding being routed through government bodies and especially local government.

Attempts to develop a North-South Voluntary and Community Sector Forum were initiated by the Department for Social Development in Belfast. Although several meetings took place, it fell into disuse because of lack of support from its opposite number in Dublin. Worse was to follow, for in the Republic the government, in implementing drastic funding cutbacks, effectively repudiated community development as an instrument to assist disadvantaged communities, closing in 2009 the internationally acclaimed Community Development Programme and withdrawing funding from the most vocal voluntary and community organisations.⁹ The Combat Poverty Agency, which had funded community development groups in the border region and was a delivery body for the PEACE programmes, was abolished. And in a final endnote, the Cross Border Centre for Community Development in Dundalk was closed at the end of 2008 within weeks of the completion of this study.

Notes

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Back to the ‘dreary steeples’?

Brian Harvey

The 2010 article *Community development along the border: an instrument for the development of the cross-border region?* held out the promise that community development *could* play a formative, positive role for the cross-border region. In the ten years that have passed, few of those hopes have been realised and, to paraphrase Churchill, ‘the dreary steeples’ of under-development have re-emerged from the mist.¹ In time, the early years of the 21st century may be seen as the zenith of cross-border community development, a tragically false dawn. Where did it all go wrong?

First, the government in Dublin shut down community development nationally, not just in the border counties. Government support for community development, which dated to the Congested Districts Board in 1891, came to a halt in 2014 when the Local and Community Development Programme was sold to contractors in lots. The Community Development Programme of 180 projects, rightly upheld as a European flagship, was shut down. The government reduced its funding for voluntary organizations by an average of 35%, but 45% for community organizations, resulting in a loss of staffing from 53,000 to 36,000.² Funding is still not expected to return to pre-2010 levels until well into the 2020s.² Restrictions against advocacy by voluntary organizations grew to the point that Irish law compared unfavorably to that of Russia.³ Governments seemed to have a real problem with voluntary and community organizations voicing public criticism.⁴ Although the redrawing of the lines between the state and the voluntary sector were not unknown – Northern Ireland experienced them too – this was extreme and unparalleled in Europe since 1948.

Second, although developments affecting the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland were less dramatic or devastating, its operational environment changed. In comparison to the long period of direct rule, when voluntary organizations such as the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action were key interlocutors with government and others were drivers of cross-border work, they were unable to re-create such a role when the institutions of government were again suspended (January 2017). The replacement of grants by contracts transformed organizations into service providers, an inherently deradicalizing process.⁵ Years of social development which they led were undermined by the austerity programme introduced by the Westminster government in 2010.⁶ There was a general deterioration in domestic funding for peace and reconciliation work, a field in which cross-border activity was always likely to be an element.⁷ With Brexit looming, voluntary and community organizations anticipated that cooperation with their counterparts across the border or the south as a whole would become more difficult, their benefits less evident and funding less certain, so by 2018 had well scaled back their investment.⁸

Third, at European level, none of the successors of Commission Presidents Jacques Delors or Romani Prodi, associated with the first two Peace programmes (Peace I, II) who so emphasized support for civil society, community development and cross-border working, had the same interest in their potential. Subsequent Peace programmes (III, IV) and INTERREG programmes were largely subsumed into routine national or local government spending ('nationalization'). Funding going directly to voluntary and community organizations in Peace IV was 22%, less than 5% in INTERREG V.⁹ Both programmes were massified, with little to promote community development across the border on the smaller scale on which such projects are routinely organized. The philanthropically-funded Access Europe, which encouraged voluntary and community participation in these programmes, found that such organizations were largely unable to access Peace IV, which the politest described as 'impenetrable'. The managing body for both, the Special EU Programmes Body, continued its long-standing routine of denial that there was ever a problem in accessing the programme and remained an important part of the problem itself. Then Access Europe itself disappeared - for lack of funding. The two most consistent and enlightened funders were the Irish government's Reconciliation Fund (€3.7m in 2019), which provides small-scale, non-programmatic grants for a broad range of purposes, including north-south work; and the International Fund for Ireland, which takes a cross-border approach and whose Peace Impact Programme (PIP) filled some of the vacuum made by the Peace Programme. Between them, these developments, at European level and in both parts of Ireland, created a much less favourable environment or support for cross-border community development. Ominously, there were warnings that Brexit will open the possibility of freezing, retarding and further undoing much of the cross-border cooperation patiently built up from the 1970s to the 2010s.¹⁰

The 2010 article drew attention to the pernicious effects of the lack of both a Civic Forum in Northern Ireland and the Cross Border Consultative Forum. The Irish government pursued the Consultative Forum, but was ultimately frustrated by the successful veto of the Democratic Unionist Party. Strangely, the Brexit crisis provided a space and opportunity for some new discussions to take place. The Irish government initiated what is called the 'All-Island civic dialogue' on Brexit, though it included not just voluntary and community organizations but everything non-governmental, from seafood to agri-business, tillage to pensions, education to transport and hospitality. Commendably, it included children's rights and human rights and there, prominent voluntary organizations in Northern Ireland, such as the Committee on the Administration of Justice, soon found themselves invited to make presentations to Oireachtas committees in Dublin. Whilst voluntary organizations welcomed the opening of these doors, older hands would have valued such places of dialogue being routine, permanent, structured and funded, rather than the temporary function of an emergency.

None of this is to say that cross-border community development, or north-south cooperation between voluntary and community organizations, has ground to a halt. But it is little seen in the public discourse, the commentariat, nor in the more specialized professional discourses around the voluntary and community sector in either part of the island. The organizational trajectories described in 2010 matured no further. With the voluntary and community sectors on both sides debilitated, funding sharply reduced, places

of dialogue unopened, it is a shadow of its former self and pitifully short of what it could have now become. The history of the island of Ireland is full of *What ifs...?* and things that could have happened, but did not, making this the most recent addition to a sad list.

25 July 2019

Notes

- ¹ ‘The whole map of Europe has been changed ... but as the deluge subsides and the waters fall short we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again, the integrity of their ancient quarrel undiminished’. Winston Churchill, 16th February 1922.
- ² This writer: *Downsizing the voluntary and community sector*. Dublin, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2012.
- ³ EU-Russia Civil Society Forum: *Report on the state of civil society in the EU and Russia*. Berlin, author, 2019.
- ⁴ This writer: *Are we paying for that?* Dublin, Advocacy Initiative, 2014.
- ⁵ Ketola, Marcus & Hughes, Ciaran: *Independence of purpose, voice, action*. Building Change Trust, 2016; Pollak, Andy and this writer: *The potential for cross-border exchange and learning about change in the community and voluntary sectors in Northern Ireland and the Republic Of Ireland*. Belfast, Building Change Trust, 2013.
- ⁶ Holder, Daniel: *Dismantling the Irish peace process*, from Vickie Cooper and David Whyte (eds): *The violence of austerity*. London, Pluto Press, 2017.
- ⁷ Morrow, Duncan; Faulkner-Byrne, Lisa & Pettis, Sean: *Funding peace - report on the funding of peace and reconciliation work in Northern Ireland and Ireland, 2007-2017*. Belfast, Corrymeela, 2018.
- ⁸ This writer: *Evaluation of Access Europe - final report*. Dublin & Belfast, Access Europe, 2018.
- ⁹ See EU Special Programmes body: *INTERREG VA (2014-2020) Letters of Offer issued to 30th June 2019 and Peace IV (2014-2020) Letters of Offer Issued to 30th June 2019*. Belfast, author, 2019.
- ¹⁰ Gray, Ann Marie; Hamilton, Jennifer; Kelly, Gráinne; Lynn, Brendan; Melaugh, Martin & Robinson, Gillian: *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report*. §5, Belfast, Community Relations Council, 2018.

We need to be big and generous towards each other:

Interview on North-South cooperation with the Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness MP MLA

*(This interview was first published in 2011, in the 6th edition of the **Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland**)*

Would you agree that North-South cooperation has been one of the success stories of the Northern Ireland peace process? What do you think are its major achievements since the Good Friday Agreement?

I do absolutely agree that North-South cooperation has made a major contribution to peace. The North South Ministerial Council, the power-sharing government in the North and the East/West institutions are obviously the foundation stones of the Good Friday Agreement, and it's vitally important that all of those relationships are developed. These institutions, first established in December 1999, struggled through a very difficult period until October 2002 when they collapsed. Then we effectively had a desert from 2002 until 2007. But I think the fact that they were restored in 2007 and they have been worked without interruption in the course of nearly four years is a major success story.

There's no doubt that the big success story of the North-South relationship has been the comfortable position that all Ministers now find themselves in at North South Ministerial Council meetings, and the important relationships that are being built on an ongoing basis. I always refer to the first meeting of the NSMC in December 1999, when Ian Paisley and I led our Ministers from the North to meet the then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern and his Ministers. At the press conference afterwards Ian Paisley talked – I thought very powerfully – about the need to end the old divisions, to bring down barriers, and the need for all of us to work together. That was a huge encouragement to me and to anybody listening to his remarks at that time. I worked with him for a period of a year in the office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister and participated with him in further meetings of North South Ministerial Council. That clearly showed everybody on this island, no matter what their political persuasion, that where there was mutual benefit to be brought to the people of the island that it was our bounden duty as Ministers to work together.

As I've said to my own people in Sinn Fein, at the very outset of this relationship with the DUP I forecast that the first term would be difficult and rocky, and that the true value of the institutions – the power-sharing Executive, the North South Ministerial Council and the East-West relationships – would only really be properly assessed in the second term of the Assembly, which will come after the elections due to be held in a couple of months time.

So I think North-South cooperation has been very important. Some of the North/ South institutions have been resounding successes: Tourism Ireland, for example, and InterTradeIreland. We've seen more trade than ever before in the history of the Northern and Southern states, with people from all over the island collaborating on plans and projects to bring employment to the people. That, of course, has been impacted by the recession of the past two years. But you still have IBEC and CBI working very closely and comfortably together and regularly inviting Ministers from North and South to address them. And you have economists North and South arguing – as the Taoiseach did at the North South Ministerial Council today [21 January 2011] – that all of us should consistently look at how we can do things together in terms of shared cross-border services and how we can use them to deliver for the people we represent. So overall I think it's been huge success.

What have been the main challenges to cooperation between North and South in recent years?

The main obstacle to be overcome for me was the building of relationships between Ministers and officials North and South so that they can work together on a consistent basis. Because a lot of the good things that can flow from human contact between Ministers comes from an acceptance that if there is mutual benefit to be gained then we have a responsibility to work together. The big difficulty obviously is that the Ministers who represent Sinn Fein and the SDLP are quite comfortable with that type of working, but they are also very conscious of the concerns within those departments that have DUP and Ulster Unionist Ministers – although the concern is more in the minds of the unionist Ministers than in their departments.

Their concern is that to further develop North-South cooperation is something that undermines the Union. However a very strong case can be made that working across the border for mutual benefit will allow us to make huge savings in terms of other monies that can be put to proper use helping our citizens, North and South, and that can be done without undermining the allegiance that unionists would have to what they call the United Kingdom. But I'm conscious that we could be making much more progress if we had a situation where unionist Ministers recognised that there could be considerable gains for their departments and the people they represent if they were to seriously examine how further benefits might be achieved by working on a cross-border basis with departments in the South without any way damaging their constitutional position. Obviously, it's not a view I share but it's one that I recognise as presenting a problem for them.

Are there particular areas of North-South cooperation you think you might be able to persuade unionists to move into in the future?

There are a range of issues where the border damages the building of social relationships and economic prospects. For example much more could be done in education. We have this phenomenon where families have moved from Derry City to County Donegal and then a furore happens in some Derry schools because children wanting to attend them are born and reared in Donegal even though their families originally come from Derry and their grannies live in Derry and are part of a childminding process after school. Then a row can develop because those children aren't being educated in the North. I think that's crazy.

Then there's the issue of health. We've had this debate about the establishment of a radiotherapy unit in Altnagelvin hospital in Derry. We have a ludicrous situation where people with cancer from Donegal and Derry have to travel to Belfast, and people from Donegal have to travel to Galway or Dublin for treatment. Now we have an agreement that that a radiotherapy unit will be built at Altnagelvin.

These are two examples of essential cross-border services that should make sense to everybody. Then there is economic development and spatial planning – all of these things could be tackled in a way that removes the border as an obstacle to social, economic and political development.

How do you work in this area with DUP Ministers who obviously might prefer that there is as little North-South cooperation as possible?

The downside to all of this is that every now and again you will hear a Unionist politician talk about the absolute need to do away with the North/South institutions. I think you can show citizens – and it doesn't matter what political persuasion they are – that gains can be made through North-South cooperation that can really improve their lives, and that people will go along with that. What it requires is leadership; what it requires is facing down those people who would like to turn us back to the bad old days.

In a recent *Irish News* column Breidge Gadd expressed frustration that North-South cooperation was being forgotten about by the politicians in Northern Ireland. Do you share her frustration?

I think it's wrong to say that it's forgotten about because it's a major priority for my party and has been for a very long time. And to be fair that's also true for the SDLP, while they may not be as forward as we are in terms of where we need to go in North-South cooperation. I'm an Irish republican, and I would love to be living in a united Ireland tomorrow morning. And I'm determined as an Irish republican to bring about a free and independent republic. That said, we do have a situation where there is a difficulty because of consistent fears unionist Ministers have looking over their shoulders because of the negative elements in Unionism.

Some Ministers on the unionist side are not prepared to go as far as they need to go in being willing to show real savings by working together across the border and then ensuring that the savings accrued as a result are put into other worthwhile projects that improve the lives of people. This is going to be a process: while the North South Ministerial Council and all the workstreams and structures that happen under the NSMC might have had a rocky beginning, we can all go from strength to strength if we encourage people to think in new ways which will improve their performance as Ministers and bring about an engagement with their counterparts in Dublin to deliver shared services that can be shown to citizens to be of enormous value to everyone without compromising anyone's political allegiances.

It was relatively easy to argue for greater cooperation with a dynamic Republic of Ireland during the good years of the Celtic Tiger. How can you persuade unionists that it makes sense now, with the South so deeply mired in financial crisis?

I actually think it's all the more imperative that we do it now. It's like people saying to Peter Robinson and I two years ago: 'What are you going to America for? America's not going to invest in the North.' We went to America and we saw companies like Universal and HBO, and a result of us convincing them to come to the North, for the past year or so 6-700 people have been employed at the Paint Hall in Belfast's Titanic Quarter making firstly a feature-length movie and then a TV series for HBO with every prospect of further series to come. You also have 400 people working for the New York Stock Exchange in the North.

Similarly on the North-South strand, what we need to do is make the argument that even at a time of recession what people think is not doable is eminently doable, and there are opportunities to be gained from North-South cooperation. So even though the South is facing a huge economic crisis, and we face our own economic crisis insofar as we have a Tory-led administration in London which has reneged on commitments made by the previous administration and withdrawn £4 billion from our budget over the next number of years, we have to see those as challenges that we have to rise to. So there is an argument for people to intensify the working together across the border rather than accepting the argument that because there are economic difficulties that's something that should not be contemplated. I don't buy that at all.

How can North-South cooperation help the two parts of Ireland come out of recession?

I'll give you an example. I am conscious that Michael McGimpsey is presently holding a report that was done by very qualified people to look at the benefits that would accrue to all the people of Ireland, North and South, through shared health services. Disappointingly he has refused to publish that over recent times. I think a very compelling case can be made that if we work together for the provision of those services on a shared, cross-border basis we will actually provide a far better health service for our citizens. I don't think our citizens, when they go into hospital – whether they're Protestants or Catholics or non-believers, whether they're unionists or loyalists, nationalists or republicans – worry one jot about political allegiance.

Any there any other public services which can be delivered more effectively – and even more cost-effectively – on a cross-border basis?

Tourism is one area. Tourism Ireland, a North/South body, is charged with the responsibility of marketing Ireland on an international basis. However I think the tourist organisations here in Ireland, North and South, need to work much more closely together than they do at the moment.

I also believe that local councils along the border need to be working much more closely together. It's a bit like the development of the North South Ministerial Council – where people can see actual benefits for citizens from such cross-border work, then the argument for continuing it can be won. The same is true at local council level. Having said that, we could do it an awful lot more quickly.

In terms of growing the economy, I think that is the next big thing to be taken on board, because the potential for economic development, and particularly export-led development to help us grow out of recession, is huge. It is ludicrous having the IDA and Invest Northern

Ireland competing against one another. But that brings you into a whole new debate around corporation tax and the fact that we don't have a level playing pitch, North and South. We have majored on that in the course of this term of the Assembly, and we are now in consultation with the British Treasury. If the power to fix our own corporation tax were to be given to the Executive, that would make a very dramatic change to our FDI prospects. And the DUP and Sinn Fein are agreed on that.

There are also some sporting and cultural services which could be better provided on a cross-border basis. There are two separate Sports Councils which contain many individual sporting bodies that are organised on an all-island basis, so there are savings to be made there.

Is there a danger of both politicians and people in the South turning in on themselves during this period of financial crisis and forgetting about the peace that was so hard won in the North, and more specifically the importance of the North-South strand of that process?

I think there is always a danger of people being complacent as we have seen in the course of recent times. There are still people out there who believe that the best way to go forward is to plunge us all back into conflict again. And of course there are people out there in the more extreme unionist political parties, for example the party led by Jim Allister, who believe that the power sharing executive in the North and the North/ South institutions should be destroyed, and effectively argue for a return to unionist and majority rule. We also faced new challenges in the course of recent times, not least the killing of two soldiers in Antrim, and the killing of policeman Stephen Carroll last year. I think the fact that Peter Robinson and I stood together in a very united way against that sent a very powerful message to our own people on the island of Ireland and to the international community, that we were politicians who were absolutely determined to move forward and not to go back.

If people in the South do turn in on themselves, is there anything that Sinn Fein, as an all-island party and one that will probably have a bigger representation in the Dail after the coming election, can do to prevent that happening?

I give the Irish people much more credit than those who would suggest that they would turn in on themselves. Because whilst a percentage of the people might be tempted to do that, I think that people all over this island have a huge appreciation of the changes that have taken place over the course of the last 10-12 years since these institutions were established, and people don't ever again want to see the situation slip back to where there is an isolationist approach in the North and this psychological barrier between North and South.

I believe that the vast majority of people, North and South, want to see politicians working together, building civilised relationships with one another, and cooperating in a positive, constructive way.

What do you hope to see coming out of the current review of the work of North/South Bodies? Is it not time that this was published?

People who watch what is happening know that the obstacles to that review being published do not reside with Sinn Fein. We are very much in favour of further developing and strengthening relationships on a North-South basis. The fact is that we are part of institutions that require the assent of everyone, and the search for solutions, not the exercise of vetoes, is the secret ingredient for moving forward. And on a lot of occasions we have done that.

There are some issues that still have to be overcome. For example a major case in point was the whole issue of the transfer of powers over policing and justice, where some people said it would never happen, and some people clearly didn't want it to happen, and some people made predictions that it would be many years before it could even be contemplated. But because we knuckled down on that issue in the course of the discussions that took place at Hillsborough Castle in the early part of last year, we found a solution, as we have found solutions to so many other issues.

Those issues include agreeing two budgets. We agreed the first budget with Ian Paisley, during his time in the Office of First and Deputy First Minister, and we have now agreed a draft budget. We were told the first budget would never happen, and then, when it did happen, that it would never last – well, it did last. The SDLP said this time 'they might agree a budget, but it will only be for a year'. Well, we agreed a budget and it's for four years. So we have confounded all of them, and I think it is quite clear that if we continue to build relationships and continue to work together in a very cordial and civilised way, there are no boundaries to what we can achieve.

Would you like to see the North South Ministerial Council's remit being extended in the future to include other areas of North South cooperation other than those agreed in the Good Friday and the Saint Andrews Agreements?

I would like to see that. I think a major case in point is the issue of energy and renewables. There are major challenges facing the administrations, North and South, against the backdrop of the huge difficulties the planet is facing around the need to discover, exploit and store renewable energy. I would make this argument not only in the context of our need to work on a North-South basis, but also in the context of needing to work with other regions as well, like Scotland and Wales, and others within our ambit of responsibility. So it's not just that we want to do this on an all island basis – in the future we could be exporting energy to Europe, for example.

Other areas where the NSMC remit could be expanded are promoting innovation, research and development; spatial planning; dealing with emergency issues like the recent water shortages during which Louth supplied water to Newry and Mourne; the technical management of flood plains (very relevant in counties like Fermanagh and Cavan); joint public procurement; waste disposal; an all-island sex offenders register; and national centres of excellence in research areas like health and engineering, so that instead of experts being spread across the Irish universities they can be concentrated in one university on the island so that you could actually grow industries out of that university on a cluster basis. The key is to develop a flexible approach to cross-border and all-Ireland working, to ensure that we make the most of opportunities that arise, opportunities that will deliver real change in people's lives.

What is your vision of the 'island of Ireland' economy in the next 10 – 15 years?

Obviously getting through the recession is going to be a huge challenge for all of us. Some of the predictions from economists in terms of our ability to do that in the next short while fluctuate from being mildly optimistic to being hugely pessimistic, so I think that developing an all-island economy is eminently in the interests of the citizens who live on the island of Ireland. I think the biggest break on what we are trying to do is the political psychology of those who see the development of an all-island economy as something to be feared. We have to consistently challenge ourselves to see how we can develop an all-island economy in ways that can benefit the people that we represent.

Now I am an Irish republican, and very labour-oriented. I do believe that there is a huge responsibility on governments to protect the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society, and that essentially means us recognising that we live on an island where there is a very small proportion of people who control the vast bulk of wealth. There are some people who are rich beyond anybody's wildest dreams, and that is to the disadvantage of the vast majority of citizens, particularly in working class areas. I am conscious that there are many political tendencies on the island: ourselves and the Unionist parties in the North, and Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Sinn Fein in the South. The forthcoming election in the South could be a watershed election. I think it is fair to predict that there will be a change of government, but there is a very real prospect that coming out of this election there could be a government in the South that doesn't include Fianna Fail or Fine Gael.

How will that fit in to what is happening in the North? To be fair, in our recent discussions on the budget with the Democratic Unionist Party, what has again been under-estimated by the media is that at the end of those deliberations there is going to be an agreed budget, and it's going to go through the Assembly. And what I take heart from is that during the course of those discussions, we agreed with the DUP that the development of our economy is still a major priority. But that priority must be set against a backdrop of recognising our responsibilities to protect front line services and to protect the most vulnerable and the most disadvantaged within our society. So it is clear that there is common ground between us and the DUP in terms of the need to ensure that as we go forward we develop an economy that is delivering for everyone and not just for the rich.

What do you make of Martin Mansergh's statement that barriers to North-South cooperation have never been lower, and that the Irish government should concentrate on continuing to lower these rather than to press any claims for Irish unity at a time when its overriding priority is to get the Irish economy out of its present crisis?

I do agree with the first part of that. Huge progress has been made and the peace process has changed everything. This was an island that had been in conflict for something like 800 years, and I think that the agreements that we have forged with the assistance of the American Government, the British Government and the Irish Government, and most important of all the agreement of political leaders like Gerry Adams and myself, Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson, John Hume and Mark Durkin, David Trimble and Reg Empey, have totally transformed the political situation. I can now say with a good degree of confidence that we are never again going to slip back into conflict in the North. This is a very big

statement to make, a very bold statement, but a very confident statement, and I say it as an Irish republican whose *raison d'être* is to bring about the reunification of Ireland by peaceful and democratic means that threaten nobody.

We have agreed through the Good Friday Agreement that if the people of the North decide that they want to end the link with Britain, then the British Government is duty bound to legislate for Irish unity.

However equally important is the work we do in the intervening period: the personal relationships we build, the ability of the politicians to work together North and South, to be civilised and cordial with each other. Yes, to fight our corner at election time, but whenever the people have spoken to roll up our sleeves, and to do the business on their behalf. And I am hugely optimistic about the future – even in the face of the very severe economic situation that we face in the intervening period.

So you don't agree that the Irish government should concentrate on solving its own crisis rather than pressing any claims for Irish unity?

Whoever is elected in the South is going to have to deal with the very grave economic circumstances that exist there. There is no running away from political realities and I respect the fact that whoever takes up those reigns has a huge amount of work to do. But I think that we need to get away from people trying to criminalise the political aspiration for Irish unity.

And we need people to be big about all of this. I mean I am big enough to accept Peter Robinson as a unionist: his allegiance is to Westminster and to what he calls the United Kingdom. I don't have any allegiance to that: my allegiance is to the people of Ireland – North and South – whether they be loyalist, unionist, nationalist or republican, and you know I represent all of them in my Mid-Ulster constituency. Up until 10 or 12 years ago, you would hardly ever have seen somebody from a GAA club walk through a street in Magherafelt or Cookstown wearing their club jersey. We see it now all the time, and there are people who walk past them now wearing Rangers jerseys. Let's be big enough to accept it – it's an Irishman wearing a Rangers jersey. That's what he is, and why should I feel annoyed or angry about that, or why should he or she feel similarly annoyed about someone wearing a GAA jersey.

We need to move beyond old positions and kneejerk reactions. We need to accept, respect and embrace diversity – to see the person behind the jersey.

We all need to be big and generous towards each other. The example for all of that is Peter Robinson and I, Ian Paisley and I, being able to go into an office together and work together.

The interviewer was Andy Pollak and the interview took place in Armagh on 21 January 2011 following the eleventh plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council.

Reflection

Martina Anderson MEP

Martin McGuinness personified statesmanship. He took a republican community to a place that it was concerned about going, but it was where it needed to be.

Throughout all of his adult life he led from the front.

His interview with the Centre for Cross Border Studies demonstrates the leader that he was and the leadership that he gave.

As a young man from the Bogside – he led from the front.

As a young people leader – he led from the front.

When SF developed into a political force he was there at the front.

When decisions once thought impossible had to be made, Martin was there at the front.

He took steps that were difficult for many, not least himself.

Martin McGuinness was a soldier, a statesman, a leader and a friend to many.

He was a big political giant and generous to all.

Martin McGuinness was also a husband, a father, a brother, a son and a grandfather. He was a family man.

Martin moved naturally across Derry and Donegal with his mother Peggy and siblings. He lived in Ireland, understand the connective thread between Derry and Donegal and he worked tirelessly to maintain alignment in the face of an establishment which had severed the methods of connectivity like all Ireland rail travel.

He was a strong advocate of Strand 2 of the Good Friday Agreement, the all-Ireland strand and indeed all the provisions of that Agreement.

He proudly represented the people of the north on an international stage and his influence and guiding hand was forever present.

There weren't two Martin McGuinness's.

There was no abrupt conversion or abdication of responsibilities.

Martin McGuinness, who defended his community of Derry in the darkest days of our

recent past, was the same Martin McGuinness who lead our peace negotiations, met the English Queen and called time on an Assembly that was not delivering. He believed that all human beings have equal rights or none have any.

He was the man from the Bogside who lived just around the corner and he acted with steely determination throughout his life. He was impressive, and he impressed.

As a Derry wan, Martin inspired us younger Bogsideers growing up to understand the importance of not just aspiring to change the world but to applying yourself to righting wrongs.

All of Martin's actions – right up to his last, were provoked by the love and compassion he felt for people especially for the most vulnerable in society.

Martin's unwavering message of equality, progress, fairness and Irish Unity through the democratically endorsed pathway in the Good Friday Agreement influenced decisions he made and work he undertook.

I often imagine I hear a warning from Martin as I go through the clouds – saying never rest on electoral success. He used to say, it is the work you do between elections that matters most, and of course he was right.

Martin knew the damage that Brexit will do to Ireland and he saw that disaster clearer than most.

I had the privilege of working closely with him throughout the Brexit referendum and after it.

He walked the corridors of the European Parliament with me and Team SF before anyone else in the political arena in Ireland though to do so.

Martin's powerful influence was felt and rewarded in the corridors of the European Parliament.

Martin undertook a diplomatic offensive to protect Ireland in the wake of Brexit. He met with the leaders of the European Parliament and stated our case unequivocally.

Some weeks after his visit, Martin's influence was clear when those same leaders supported our insertions in a Brexit European Parliament resolution to protect the Good Friday Agreement "in all of its parts" and there would be no "hardening" of the border partitioning Ireland.

On a lighter note, I consider myself a fast mover, but physically keeping up with our Martin was challenging.

I told him that he taught me to "walk with purpose", even when lost, to act like I knew where I was going.

When he sat across the kitchen table with my husband and I, asking me to be his Junior Minister I thought to myself, how will I keep pace with “the man” mentally.

But I was more than eager and willing to try.

If I could have picked a ministry in which to apply myself, I would have asked for that one, just to work closer with Martin McGuinness, to learn more from him – and during that year as his Junior Minister I learnt a lot.

To say I was one of Martin McGuinness’s Junior Ministers is such an honour, felt deep inside especially now in this world without him.

There were only a few of us who were his Junior Ministers and in the grand scheme of things, it’s just a moment in time, but it’s “that” moment that we’ll all cherish, forever.

Personally, I find working the corridors of power in the best interest of people harder to do so without the power, the strength, the ideological purity and the experience of our lost leader Martin McGuinness.

I miss him.

I miss him calling me at the right moment, when I needed him at my side, he’d discuss purpose, strategy, messaging and then agree timing. He was always “there”.

He just instinctively knew when the right time was, to go in the right direction.

On a personal level, he knew when to approach you, put his arms around you, tell you to stay strong and to carry on.

There is no doubt that each of us individually and collectively are all better off for having Martin McGuinness in our lives and our movement.

His shoes cannot be filled. No one would even try.

When the recent history of Ireland is written, no one should feature larger than Martin McGuinness.

Often, I stand before his grave for just a few moments asking him to guide me in everything I do.

And as I go about my work, there is the influence of Martin McGuinness doing just that.

Martin is gone, but be in no doubt his influence lives on.

18 July 2019

Keeping up with the neighbours: *Human rights protection, North and South, since the Belfast Agreement*

Michael Farrell

*(This article was first published in 2011, in the 6th edition of the **Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland**)*

I was very pleased and honoured to be asked to give last year's Stephen Livingstone Lecture on 5 October 2010. Stephen was one of the brightest stars of the very remarkable group of human rights lawyers and activists that came together around the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) over the last 30 years. It was a real honour to be asked to pay a tribute to him. I first met Stephen in the mid to late 1980s at a small meeting in Dublin about the campaign to get the Irish Government to ratify the European Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners. It was evidence of his deep concern for one of the less popular human rights causes – the rights of prisoners and their families.

I then got to know him better as part of the close cooperation, led by CAJ, between the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, of which I was co-chairperson at the time, Liberty, British-Irish Rights Watch, Amnesty and the US Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, who worked very hard and with some success to try to ensure that human rights protections formed a key part of the Northern Ireland peace negotiations and the eventual Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement.

The last time I met Stephen was in connection with a fascinating conference organised by himself and Kieran McEvoy on the Judiciary and Human Rights, held at the Stormont Hotel. I think it was in connection with it that I rang Stephen on his mobile phone at one stage only to find that he was answering from a hotel in Addis Ababa, which brought home to me just how far-reaching, in the literal sense, was his concern for human rights.

It was quite some time after I first met Stephen when I learned that he had been, as he put it, the 'fifth Beatle' member of the very funny comedy group, the Hole in the Wall Gang. It helped to explain his wry wit and quirky sense of humour. And it was later still that I realised that I had worked in the old Belfast Tech in College Square with his father Max, a quiet and courteous man in very troubled times.

In retrospect it has become clearer that Stephen was a very important figure in the creation of a vibrant and determined human rights community in Northern Ireland, committed to developing a culture of human rights and equality in this jurisdiction, in the island of Ireland and in these islands. His loss was a great blow not just to his partner Karen and his immediate family, but to the whole human rights community here – but he had helped to dig the foundations well and the house still stands.

Equivalence of rights?

I should say at the outset that although I am the senior solicitor with Free Legal Advice Centres in Dublin and I am also a member of the Irish Human Rights Commission, I am speaking in my personal capacity. I would not want my respected and respectable colleagues to get blamed for what I say.

It seemed fitting that a lecture to honour Stephen's memory should deal with the human rights provisions of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, which embodied much of what he had worked for. And since I have lived and worked in the Republic for many years, I thought I should talk about an aspect of the Agreement that is less commonly discussed: namely the requirement in its 'Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity' section that the Republic should introduce measures to 'ensure at least an equivalent level of protection of human rights as will pertain in Northern Ireland'. That requirement clearly envisaged an all-island dimension to the rights protections in the Agreement.

To the human rights community and, I hope, to many others who welcomed the Agreement as an opportunity for a new beginning, this amounted to a vision and an ideal of a society throughout the island that would be based on a culture of human rights, with laws and institutions to deliver and protect those rights.

And even at the most mundane and pragmatic level, the requirement for equivalence of rights was based on the idea of a symmetry of rights protections, North and South, to demonstrate that the Republic was fully committed to the ideals of equality, fairness, respect and due process that it was advocating for Northern Ireland. It may even have implied that the Republic might sometimes set an example by implementing 'equivalent' reforms with an energy and enthusiasm that would highlight any foot-dragging north of the border. Either way, the requirement for equivalence held out the prospect of an island committed to a common platform of human rights, available and enforceable from Ballyferrier to Belfast and from Coleraine to Cork.

I want to look at the extent to which the Government in the Republic has delivered on this commitment, but given the all-island character of the vision of a new era of human rights, and in light of some recent developments here in Northern Ireland, I want to say a little about the situation in the North as well.

The position in the Republic

The section of the Agreement on 'Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity' was clear, specific and quite far-reaching in relation to the Republic. It stated that:

The Irish Government will also take steps to further strengthen the protection of human rights in its jurisdiction. The Government will ... bring forward measures to strengthen and underpin the constitutional protection of human rights.

The Irish Government agreed to consider incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into its domestic law; to establish a Human Rights Commission 'with a mandate and remit equivalent to that within Northern Ireland'; to ratify the European Framework Convention on National Minorities; to bring in enhanced employment equality

and equal status legislation; to take steps to demonstrate respect for the different traditions in the island; and to initiate ‘a wide-ranging review of the Offences Against the State Acts, 1939-85’.

This was all in the context of the commitment to ensuring *at least* (my emphasis) an equivalent level of protection of human rights to that in Northern Ireland.

A Joint Committee of the two Human Rights Commissions was also to be set up ‘as a forum for consideration of human rights issues in the island of Ireland’. And the Joint Committee was tasked to consider establishing ‘a charter... reflecting and endorsing agreed measures for the protection of the fundamental rights of everyone living in the island of Ireland’.

This was clearly a vision, an ideal of a new dispensation, with the whole island sharing a commitment to an enhanced protection of human rights. It was very much what the coalition of human rights bodies I mentioned earlier had worked for. And of course such a vision had also been advocated by a number of the parties involved in the negotiations for the Agreement, notably the Women’s Coalition, sadly no longer with us, but whose strong support for human rights has been carried on by Monica McWilliams as Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

The Irish Government had, we understood, supported this vision, and had, of course, signed up for it in the Inter-Governmental Agreement, which is part of the overall Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and which included a commitment by both British and Irish Governments to implement the provisions of the Multi-Party Agreement and to protect ‘civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights in their respective jurisdictions’.

How has the Dublin Government delivered on its commitments? Sadly, when the euphoria over the signing of the Agreement subsided, successive Irish governments showed little enough enthusiasm about delivering what they had pledged. While the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was established promptly, the Irish Human Rights Commission was not set up until 2001, three years after the Agreement. And even then there was a major controversy when the Government rejected most of the recommendations of its own selection committee for members of the Commission. It had to subsequently back down and appoint the rejected nominees as well. And it never allocated a budget that was sufficient to allow the Commission to carry out all its functions.

Regrettably, the Joint Committee, the proposed ‘forum for the consideration of human rights issues in the island of Ireland’, has never really taken off. With both Commissions regularly underfunded, they could not spare the money or the staff to make the Joint Committee a serious body with its own, even seconded, staff and resources, without which it could not be effective. And the Charter of Rights for the whole island, which could have provided a blueprint for realising the vision of an all-island zone of human rights, has withered on the vine, a victim of the delays and obstacles put in the way of the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and the chronic lack of funding of the two Commissions.

European Convention finally incorporated

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) was not incorporated into domestic law in the Republic until the beginning of 2004, nearly six years after the Agreement, and even then it was only after an active lobbying campaign by NGOs and some pressure from the Irish Human Rights Commission. By then Ireland was the only Council of Europe member state not to have incorporated the Convention. And the Irish legislation, which was closely modelled on the UK Human Rights Act, specifically excluded the courts from the definition of bodies required to act compatibly with the European Convention and contained no provision similar to the UK one which requires Ministers to certify to Parliament whether proposed legislation is compatible with the ECHR.

New and quite wide-ranging equality legislation was brought in promptly and a new and more powerful Equality Authority set up, but it is arguable that this owed more to EU obligations than to the Agreement. The new legislation did not prohibit discrimination on the basis of political opinion, however, and in a major weakness compared with the Northern Ireland legislation, there was – and still is – no equivalent of the Section 75 positive duty to promote equality, that is so important in the North.

A committee was set up to review the Offences Against the State Acts, as pledged in the Agreement, but when it reported in 2002, it was deeply divided. A majority supported the retention of the power to intern suspects without trial, continued use of the non-jury Special Criminal Court even for some non-paramilitary offences, and use of the opinion of a Garda officer as evidence of membership of an illegal organisation. No action was taken by Irish Government even on some minor reforms suggested by the committee and new legislation brought in last year has extended the use of the Special Criminal Court to try non-paramilitary gangland offences.

Little attention seems to have been paid by either the committee or the Government to the commitment by the UK Government in the ‘Security’ section of the Agreement to ‘as early a return as possible to normal security arrangements... and...the removal of emergency powers in Northern Ireland’. And it does not seem to have occurred to anyone that, in the context of developing an all-island zone of enhanced human rights protections, this might have been an area where it would have been easier for the Irish Government to take the initiative in dismantling emergency legislation, faced as it was with a lower level of paramilitary activity.

Those were the areas where formal and specific commitments had been given by the Irish Government. In other areas where the general requirement of equivalence applied, the record was no better. One of the flagship changes in Northern Ireland has clearly been the establishment of the Police Ombudsman’s Office, which has become a model for many countries seeking to reform their police forces. There were calls for a similar body to be set up in the Republic, but it took a series of domestic scandals, culminating in the extraordinary behaviour of a number of gardai in Donegal, recorded in the devastating reports of the Morris Tribunal, to finally push the authorities in Dublin into setting up the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission.

And, returning to a theme close to Stephen Livingstone's heart, accountability and transparency have not made much impact on the prison system in the Republic, where gross overcrowding, some of it in crumbling Victorian buildings with no in-cell sanitation, has turned many of the prisons into penal slums. Despite the appointment of a Prisoner Ombudsman in Northern Ireland in 2005, there has been no response by Dublin to calls for the establishment of a similar institution in the Republic.

In other areas unconnected with the legacy of the Troubles or other security issues, progressive changes in Northern Ireland, generally as a result of developments in the UK as a whole, have not been the trigger for changes in the Republic to provide equivalent rights. Instead, such changes have generally resulted from domestic demands and/or developments in the European Court of Human Rights or EU law. Examples are the recent passage of the Civil Partnership Bill and the Irish Government's even more recent move to introduce legal recognition for transgendered persons – both developments which have been in effect in Northern Ireland for some time.

In summary, not long after the Agreement was concluded, the Irish Government seems to have taken its eye off the bigger picture and the exciting and inspiring concept of an all-island area of human rights. While elements in the administration remained committed to the ideal, inertia seems to have set in, coupled with resistance to change by parts of the permanent government.

The specific commitments in the Agreement – apart, arguably, from the dismantling of the Offences Against the State Acts – were delivered on, somewhat grudgingly, but there was no enthusiasm for change, no brave initiatives to generate a momentum that would be infectious across the border as well.

And then came the economic crisis. In 2008-2009 when we were seeing only the tip of the iceberg that was to come, the Irish Government had already decided to pay off the enormous debts generated by profligate banks and developers from the pockets of the ordinary people. There was a drive to cut public spending with a general reduction of 10% in the budget of public bodies, but the Government slashed the budget of the Equality Authority by 43%, forcing the resignation of its widely respected chief executive, Niall Crowley, and seriously undermining its effectiveness.

The budget of the Irish Human Rights Commission – a specific commitment in the Agreement – was cut by 32% and a ban on filling vacancies in the public service is slowly strangling it. A National Action Plan Against Racism was not renewed and both the state-funded antiracism body, the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) and the Combat Poverty Agency were disbanded – at a time when racism and poverty were likely to get substantially worse.

There is no doubt that there was a quite disproportionate cut in funding for the human rights and equality sector and there has been much speculation about the reasons for it. Was it revenge for the Equality Authority taking discrimination cases against public service bodies, for the Human Rights Commission criticising the Government's policy on US rendition planes landing at Shannon, or for both these bodies criticising the Government's treatment of asylum seekers?

Or was it a bid to silence bodies that might speak out when Government austerity policies began to really hurt the most vulnerable in Irish society?

Whatever the answer to those questions, even the most charitable view would indicate that when things began to get tough and cuts had to be made, the Government saw human rights and equality as expendable as luxuries which were alright in times of plenty, but which should be among the first to go when belts had to be tightened.

And again it seems that no thought was given to the wider vision of an all-island culture of human rights, to the specific commitments in the Good Friday Agreement, or to the knock-on effect that undermining key human rights bodies in the Republic might have on the UK Government's attitude to the equivalent bodies in Northern Ireland.

I am conscious that I am not painting a very encouraging picture, but I do not think that all is entirely lost in the Republic. I will come back to that point, but now I would like to say something about the situation in Northern Ireland. I say this with some diffidence since most people here will be more familiar with the details of these matters than me, but to get a rounded picture of the all-island position it is necessary to look at developments in both jurisdictions.

Developments in Northern Ireland

There has undoubtedly been substantial progress in human rights terms in Northern Ireland since the Agreement. The police have been radically reformed and 50/50 recruitment and active recruiting of women has made the PSNI much more acceptable across both main communities, while the establishment of the Ombudsman's office has given confidence that where there are abuses, potential remedies are available.

The Human Rights Act has made the law a significant instrument of change, and human rights advocates can now look to the new Supreme Court as an ally in the protection of human rights in a way they would not have done to the House of Lords in the pre-Human Rights Act days. And the judiciary in Northern Ireland has become much more representative of the main political/ religious communities as well – though it remains singularly unrepresentative of half the population – women.

The equality legislation, the Equality Commission and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act have done a lot to end the discrimination that played such a role in the origins of the Northern conflict. There are, however, still significant imbalances in unemployment and deprivation, and areas of persistent poverty and neglect that need to be addressed, and this may well require more emphasis on positive action and targeting investment and resources than on the limited remedy of decisions on individual complaints.

The report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry during the summer of 2010 also represents a major step forward, despite its unconscionable cost, which was not the fault of the victims or their families. The fact that Lord Saville asserted clearly the innocence of all those killed or wounded on that day and the responsibility of the British army, and the forthright apology by David Cameron, have gone a long way to undoing the insult of the Widgery Tribunal and bringing some closure to the families and very many people in the city of Derry.

I hope the results of the remaining inquiries will be as frank and forthright and that the Government will finally agree to hold a proper public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane as well.

The establishment of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has been a major building block in the human rights infrastructure in the North. It has had its problems and divisions, which perhaps in retrospect was not surprising given the difficulty of some of the issues it has had to grapple with and the less than supportive attitude of the UK Government and some of the local parties. But the Commission has survived and has earned a well-deserved reputation for the excellence of its work in trying to protect the rights of the most vulnerable in all communities in Northern Ireland.

It has become a crucial driver of the whole human rights dimension of the Agreement. However, warning lights have begun to flash in connection with the attitude of the UK Government to the Commission and by implication to the whole Agreement.

Bill of Rights

A key responsibility of the Commission under the Agreement was to advise the UK Government on a Bill of Rights, which was envisaged as becoming, together with the European Convention on Human Rights, a basic constitutional document for Northern Ireland. The Commission and its staff put nine years of dedication, commitment, enthusiasm and sheer hard work into drawing up its Bill of Rights proposals. It held consultations across Northern Ireland and with every sector of society, raising hopes and expectations. The Bill of Rights Forum put another two years of hard work into the process under the patient direction of Chris Sidoti, former head of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission. NGOs and civil society generally made countless submissions to the process.

The draft Bill was inevitably a compromise and may not have satisfied everybody, but it was and is an impressive document that genuinely tries to deal with the particular concerns of Northern Ireland, and it contains innovative proposals on social and economic rights that are particularly relevant to a society that has consistently higher levels of poverty and deprivation than other regions of the UK.

For the Northern Ireland Office to sit on these proposals for almost a year and then issue a Consultation Paper that refuses to consider nine of the key recommendations, and dismisses a number of the others as well, seems to me to show contempt for the whole process and for a key part of the architecture of the Agreement. And when the new Coalition Government apparently adopts and repeats more firmly its predecessor's argument that the Bill of Rights process should be effectively subsumed in its plans for a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for the UK as a whole, it appears to show a lack of understanding of the basic concepts of the Agreement, with its recognition of the particularity and special circumstances of Northern Ireland.

The proposal for a 'Bill of Rights and Responsibilities' contains its own difficulties. The rhetoric around this proposal about substituting a more 'British' set of rights for the 'European' model of the European Convention on Human Rights, and the suspicion by

many in the human rights community that this is really intended to dilute the Human Rights Act, is liable to undermine some of the confidence in the Agreement.

After all, the ‘incorporation into Northern Ireland of the European Convention on Human Rights [ECHR], with direct access to the courts, and remedies for breach of the Convention, including power for the courts to overrule Assembly legislation on grounds of inconsistency’ was a key component of the Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity section of the Agreement.

And the role of the ECHR is also written into Strand One of the Agreement under ‘Democratic Institutions in Northern Ireland’. It is hard to see how, if the Human Rights Act, which incorporates the ECHR into law for the whole of the UK, was diluted, the European Convention could continue to play the crucial role in Northern Ireland that was envisaged for it in the Agreement.

Then there is the proposed 25% cut in the budget of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, following the example set by the Irish Government, and the arbitrary refusal to allow the Commission to accept philanthropic support for specific projects, something which has proved a lifeline for the IHRC and has not compromised its independence in any way. In a situation where the Northern Ireland Commission has been inadequately funded from the beginning, a 25% cut could seriously impair its capacity to do its job, thus undermining another key element of the Agreement.

This seems to me a dangerous course. It threatens the vision behind the Agreement, the concept of a new society where the rights of everyone in all communities will be comprehensively protected and enshrined in law and can be enforced through the courts.

I would prefer to concentrate on the vision and the ideals behind the Agreement. But there is a down to earth and practical danger here as well. The UK Government has been warning of a serious danger from dissident Republican violence. While there is very little political support at the moment for the activities of Republican ‘dissidents’, there is a close correlation between support for dissident organisations and areas of serious deprivation, which are marked by hopelessness and lack of faith in the political system. Even from a *realpolitik* point of view, this is not a time to begin dismantling or undermining parts of the Agreement – or to cut public spending and investment in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland.

This is more than ever a time to reach out and try to demonstrate to deprived and marginalised people, who have experienced no peace dividend so far, that the Agreement and the political settlement based on it can offer them hope and the prospect of a fair deal in a new society based on respect, equality and human rights principles. This is a time, North and South in the island of Ireland, to defend and develop the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, not to dismantle it.

It is also a time, in both jurisdictions, to place more focus on social and economic rights as well as the civil and political rights which have up to now been the main focus of discussion. It is worth repeating that the Inter-Governmental Agreement commits both British and

Irish governments to protect ‘civil, political, *social, economic* [my emphasis] and cultural rights in their respective jurisdictions’.

The Human Rights Commission Act in the Republic defines human rights as the rights conferred by the Constitution and the international treaties to which the State is a party, which, of course, includes the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the European Social Charter. And although the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement refers only to the European Convention on Human Rights, the House of Lords and the Supreme Court have indicated in some recent judgments that the ECHR requires at least a minimum level of social protection in the states that are parties to the Convention (cf. *R (Limbuela) v. Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2005] UKHL 66).

As the economic crisis deepens in both jurisdictions and impacts more severely on those already on the margins, such as the sick, the disabled, the elderly, single parents and their families, the homeless, migrants and asylum seekers, we face a challenge to make human rights more relevant to these groups. Indeed a lack of pressure to implement the Agreement from those working with the most deprived and marginalised in the Republic because they saw it as largely connected with the North rather than with the vulnerable throughout the island, may have contributed to the Irish Government’s lack of energy and enthusiasm in carrying out its commitments.

Fortunately, the NI Human Rights Commission has prepared the ground for such an initiative by naming and explaining key social and economic rights in its Advice on the Bill of Rights.

Conclusion

So far I have presented a fairly gloomy picture: the inspiring vision in the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement of a new dawn and a new dispensation – an island based on a culture of human rights – but slow, grudging and half-hearted delivery of some of the specific commitments in the Agreement and downright refusal to implement others.

But this was never going to be easy and a great deal has already been achieved – in both jurisdictions. And it is a lot better in a cold climate to be defending and seeking to build upon gains that have already been made, than having to start off afresh.

While I can only speak with confidence about the situation in the Republic, there are some hopeful signs as well. The crude attack on the human rights and equality sector has provoked resistance among NGOs and community organisations which have formed a broad-based Equality and Rights Alliance that has already had some success in preventing further cuts. And the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe Commissioner, Thomas Hammarberg, have intervened as well and put significant pressure on the Irish Government not to undermine these bodies any further.

The revelations of the appalling greed and hubris of the Irish banking sector and the complicity and mismanagement by the Irish Government have made an early election inevitable. The electorate is deeply disillusioned with the existing political system and open to new ideas on how to build a better society. The Labour Party, which will be pivotal to

any new Government in the Republic, has called for the drafting of a new Constitution to replace the existing one which is based on the values of a different age.

There is a real opportunity in the Republic now to put the case, not just for the restoration of the human rights infrastructure as it was, but for a renewal of that vision in 1998 of an island built on a culture of human rights and for stronger, more effective, more committed human rights structures to help bring it about.

The dynamics may be different in Northern Ireland, just as the recession that has devastated the Republic's economy is only beginning to hit the UK with full force now. But this is no time to give up hope, to abandon the huge gains that have been made, or to lose sight of the vision behind the Agreement. Instead it is a time in the words of one of the inspirational songs of the US Civil Rights movement, to 'Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on'.

Keeping our eyes on the prize: *Still protecting human rights, North and South*

Michael Farrell

When I wrote about the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (the Agreement) and Human Rights protections North and South on the island of Ireland almost 10 years ago, I criticised Dublin for being slow to ensure “*at least an equivalent level of protection of human rights*” with Northern Ireland, as required by the Agreement.

Things have changed quite a bit since then with the introduction of same sex marriage in the Republic in 2015, passing a more liberal law than the UK on recognising Transgender persons in the same year and ending the constitutional ban on abortion in 2018. And the Republic now has an openly gay Taoiseach who recently walked in the huge 2019 Pride parade in Belfast.

Moreover, these changes, especially in relation to marriage equality and abortion, were the product of grass roots campaigns resulting in decisive majorities in two referendums.

Ideally, under the equivalence principle in the Agreement, Northern Ireland would now be expected to catch up with the Republic on these issues, and hopefully will do so quite shortly. But meanwhile the whole “*Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity*” section of the Agreement, which was and is crucial to the new dispensation it promised, is under serious threat from Brexit.

The strengthened Equality legislation introduced in Northern Ireland under the Agreement was derived from EU laws, now collected together in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights* of the EU, which has binding effect throughout the Union. However, that Charter has been singled out for exclusion from UK law under Brexit, even under Theresa May’s Withdrawal Agreement and it is a particular target of the hard-line Brexiters.

Even if current EU equality law was retained under Brexit, exclusion of the Charter, and the jurisprudence of the EU Court of Justice interpreting it, would lead to a growing gap between equality, and labour and consumer, law in Northern Ireland and the Republic, where the Charter and the rights protected by it would still apply as a living, developing instrument.

The other major source of human rights law relied upon in the Agreement is the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which is incorporated into UK law by the Human Rights Act, 2000 and is given increased effect in Northern Ireland. Although it is a Council of Europe instrument, not an EU one, it is also a particular target of the hard-line Brexiters and several members of Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Cabinet have called for repeal of the Human Rights Act and a much weaker relationship with the ECHR in the future.

The Human Rights Convention has been at the heart of almost every human rights decision in relation to Northern Ireland for more than 40 years. To side line the ECHR at this point would gravely damage confidence in the courts and the rule of law by almost all parties in Northern Ireland.

Twenty one years ago, when the Agreement was adopted, there were high hopes that the violence would end and there would be a new era where the rights of everyone would be protected and where barriers between the two main communities in Northern Ireland, or between Northern Ireland and the Republic, would be removed.

Ten years later there were disappointments. Some of the promises in the Agreement had not been fulfilled; for example there was no Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and the walls dividing communities had not come down.

But there were gains as well: confidence that the legal system was fair and would protect rights and equality, and growing communication and cooperation on the ground between North and South, especially along the Border. Prejudices were gradually breaking down and a younger generation was interested in wider issues than just the rapidly disappearing Border, hence the widespread support for demands like marriage equality in both jurisdictions.

Now, however, Brexit, with the distinct possibility of a so-called 'hard Border', threatens to undo much of the progress that has been made, slowly and painstakingly, in the intervening period.

I mentioned in my earlier article that a coalition of civic society and NGOs from Ireland, North and South, from Britain, and from the US, had worked very hard, but successfully, to ensure that Human Rights and Equality would be at the core of the Agreement.

It seems now that a similar coalition is needed to try to preserve the legislation and institutions that protect Human Rights and Equality in Northern Ireland, to keep the Border open – and on another issue, to oppose any attempt to force the Republic to implement new highly restrictive immigration controls that are likely to be introduced by a post-Brexit UK government.

Of course, Brexit may not happen after all, but if it does it will be too late to begin planning how to protect the provisions of the Agreement.

So, how can this be done? Northern Ireland has had its own laws in a number of areas for many years. There is no reason why it should not retain the role of the ECHR and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in its legislation; and no reason why it should not seek as well to retain the right to freedom of movement and other rights of EU citizens, since about one third of its population are already Irish, and therefore, EU citizens, and almost all of the rest are entitled to Irish/EU citizenship as well.

This may seem like a tall order but it must be remembered that a majority in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU and subsequent polls suggest that majority may have

increased since then. So a campaign to protect key provisions of the Agreement which are also part of EU law should have substantial support.

And as a footnote, civil society, North and South, in Ireland should pay close attention to what is happening in Scotland, where the Scottish parliament has voted to preserve full adherence to the ECHR and to try to retain the role in Scottish law of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the decisions of the EU Court of Justice interpreting it.

16 August 2019

The Agreement Generation: *Young people's views on the cross-border relationship*

Aoibhín de Búrca and Katy Hayward

*(This article was first published in 2012, in the 7th edition of the **Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland**)*

Martin McGuinness's candidacy for Sinn Féin in the 2011 Irish Presidential election brought the complex reality of the North-South relationship to the fore in a Southern political context. One particular question posed directly to McGuinness by a young woman in a debate on the RTÉ *Frontline* programme encapsulated an underlying tension (emphases as verbally delivered):

As a young Irish person, I am curious as to why you have chosen to come down here to this country, with all your baggage, your history, your controversy? And how do you feel you can represent me, as a young Irish person, who knows nothing of the Troubles and who doesn't want to know anything about it?¹

McGuinness responded with the assertion that Derry is as Irish as Cork or Kerry – a comment that generated loud applause from the audience. He went on to state that, although he had met a 'tiny minority of people who are partitionist in their thinking ... the people of Ireland are not partitionist'.

Even if more than a tiny minority agree with this young woman's opinions, her willingness to express them publicly is unusual in the Republic – perhaps it reflects the fact that historical progress, as well as geography, has fortunately distanced her from the conflict. Thus, the reason her question proved so striking is that it indicates not only alienation between North and South, but a growing inter-generational gap in attitudes towards the border. The young questioner simply equated 'Northern' with 'Troubles' and, therefore, as something she did not want to know about, let alone engage with. In this paper, we seek to understand a little more about the views of young people on both sides of the border about their relationship to each other. In doing so, we suggest that, as hinted by the tenor of the *Frontline* question, it is not necessarily the case that the benefits of peace will be translated by the 'Agreement Generation' into more amicable cross-border relations.

The Agreement Generation

Young adults of today are the first generation of people on the island of Ireland raised in a context of a negotiated – and democratically endorsed – agreement on the constitutional question, supported by institutions working on a power-sharing, cross-border and inter-governmental basis. The 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement provided an opportunity to

reframe the various relationships within and between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. But its lasting legacy will be determined by those who were young children at the time of its conception – a generation whose views on the subject of the border and the ‘other’ across it remain relatively unknown.

Using Mannheim’s work on the sociology of generations, we define a ‘generation’ as an age group located within a shared social and historical process. Those whose early childhoods coincided with the peace process can be said to be part of this ‘generation location’.² More difficult to identify is whether this group exist as a ‘generational actuality’, North and South, whereby they share a common vision, ideas and conceptual reference points.³ We could theoretically discover this if there appears to be evidence of identity shifts and norm-creation in line with the principles of the 1998 Agreement. Our examination of the concept of the ‘Agreement Generation’ does not expect convergence of opinion among Northern and Southern respondents on all topics of debate, but it is premised on the belief that the social and historical process stimulated by the 1998 Agreement has created a new all-island context for conceiving the Irish border and relationships across it.

In order to assess the impact of this changed context on the North-South views of the young people who make up the Agreement Generation, we briefly examine here the legacy of the conflict on opinion in the Republic (as reflected in anti-partitionism) and in Northern Ireland (as reflected in community relations) with reference to public opinion survey data as well as academic research on shifts in national and communal identity on the island. We then report the initial findings of a small focus group study with undergraduates in the Republic of Ireland from University College Dublin (UCD) and in Northern Ireland from Queen’s University Belfast (QUB). The focus groups were conducted to examine in depth the views and opinions of the younger generation regarding the conflict, the 1998 Agreement, the North-South relationship and their vision of the future of this relationship.

Anti-partitionism in the South

There is a tendency (as McGuinness predictably exemplified) to presume that the majority of people in the Republic are in favour of unity and have remained anti-partitionist since the creation of the state. However, unsurprisingly, polling data shows the issue to be more complex. Support for a united Ireland was highest in the late 1970s and early 1980s during the ‘Troubles’, but by the turn of the century the European Values Survey (1999-2000) found that only a slight majority favoured Irish unity (54 per cent), whilst one third wanted to see an independent Northern Ireland.⁴ This very slender pro-unification majority is in line with more recent polling on the topic by the Sunday Independent and Sunday Business Post newspapers.⁵

Additional questioning finds that unification is not an immediate objective, and the commitment and support to it is not always wholehearted.⁶ Thus Mair describes the attitude of Irish voters as: ‘Unity would be nice. But if it’s going to cost money, or result in violence, or disrupt the moral and social equilibrium, then it’s not worth it’.⁷ As the official version of Irish nationalism has rescinded irredentist claims over Northern Ireland as part of the peace process and a broader process of Europeanisation,⁸ so popular Irish nationalism has slowly incorporated ‘the physical border created between the North and South’.⁹

Relevant to this, and notably present in the 2011 Presidential election debates, is the argument (by Fahey et al.) that civic features (i.e. centred on common laws, values and institutions) are more prominent than ethnic features (e.g. language, ancestry) in how people in the Republic define Irish nationalism and national identity.¹⁰ That said, although ‘speaking Irish’ or ‘being Catholic’ may be seen as optional identity markers for those born to white Irish parents in the 26 counties, the results and debate around the 2004 referendum on Irish citizenship arguably returned ethnicity and ancestry right to the heart of the process of determining ‘legitimate’ Irish identity.¹¹ It appears indisputable that changes to Irish nationalism in the contemporary Republic are social and cultural in nature, as much as they are due to modified interpretations of the ‘constitutional question’.

The constitutional question has not been definitively resolved, but it was removed as an obstacle to cooperation by the 1998 Agreement. This has helped facilitate significant advances in policy sharing and regional infrastructure, as well as material, symbolic and cultural exchange (as assiduously reported and aided by the Centre for Cross Border Studies). The Agreement Generation have grown up with these new North-South developments and are thus part of a ‘generation location’; yet to what extent has this shaped the creation of common values and opinions that would indicate even a tentative cross-border ‘generational actuality’?

What’s new for the new generation in the North?

Studies of young people in contemporary Northern Ireland consistently point to the enduring legacy of the conflict. Connolly et al. found that cultural dispositions and prejudice are formed among children from a young age,¹² and Leonard has shown that these cultural habits soon translate into the use of sectarian markers – and divergent social worlds – of Catholic and Protestant teenagers.¹³ Indeed, Shirlow and Murtagh argue that these cultural barriers are such that young people are more likely to hold sectarian views than their parents or grandparents.¹⁴ Such findings pose the risk of allowing young people to be presented as ‘perpetrators’ of the conflict rather than as its ‘victims’.

The Agreement Generation is made vulnerable to conflict by this persistent sectarianism, together with (according to the young participants in our study) the institutionalised segregation of the education system. Opinion surveys among young people in Northern Ireland consistently show that they are generally favourable to enabling greater ‘mixing’ between communities; indeed, 20 per cent see themselves as belonging to neither the Protestant nor Catholic community.¹⁵ Morrow’s study of a series of these surveys leads him to the conclusion that ‘this is a generation expectant of change’.¹⁶ Yet this tells us little in itself about what kind of society these young people might contribute to creating in Northern Ireland. Indeed, our tendency to burden young people both with the hope that they might bring future change, as much as to blame them for opportunistic/ occasional sectarian disorder, only serves to disempower them as active citizens. A better approach would be to prioritise redressing the serious deficit in the recognition of young people’s rights which currently inhibits their engagement and participation in wider society.¹⁷

Research study outline

For the purposes of this small study, we used the method of convening focus groups among social science undergraduates who were in their early years of primary school at the time

of the 1998 Agreement: that is to say, students who will have had all their political socialisation and education in a post-Agreement environment (shared 'generation location'). The rationale for the use of focus groups was to enable discussion to be centred upon five core themes but still be open to development in response to opinions and issues raised among the student groups themselves. These core themes were:

- Generational difference
- Knowledge of/familiarity with the 1998 Agreement
- Interpretation of the Agreement and its significance
- Cross border relations and perceptions
- The future: suggestions for building cooperation, especially within own generation.

Three focus groups were conducted (two in Dublin, one in Belfast), each session lasting around an hour and a half and involving an average of four participants. This data was supplemented by self-completed questionnaires of open-ended questions on these same topics to an additional set of students in Belfast. Ethical approval was given for this research by the relevant research ethics boards in both UCD and QUB. Particular care was taken to ensure that, although focus groups were held on campus to ensure that participants felt as comfortable as possible, students were absolutely clear that the process was wholly disassociated from their college studies and performance. All responses were fully anonymised and the recordings of the focus groups were accessible only to the interviewer.

We were conscious that some participants could find some of the topics covered sensitive, so the purpose and remit of the session, together with ground rules for constructive discussion, were made clear in advance, with each participant understanding that (s)he was free to withdraw at any point. Although participation was secured on an opt-in basis from students within the same social science degree programmes, we found that ensuring a mix of 2nd and 3rd year students meant that students tended not to know each other beforehand and knew their paths were unlikely to cross again, and therefore did not appear constrained from discussing the issues in hand.

Helping to ensure that students felt free to express their views was an especially important consideration for participants in Belfast, where (perhaps ironically given the ever-present issue of conflict) opportunities to discuss the subject openly in a cross-community group are still rare. Although we had a mixture of gender, social and religious backgrounds in these focus groups, we make no claim that these groups are representative of wider opinion in their age group. Nevertheless, we used this method to bring to a wider audience the views of some in this generation who, being third level social science students, are among the most engaged and informed regarding the subject in question.

Generational difference

All the students participating in this study identified a clear generational difference between their views and those of their parents and grandparents regarding the conflict and the 'other side' of the border. This was not framed consistently as being a result of

having grown up in a post-ceasefire context. Indeed, one participant in a Dublin focus group argued, in response to McGuinness's Presidential election candidacy:

*That is the problem with Martin McGuinness running: it's too fresh. It's not that 'your father did this to my father', or 'your grandfather did this to my grandfather'. It's: 'you did this to my family'. It's too soon.*¹⁸

It is notable that this view of the 'live' conflict is expressed by a Southern respondent – but it is surely no coincidence that this comment arose when discussing the Presidential candidacy of McGuinness. Perhaps this suggests that the young woman's question on the *Frontline* programme encapsulated a wider popular fear, and even resentment, that McGuinness's presence in the Presidential race was dragging the very issue of the Northern conflict back into the South and into the twenty-first century. In contrast, Northern respondents readily acknowledged that the conflict is still very 'real' for them (one respondent to the questionnaire stated: 'Sectarian violence, and fear of it, doesn't seem to be decreasing'), but were confident in drawing a distinction between their experience of it and those of their parents.

For example, one of the participants in the Belfast focus group described the fear and bitterness that shaped the lives of her grandparents as having been 'phased out' by the time of her generation.¹⁹ Her fellow focus group participants generally echoed the belief that they are relatively free from the burden of past hurts, and therefore were able to articulate a general optimism about the potential of their generation to 'rise above' identity politics and engage with more urgent problems. Indeed, all focus groups expressed particular frustration at the failure of politicians to concentrate on working together on issues of concern to everyone, such as health and education. The solution proffered in frank terms by one Dublin-based student was:

*Make the Northern Ireland Assembly themselves make decisions. This will finally make the politicians answerable to the voters, and voters will ask: 'Why did I vote for this person, they're an idiot!' And let them see that the politicians, when given responsibility, are not representing them and doing their job.*²⁰

The 1998 Agreement

It is this perception that those currently in power are 'still bitter and stuck' that directly informs students' slight caution towards the 1998 Agreement. One respondent to the QUB questionnaire wondered: 'Did our parents make a mistake in agreeing to the Agreement? We're wary of doing the same'. Students on both sides of the border are keen to judge the success of the Agreement on the basis of the changes it has facilitated rather than on its symbolic significance, seeing it, quite realistically, as an ongoing process fraught with difficulties.

*Even though the Good Friday Agreement was sensationalised in the media as a great turning point, really it took many years for any of the stuff to come into practice. You know there is still a lot of hostility in many communities to the other side. I think it's really only now you're seeing – with the regeneration programmes and stuff – a bit of change happening. ...So I wouldn't say [the Agreement is] a huge success.*²¹

No student participant appeared to be entirely familiar with the minutiae of the Agreement and the subsequent institutions, but all seemed aware of its key areas of impact and, interestingly, the issues of contention around it.

Related to this point, the respondents generally agreed that progress in Strand Two is stymied by suspicions over the motivations for this North-South dimension, but Northern and Southern students had differing interpretations as to what the motivation for cooperation was. Whereas those in Belfast saw engagement with the South as directly related to religious or political affiliation, Southern students said the objective of cross-border cooperation was to promote investment and trade for mutual benefit, and was thus driven by financial considerations rather than any nationalist ideology or solidarity. (This is perhaps reflected in the fact that, of the participants in the Dublin focus groups who had visited Northern Ireland, many had done so to go shopping!) Otherwise, they argued, there is no incentive to cross the border – indeed, it appeared to them in some ways more awkward to do so than to travel elsewhere in Europe.

The ‘other jurisdiction’

In comparing both jurisdictions, the Dublin-based students highlighted the changing nature of ‘Irishness’ and nationalism in the Republic in the past century, particularly the diminishing importance (in their eyes) of religion and traditional ethnic nationalism. Furthermore, the Southern students suggested that the British-Irish relationship is more positive, or at least less fraught, than the North-South relationship; some went so far as to indicate more affinity with London than Belfast, due not only to its cultural diversity and size but also to a sense of simply not understanding Belfast. Although respondents recounted largely positive experiences of crossing the border, some confessed that doing so made them consider the cultural differences between them to be greater than they had originally believed.

More broadly, the students readily acknowledge the complexity and ambiguity of the current arrangement. Southern respondents in particular expressed frustration at the difficulty of classifying the relationship of Northern Ireland to the Republic:

We don’t know what they are. It’s not clear. They aren’t just a neighbour or another country like Spain. They aren’t like England either. So they’re not a neighbour, but they are also not part of Ireland as things stand. Nobody has come up with a definition of what the relationship is between the 26 counties and the 6 counties.²²

The use of language and ambiguity, its role in positioning and identification, and the difficulties that exist regarding certain terms, was mentioned repeatedly in the focus group discussions. The reasons for this perhaps include the fact that, as they talked, the students themselves became aware of how cautious they are habitually prone to be when discussing the topic of the conflict and cross-border relations.

Related to this, one finding from the focus groups is that the Northern and Southern respondents view one another, and the ‘other jurisdiction’, in quite different terms. In this very small study, all the Dublin-based students explicitly recognised partition. One UCD student put it bluntly:

Neither of us want it [Northern Ireland]: neither us nor the UK government. I'd say if you asked the majority of Irish people – yes, nationalists, out of a sense of allegiance, might say they wanted Northern Ireland – but it's really far more trouble than it's worth. I mean to integrate Northern Ireland into this state – why would you be bothered? The status quo satisfies everyone.²³

Nevertheless, some of his fellow respondents confirmed that they aspire for a united Ireland in the future, and reaffirmed the right to hold such aspirations. More of them expressed a curiosity about the North, and a desire to improve the relationship with it and to be actively inclusive in doing so. There was more divergence among the views of the Northern respondents about North-South relations, and this – not surprisingly – appeared to relate to traditional lines of political affiliation. All of them, however, expressed surprise at their Southern counterparts' explicit recognition of two jurisdictions and their perception of 'huge cultural difference' between North and South.

The legacy of conflict

The cultural 'otherness' of the North was frequently and unambiguously claimed by our Southern respondents, including by those who expressly hoped for Irish unification. The example of 'painted kerbstones' was raised in each of the focus group discussions (North and South) by the participants as a convenient illustration of the division and confrontational identities still associated with Northern Ireland. One Dublin-based student used the language of bio-cultural determinism to explain his lack of identification with his Northern counterparts: 'kids [in Northern Ireland] are brought up in such an environment that [it] means the conflict is embodied in them. ...I just don't know how far they have come.' Another, in a different group, similarly described the conflict in Northern Ireland as: 'an inbred thing of "I must take the side of the Catholics or the Protestants"'. He then went on to make a somewhat surprising local comparison: 'You know, it's like Fianna Fáil people just hate Fine Gael people and they don't even know why!'²⁴ Such sweeping generalisations were not reciprocated by the Northern respondents towards the Republic and its population.

Somewhat ironically, given the ease with which some of the Dublin students stereotyped Northern Ireland and Northerners, the need for diplomacy and tact in North-South relations was acknowledged by all. Some frustration was expressed at the fact that the North-South relationship (or, indeed, unification) is rarely discussed openly and honestly. Most explain this to be due to necessary consideration of opposing views and out of a concern to not do anything to damage the fragile peace. All expressed some exasperation with people, including parents as well as politicians, who still focus on and thus perpetuate the traditional divides and divisive constitutional question. They saw this very much as a problem of older generations rather than their own.

This reflects the fact that all our respondents appeared to draw a direct link between 'traditional' views, 'bias/ prejudice' and the Northern conflict. Northern respondents were careful to constantly reiterate that their generation is determined that political goals are 'not worth the cost' of violence. As one (nationalist) participant said when talking about the aspiration of Irish unity: 'a lot of people growing up now can't be bothered with it. They are nearly fed up hearing about it. No one cares anymore'.²⁵ Southern respondents

were equally aware of the priority and fragility of peace and perceived strong Irish nationalism to pose a threat to this, as seen in one person's description of the situation in Northern Ireland:

It's a tinderbox and if you push it, it might just explode, and no one wants to go back to what it was. Nobody wants to go back to shootings. Even during the recent riots in Belfast everyone just thought: 'What are you doing? Just get a grip of yourselves and calm down'.²⁶

The future

Such events as the summer 2011 riots in Belfast contributed to the sense of general pessimism regarding the current state of affairs in Northern Ireland (with concerns over the North-South relationship voiced by the Southern students in particular). Nevertheless all participants expressed the hope that the remaining problems can be addressed, not least because they see these as 'bread and butter issues' for which solutions can be found, given the political will (a factor viewed by our respondents as being all too often in short supply).

First, they expressed a wish to see the end of segregation in housing and education, and impatience with the lack of initiatives in these areas. They also had many suggestions of their own: such as to teach similar civic and history education to students on both sides of the border; to give more media coverage to North-South cooperation and cross-border bodies; to cooperate on upcoming commemorations in order to show respect for one another's important historical events rather than allow them to be divisive; and to establish third level cross-border exchanges so that students can become familiar and engaged with their counterparts over a period of time in a safe environment.

If the Northern conflict endures because of fear, then our findings (as with the response to McGuinness's presidential campaign) suggest that it will also continue to linger in the cross-border relationship within the young people who make up the Agreement Generation. The young generation in the South still perceive the North with some degree of apprehension – something that is based on a simple association of the North, and Northerners, with conflict (as evident in the *Frontline* question directed to McGuinness). Even our young Dublin-based respondents have internalised a wariness of 'huge cultural difference' (expressed in their concerns about wearing the wrong colour shirt or having a noticeable accent) that reinforces in their own minds the 'otherness' of Northern Ireland and the implications of crossing the border.

It is notable, however, that such fears are not reciprocated with nearly as much broad intensity of feeling by Northern respondents towards the South (although community background and proximity to the border are significant variables). One Belfast-based student even attempted to empathise with her Southern counterparts' fears by making the analogy of cross community relations:

I suppose [for a Dublin student crossing the border] it's how a Protestant feels going into a Catholic area: it makes you feel maybe a bit uneasy – and the same with a Catholic going into a Protestant area. I wouldn't say it's entirely different with North and South.²⁷

This debate reveals something of the enduring attentiveness to cultural difference and borders/boundaries for the Agreement Generation, North and South. Yet their broad willingness to empathise and to be aware of the sensitivities of the subject and, furthermore, not to allow this uneasiness to transmogrify into prejudice or conflict, is something that characterised the discussion of the North-South relationship across our study.

This is connected to the overriding theme emerging from all our focus group discussions: the need to affirm the norm of consent and respect for difference, and not to force people into identity categories or constitutional positions. In so doing, our respondents, North and South, appear to have – to no insignificant degree – incorporated the key principles of the 1998 Agreement into their thinking on the North-South relationship (principles such as replacing absolutist goals with political accommodation, mutual consent, acceptance of differing national identities and principles, and pursuing political aims by peaceful means).

This may be seen to constitute the tentative elements of a ‘generational actuality’ that gives the very concept of an all-island Agreement Generation some validity. Sharing these values, this generation see themselves as being better placed than their parents to work on building North-South trust and respect. But they also readily acknowledge that the embedding of peace requires deep political and social reform that will not simply appear as a product of the passing of time. The Agreement Generation (and their cross-border relationships) remain indisputably affected by the legacy of conflict; yet their very awareness of this legacy, and of the long distance yet to be travelled to realise the Agreement-based principles they share, constitutes a common foundation for their role in the consolidation of peace.

Notes

- ¹ RTÉ *Frontline* programme broadcast on 24th October 2011, question posed by Emma Louise (emphases as verbally delivered). Available online: www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1025/media-3090560.html [accessed Jan 2011].
- ² Mannheim, K. (1952) *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed Kecskemeti, P., London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, p. 292.
- ³ Mannheim, K. (1952), p. 306.
- ⁴ Fahey, T., Hayes, B. and Sinnott, R. (2005) *Conflict and Consensus: A study of values and attitudes in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, pp. 89-92.
- ⁵ O'Reilly, J. (2005) 'Almost half of us would reject a United Ireland: poll', Sunday Independent, 18th Sept 2005. Leahy, P. (2006) 'Majority want a united Ireland but not in a hurry', *Sunday Business Post*, 2nd April 2006.
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- ⁹ Davis, T. (2003) 'The Irish and their Nation: A Survey of Recent Attitudes', *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 2 no. 2, January 2003, p. 33.
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- ¹¹ Ryan, B. 'The Celtic Cubs: The Controversy over Birthright Citizenship in Ireland', *European Journal of Migration and Law*, Vol. 6, pp.173-193.
- ¹² Connolly, P., Kelly, B. and Smith, A. (2009) 'Ethnic Habitus and Young Children: A Case Study of Northern Ireland', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp.217-232.
- ¹³ Leonard, M. (2009) 'It's Better to Stick to Your Own Kind: Teenagers' Views on Cross-community Marriages in Northern Ireland', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp.97- 114; Leonard, M. (2010) 'Parochial Geographies: Growing up in Divided Belfast', *Childhood*, Vol.17, No.3, pp.329-342.
- ¹⁴ Shirlow, P. and Murtagh, B. (2006) *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City*, London: Pluto Press.
- ¹⁵ Results from *Northern Ireland Young Life and Times* survey (2010), see: www.ark.ac.uk/yilt/2010/index.html [accessed Jan 2011].
- ¹⁶ Morrow, D. (2008) 'Shared or Scared? Attitudes to community relations among young people 2003- 7', in D. Schubotz and P. Devine (eds) *Young People in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland*. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing, p.16.
- ¹⁷ McAlister, S., Scraton, P. and Haydon, D. (2010) *Childhood in Transition: Experiencing Marginalisation and Conflict in Northern Ireland*, Belfast: Queen's University/Save the Children/ Prince's Trust.
- ¹⁸ Extract from transcript of focus group, University College Dublin, 19 October 2011.
- ¹⁹ Quotations from transcript of focus group, Queen's University Belfast, 2 November 2011.

- ²⁰ Extract from transcript of focus group, University College Dublin, 19 October 2011.
- ²¹ Extract from transcript of focus group, Queen's University Belfast, 2 November 2011.
- ²² Extract from transcript of focus group, University College Dublin, 19 October 2011.
- ²³ Extract from transcript of focus group, University College Dublin, 21 October 2010.
- ²⁴ Extract from transcript of focus group, University College Dublin, 21 October 2010.
- ²⁵ Extract from transcript of focus group, Queen's University Belfast, 2 November 2011.
- ²⁶ Extracts from transcript of focus group, University College Dublin, 19 October 2011.
- ²⁷ Extract from transcript of focus group, Queen's University Belfast, 2 November 2011.

The Agreement Generation into Brexit

Katy Hayward

Although the three years since the 23 June 2016 referendum have appeared in many ways to be an interminable period of time – with circular debates and short memories – it is actually a very short time period to be witnessing a complete overhaul of the status quo. There are many things that seemed fairly secure three years ago but which now seem quaintly outmoded.

This has particular ramifications for the next generation, specifically the Agreement Generation whose views on north/south relations and Irish unity Aoibhin de Burca and I analysed for an article for the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* back in 2012. This generation has grown up in the transformational environment created by the 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement. And now it will be the one set to deal with the consequences of the UK's decision to withdraw from the European Union. For some this will mean personal opportunities (e.g. a raft of job opportunities has opened up in the previously-shrinking field of customs facilitation!) but for most this will mean constraints rather than benefits.

So far there have been two revolutions in the lives of this Agreement Generation. It is worth considering the ways in which this is taking shape and what it might mean to them. It is interesting to do so in light of the findings of our 2012 research paper. From the research we conducted through focus groups with university students in Dublin and Belfast arose four key findings that have new pertinence in light of the consequences of Brexit – or at least as the process of the UK's withdrawal has unfurled so far.

The first is that there was a satisfaction among the southern respondents in particular with the way things were. There was no sense of a need to change. Moreover, there was even a sense of insouciance about what happened up in the north. When asked about the prospect of Irish unity, one young man said:

Neither of us want it: neither us nor the UK government. ...it's really far more trouble than it's worth. I mean to integrate Northern Ireland into this state – why would you be bothered? The status quo satisfies everyone.

This gives rise to the obvious question: what happens when the status quo is no more? And what was it about the status quo that enabled such a sense of satisfaction? Perhaps it was the fact that the status quo then centred on the totality of relations across these islands, whilst also allowing for its complexity.

That said, a second finding was the depth of distance between the north and the south. It would be entirely wrong, in light of Brexit, to over-state the closeness of connections within the all-island Agreement Generation. From the southern perspective, Northern Ireland

was intrinsically different and quite awkward – neither one thing nor another, hard to place. This is, of course, a perfect representation for what the 1998 Agreement managed to do: British, Irish or both. There is no clear ‘Northern Ireland’ or ‘Northern Irish’. This has a new significance in the light of the present day Brexit conundrums.

The Irish government has been more explicitly committed to Irish citizens in the north in a way that has been unprecedented. The position of the Irish government and – let us note this remarkable fact – thus the position of the 26 other member-states on Brexit has been built on its sense of responsibility towards the 1998 Agreement and (thus) towards the north. Similarly, for perhaps slightly different reasons, the British government has consistently stated its support for the 1998 Agreement and its wish to reassure unionists (as distinct from British citizens) when it comes to what it will allow to see happen post-Brexit.

The common assurance of support for the 1998 Agreement should in principle have enabled the two governments to stand united on a way forward on Brexit; instead it is leading them to very different positions, if not directly counter-poised ones. The Agreement Generation holds its breath.

The third finding was that, so ‘alien’ did they find Northern Ireland to be (still), that some southern respondents admitted feeling more comfortable with the British-Irish relationship than the North-South relationship. As we note in the paper, some went so far as to indicate more affinity with London than Belfast, due not only to its cultural diversity and size but also to a sense of simply not understanding Belfast. Indeed, visiting the north led some to find cultural differences to be greater than expected.

Is it the case today that they would still feel the same? It is not possible to test this hypothesis without directly comparable data. However, it is worth noting that in studies I have conducted in the central border region since the Brexit referendum, there have been comments from survey respondents that suggest they feel differently about Britain compared to before.¹ Or, to be more precise, the experience of Brexit so far is leading to different choices being made. As one young person in a focus group in Monaghan commented: “My sister wanted to go to England or Wales for college, now she won’t.” The decisions of those in the Agreement Generation – the ‘roads not taken’ – will start to make those bonds of positive familiarity less common than they have been until now.

And – to the final point – it was notable in the 2012 study that the Agreement Generation was very careful not to talk about Irish unity – or at least to do so only with great caution. As one northern respondent put it: ‘a lot of people growing up now can’t be bothered with it. They are nearly fed up hearing about it. No one cares anymore’.

This is no longer the case. The topic of Irish unity has come out from the corners of politicians’ discussion and into the mainstream of polite company. Brexit has put the topic of Irish unity fore square on the table.

There are plenty of new initiatives now from people – often led by those in the Agreement Generation – being willing to consider Irish unity. They are keen to consider it from the

perspective of those brought up in the unionist tradition in Northern Ireland, from the perspective of green activism, or social justice, or women's rights or marriage equality. This would not have been conceivable three years ago. And in our 2012 study it was clear that the topic would have been almost consciously avoided.

The Agreement Generation not only have to face up to the topic that many thought was an unhealthy obsession for their parents' generation – they have to deal with the consequences of it being still such a divisive subject and one that they have to find frameworks and language to talk about in ways that are as respectful and constructive as possible. Having to do so in a context in which British-Irish relations are under extraordinary strain and outside of the context which kept the UK and Ireland as equal partners is a tremendous ask. In the actions and response of this generation, we will really see the legacy of the Agreement put to the test.

28 August 2019

Note

- ¹ 'Bordering on Brexit', Irish Central Border Area Network and Queen's University Belfast, 2017: go.qub.ac.uk/bordering; 'Brexit at the Border', Irish Central Border Area Network and Queen's University Belfast, 2018: go.qub.ac.uk/brexitborder.

Reflection

Aoibhín de Búrca

If the Irish government had consulted with our focus groups on Brexit messaging, it would have been confident to go with the approach it did: prioritising peace on the island of Ireland and protecting the Good Friday Agreement. However, the current British government would have had a different experience.

The focus groups were run nearly a decade ago now, and at that time the students were in their second and third years of undergraduate social science studies.

Reflecting on the article for this anniversary edition of the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland*, and re-reading the transcripts was very interesting and timely given Brexit.

The three areas that stood out then and now were: the students' views on the Agreement; the commitment to the principle of consent; and the North/South relationship.

Although the students were very realistic about the limitations of the Agreement, they felt it allowed for space and the accommodation of different, even polar opposite, political and constitutional positions, and they valued this. They also recognised that realising the potential of the Agreement would require a huge amount of work, and that the political reforms required would not come easily.

They also spoke about the Agreement in the context of the rawness of the issues for Northern Ireland regarding victims and killings, and said it was all still very "fresh". There was sympathy and empathy with those who had been bereaved and hurt. There was also recognition that Northern Ireland had emerged from a period of conflict, and required time to heal.

The principle of consent in the Agreement and why you should not force people into political or identity positions was repeatedly articulated, explicitly and implicitly. As the focus group interviewer I could see the reactions to questions, and the students reacted in particular to any challenge to the principle of consent, or attempts to challenge it:

- The Good Friday Agreement means "peace. Peace at last".
- "You can't force someone."
- "You can't tell someone what their identity is."

On the constitutional issue the southern students in particular were vehement that advocating for a Border Poll, and a 50 plus 1 percent result in a Border Poll would not be acceptable. They spoke of the need to make decisions together, North and South,

deliberatively and with consent. This was even the case for those who asserted the right to aspire to a 32 county Ireland, now or in the future.

All focus group participants voiced impatience and frustration with those who imposed rigid identity positions, or who, as they saw it, forced others into unwanted confrontation. There was palpable disagreement with going back to the past, any suggestion of using violence or agitating on constitutional issues. There was very little difference between the groups on these issues.

The North/South relationship however was actually the most contentious area and was the more difficult aspect to write about. Possibly the conversations in the focus groups occurred because of the structure of the focus groups: held with exclusively southerners and northerners respectively, in the two different jurisdictions.

But southerners voiced that they were very aware of the differences, from observation and travel to Northern Ireland, between the lived experience in the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. They felt the North/South relationship was immature and somewhat fraught on a personal level. But this was an unspoken thing where you could not acknowledge it without causing offence: "it's easier to say we are all the same". But in the focus groups they did speak about it and said "we are so close to them, but in reality we are so far away from one another on so many different things" and the differences were described as "cultural". There was a real desire to improve the relationship, to work at it and to be inclusive regarding identity, but they also wanted to acknowledge the difference and diversity where it existed. However, when this was brought up in the focus group with the northerners they were quite shocked and taken aback, as they felt the relationship had greatly improved and was much less jurisdictionally defined.

Clearly Brexit brings these relationship and identity issues to the fore, and a no-deal Brexit places the current arrangements under threat. In addition, the issue of the North/South relationship could also raise its head again very publicly should there be a referendum giving those outside of the jurisdiction of Ireland a vote in Presidential elections. This will need to be handled with tact and diplomacy, mindful of the hurt that can be caused. Certain things may be unspoken in polite company while we all come to terms with the past, but referendum debates are not civil and even if they were, the vote will be very public.

North-South Cooperation in 2013: *Towards an ever closer working partnership*

Sir George Quigley

(This interview was first published in 2013, in the 8th edition of the Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland)

Sir George Quigley can justly be regarded as the ‘father’ of practical North-South cooperation in Ireland. In a speech in February 1992 he outlined his vision of a growth-led Belfast-Dublin ‘economic corridor’ and an ‘island of Ireland’ economy which the EU should treat as one economic area for funding purposes. This vision led to the formation of the IBEC/CBI Joint Business Council; underpinned much of the thinking behind the setting up of the North/South trade and business development body InterTradelreland; and was a key element in the argument that strong economic and business cooperation between the two parts of the island would be a vital element in any sustainable peace process in Northern Ireland. This interview was conducted by Andy Pollak on 11th January 2013. Sir George died suddenly on 3rd March, aged 83.

What was your vision for North-South cooperation when you proposed the Belfast-Dublin ‘economic corridor’ and ‘island of Ireland’ economy in 1992?

I envisaged the island as a regional space – an economic zone – permeated by complex circuitry reflecting a network of market and non-market relationships. I was greatly taken with Kenichi Ohmae’s analysis of how, across the globe, economic zones were developing which transcended political borders without in any way jeopardising those borders.

Also published in the 1990s was a study undertaken for the Asian Development Bank which examined growth triangles in Asia. This showed how, by exploiting economies of scale and integrating the resource endowments of their members, adjoining areas in neighbouring countries could together be far more competitive in sectors such as manufacturing and services (including tourism). It was clear what could be achieved (as for example in the South China Triangle) by countries with very different political systems cooperating to address mutual needs. If it could happen in Asia, why not in Ireland?

In fact, when I first advanced the idea of the island economy and the Belfast-Dublin corridor at the annual conference of the Confederation of Irish Industry (now IBEC) over 20 years ago, I also argued that funding from Europe to the island of Ireland should be carefully aimed at promoting its development as precisely such an economic zone. This idea was not pursued, though as time went on steps were taken to coordinate flows of aid to North and South to mutual advantage.

Inherent in my vision was the encouragement of the far fuller exploitation of the South by the North as a market for goods and services, and vice versa. For that to happen, each part

had to acquire much greater knowledge of the other. Impediments to trade, such as poor infrastructure, had to be removed.

I was in no doubt that it was a daunting agenda. So it was very encouraging when a number of champions emerged from within the business community and the effort was given structure through the establishment of the IBEC/CBI Joint Council, to which the recently deceased William Poole, as its Director, gave such sterling service for many years.

Were you involved in discussions with political and other leaders in Northern Ireland, Ireland, Britain and elsewhere during the 1990s as the NI peace process unfolded about this vision, and about the economic dimension of that process? Can you tell us a little about those discussions?

For five or six years after 1996 I chaired a group of business-oriented bodies (called the Group of 7, or G7) which came together in alarm at the violence around contentious parades and the very slow progress being made in filling the political vacuum. We emphasised strongly the damage being done to Northern Ireland's economic prospects and the need for local politicians to bring the economic dimension closer to the top of the agenda. We returned to this topic again and again.

I do not recall the North-South economic issue featuring in those discussions. Unionists generally had reacted pretty negatively (to put it mildly) to what I had said (and continued throughout the nineties to say) about the island economy and, as the negotiations resulting in the Good Friday Agreement evolved, they were clearly having difficulties with the concept of North/ South bodies.

I did, however, take the opportunity in informal discussion with nationalist politicians to urge that the Good Friday Agreement should go for North/ South bodies that could really deliver something tangible. The proposed North/South Trade and Business Development Body – to become known as InterTradeIreland – was obviously such a body. I argued – unsuccessfully – that a body capable of addressing energy issues was an equally compelling candidate. I got the impression, however, that the sensitivities were just too great to allow the boat to be pushed out very far.

What is your view of the North-South dimension of the 1998 Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement, and of the North/South bodies that emerged from it?

As you may have gathered, I would have liked to see at least one additional body. Of those that were established, I am really only familiar with the work of InterTrade Ireland. It had the good fortune to be steered through the initial all-important formative years by one of Ireland's most successful and enterprising business figures – Dr Martin Naughton – and it has been guided throughout by a very proactive Chief Executive, Liam Nellis (recently retired). To its credit, it has broadened its activities far beyond what its title might suggest its function would be – namely promoting trade links between North and South. I believe its remit should be formally enlarged to encompass much of what is involved from a business perspective in the creation of the island economy, with a new title indicative of such a role.

I would also have liked to see the North South Ministerial Council given the explicit role of identifying on an ongoing basis any other issues which should be addressed by means of a North/ South body. Such machinery poses no threat to anyone. It can (and should be) fully accountable to the democratic institutions in both parts of the island. It should be seen not as a threat to be minimised but as an opportunity to be captured – provided always, of course, that each body passes (and continues to pass) the severely practical test of delivering results which would otherwise not be achievable for both parts of the island on their own.

How do you see the implementation of the North-South ‘Strand Two’ of the Belfast Agreement over the past 13 years? What are its successes and shortcomings?

I believe that Strand Two has been a resounding success – contrary, probably, to what many people expected. The North-South relationship has been transformed. Someone, indeed, has referred to its unprecedented ordinariness and normality today. We seem to have been able to resolve North-South tensions in a way which still too often escapes us so far as the traditional divisions within the Northern Ireland community itself are concerned. In a purely political context, the handling of the contentious matter of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution appears to have been highly significant in removing tensions.

It is problematic what effect recent efforts to draw the South into issues around Northern Ireland’s so far unsuccessful attempt to ‘deal with’ the past will have on the tone and temper of the North-South relationship.

I suspect that, even without the structure given to it by Strand Two, the relationship would have steadily developed as each part of the island opened up to the other in an era where borders have become far more porous. After all, strong foundations for economic/business interaction were laid well before Strand Two of the Belfast Agreement.

Success can be measured in very practical ways. To mention but a few: the North’s sales to the South are now roughly the same as its sales to all the other European countries put together; there is close cooperation on infrastructure development; and a Single Electricity Market is being developed (notwithstanding the absence of a North/South body in this area).

But equally significant is how vastly enriched is the discourse these days about North-South possibilities. I take just four examples. There is the Irish Academy of Engineers’ 2010 study, *Infrastructure for an island population of 8 million*. There is the 2012 report by John Bradley and Michael Best on *Cross-Border Economic Renewal: Rethinking Regional Policy in Ireland* published by the Centre for Cross Border Studies. There is Michael D’Arcy’s 2012 survey of *Opportunities in North/South Public Service Provision* (also published by the Centre). And there is the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* and the journal, *Borderlands*, and other research publications of the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD). This ICLR material deals with an impressive range of issues from river basin management to the mapping of functional territories throughout the island, with much else of significance in between. This last is a potentially exciting concept since, put at its simplest, it could hopefully be developed to provide guidance in an island context on what services should be put where, having regard to optimum catchment areas, thereby

enhancing accessibility and ensuring that services are affordable, economically operated and effectively configured and managed to sustain high quality.

The richness of the discourse takes us into an entirely different world. What is now vital is to get it positioned within the mainstream of government thinking, North and South, and to have governments that are determined not to let a single idea that merits follow-up fall on stony ground.

Has the financial and economic crisis in both Ireland and Britain meant that North-South cooperation as part of the Northern Ireland peace process is now very low down the agenda of policy-makers in Dublin and London?

All countries – and the UK and Ireland are no exception – are undoubtedly preoccupied with the particular manifestation of the global financial and economic crisis in their own jurisdiction. And understandably so, since it would only be exaggerating slightly to describe the threat posed as existential. Doing whatever is needed to restore as quickly as possible a vigorously growing economy in the South is ultimately going to be what counts for the dynamism of North-South cooperation. It is, however, vital that the contribution which such cooperation can actually make to that restoration process should not be ignored. Reducing the burden of public expenditure North and South is an imperative, and it is therefore more important now than ever that all the opportunities to do so by rationalising public service provision in an island context without detriment to standards should be grasped.

Rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy by growing a far stronger private sector is also going to boost the prospects for North-South cooperation in the future. It is therefore disappointing that the UK Government has dragged its feet over the project to devolve to Northern Ireland the power to set its own rate of corporation tax. This is supported on all sides as being far and away the best strategy for growth in sight. The case for it is even more compelling in light of the impact locally of the UK's 'great recession'. This power should be urgently devolved as part of the UK's national response to the recession.

Does the Irish Government now see the East-West relationship with Britain (and particularly its economic dimension) as more important than the relationship with Northern Ireland? What are the implications of this for the North-South dimension of the peace and reconciliation process on the Island?

The growing friendship between the UK and Ireland has been a vital feature of the architecture of peace. Keeping it in good repair and where possible enhancing it (as for instance was demonstrated by the Queen's visit to Ireland in 2011) therefore makes good sense. It would, however, represent a signal failure on the part of both governments if they regarded the relationship as a Great Britain-Ireland relationship rather than a UK-Ireland one. I suspect that the health of the Northern Ireland Peace Process will indeed be very much on the agenda, and the demonstration around the turn of the year in Belfast of the fragility of the peace process will have countered any tendency to the contrary.

But it goes wider than that. The survey by Michael D'Arcy which I mentioned earlier refers to what he describes as a 'coordinated, comprehensive and proactive programme'

launched a year ago to develop the potential for mutual economic benefit between the UK and Ireland. He quoted a senior business person in Dublin to the effect that it would be most helpful to be able to explore pro-actively how and where Northern Ireland could benefit from this work and how the South could benefit from the North's active participation in it. I very much agree.

What are the implications of the current low level of interest by the Republic's politicians and public in Northern Ireland?

It was inevitable that the exceptionally high level of interest would diminish, particularly since the 'problem' was perceived to have been 'fixed'. It would have been a reflection on the lack of maturity of Northern Ireland politicians if they had continued to be regarded as being at the nursery stage and still needing nannying by Dublin or London. I myself applaud the notion of our being deemed able to stand on our own feet, plot an ambitious course, address the tough issues and shape our own destiny. Hopefully this confidence will not in the event prove to be misplaced.

But the point about lack of interest can be exaggerated. I have, for example, listened to a couple of very well-informed and cogent speeches by Taoiseach Enda Kenny in the North and the new President has also made very thoughtful and insightful contributions on visits to the North. Moreover, the decision by the Taoiseach and Tánaiste to participate in the Remembrance Day ceremonies in Belfast and Enniskillen last November showed that the South remains no mean judge of when the situation can benefit from a well timed strategic intervention.

The 1990s and 2000s were a very benevolent period for Ireland, Europe and the Western world generally, with the end of the cold War and rapid economic growth everywhere. We are living in a very different and harsher climate now. How has this affected your vision for the island of Ireland and for North-South cooperation?

It was a tragedy that the South departed from its brilliantly successful model of export-led growth and that the collapse of the resultant property bubble in effect wrecked the banking system. Ireland was doubly unfortunate in that it had to seek a bail-out from Europe early on, before Europe had gone through the long tortuous process (still incomplete) of discovering how crises of this nature and magnitude should be handled. Ireland's debt to GDP ratio pre-crisis had been remarkably low, but the routing of the rescue of the banks through the state turned a bank problem into an unnecessarily severe sovereign debt problem, which denied Ireland the ability to borrow in international markets at other than punitive interest rates.

The harsh consequences of the resultant austerity inevitably occupy centre stage, masking the fact that the solid benefits of the investment which surged into Ireland from overseas are still firmly in place and that the South continues to tap overseas markets very effectively. Remarkably, the value of exports exceeds the country's GDP and, in the absence of domestic demand, it is this strong engine on which Ireland has been relying for the revival of growth. As we speak, Ireland is featured in the *Economist* as the poster boy of European recovery, with promising prospects but with a long haul still ahead of it.

A characteristic of the current recession has been the (very natural) reluctance to accept the research finding, published in the early stages of the crisis, that the combination of circumstances which it exhibits entail a very prolonged period of recovery. And that research related to periods when the inter-dependencies engendered by globalisation were far less marked, making for still greater complexities in today's world.

Realistically, it is going to take at least the rest of this decade to repair balance sheets public and private, and perhaps even longer to absorb the labour surplus created by the debacle. Much of course will depend, particularly for an economy as open as Ireland's, on the health of the wider global economy.

If it were a sovereign state, the North would be regarded as having a wholly unsustainable structural deficit requiring drastic surgery. As a devolved administration, however, it only has to deal with its proportionate share of the squeeze on UK public expenditure in a climate of austerity. But the economy cannot grow significantly unless the private sector expands a lot more than is needed to compensate for that contraction of the public sector. As things are now, the North's private sector is far too small to do so. Hence the importance of the corporation tax flexibility to which I referred earlier, boosting investment at home and from overseas. Getting the process of rebalancing the North's economy under way with far more urgency than the UK Government has hitherto displayed will determine how well the North weathers the present decade and how well equipped it is to make rapid strides thereafter.

It is vital that during this difficult decade the vision for the island remains intact and, as I said earlier, that none of the many ideas for action now spun out of the discourse that is now so strongly established is lost.

How have recent developments in the UK (e.g. the economic recession/financial crisis; the referendum on Scottish independence) affected your vision of North-South cooperation in Ireland?

The short answer is 'not at all'. I can't add to what I've said already on the economic dimension, but I suspect that we are far too fearful of the implications of the referendum on Scottish independence. Even if (as I believe is unlikely) the Scots opt for independence, the common monarchy seems set to remain, thereby reverting to the position between the accession of the Scottish James VI to the English throne in 1603 and the act of Union in 1707. There also seems likely to be a shared currency, with the Bank of England's writ continuing to run in Scotland, and with the Scottish Parliament's fiscal freedom severely constrained by the controls which the eurozone experience has shown are necessary to prevent a common currency being jeopardised by irresponsibility on the part of individual members – as if the Scots would ever act irresponsibly!

In sum, a rather peculiar kind of independence could emerge (still preserving much of the architecture of economic union) which could be readily accommodated by England, Wales and Northern Ireland in a different configuration of the old relationships, particularly if Alex Salmond's notion of a continuing strong 'social union' persists.

If independence is rejected, Scotland would probably demand more autonomy and, as we speak, there is speculation that this could lead to a wider constitutional convention. If this happened, there could be any one of a range of outcomes: e.g. a fully fledged federal structure; or a more fully thought through system of devolution, with each jurisdiction, on the variable geometry principle, able to get the tools to do the job it has to do. Any of the outcomes must surely entail the abandonment of the obsession with centralisation and uniformity which presently bedevils UK governance arrangements.

Whatever happens, I foresee Northern Ireland securing greater autonomy and therefore having more space to pursue a meaningful North-South agenda.

How have recent developments in the EU (and notably the long-running euro crisis) affected your vision of North-South cooperation in Ireland?

The critical issue was clearly whether the South could box its way out of the crisis whilst remaining within the eurozone. Ireland's competitiveness, which had deteriorated badly, had to be rebuilt and there were many voices arguing – not just in respect of Ireland but of other countries experiencing difficulty – that recovery would be hampered by the inability, within a regime of irrevocably fixed nominal exchange rates, to regain competitiveness by currency depreciation. Ireland, no doubt sensible of how problematic for all sorts of reasons the project to exit the eurozone would be, chose the difficult path of internal devaluation, which entails slower price and wage growth (or even outright decline) and faster productivity growth. As I said earlier, so far, so good. And, as I also made clear, the stronger the economies on both sides of the border, the better the prospects for dynamic interaction.

This does mean that, since the prospects for the UK entering the eurozone seem to have vanished, the island is stuck indefinitely with two currencies. This obviously adds to transaction costs, but business seems to have adjusted to it and it has not appeared on the North-South agenda as a significant issue. That could change if sterling and the euro ceased to be virtually parallel currencies and the relationship was characterised by extreme volatility.

But what if the UK exited from the EU? Would that imperil the North-South project? Surely it would in effect reinforce the border?

First of all, I don't think it is likely that the UK will leave the EU. To decide to go it alone in what is likely to be increasingly a world of competing continents would be a huge leap in the dark. On its own, the UK's bargaining power on trade issues, for example, would be slight. Moreover, more than 50% of its trade is with the EU and it is problematic what terms it could negotiate from outside the Single Market. The pressures to remain in from business and those fearful of job losses will be immense.

What seems more likely, if (and it is a big 'if') the eurozone succeeds in consolidating itself as a more integrated political, fiscal and monetary unit, is that the EU will resolve itself into a two-speed Europe held together by the Single Market. In that event, the UK might well get some support from other members in the slower lane for changing the way the Single Market has been packaged over the years. Sufficient face could be saved all round to keep the UK inside the tent.

Even if the UK were to leave, I cannot see it ever being prepared to do so except on terms which did not disadvantage it in relation to its trade with the EU. The risk of serious damage to North-South trade therefore seems remote in any circumstances. And of course much of the rest of the agenda for cooperation which I have sketched out in this interview would be entirely unaffected.

What are the key domestic and international issues which will affect North-South cooperation and the ‘island of Ireland’ economy in the immediate future?

Since the correct strategy for both parts of the island is export-led growth, a key determinant of the prosperity of both will be the health of the world economy. On the domestic front both North and South, the trick will be to find the right balance between the discipline required to rebuild public and private balance sheets and the incentives needed to stimulate growth. And growth simply cannot occur without banks able and willing to lend responsibility to responsible borrowers.

Are there strategic ways in the foreseeable future for capturing more of the synergies inherent in the idea of the ‘island economy’? In which areas might these synergies be best captured?

Let me take first of all the provision of public services. For most, perhaps all, public sector programmes, effort is directed very specifically to meeting the needs of the population in each jurisdiction, with little reference being made to those requiring similar services on the other side of the border.

As to remedies, there is no need to rediscover the wheel. Michael D’Arcy’s scoping study has identified significant possibilities for North-South synergy in such areas as health, higher education and research, energy, tourism and water, and has made a series of recommendations. There are enough ideas here to fuel a North-South public sector agenda for at least a decade ahead and it would be a shame if the report were simply to gather dust somewhere. Surely it ought (if this has not already happened) to feature prominently in the deliberations of the North South Ministerial Council, with responsibility assigned for follow-up action. I believe that, where strong *prima facie* possibilities for North-South synergy are identified, there should be set up a small joint planning function within those areas, which looks at the present disposition of facilities and future needs throughout the island and explores, in effect, how you proceed within an island context. That notion links up with the concept of functional territories which I mentioned earlier. It can never make sense – but especially not when there is going to be such an ongoing tight constraint on resources – to duplicate capacity unnecessarily or to meet needs in other than the most cost-effective, value for money way.

I would like to pick out for further brief comment just two areas from those I listed a moment ago. It is a cliché that a strong research base both within higher education and business (and by way of dynamic interaction between them both) is vital for economic growth. But I wonder whether the full potential of North-South synergy is presently being derived from the research base within the entire island. Is any attempt being made to scope the possibilities and proactively seek to have them developed?

The second area is energy, which is a key factor in the competitiveness equation. Some progress has been made towards realising the concept of a Single Electricity Market. But can we really develop the full potential of the island, conceived as a single all-purpose energy market, without the creation of an all-island Energy Authority and an all-island regulatory regime? We seem unlikely under present arrangements to advance towards the exciting vision, set out by Ulsterman and Harvard Professor Michael McElroy, of an all-island wind-generated electricity system as an alternative to fossil fuels and (to surely transformative effect) giving the island the capacity to be an energy exporter. Shale deposits are transforming the USA energy scene. We have few natural resources: if Fermanagh's shale capacity turns out to be significant and safely exploitable, may it not prove to be a very valuable *island* asset?

Turning briefly to the private sector, I have already made clear that both parts of the island have to find their fortune in world markets – capturing the investment opportunities afforded by the global value chains which girdle the earth, and selling goods and services from the island into what will be a steadily widening spectrum of increasingly prosperous global markets.

Would it not make sense for North and South to undertake as a collaborative project the study and ongoing monitoring of the mega trends which will be determining the pattern of manufacturing and services worldwide during the next decade and beyond, since this holds the key to achieving the goals I have just outlined? In particular, should we not be working in partnership to develop the island's interface with the formidable players – the BRIC countries and the others following closely on their heels – who are going to dominate the future of our new multipolar world? Should we not see how all-island clusters of companies might be formed which could join forces to gain greater clout in their chosen markets or which could share their experience of how barriers to penetration of new markets can best be removed?

There is so much that can be done.

How can Ireland, North and South, establish itself as 'a globally competitive production platform for goods and services traded worldwide'? (a phrase which you used in your North South Ministerial Council 10th anniversary address in Armagh in December 2009).

North-South co-operation must not be an inward-looking insular project. A primary object must be to come together in ways that perfect our ability to win the battles that count, i.e. outside Ireland. So what I had in mind was that we must give free rein to the competitive forces *within* the island in areas such as the provision of professional services, for example, so that the cost base in either part of the island does not become hostage to vested interests and the ability to compete globally is lost.

What I also had in mind was that, by world standards, both North and South are small and separately may lack the critical mass to operate on a scale which minimises unit costs. Energy is one – but merely one – example. Research centres of excellence are another. It would be foolish not to concentrate resources in order to achieve scaleability and hone the island's competitive edge.

Do you think there is any scope for the two Irish jurisdictions to come together to learn from the commemorations of the 1912-1922 period?

Very much so. The commemorations can be a wonderful access point into the two grand narratives which define the strands of Britishness and Irishness on the island. Far from being an obstacle to focusing forward, history offers all of us an indispensable means of learning to understand each other and taking the monkey off our backs. But the history I speak about is the history which stretches back far beyond the Troubles and which shaped the context out of which those Troubles emerged. History did not begin in 1968.

We can all benefit from learning that neither of the great streams of Irish history had a consistent vision of an inclusive society. Both contributed to the development of confessional and tribal politics, with religion as the badge of identity. History reveals few blacks and whites but at least fifty shades of grey! The playwright Frank McGuinness called one-dimensional folk memory 'a lethal cultural weapon'. The challenge for us is to transcend a bitterly divisive legacy.

It seems to me that the handling of commemorations in their historical context is therefore an ideal topic for consideration by the two governments, aided by a panel of professional historians. An excellent model exists in the framework developed by the Government in the South, with the help of historians, to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of 1798.

Do you think that the protests and violence over the flags issue which erupted in December invalidate your vision?

No, I don't. On the contrary, I think it makes all the stronger the case for developing a good, healthy, mutually beneficial partnership between the two parts of the island. This can demonstrate that all strands of identity can not only co-exist but can work together in the common interest. Until recently, the South was seen as the *eminence grise* behind a nationalist conspiracy to take over the North. That does not feature any longer in public debate.

I have already referred to the success of Strand Two. Its continuing success can serve as a paradigm for inter-community relations in the North.

How do you foresee the economic and social shape of Ireland in 2020?

I foresee an island emerging somewhat battered and bruised from a decade more difficult than anyone could have begun to imagine as the new millennium dawned. Much still has to be done to prevent a recurrence. For example, the matter of how radical the restructuring of the financial sector needs to be has yet to be adequately addressed. Nor do we know how to ensure that the vast amounts of money which slosh around the globe find productive uses in the real world rather than in a parallel universe of speculative activity. How these issues play out will largely determine the scope and limits of 'the new normal'.

However, once the economic legacy of the 'noughties' boom is liquidated, and both parts of the island are able to operate as open, well-balanced economies, drawing fully on the synergies they develop between them, I see no reason why sustainable growth levels which

support a widespread high standard of living and good quality of life, and enable disadvantage to be decisively tackled, should not be achievable.

Can you foresee any new constitutional configuration for the island of Ireland in the future?

I shall resist the temptation to duck this question in order to make one observation and to venture a speculation.

The observation (whose validity is confirmed by so much that has happened in the North) is that major change has to obtain legitimacy if it is not to prove destabilising and even impermanent. Achieving legitimacy in this context must surely start with the recognition that there are in this situation two mutually opposed ‘principles of legitimacy’ which are strongly held - one nationalist and one unionist - and that some common ground would have to be found on which the divergent aspirations are transcended in a general consensus. The Good Friday Agreement recognises this in its espousal of the principle of consent for constitutional change. It would be a delusion to suppose that change could be achieved through some simple majoritarian process rather than by negotiation.

My speculative comment is this. *If* there is ever a new constitutional configuration for the island, my guess is that the model by far the likeliest to secure consent is the confederal model which featured as the most persuasively argued of a range of options in the Report of the New Ireland Forum in 1984. On this basis the final agreed Ireland would be a joint, equal venture between North and South, with each having its own governance structure, and with policies related to the powers to be specifically delegated to confederal level determined jointly by representatives from North and South. It is worth recalling the 1984 Report’s comment that ‘based on the existing identities, North and South, [a confederal solution] would reflect the political and administrative realities of the past 60 [now of course 90] years and would entrench a measure of autonomy for both parts of Ireland within an all island framework. While protecting and fostering the identities and ethos of the two traditions, it would enable them to work together in the common interest’. The Report envisages unionists having parallel British citizenship and, as it put it, being able to ‘maintain special links with Britain’.

Is there anything you would like to say in conclusion?

Just, first of all, to thank you for the opportunity to address these issues, daunting though the questions you have posed were!

But, second, to say that I do believe that North and South will develop an ever closer working partnership. The cumulative process of widely dispersed incremental change and the occasional breakthrough will reach a tipping point where North-South co-operation develops a momentum of its own. Indeed, increasingly, the interdependence of both parts of the island is forcing itself on public attention. A weaker economy in the South hits the North’s exports. The collapse of the South’s banks makes a public body in the South (NAMA) a major property owner in the North, with the ability to have a huge impact on the local property market. Differences in taxation between the two parts (e.g. corporation tax and VAT) can skew economic activity in significant ways.

It seems sensible to forge out of growing interdependence the positive *outcomes* for both North and South which the vision I described at the start of this interview embraces.

Until his sudden death on 3 March 2013, Sir George Quigley was Chairman of Bombardier Aerospace in Belfast. After a distinguished career in the Northern Ireland civil service – during which he was Permanent Secretary in a number of departments – he became Chairman of Ulster Bank in 1989. He was a former President of the Economic and Social Research Institute in Dublin and Chair of the board of the Institute of British-Irish Studies at UCD, and served on numerous public bodies in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Britain. In 2002 he carried out a review of the NI Parades Commission. He was part of the team which oversaw the ‘putting beyond use’ of loyalist paramilitary arms. He was mourned by all sections of the community in Northern Ireland.

Sir George Quigley, the Island Economy and Brexit

Michael D’Arcy

Introduction

The ‘hand of history’ fell unexpectedly on the comprehensive and prescient interview with Sir George Quigley that Andy Pollak conducted just eight weeks before his sudden and untimely death. But it is clear that confronted by Brexit Sir George would be vigorously defending his vision for an island economy and its now proven benefits that are underpinning the Belfast Good/Friday Agreement (B/GFA) and helping to embed peace.

Amongst Sir George’s core strengths as a thinker, policy innovator and advocate was his determination to look beyond the immediate to the longer term. Today critical long term questions about peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland are being generated by Brexit because it is bringing together economic, political and constitutional questions to create unprecedented choices for decision makers in politics and business.

The most relevant aspect of this interview is that it reveals Sir George had thought about the possibility of the UK leaving the EU so it includes a number of indicators as to how he may have responded, and these I propose to highlight and add to.

Sir George’s economic vision is helping to sustain peace

Sir George conceived the island economy to be: *“a regional space –an economic zone-permeated by complex circuitry reflecting a network of market and non-market relationships”* that *“...transcend political borders without in any way jeopardizing those border.. (and encouraged).. the far fuller exploitation of the South by the North and vice versa. For that to happen each part had to acquire much greater knowledge of the other, impediments to trade such as poor infrastructure had to be removed”*.

His overall view on the implementation of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement’s (B/GFA) North/South (N/S) Strand Two Sir George had no doubts *“I believe (it) has been a resounding success –contrary, probably, to what many people expected (as) the North/South relationship has been transformed”* to being characterized by *“unprecedented ordinariness and normality today”*. He understood ‘ordinariness’ was a real and tangible achievement after 35 years of the ‘Troubles’.

He appreciated that *“...strong foundations for economic and business interaction were laid well before Strand Two of the Belfast Agreement”*. This could only mean the combination of joint EU membership, the creation of the Single Market and the resulting acceleration in N/S business interaction facilitated by the paramilitary ceasefires.

As the interview was conducted in the wake of the Great Recession he was keen to highlight recent research and suggest new initiatives to help the island economy's positive momentum to recovery such as:¹

- Far greater synergies in the provision of public services to meet the needs of the population on both sides of the border (but *"no need to rediscover the wheel"*)
- A collaborative study on *"mega trends in services and manufacturing worldwide"*

In summary his vision remained: both parts of the island as open well balanced economies competing globally and drawing ever more fully on the synergies between them to ensure sustainable growth, *"a high standard of living"* and disadvantage to be *"decisively tackled"*.

Responding to Brexit

In reply to a question about what we now call 'Brexit' Sir George said: *"I don't think it is likely the UK will leave the EU"*. He felt that *"To decide to go it alone in what is likely to be increasingly a world of competing continents would be huge leap in the dark. On its own the UK bargaining power on trade issues, for example, would be slight. Moreover more than 50% of its trade is with the EU and it is problematic what terms it could negotiate from outside the Single Market"*. Instead he envisaged the EU becoming a *"two-speed Europe"*.

However he also considered a different outcome: *"Even if the UK were to leave, I cannot see it ever being prepared to do so except on terms which did not disadvantage it in relation to its trade with the EU"*. But he was confident *"The risk of serious damage to North-South trade therefore seems remote in any circumstances. And of course much of the rest of the agenda of North/South cooperation which I have sketched out in this interview would be entirely unaffected"*. So like most of us he did not see Brexit happening, and even if it did that N/S economic collaboration on vital trade and business would be protected.

Sir George regularly used illuminating quotations to underpin his arguments. Therefore since June 2016 he would have searched widely for new knowledge and insights to inform his contributions on how the unfolding consequences could, and should, be managed.

He may have first read *'The Rule of the Land: Walking Ireland's Border'* (2017) by Queen's University geographer Garrett Carr that described 'the sheer ordinariness' today of lives and living all along 'the border'. Then measured the progress described by revisiting Colm Tobin's *'Bad Blood: a walk along the Irish Border'* (1994) and its different and darker tale of the divisions of plantation, Partition and the 'Troubles' being his traveling companion.

He would certainly have forensically considered all the official documents released as the EU/UK Article 50 negotiations unfolded and welcomed the December 2017 'Joint EU/UK Declaration's' commitment to support N/S cooperation and the all-island economy to protect the B/GFA 'now and into the future'. As debate on the 'Backstop' negotiated to implement this commitment intensified he surely would have spoken out regularly and in detail on its importance.

Such interventions would have been informed by the in depth work of bodies he was closely associated and/or worked with including NISRA, the Esri, InterTradeIreland, the Royal Irish Academy, the CCBS and jointly by Ibec and CBI and supported Northern Ireland's civic groups and business representatives vigorously defending the local economy.

Having worked tirelessly in public and private to counter sectarianism, its causes and the resulting divisions Sir George would have carefully studied Duncan Morrow's Report on *'Sectarianism in Northern Ireland: A Review'* (2019). That his wife Lady Moira Quigley and the Foundation she has founded in his name commissioned this Report would consequently be a source of considerable satisfaction.

The possibility of constitutional change

Andy's final question "*Can you foresee any new constitutional configurations for the island of Ireland in the future?*" prompted Sir George to wisely observe that "*a major change has to obtain legitimacy if it is not to prove destabilizing if not impermanent*". And this required recognizing "*the legitimacy of two mutually opposed principles of legitimacy*" so that some ground would have to be found "*on which divergent aspirations are transcended in a general consensus*".

Critically he noted "*The Good Friday Agreement recognizes this in its espousal for constitutional change*" but added "*a speculation*" that "*the model by far the likeliest to secure consent is the 'confederal model'*" as it "*featured as the most persuasively argued*" of the options in the Report of the New Ireland Forum set up by the Irish Government, which reported in 1984 and whose recommendations he quoted approvingly.

In addition having strongly suggested "*it would be delusional to suppose that change could be achieved through some simple majoritarian process rather than by negotiation*" he would have noted Seamus Mallon's call in his recent biography *'A Shared Home Place'* (Lilliput 2019) that "*some mechanism needs to be devised that would ensure the support of what I will call a 'sufficient plurality' of both communities unionist and nationalist for a united Ireland*".

Many conversations to explore the pros and cons of both his and Seamus's suggestion would likely have followed, and not all would have been supportive. For example amongst political scientists he would find divergent views, with some advising that to have other than 50%+1 as a decision in a referendum is to give greater weight to one person's vote over another, and as such is anti-democratic.

Most recently Brendan O'Leary's *'Treatise on Northern Ireland'* (Oxford University Press, 2019) might have deeply engaged him and especially Volume III *'Consociation and Confederation'* considering forms of reunification with economic benefits for the island.

As Brendan draws on Northern Ireland historian David W Millar's *'Queens Rebels: Ulster Loyalism in Historical Perspective'* (1978) he may have revisited his later 'regional systems approach' that recalibrates the regional impact of where the border was drawn by focusing on a dominant core and a disadvantaged periphery. Under this approach Partition has separated from Derry/Londonderry, Enniskillen and Newry large sections of their natural

and historic geographic and economic periphery and in effect creating those 208 border crossings.

Looking to the future

In 1992 Sir George presented his vision for an island economy against the backdrop of continuing political violence ahead of the paramilitary ceasefires and when few imagined there would be a multi-party Agreement on Northern Ireland's future that embraced the 'totality of relationships' on this island, and between these islands.

As the most recent deadline for the UK to leave the EU approaches with the increasing risk of 'No Deal', his concern, anxiety and possibly alarm on the unprecedented uncertainty and flux this creates for achieving the full potential of the island economy and the potential consequences for the B/GFA would increase, but his public interventions would continue to present the positive and the possible.

Paramount for Sir George would be protecting this island's "*complex circuitry reflecting a network of market and non-market relationships*" that "*...transcend political borders without in any way jeopardizing those borders*" along with an acute awareness of the proven benefits of the deep personal, social and economic networks that Brexit has highlighted

Crucially his understanding of the overlap and interaction between economic and business relationships and their wider political and cultural context is evidenced by his call for the Centenaries that then lay ahead to transcend the "*bitterly divisive*" potential of what he quotes playwright Frank McGuinness describing as a "*one-dimensional folk memory* (and) "*a lethal cultural weapon*". Key to this was his conclusion that "*it seems sensible to forge out of growing interdependence the positive outcomes for both North and South which the vision I have described...embraces*".

Beyond Brexit

Regretfully we can never know how precisely Sir George would have responded as Brexit unfolds. But this interview indicates that he would have wished to minimise its potentially adverse impact by policy makers *on all sides* being committed to protecting the "*complex circuitry*" of networks and trust currently powering the all-island economy and hard wired into sustaining peace and protecting the B/GFA's principles, purposes and processes.

Sir George had a deep understanding that the 'ordinariness' the B/GFA has achieved is also made possible by the freedoms of movement that result from being in the EU and the Single Market. In 2013 he could not conceive of it being otherwise because by every reasonable measure they were improving economic, political and social relations within and between this island's two jurisdictions to historic highs.

These conditions are being altered by Brexit with potentially profound consequences and it is unimaginable Sir George would not have acknowledged this, including the possibility of a new "*constitutional future*" for the island. How precisely he would have responded we will never know. But my very best guess is that he would have worked with care, sensitivity and deliberation to avoid any return to our troubled past advocating we continue

to work jointly to ensure sustainable growth, “*a high standard of living*” and disadvantage is “*decisively tackled*”. And we do so within a new ‘totality of relationships’ that ensures a “*strong foundation for economic and business interaction*” to continue and sustain the all island economy thereby protecting the B/GFA and underpinning peace.

19 August 2019

Note

- ¹ Sir George cited two CCBS Reports: *Cross-Border Economic Renewal: Rethinking Regional Policy in Ireland*: John Bradley and Michael Best (March 2012): www.crossborder.ie/oldsite/wp-content/uploads/economicrenewal-2012.pdf; *Delivering a Prosperity Process: Opportunities in North/South Public Service Provision* Michael D’Arcy (May 2012): www.crossborder.ie/oldsite/wp-content/uploads/deliveringprosperity-2012.pdf

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

LIAM O'DOWD is Emeritus Professor at Queen's University Belfast. He has researched and published extensively in the area of border studies, urban divisions and the Northern Ireland conflict. Formerly Director of the Centre for International Borders Research at Queen's, he was also involved with the Centre for Cross Border Studies from its inception serving for several years on its board of directors.



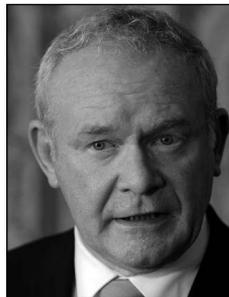
ANDY POLLAK was the founding Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies (1999-2013). Before that he was Belfast reporter, religious affairs correspondent, education correspondent and assistant news editor with the *Irish Times* (1981-1999). In 1992-1993 he was coordinator of the Opsahl Commission, an independent inquiry into ways forward for Northern Ireland, and editor of its report, *A Citizens' Inquiry: the Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland* (1993). He is co-author of *Seamus Mallon: A Shared Home Place* (with Seamus Mallon, 2019) and of *Paisley* (with Ed Moloney, 1986). He is a board member of the Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in County Wicklow.



BRIAN HARVEY is an independent social researcher working in the fields of poverty, social exclusion, equality, community development, human rights, the world of non-governmental organizations and European integration. He lives in Dublin and works for voluntary and community organizations, government agencies, intergovernmental bodies and trusts and foundations in both parts of Ireland, Britain and continental Europe.



Born in 1950 in Derry, at the time of his interview with the *Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland* in 2011, **MARTIN MCGUINNESS** held the office of Deputy First Minister, having been first elected as a Sinn Féin Member of the Assembly in 1998 for the Mid-Ulster constituency, later becoming the MLA for Foyle in 2016. At the time of his interview he was also the Member of Parliament for Mid-Ulster. He resigned as Deputy First Minister in January 2017, and died in March of the same year.



MARTINA ANDERSON MEP was born on 16th April 1962 from the Bogside in Derry. She comes from a large family of six sisters and three brothers with a tradition of Irish Republicanism. She has been involved with the Irish republican struggle for over thirty years. Having spent over thirteen years as a political prisoner in prisons in England and Ireland she was released in 1998 under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement and immediately became involved in working in Sinn Féin.



She was elected in 2007 as an Assembly member for the Foyle constituency, representing her home city of Derry, at which point she was nominated as one of the first Sinn Féin members of the Policing Board. In 2011 she was made Junior Minister in the Office of First Minister & Deputy First Minister, working alongside her party colleague Martin McGuinness. She was part of the party's political management in the Assembly in Belfast, and then for almost three years she served as the party's All Ireland Political Co-ordinator promoting, upgrading and mainstreaming the All Ireland agenda. Following the 2006 Ard Fheis (Congress), at which the Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams TD indicated the priority of developing an entirely new relationship with unionism, Martina was appointed to the role of Sinn Féin's Director of Unionist Engagement. This is a task she has pursued with vigour, leading to a number of first public meetings between the party leadership and churches and opinion makers within unionism. Martina Anderson has been a member of the European Parliament since May 2012 and was the party's Group Leader in the Parliament for the last five years. She is the party's lead spokesperson on Brexit and over the last number of years and has been a key member of the party's team which has been negotiating with the Irish and British governments and at EU level. She is a member of the Committees on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO), International Trade (INTA) and the Delegation for relations with Palestine (DPAL).

MICHAEL FARRELL was a prominent activist in the Civil Rights movement in Northern Ireland in 1968 and afterwards, and is the author of several books about the political history of Northern Ireland. He worked as a journalist in the 1980s and was involved in the Miscarriage of Justice campaigns on behalf of the Birmingham Six, Guildford Four and Judith Ward. He became a solicitor in the early 1990s and took cases to the European Court of Human Rights, the UN Human Rights Committee and the Council of Europe Committee on Social Rights. As senior solicitor with Free Legal Advice Centres he represented transgender woman Lydia Foy in her case which led to the recognition of transgender persons in the Republic of Ireland in 2015.



He is a former Co-Chairperson of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and was a member of the Irish Human Rights Commission from 2001 to 2011. He was a member of the Council of State of the Republic of Ireland from 2011 to 2018 and he is currently a member of the Bureau of the Council of Europe Commission Against Racism and Intolerance.

Dr **AOIBHÍN DE BÚRCA** is Communications Manager for the largest health regulator in Ireland, The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland. She previously worked in public affairs and communications roles for the Royal Irish Academy, the Irish Humanities Alliance and RTÉ. She was a UCD Ad Astra Research Scholar when the initial article was published and received funding from Universities Ireland and UCD's John Hume Institute for the research and the Agreement Generation conference, which she convened in November 2010. Her PhD research was published by Palgrave's Rethinking Political Violence series in 2014: "Preventing Political Violence Against Civilians".

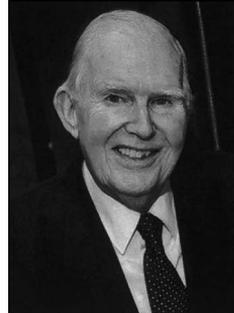


Dr **KATY HAYWARD** is Reader in Sociology and a Fellow of the Senator George Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security & Justice at Queen's University Belfast. She is currently a Senior Fellow of the UK in a Changing Europe Initiative for which she is working on 'The Future and Status of Northern Ireland'. A political sociologist, Katy's research has covered various aspects of conflict and conflict transformation on the island of Ireland – from local level contentious events (such as the Flags Protest) to the impact of EU membership on the Irish border and peace process. She is the author of over 200 publications, including *Brexit at the Border* (2018) and the co-edited book *Dynamics of Political Change in Ireland* (2017).



Katy has presented widely on the topic of Brexit and Northern Ireland/Ireland to public, policy, media and academic audiences. She has presented written and oral evidence on this subject before parliamentary committees in the UK and Ireland, as well as in the European Parliament. Outside academia, she is also a member of the Board of the Centre for Cross Border Studies.

SIR GEORGE QUIGLEY can justly be regarded as the ‘father’ of practical North-South cooperation in Ireland. In a speech in February 1992 he outlined his vision of a growth-led Belfast-Dublin ‘economic corridor’ and an ‘island of Ireland’ economy which the EU should treat as one economic area for funding purposes. This vision led to the formation of the IBEC/CBI Joint Business Council; underpinned much of the thinking behind the setting up of the North/South trade and business development body InterTradelreland; and was a key element in the argument that strong economic and business cooperation between the two parts of the island would be a vital element in any sustainable peace process in Northern Ireland. Sir George died suddenly on 3rd March 2013, aged 83.



MICHAEL D’ARCY has extensive experience in economic and regulatory reform at regional, all-island, EU and international level. He has provided advice, prepared reports, facilitated networking initiatives and served on a number of Boards and consultative committees in the private and public sectors. He is also an experienced facilitator, interlocutor, mentor and lecturer. Michael has been involved in the development of an all-island economy since jointly editing the seminal book ‘*Border Crossings; Developing Ireland’s Island Economy*’ (1995). He is a subject expert on North/South economic and business interaction on which he has written extensively including for the Esri; the European Economic and Social Committee; InterTradelreland; Co-Operation Ireland; Chambers of Commerce Ireland; the International Fund for Ireland; University of Ulster; IT Sligo and The Irish Times.



Since the UK voted to Leave the EU this work has increasingly focused on protecting business in the all-island economy, highlighting how it is underpinning peace and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. He is currently independent advisor to the Ibec/CBI Joint Business Council, co-authored ‘*The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the island of Ireland economy and Brexit*’ (2018) a Brexit Briefing Note for the BA and RIA and was production coordinator of the joint Ibec/CBI ‘*Business on a Connected island*’ Report (2018). Michael has supported the CCBS since its foundation and produced its publication: *Delivering a Prosperity Process: Opportunities in North/South Public Service Provision* (2012).