



CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

Research Project

“New Approaches for a New Decade?

A Scoping Study of Border Communities”

March 2021



Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Research Outputs	3
3. Research Methodology	4
4. Key Findings – Challenges and Issues/Needs and Priority Support	5
5. Recommendations	13
6. Conclusions	17

1. Introduction

Research Background

In January 2020 the “New Decade, New Approach” (NDNA) agreement enabled the reestablishment of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, which brought about the reconvening of meetings of the North South Ministerial Council.

The agreement itself includes a commitment to commission a study to identify challenges facing border communities, paying particular attention to the needs of minorities in border counties, and to explore options, including the establishment of dedicated funding streams, to address any identified gaps in current support.

This scoping study (March 2021) complements previous work undertaken by the Border People project and the Centre for Cross Border Studies, and will draw on direct knowledge of practical cross-border issues affecting citizens (Border People) and on the Centre’s extensive collaborations with a wide range of community organisations in both jurisdictions. Examples of previous relevant projects include the Towards a New Common Chapter project, as well as Bringing the Agreement Home project. Both involved cross community and cross-border dialogue between a diverse range of community organisations; including those representative of minority border communities.

Groups (including minority border community groups) taking part in the Towards a New Common Chapter project, expressed the desire to, *“Facilitate the exploration and celebration of a community’s culture and heritage with a view to future cooperation”, and to work on the “exploration of history and heritage that crosses borders within and between these islands”*.

This scoping study would, therefore, build on this work and on these existing links.¹

¹ This scoping study is part of the Centre for Cross Border Studies’ project, “New Approaches for a New Decade? A Scoping Study of Border Communities”, which was generously funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs’ Reconciliation Fund.

2. Research outputs

Through this scoping study, we aim to achieve the following outputs:

- To identify challenges and issues facing border communities.
- To identify the needs of border minority communities.
- To explore options, including the establishment of dedicated funding streams, to address gaps in current support.
- To provide a basis for a larger study that would meet the commitments made in the New Decade, New Approach agreement.

This initial scoping study will influence the development of longer-term strategies and policies tailored to meet the needs of communities in the border region and the organisations that support them; with buy-in from both administrations on the island of Ireland.

3. Research methodology

In January 2021, The Centre for Cross Border Studies commissioned Rural Community Network to conduct this scoping study.

Rural Community Network (RCN) is the regional voluntary organisation established in 1991 by local community organisations, to articulate the voice of rural communities on issues relating to poverty, disadvantage, equality, social exclusion, and community development.

The scoping study consisted of three principal stages:

Stage 1 – Initial research: RCN would gather relevant information on the nature of minority communities in border counties: who they are/where they are located. RCN would identify potential key organisations/bodies that could be invited to engage in this study as well as a larger subsequent study. These organisations and individuals would be from both jurisdictions, including the North West, Central Border area and Eastern Border Area (January 2021).

Stage 2 - Needs analysis: Qualitative Interviews (9 in total) would be carried out with representatives from organisations, in order to establish key priorities and concerns (via online platforms due to Covid-19 public health restrictions). There would be an exploration of their experience of existing funding streams and whether their needs are satisfactorily met through current funding opportunities, or whether some needs are not presently catered for (February 2021).

Stage 3 - Analysis of findings, compilation of final report and recommendations: A scoping study that will clearly set out the key findings and make recommendations for further work (March 2021).

Ethical Framework

In terms of conducting the research itself, an ethical framework was developed by RCN and agreed by the Centre for Cross Border Studies, which ensured consistency in approach. This allowed participants and researchers to agree, in advance of fieldwork, the issues being discussed, and how information would be used, including issues around confidentiality and consent.

4. Key Findings

This section of the paper will present the key findings from the qualitative interviews. There were 9 interviews in total carried out (6 Female and 3 Male). They were carried out across both jurisdictions – North West, Central Border Area and Eastern Border Area – to ensure that there was a representation of the 300 miles of border that exists between NI and the ROI (Fermanagh/Tyrone/South Armagh/Louth/Derry/Londonderry). Some of those interviewed were involved in community organisations, working on a single identity and cross-community basis, as well as working on a cross-border basis. Some were also involved in small businesses on a cross-border basis, and others were involved in the faith sector.

Issues/challenges facing border minority communities

For many of the Protestant community in border areas, their lived experience of being a minority community is real and is very much felt. Interviewees were very forthright and honest about the challenges they face and the difficulties they experience as part of both minority and border communities. This study of 9 interviews grouped the findings into the following headings and each of these is explored in more detail in the report:

- Lack of voice
- Minimal acceptance, recognition or validation of identity
- Cultural misrepresentation and marginalisation of groupings
- Limited recognition of protestant creative cultural expression
- Patchy cultural and community infrastructure
- Gaps in cultural development support from semi-statutory bodies
- Weak elected political leadership/alternative forms of leadership
- Political disengagement and disillusionment
- Funding determined by targets not by need
- Fallout from Brexit/Impact of Covid-19

Lack of Voice

For community workers working within Protestant groupings there is a real challenge in getting their voice heard within wider community networks, and a sense of struggle around how Local Authorities take on board the views of a minority community.

"There is no way to challenge anything really because the numbers and the politics are really stacked up against you. So, the biggest problem for me is there's not enough people in similar positions like myself. As one of the Derry Girls says, "there are just not enough Protestants to go round". A main issue is the political influence of the Catholic nationalist community sector. The sector is just not geared up for equality where you have a majority versus minority".

The word equality was used reluctantly to describe the lack of investment in Protestant communities, including a lack of full-time paid positions within Protestant areas and specifically within cultural organisations. Interviewees referenced the fact that Derry City and

Strabane District Council area has two Irish language workers and no Ulster Scots cultural workers.

Minimal acceptance, recognition or validation of identity

There is a sense that identity is questioned, fought over, and denied, rather than accepted and validated; more specifically in relation to those engaged in Ulster Scots activities, and fife and drum traditions, and especially flute bands traditions. Four interviewees in the North-West referred to the motion and vote in Derry City and Strabane District Council to not mark Northern Ireland's Centenary as a recent example of the disconnect which exists between the minority Protestant community and public representative bodies. Members of the Protestant community understood the matter to have arisen as a result of a lack of leadership, and even diplomacy.

"It was a dis to people's identity. An attack. We don't care that you and your identity has (sic) been in existence for 100 years."

However, where there has been an investment in civic leadership and cultural infrastructure (i.e. the North West Cultural Partnership, NWCP), individuals active in the NWCP found constructive ways to address the issue, with civic community leaders, unionist elected representatives and nationalist/republican party reps, and as a result of much discussion the motion not to mark the Centenary was overturned.

However, this matter has left a question within the Protestant community and members of the community struggle to comprehend the refusal to find common ground. They point to the successes of 'Northern Ireland', a place worthy of celebration - e.g. in the arts, sport and culture/tourism, NI Screen, literary heritage, areas of natural beauty. There is fear that common ground once found is being lost. The NWCP has planned to mark the centenary in ways that create opportunities for reflection, celebration and reconciliation. It is regarded within the Protestant community (in the North West) as an opportunity to reflect and discuss the challenges around the formation of NI, its current issues, and importantly challenges for its future.

Cultural misrepresentation and marginalisation of groupings

This is particularly relevant to members of the Protestant community engaged in Ulster Scots and bands, and very specifically the latter. Representatives working with the Londonderry Bands Forum (LBF) point to political statements made (such as those made by Richard Haass), which identified marching bands as being an impediment to the peace process. This, and other misrepresentation in the media, creates an environment where the positive social capital dimension of bands and their work is overlooked and members are marginalised. The Londonderry Bands' Forum is the only bands' forum in Northern Ireland with a funded full-time worker and for the past 4 or 5 years has been undertaking focused capacity building work and leadership engagement for 14 band leaders. A "Behavioural Accord for Bands" is now in place, with the Bands' Forum actively reaching out to engage others around the perception of bands. Representatives point to the uphill struggle of having the musical skill and talent of traditional flute players acknowledged in the same way as traditional Irish

musicians. They also point to a need to intentionally engage with more marginalised bands and in some instances their connected bonfire groups, rather than vilify them.

Limited recognition of protestant creative cultural expression

For other interviewees there is an uneasiness in the way in which the culture of the Protestant community is not fully embraced or recognised unless it comes under an Ulster Scots banner. There needs to be a wider frame of appreciation and recognition of cultural voice across all forms of creative and cultural expression. For some the binary framework of Irish and Ulster Scots is too limiting. For others, Ulster Scots is an important traditional cultural form and they sense there is an undervaluing of the Ulster Scots' cultural voice, as it is only in recent years there has been a focus on the works of CS Lewis, Thomas Carduff, John Hewitt, and contemporary writers like David Ireland and Jan Carson. There is also a resentment that the Protestant community does not see itself as being well represented in media, or public cultural and festival offerings, including programming provided in Council run arts venues.

"We are physically painting an identity onto places and people and we say 'this is yours'".

"...do we very readily fit into an Ulster Scots or a Gaelic box? I wonder here in Fermanagh do people tend to think of Ulster Scots as a speaking style more prevalent in Ballymena?"

Culture shouldn't just be regarded in these more purist forms".

Patchy cultural and community infrastructure

The high level and standards of work undertaken and showcasing Ulster Scots as part of Derry~Londonderry City of Culture's - Walled City Tattoo (WCT) events contributed significantly to dispelling some negative connotations and to addressing sectarian perceptions of Ulster Scots and bands across the city. WCT events brought in the most ticket sales and were a positive turning point in the city's cultural acceptance, for those who worked on a voluntary basis to make it happen.

Buoyed by this positive reception and experience, individuals involved in WCT formed the North West Cultural Partnership, which is today an active cultural hub in the city involving 6 cultural groups. All these groups undertake community engagement work, including with young people within the Protestant community, and with other cultural organisations in the city and on a cross border basis.

Recent years it has led to New Gate Arts and New Gate Arts Festival, as well as other cultural programming and outreach work with young people. This type and level of cultural support infrastructure is not evident in other urban or rural border areas across the north or south. Those involved stress that it has taken funders like IFI and DFA to invest in their work, and it has taken 13 years to build the strong cultural networking body it is today. Interviewees point to the 'Derry Model' of the NWCP as a cultural hub and as a model that could be replicated across minority community areas and in other parts of Northern Ireland.

Interviewees pointed out that there are significant numbers of voluntary groups who are very active in the Protestant community; from Bands, Lodges and Sports groups, Cricket Clubs, Football Clubs, Bowls, Women's groups (including Mother's Unions and WI); and questions

were raised as to why, with this level of existing community infrastructure and organisation, are these groups not being engaged in much broader ways. However, in some areas there is a sense that many of these groups are inward facing, and they run independently of much connection outside of their own members, and too few are part of wider networking bodies.

"I think the Protestant communities in Fermanagh are quite introverted still. Generally, we've been looking in on ourselves, often keeping our own organisations alive without actually reaching beyond that."

Gaps in cultural development support from semi-statutory bodies

Interviewees identified that performer talent and skill in Bands is being overlooked by the Arts Council for Northern Ireland, and that Ulster Scots dance, music and development in the rural north west is not being supported by the Ulster Scots Agency to the level of need that exists. There are no funded Ulster Scots development workers in the North West despite resources being available, and the limited resources for dance programmes in schools comes from the Education Authority. At present there is little evidence to suggest that this is a similar story in other border areas, e.g. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area.

Weak elected political leadership/alternative forms of leadership

Elected political leadership is regarded as ‘weak and inarticulate’. Community workers spoke of having to work with the elected leaders to encourage them to find a new way to challenge the majority community to “cut the minority community some slack” and “to find common ground”.

Interviewees identifying as unionist expressed real reluctance to be involved in unionist party politics and expressed a sense of feeling largely ‘let down by’ or ‘not knowing whether to be most angry with Boris or Arlene’.

Interviewees feel ‘the entry level’ to become a politician is very low, and this reflects within Council chamber debates, leading to those active in community work to look to themselves and other community workers for leadership.

In areas with stronger community infrastructure and stronger community voices there is a desire for, and a sense of, a new emerging form of pragmatic politics and pragmatic leadership. Some interviewees working within the PUL community expressed the need for alternative leadership, and are determined that this can, and must, emerge from those often-regarded as ‘hard to reach’, including those involved in the bands and bonfires.

In more rural areas where there is even less formal or formally resourced community infrastructure there is a sense that there is a reliance on a very small number of people to lead. There is a perceived unwillingness to engage in ‘the diagnosis of the problem’ and so to a degree even the community ‘is happy being less than happy’ with how things are as there is no willingness to ‘rock the boat’. Adam Curtis has described this phenomenon as “Hypernormalisation”.

Political disengagement and disillusionment

Interviewees believe the majority of the grassroots community is turned off politically, and they perceive a real reluctance to participate in public meetings and wider political or civic forums. Community leaders point to the level of political division and rancour between political parties as being the main turn-off factor. Several interviewees pointed to the segregated nature of Northern Ireland – the polarising ‘us and them’ nature of politics, as well as the perceived sectarian education system and disparities in housing, as the biggest stumbling blocks to progress.

“To be honest, the real solution is in the educational system. We must start at the start, you know, it can't start when people are 16. We send young people to university and that is sometimes the first time they meet anyone from another religion. We should put them together at the start. That would be the big sea change for me”.

Interviewees referred to ‘the greater good’ becoming too easily missed when it comes to ballot-box ‘green and orange’ politics, with everyone becoming the loser. For some interviewees, the turn off factor is to do with inclusion and tokenism within the Protestant community itself. Women interviewees expressed belief that their attempts at progressive conversations are ‘stifled’. Anyone who questions the status quo is likely to be side-lined out of the “shiny red, white and blue biscuit tin”.

Organisations such as NWCP and New Gate Arts through specific programmes, e.g. Fringe Festival, actively seek to engage young people and encourage healthy inclusive debate, inviting speakers from outside the community and creating opportunity for exposure to diverse perspectives.

Funding determined by targets not by need

The use of balanced PUL and CNR participation targets is a challenging issue where minorities exist. One of the most problematic examples provided was the European PEACE IV funds which have stated participation figures across all Council areas as being 48% Catholic, 48% Protestant and 4% BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic). This means the Protestant community, in areas where it is a minority, comes under huge pressure to have sufficient numbers to partner with CNR groups. There is a sense that many of these approaches are tokenistic.

The focus on having to do cross-community work can also restrict and prohibit development work regarded as necessary within the Protestant community and there is a pressure on some to engage in ways that they do not wish to engage or that they are not ready to engage. This type of intervention, despite being well intentioned, if it is badly handled, can be of no direct benefit to participants. In the case of PEACE funding, the emphasis on the administrative aspect, and on targets and numbers, is seen to have overtaken the real work of peace building.

One interviewee from the South Armagh area, who describes themselves as a conservative unionist, does not accept the terminology that is used in relation to how the Protestant

community is described. There is a feeling that this language is now out of touch and needs revisited.

"I do not accept the term PUL community. If the 'powers that be' decide that there is such a thing as a "PUL" I would object to that, in the same way as I would object to the other side being classified as CRN."

Fallout from Brexit/Impact of Covid-19:

"Brexit has turned things constitutional and therefore it is affecting Protestant communities"

Most interviewees stated that the issues facing them now, as a minority community, were there before Brexit. However, Brexit has brought to the fore the constitutional issue and question of a border poll. Interviewees have also pointed to what they perceive as 'more anti-British' including common use of phrases such as 'the stupid British', 'haha rub it up ye' sentiment and tone within public discourse. There is a perception that Brexit is 'giving cover' to a vitriolic form of Irish nationalism within public discourse. In general, public 'rhetoric' around Brexit, and around the recent revoking of article 16 by the EU, does not ease concerns or fears within the PUL community.

"It's important to realise that every separation from the UK mainland is for me a diminishing of Northern Ireland's status as part of the UK. And the politics and rhetoric that's been built up around it, is polarising. We are like the seesaw, if you're up I'm down, if I'm up you're down."

Interviewees are highly aware of the 'farcical' position Brexit creates of loyalism and unionism in Northern Ireland:

"Larne's British citizens are against the Irish sea border imposed by the British government. It's farcical"

Depending on the language used and the people engaged with or excluded, conversations about 'a new Ireland' or 'an agreed Ireland' or 'a united Ireland' may all be different conversations.

"The old conversation is about an 'all Ireland' or 'united Ireland' solution. The modern conversation is about an 'all island' solution"

Interviewees including those who work in working class areas, and with more marginalised groups (e.g. bands and bonfire groups) are uneasy and concerned about the unreadiness within the Protestant community for constructive conversations about constitutional issues and about a border poll.

"So on one level we're right up against that conversation, and on another level we're a million miles from being able to have it in the way you would want to see it happen"

Those of a Protestant unionist community background who do not identify with loyalism or political Unionism are effectively 'politically homeless' and are highly concerned about the

constitution and border poll conversations, and how these are being framed. They would urge inclusivity, consideration for the use of language and greater facilitative leadership.

"If we are to consider a new Ireland, and we have the opportunity to ask, 'what do we want to be and what do we need to have supported?', then that conversation needs to be a broad conversation. It needs to include young people about to go away to university and the young people staying here, the marching bands, and social care workers, nurses, women's groups, line dancers and all kinds of civic groups. It's that 40 shades of orange thing - you throw an issue out around the dinner table in a Protestant family and you could get 40 different views. It's this breadth of thinking around identity that needs to be heard in the public domain, rather than it being dominated all the time by the most aggrieved, and that's not to say that the aggrieved do not need to be listened to and have their anxieties addressed".

Those living in the South Armagh and Louth areas have the view that the conversations on Brexit now need to take place, particularly in relation to the bigger picture.

"In terms of Brexit, I think that the Protestant community have to look at the broad picture of where it is going to take... every community, there is more than two communities. I do not think the Protestant community, nor any community, has grasped - what is going to happen in the future. No one knows, Brexit could be the greatest thing since 'sliced bread' for the economy of Northern Ireland, or it could be a disaster. The important thing is, will the people understand what Brexit is and I do not think the vast majority of Protestants do."

One interviewee felt:

"The current misunderstanding of the protocol is being wound up in fear. If you ask anyone on the street, from whatever background, what this protocol is, they will not have a clue. Very few people understand the nitty gritty of it. I include myself in that."

"I think there is a small section of the Protestant or Loyalist community who are in fear of a United Ireland. Their fear is not based on the economy of both the Republic and N.I., it is not based on the position of either, it is just ingrained from an historical perspective".

However, there was a recognition by the interviewees that they themselves did not understand the whole complexities of Brexit and the NI Protocol and they felt that herein lies the problem. Interviewees also felt it was important to state that there is a perception that all Protestants voted for Brexit and there is a narrative that they should all support Brexit when in fact some of them do not.

"I personally voted to remain in the EU, as did a lot of other Protestants. I am also a democrat and I understand that the whole of the UK decided to leave. That's where I stand."

One interviewee, south of the border in Louth, discussed her concerns in relation to the impact of Brexit on her small business and the issues she was having in relation to the normal supplies she would have received from GB. As her supplies are held up in Belfast and Larne

docks, this has had a direct impact on her business with potential loss of earnings. This interviewee also went on to comment that pre-Covid there was a nervousness around Brexit and the impact on border communities but now, with lockdown, she has had little to no interaction with others and finds it hard to gauge how people are really feeling now that Brexit is in place.

“The pandemic is impacting on business and social interaction and as there is little communication now with others. I am not aware of the impact of Brexit on them. Prior to Brexit there were nervous conversations about the implications of Brexit. People did not know what was going to happen, how it would progress. They were very nervous.”

What a number of interviewees did highlight was that Brexit and the pandemic are both occurring at the same time and as a result are now interlinked. There is a feeling that there is a vast difference in how people are perceiving the pandemic, with some having nothing but the pandemic in the forefront of their minds. In terms of some sort of return to normality, education, health, employment, and the economy were more important, but for others it is identity politics and Brexit. One interviewee asked:

“Which one takes priority in peoples’ minds? My priority is to get through this. When we get through the pandemic, which will hopefully be in the next number of months, then we can look at Brexit. I think that if you ask the majority of Protestants in the border area they are the same as me. They want to get back to normal”.

5. Recommendations - Priority areas for support

Having analysed the findings and discussed the issues at length, the interviewees themselves have identified what the needs are in relation to the issues and challenges Protestant border communities face, and what areas of support are now required in the future to further assist them.

Funding Priorities and Priority Groups:

Cultural traditions and cultural development workers and programming:

- Equitable investment in cultural traditions - i.e. Ulster Scots in rural border areas
- Investment in people development - e.g. traditional performance, skill and talent, career pathways, competition pathways and East West links
- Investment in full time cultural development workers, including those with Ulster Scots specialisms at Council level or in local areas AND workers/projects/programmes taking a wider cultural engagement/cultural imagination remits - i.e. through community arts and creative imagination work within the Protestant community, which also supports imagination and critical enquiry around "who are we".
- More cultural traditions and cultural development work programmes engaging in schools, Controlled and Maintained.

Development of cultural infrastructure/cultural hubs across border areas to consider and address minority community needs

It is clear that the development of a cultural infrastructure has added value to the cultural vibrancy of Derry City and has enabled greater cross community and inter-community relationships to be developed and has supported the emergence of leadership within the Protestant community. The Londonderry Bands Forum and the NWCP offer something as cultural hub models, where civic society is identifying needs and forging its own development on traditional self-help models. These models could be adapted and replicated across border areas, allowing for the differences that exist across rural counties and border areas. The LDBF and NWCP have the support of Local Council Good Relations teams, and there is opportunity for cultural hubs to connect into locally based good relations strategies.

There may also be other learning from 'Urban Villages' models which have been rolled out by the NI Executive Office but has had no direct impact on rural or border communities, but that is not to say the learning from this programme could not be shared and replicated across rural and border counties.

There are also other networking needs in rural areas to ensure that sports clubs, churches and social groups are availing of support and networking opportunities that exist within rural areas (could be factored into/addressed by locally based cultural hubs).

However, it has been clearly communicated that development needs to be area-based and cognizant to the uniqueness of those areas; informed by local needs and local relationships which themselves are informed by specifics around history, conflict, political dynamics, inter

and intra community relationships, relationships between leaders, previous work within communities, existing levels of networks, infrastructure, engagement and capacity.

These interviews took place at different geographic locations around the border and whilst there has been commonality in terms of the issues and challenges presented, what has been very clearly demonstrated is that each area is also very different, with different dynamics and therefore an individual community-based approach is needed at a very local level. Just as the Protestant community itself is not one homogenous group, there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to the challenges and issues these minority communities face.

Priority groups to include bands, bonfire groups, and young people in deprived areas:

Those engaged in the Londonderry Bands Forum/NWCP suggest that there is a real need for engagement with specific groups who continue to be on the periphery of society and community. And investment in '*alternative leadership*'.

- **Bands and bonfire groups**

The work of Londonderry Bands Forum points to new emerging forms of leadership within the Protestant community and has led to the development of new cooperative relationships across Derry City. Work with bonfire groups is at a more embryonic stage, however, workers are hopeful there will be positive community engagement and empowering spin offs to come from this work. Programmes of work to include personal development, leadership, historical education, and cultural awareness/development.

- **Engagement of young people from disadvantaged communities**

A funding priority should include engaging young people in a civic political development programme to develop greater awareness around culture and history, in ways which engage with multiple co-existing narratives and hidden voices.

“Funders need to be brave. Adrian Johnson a few years ago came out with a brave statement saying by 2023 we want all the interface walls brought down in NI. I applauded him for that. Setting that target probably progressed that work quicker. We do need to focus into the real issues and set targets. That relates to community workers and other agencies – we can’t all be staring at our feet when the flags go up”.

Funding priority to also include: outward-facing projects and programmes supporting groups to reach out and make new connections, including new cross-community relationships.

It was suggested that in more isolated rural areas, where there is poorer formal and formally funded infrastructure, the type of support that would be most beneficial would be to encourage voluntary groups in various ways to engage (and a sliding scale might be useful here) to:

- a) reach out beyond their own group to connect with others around common/shared interests,
- b) build constructive relationships and develop joint working partnerships on a cross community basis (i.e. where all groups are involved in design, delivery, decision making),
- c) develop trust to enable new conversations around difference.

There is also a suggestion that there should be encouragement and support for more risk taking within the Protestant community in regard to engagement with new perspectives, diverse/multiple narratives – e.g. a Festival event in a Protestant area in Derry/Londonderry discussing the impact of Bloody Sunday on the Protestant community.

The question of a Designated Funding Strand for Minority Border Communities:

Interviewees in the Derry Strabane District Council areas (especially around the Derry City area and between Derry and Strabane) are very comfortable with designated funds for the minority community. These groups have recognised their minority status and been working within a majority-minority framework for some time and feel confident in the use of this language. Based on the existing track record of IFI and DFA supported work, there are no issues for ongoing funding support for specific target groups.

This is not necessarily the case in more rural areas. There is information to suggest that some within Protestant communities are uncomfortable with the ‘labelling’ of good relations and cross community work.

“All support will be welcomed if offered in the right way. Obviously when things are labelled heavily as this or that, it can put people off or push some people away”.

**Further exploration is needed around framing of support and language as the minority community is a very diverse community.”*

New Donor/Funder relationships:

Interviewees would like to see:

- Greater partnership approaches within the funding relationship. I.e. the funder-project/group relationship is one of ‘being or getting alongside’, offering space to discuss challenges and difficulties, and to develop a greater understanding of the pressured environment of community based work
- Commitments which include medium term funding support, enabling the community/civic sector to set bolder targets and build in more formative evaluative practice.
- More equality between terms and conditions of workers in the community and public sector / funding officers - e.g. project workers rarely on permanent contracts, no pension payments, less clear line management supports.

Brexit: North South Working and Inclusive Modern Civic Conversations:

A number of Interviewees remarked they thought there should be greater levels of cooperation North to South i.e. there should have been more joint working around Covid-19 and cited the pandemic as offering an opportunity going forward to do things differently both North-South and across communities in NI - i.e. joined up working, sharing information, sharing learning and skill sharing which can create win-wins. Joined up working should be progressed in whatever areas there is agreement on and these are typically referenced as being in the areas of health and the environment. It is recognised and the organisational culture of NI and ROI are barriers to co-operation.

Interviewees recognise that a lack of joined up working has meant losses for everyone in border areas. A big concern of a number of interviewees is the so called 'brain drain' of young people, including Protestant young people. 'Smarter' joined up working which prevented this, for future generations, would be pragmatically welcomed by all.

Leadership is required from the top, especially in the use of language and framing of any civic conversations around constitutional issues. Governments and ministerial councils should be asked to provide more *facilitative leadership* (win-win models, see also John Paul Lederach's work building relationships, being creative, taking risks and honing our paradoxical curiosity) around the issues.

Constitutional conversations should be well considered and parameters well framed in advance to ensure conversations 'are modern for a modern time', and that some conversations need to be future proofed and cognizant of global issues rather than being bogged down in history. It has been suggested that learning drawn from the Republic's Citizens Assembly and other civic forum models could be useful tools to promote more inclusive, and more effective, citizen participation in civic life. Several participants emphasised the risks and complexities of the 'Brexit' issue (i.e. a 'cart before horse" – voting on constitutional arrangements before relationship building and meaningful civic engagement) is more likely to cause civil discontent and disruption.

Encouragement of civic discussion spaces (including the Protestant community) where civic society can explore and discuss issues, develop awareness and capacity for conversations across differences of opinion.

Any such conversation will require a greater degree of honesty of Dublin and British governments and the EU around intentions and interests.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, though the number of interviews was small in this initial scoping study, the qualitative material gathered was extremely rich and explored the breadth, depth and knowledge of the key experts and organisations working with these border minority communities on an ongoing basis. As well as identifying the challenges and issues faced, it was very encouraging to see forward-thinking practitioners who were able to have some foresight into how these communities could be assisted going forward, but also how local government, central government (policy makers) and funders could and should be working closely with them through a community development needs-led approach. There was an appetite to take this work forward and there was a hunger to “get things done” for the betterment of this society.

In terms of the next steps, it is evident that there needs to be a larger study of minority border communities exploring in depth the issues and challenges presented in this paper. Interviewees themselves commented that they would welcome the study expanded to border counties of counties Monaghan, Leitrim and Cavan. There was also an appetite for even more diverse voices to be heard, not just those engaging in community development/good relations work, but to expand the study to include those engaging with young people, health, employment, training, small business, faith sector, women and many more.

This is the first step to highlight the principal challenges and needs of border communities, and a valuable starting point to inform policy makers in the commissioning of a larger study.