

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

**New Approaches
for a New Decade?
A Scoping Study of
Border
Communities:
*Summary Report***

Dr Anthony Soares

March 2021

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Executive Summary

This Summary Report presents the main findings of a scoping exercise funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs' Reconciliation Fund, which aimed to identify challenges facing border communities, with a particular focus on the needs of minorities in border counties. The scoping exercise, therefore, involved interviews with sixteen representatives from PUL (Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist) organisations or those working in PUL communities, with two additional interviews with representatives from rural development and migrants' rights organisations.¹

The principal findings set out in further detail in the body of this report can be summarised as follows:

- The physical and psychosocial isolation often deriving of the rurality and peripherality of the border region exacerbates many of the major contemporary challenges being experienced more widely, principally in terms of the impacts of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic and how these are felt by minorities in border counties. Whether in respect of those from PUL communities or migrants, uncertainties provoked by Brexit and the public health crisis magnify sentiments of isolation and precariousness for those in border counties.
- Until some of the negative characteristics associated with rural areas – especially in terms of connectivity – are resolved, the communities that inhabit them will continue to lack the opportunities that may be available elsewhere. It also means that communities in the border region will be unable to fully exploit the benefits of investments made in their social and cultural infrastructure.
- There is real evidence of the need for sustained investment in community leadership, for the mapping and assessment of the quality of the existing provision of community leadership skills development for PUL communities in the border region, as well as a mapping of the existing skills base within these communities. Crucially, in order to ensure community leadership skills are retained within PUL communities in the border area, the region's underlying issues of peripherality, lack of connectivity (including digital connectivity) and comparative lack of higher-quality employment opportunities need to be addressed.
- To address the fragmented nature of cultural and community infrastructure for PUL communities (and replicable for other minority communities) in border areas, and to build upon the existence of good practice dispersed across the region, investment could be made into innovative means of providing cultural and community hubs informed by the North West Cultural Partnership model.

¹ We recognise from the outset the unsatisfactory nature of the term "PUL", which can often be employed as a shorthand label that denies the diversity and agency of the communities and individuals it is meant to denote.

- To support the emergence or strengthening of connective nodes as part of cultural and community infrastructure hubs with a digital element, they require sustained investment in the people that will lead them and make them thrive.
- There is a need for local government structures and networks in the border region to actively seek and support the involvement of minority communities, and to ensure their involvement is not reduced to one that is largely tokenistic. Similarly, internal structures within minority communities need to encourage and support their members to engage with external structures. Faith communities have a particular role in this regard.
- Consideration should be given to the undertaking of an audit of recent cultural programming in the border region to assess the extent to which it is representative of PUL communities and what content is of PUL cultural expression. However, specific investment should be made in full-time cultural development workers in the border region, including workers with Ulster Scots specialisms, along with investment in cultural projects and activities.
- There is an evident need for investment in independent sources of information on the impacts of Brexit relevant to border communities, and in particular minority border communities.
- Crucially, investment is required to support the independent provision of reliable information concerning the role of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and its ongoing implementation, while investment should continue to be made in support of the establishment of platforms for intra and inter-community dialogue, including on a cross-border basis, dedicated to the exchange of views on the evolving post-Brexit context and on relations within and between these islands.
- Although there is a voiced need for single-identity work to be supported among minority border communities, there is also ample recognition among PUL communities of the value of cross-community work.
- For those responsible for the provision of funding support to border communities, and to minority border communities in particular, where this is not already the case determined efforts must be undertaken to establish genuine partnership approaches to the funding relationship. There is also a need for greater medium-term investments, enabling community organisations to become more ambitious in terms of the change they bring about and how it is measured.

Introduction

In January 2020 the “[New Decade, New Approach](#)” (NDNA) agreement enabled the re-establishment of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, which in turn would bring about the reconvening of meetings of the North South Ministerial Council. NDNA included a commitment from the Irish Government 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 Summary Report by the Centre for Cross Border Studies aims to contribute to that commitment, as it presents some of the key issues arising from a scoping exercise into the challenges facing border communities in the short to medium-term, with specific reference to what minorities in border communities see as the supports necessary for them to overcome the particular challenges they face. With support from the Department of Foreign Affairs’s Reconciliation Fund, this scoping exercise, which involved two main studies and sets of related interviews with representatives of PUL communities, also gathered initial evidence on the supports border communities currently avail of. Additional interviews were undertaken in February 2021 with a focus on rural concerns and migrant communities in the border region.

The two studies and interviews that inform this Summary Report were undertaken respectively by Rural Community Network and Peter Lavery in March 2021,² with advisory support provided by Earl Storey and Anthony Soares.

This scoping study complements previous work undertaken by the Border People project and the Centre for Cross Border Studies, and draws 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 the “[Bringing the Agreement Home: In all its parts](#)” project (both of which were also beneficiaries of support from the Reconciliation Fund). Both involved cross-community and cross-border dialogue between a diverse range of community organisations, including those representative of minority border communities. These projects saw specific needs being voiced by community groups based in border counties, including minority and women’s groups, and a desire for these to be addressed. The [New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands](#), developed by groups (including minority border community groups) taking part in the Towards a New Common Chapter project,

² Rural Community Network, “Research Project: ‘New Approaches for a New Decade? A Scoping Study of Border Communities’” (March 2021); Peter Lavery, “A Minority View: New Approaches for a New Decade – A Scoping Study of Border Communities” (March 2021).

expresses the desire to, for example, “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 histories and heritage that cross borders within and between these islands”.

The scoping study and this Summary Report build on this work and on these existing links to address the need established by the commitment made in NDNA to identify the challenges facing border communities. Many of those challenges in relation to PUL communities in border counties are not new and were already visible not only in the previous projects undertaken by the Centre for Cross Border Studies, but also in a range of existing reports analysed as part of the desk research for the present scoping study. However, what the present study may also highlight is how underlying issues affecting PUL communities in the border region can resurface and acquire a new urgency as a result of certain (external) events, while also indicating that some issues are persistent because by their very nature they require ongoing attention.

Leadership

The interviews undertaken by Rural Community Network and Peter Lavery bring to the fore the issue of leadership of PUL communities in the border counties. This is both in terms of the communities’ perceptions of the quality of political leadership within unionism, and of the capacity for leadership within the PUL communities in the border counties themselves. Whereas in relation to the former there are concerns that there is “a mismatch between the talent that politicians have and the expectations of the role and position that they hold” (Lavery, p.9), in relation to the latter “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” (RCN, p.9). Such an overreliance on a limited number of individuals is exacerbated by the communities’ difficulty in retaining potential future leaders, with young talented people often failing to return after having left to attend university, and all the more likely not to return given the lack of appropriate employment opportunities.

However, in areas where more resilient community infrastructure is in place and where stronger community voices can be heard “there is a desire for, and a sense of, a new emerging form of pragmatic politics and pragmatic leadership” (RCN, p.8). Here there are calls for alternative leadership, which is seen as needing to “emerge from those often regarded as ‘hard to reach’, including those involved in the bands and bonfires” (RCN, p.8).

The issue of leadership in PUL communities in the border counties is not new. In her 2002 report for Rural Community Network, for example, Marie Crawley notes how a “lack of community development activity was attributed [by those she interviewed] to the lack of leaders”.³ A 2005 report found that the Protestant population of Derry/Londonderry

³ Marie Crawley, “[Protestant Communities in Border Areas Research Report](#)”, Rural Community Network (May 2002), p.37.

considered their perceived unsatisfactory situation to be partly a result of “deficient internal community and political leadership”,⁴ while a report from 2008 noted calls for “More positive civic and church leadership”.⁵

The fact that reports going back two decades were referring to the same question of leadership as is the case in the reports undertaken as part of the present scoping study should not be seen as indicative of the failure of past efforts to address this issue. Instead, it should be seen as **evidence of the need for sustained investment in community leadership**, with each new cohort of young members of PUL communities in the border region being able to seek and access leadership skills.

However, **there is also a need for a mapping and assessment of the quality of the existing provision of community leadership skills development for PUL communities in the border region, as well as a mapping of the existing skills base within these communities**, and where excellence may be present in skills that could be shown as transferable to community leadership. Crucially, the provision of community leadership skills development programmes to PUL communities in the border region must always be of the highest possible quality (predicated on excellence), availing of input from inspirational and recognised leaders in other fields (including sports associations with a community development outlook) and from other communities, and offering continuous and tailored support that reflects participants’ progression and growth. This should be viewed as a priority area for investment.

Crucially, **in order to ensure community leadership skills are retained within PUL communities in the border area, the region’s underlying issues of peripherality, lack of connectivity (including digital connectivity) and comparative lack of higher-quality employment opportunities need to be addressed**. Otherwise there will be a lower return for the investment made in the development of community leadership skills.

Cultural and community infrastructure: gaps, best practice and visibility

Interviewees highlighted to RCN as part of the work for this scoping study how the events of the Walled City Tattoo (WCT) initiative as part of Derry~Londonderry City of Culture were an example of best practice, leading to the establishment of the North West Cultural Partnership. WCT’s showcasing of Ulster Scots “contributed significantly to dispelling some negative connotations and to addressing sectarian perceptions of Ulster Scots and bands across the city” (RCN, p.7). Noting how the support of the International Fund for Ireland and the Department of Foreign Affairs’ Reconciliation Fund has been crucial to its success, “Interviewees point to the ‘Derry Model’ of the NWCP as a cultural hub and as a model that

⁴ Peter Shirlow et al, “[Population Change and Social Inclusion Study Derry/Londonderry](#)” (2005), p.9.

⁵ David Gardiner, “[‘Whatever you say, say nothing’: A report on the views and experiences of Border Protestants for the Church of Ireland Diocese of Clogher](#)” (2008), p.34.

could be replicated across minority community areas and in other parts of Northern Ireland” (RCN, p.7).

Away from Derry/Londonderry, other examples of community organisations and initiatives identified by interviewees as furnishing some positive infrastructure for PUL communities in the border counties include “groups along the border in Kesh and Pettigoe with good equipment and good heritage trails which could be replicated in other areas such as in Cashel and Kiltyclogher and in Garrison and Rossinver” (Lavery, p.23), bands, lodges, women’s groups and organisations such as the Irish Countrywomen’s Association, the Mothers’ Union and the Women’s Institute, as well as a range of sports clubs.

However, while “Interviewees pointed out that there are significant numbers of voluntary groups who are very active in the Protestant community” (RCN, p.7), this did not necessarily lead to wider cultural or community visibility or to significant external engagement. The perception is that “many of these groups are inward facing, and [...] run independently of much connection outside of their own members, and too few are part of wider networking bodies” (RCN, p.8). In a similar vein, and from a cross-jurisdictional perspective, it was considered that “In some border areas there are low levels of community development projects and low participation in volunteering”, and that “These areas have not had the experience of participating in Cross Border/Cross Community projects so they have not seen the benefits that these projects can bring to communities” (Lavery, p.15).

If the North West Cultural Partnership stands out as a significant example of a visible community infrastructure that encompasses PUL communities in its area of activity, the nature of the wider border region and the well-documented heterogeneity of PUL communities means there are significant challenges in achieving equivalent results elsewhere. A 2008 report, for example, notes how while “Denominational allegiance is important as is an identity attached to a Protestant understanding of identity and cultural belief”, the importance given to denominational allegiance also “highlights the diversity among Protestants in the southern border counties”.⁶ This may result in a fragmented community infrastructure landscape in terms of the PUL communities in the border counties, wherein there will be many individual instances of good community work being done, as has been evidenced during the current pandemic, but with respondents to the present scoping study being “less than complimentary of the totality of the initiatives” (Lavery, p.14). This picture may be exacerbated further where gaps appear in the funding support for individual initiatives and for the community workers associate with them, with some of them unable to sustain themselves until a new tranche of an existing funding programme or an alternative programme become available.

⁶ Paddy Logue, Karen McGillion and Pete Shirlow, “[A report to the PEACE II Monitoring Committee on the Border Protestant Community & the EU Peace Programmes](#)” (May 2007), p.17.

To address the fragmented nature of cultural and community infrastructure for PUL communities (and replicable for other minority communities) in border areas, and to build upon the existence of good practice dispersed across the region, investment could be made into innovative means of providing cultural and community hubs informed by the NWCP model.⁷ Bearing in mind deficiencies in access to adequate broadband in rural border areas, which also require urgent investment, the experience of online delivery of many community services during the Coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated the ability of the community and voluntary sector to operate successfully by adopting different methods that could become part of blended hubs of cultural and community infrastructure for PUL communities in border areas, particularly outside of larger population centres. The digital elements of these hubs could become connective tissue between what are currently dispersed cultural and community infrastructure assets, enabling the communication of best practice and sharing of material and initiatives, and thereby to some extent alleviating feelings of isolation.

However, investment in digital elements of such hubs of cultural and community infrastructure must be accompanied by sustained investment in people and the “physical” elements of those hubs. The digital elements require content and the chairing, animating and moderating of intra, inter-communities and cross-border dialogue, which in turn require community workers and leaders from the PUL (and other minority) communities to produce it and act as chairs, animators and moderators. Neither can the digital elements ever replace the need for meeting places within localities, with rural border towns serving as central nodes and sites of connection between townlands, including on a cross-border basis. Again, **to support the emergence or strengthening of such nodes as part of cultural and community infrastructure hubs with a digital element,**⁸ **they require sustained investment in the people that will lead them and make them thrive**, addressing the “lack of full-time paid positions within Protestant areas and specifically within cultural organisations” (RCN, p.5), and recognising that “A paid worker for two years to work across the border is of no use” (Lavery, p.18).

The success and sustainability of hubs of cultural and community infrastructure can be more properly guaranteed if they are given the necessary visibility and voice in local structures, and if the necessary encouragement is offered. An illustrative example was given to Peter Lavery in his research for this scoping study:

⁷ It is important to stress the plurality of hubs. There should be no attempt to introduce a single hub that would erase the diversity and deny the complexity of PUL communities.

⁸ Support may invariably come in the form of a more strategic approach that recognises and capitalises on existing cultural and community infrastructure. As the Rural Community Network’s report as part of this scoping study makes clear: “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” (pp.13-14).

“Recently three border church groups have registered with the Public Participation Network (PPN) in Monaghan. They have attended online meetings and training events. They have been successful in receiving local authority funding. This was a big deal for some of the groups. Now they want to be more integrated and can see the benefits of networking with other organisations” (Lavery, p.15).

The potential role of PPNs was also highlighted during the work for this scoping study in terms of the wider issue of rural development and addressing the needs of rural communities, although the issue of representativeness and a divergence of experience across local authorities were also raised. By contrast, Rural Community Network’s research for the present study noted how “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” (RCN, p.5).

There is a need for local government structures and networks in the border region to actively seek and support the involvement of minority communities, and to ensure their involvement is not reduced to one that is largely tokenistic. Local government best practice, *as identified by community organisations*, in terms of achieving the active participation of minority communities in local structures and networks – *including cross-border networks* – needs to be disseminated and embedded more widely. This may involve the adaptation of initiatives found elsewhere to the local circumstances of the border region, such as the “Urban Villages” programme rolled out by the Northern Ireland Executive. While this programme may have “had no direct impact on rural or border communities, [...] that is not to say the learning from this programme could not be shared and replicated across rural and border counties” (RCN, p.13).

However, in order for minority communities in the border region to gain visibility for themselves and their cultural and community infrastructure, it is not simply a question of local government structures and networks making themselves more attractive to and accommodating of minority communities, although this is where the emphasis should lie. There is also **a need for internal structures within minority communities to encourage and support its members to engage with external structures. Faith communities have a particular role in this regard**, with church leaders well positioned to offer those from minority communities the confidence to reach out to other communities and networks.⁹ Without this encouragement it will be harder to reverse the situation whereby “PUL communities don’t have the confidence or the capacity to succeed in building the type of social and cultural infrastructure in the same way as those from the nationalist community” (Lavery, p.12). It should also be noted that the role of churches, particularly evangelical churches, in positive

⁹ It is interesting to note, as [reported by the BBC](#), the recent joint statement issued by Protestant and Catholic church leaders “admitting they have not done enough in the past to heal divisions”.

engagement with migrant communities in the border region was also highlighted during this scoping study.

Recognition and validation

The interviews carried out by Rural Community Network and Peter Lavery as part of this scoping study point to a continuing – and even accentuated – feeling among PUL communities in the border region that they are not truly recognised and accepted by the majority community. The same sentiment was noted in relation to migrants living and working in the region, who saw host communities and public authorities as not giving the necessary value to the skills and cultures they brought with them, and that this could therefore lead to unfair treatment. More generally, the current scoping study also heard a repeat of the longstanding view that government policies fundamentally fail to recognise and therefore properly address the concerns of rural communities, and even more so in relation to the specific needs of border communities. Indeed, this criticism is not necessarily reserved for political representatives and policy-makers; it can also be levelled at those in urban areas who may share membership of a wider community identity, but who are not seen to understand the lives of those from the same community in rural border areas.

For PUL communities in the border region, “There is a sense that identity is questioned, fought over, and denied, rather than accepted and validated” (RCN, p.6), with this perception seemingly being reinforced following an initial decision by Derry City and Strabane District Council not to mark Northern Ireland’s centenary. Although this decision was subsequently reversed, “this matter has left a question within the Protestant community and members of the community struggle to comprehend the refusal to find common ground” (RCN, p.6). Unease and an accentuation of the isolation that is already frequently felt as a consequence of rural life can often be in part “due to the opinion that the PUL community feel that they are tolerated but not valued within a community” (Lavery, p.7).

A restrictive interpretation or invalidation of cultural expression can also add to the sense of the failure to recognise minority communities. While marching bands, for example, are seen by PUL communities as important vehicles of their cultural identity, there is a sense that they are misrepresented to wider society, creating “an environment where the positive social capital dimension of bands and their work is overlooked and members are marginalised” (RCN, p.6). Rural Community Network’s research for this scoping study also found that:

“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” (RCN, p.7).

To address these concerns, **consideration should be given to the undertaking of an audit of recent cultural programming in the border region to assess the extent to which it is representative of PUL communities and what content is of PUL cultural expression. However, specific investment should be made in full-time cultural development workers in the border region, including workers with Ulster Scots specialisms, along with investment in cultural projects and activities.**

Brexit and the Protocol

The unfolding consequences of the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union have unquestionably provoked significant uncertainty and given rise to community tensions in Northern Ireland, with the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland causing considerable disquiet among PUL communities. Brexit has also impacted on the lives of many migrant communities in Northern Ireland, as well as of EU-26 migrants resident in the border counties of Ireland who are cross-border workers, who will require ongoing access to relevant information. It has also served to remind those who may provide public services that for some migrants their cross-border options have always been more limited or non-existent, with immigration rules meaning they are not able to avail of work opportunities or certain services in the other jurisdiction in the same way as many of their neighbours can.

The sense of disquiet and discontent is starkly apparent in the interviews carried out by Rural Community Network and Peter Lavery for this scoping study, with PUL communities uncertain as to what the future holds for Northern Ireland. While many of the issues PUL communities as minority communities in the border regions face today were there before Brexit, the UK’s departure from the EU “has brought to the fore the constitutional issue and question of a border poll” (RCN, p.10), with interviewees also reporting a rise in anti-British sentiment and that “Brexit is ‘giving cover’ to a vitriolic form of Irish nationalism within public discourse” (RCN, p.10). While the PUL community in the border region is described as living in a “permanent state of stress”, Brexit has given rise to “increased uneasiness, almost verging on fear, that Northern Ireland’s position within the United Kingdom is under threat” (Lavery, p.7). There is also “clear uncertainty about the border” (Lavery, p.8), with people asking questions that have not been asked for many years, including farmers with land on both sides of the border who are unsure as to how they will be able to manage their businesses in the new context. Moreover, politicians are seen as “increasing the fear and uncertainty as they pursue a personal agenda for their own benefit” (Lavery, p.8).

There is an evident need for investment in independent sources of information on the impacts of Brexit relevant to border communities, and in particular minority border

communities. Such information needs to be continually updated in light of changing circumstances, but also capable of reassuring communities where pre-existing arrangements between the UK and Ireland mean Brexit will not alter certain cross-border rights and entitlements. Crucially, **investment is required to support the independent provision of reliable information concerning the role of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and its ongoing implementation**, furnishing communities with a more informed understanding of what the Protocol means for them. As noted by Rural Community Network's report for the present scoping study, "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" (RCN, p.11). Additionally, **investment should continue to be made in support of the establishment of platforms for intra and inter-community dialogue, including on a cross-border basis, dedicated to the exchange of views on the evolving post-Brexit context and on relations within and between these islands.**

The nature of current funding provision and support

While there is some acknowledgement that investments are now being made or have been committed to in terms of infrastructure that may improve connectivity – including cross-border connectivity – in parts of the border region, as set out in the New Decade, New Approach agreement, for example, there is nevertheless an ongoing sense that rural areas continue to lag behind urban centres in terms of public policy focus. Whether responding from a migrants' or PUL communities' perspective, interviewees for this scoping study repeatedly stressed the need for significant investment in the border region's infrastructure to improve the retention of its population and its attraction to new sources of economic activity. Without this renewed focus on infrastructure, investment in border communities will not offer the benefits that would otherwise be the case.

Linked to the issue of recognition and validation, there were also reported instances of individuals representing funding bodies displaying inappropriate or negative attitudes towards minority communities – particularly migrant communities, where racial prejudices were seen as being a contributory factor – who were in receipt of funding support. There were concerns that there was often a lack of understanding of the specific needs of minority communities and of the nature of the border region, including its rurality, which meant the support offered to funded projects was shaped according to dominant modes of thinking more appropriate for urban settings with a different population make-up.

The RCN report for this scoping study highlighted the concern that funding provision and the initiatives supported can be excessively focused on overarching policy targets rather than the real needs of minority communities. It states:

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 (RCN, p.9).

Indeed, this issue along with the question of the relative degrees of support for and focus on single-identity and cross-community work is a longstanding one. Although the community groups who developed it decided not to include it in the final version of the New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands, for example, there was a general consensus voiced during the work of the Centre for Cross Border Studies' "Towards a New Common Chapter" project that funding was too often provided on the basis of achieving levels of participation that were not reflective of the landscape in which the funded projects were taking place. Moreover, as the Rural Community Network report notes, "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" (RCN, p.9). Additionally, this can mean that smaller organisations (continue to) lack the confidence and/or technical capacity to apply for such funding, leading to the conclusion that "Public sector agencies should be supporting groups with this funding and not leave it to low capacity groups to do this" (Lavery, p.18).

It is important to stress, however, that **although there is a voiced need for single-identity work to be supported among minority border communities, there is also ample recognition among PUL communities of the value of cross-community work.** Thus, interviewees for Peter Lavery's report for this scoping study cited how "Some communities who have participated in the Peace Projects have seen significant improvement in relationships between cross-communities in all ages" (Lavery, p.15), while the Rural Community Network report concludes 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 with the Protestant community" (RCN, p.13). However, it is also important to note that although the research undertaken by Rural Community Network for this scoping study found "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", the same was not necessarily the case within more rural areas of the border region where information suggests "some within Protestant communities are uncomfortable with the 'labelling' of good relations and cross community work" (RCN, p.15).

For those responsible for the provision of funding support to border communities, and to minority border communities in particular, where this is not already the case there is a need for determined efforts to establish genuine partnership approaches to the funding relationship. Such efforts should mean that the "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” (RCN, p.15). **There is also a need for greater medium-term investments, “enabling the community/civic sector to set bolder targets and build in more formative evaluative practice” (RCN, p.15)**, and lessening the emphasis on short-term (one-year or shorter) funding interventions that are unlikely to have sustainable impacts and are instead incentivising quantitative rather than qualitative measures of change.

Conclusions

As noted by the Irish Government in its recently published [Our Rural Future](#), “Highly Rural/Remote areas, while spread throughout the country, are predominantly found along the Atlantic seaboard and in the Border region” (p.24). Until some of the negative characteristics associated with rural areas, which predominate on both sides of the border – especially in terms of connectivity – are resolved, the communities that inhabit them – including minority communities – will continue to lack the opportunities that may be available elsewhere. It also means that communities in the border region will be unable to fully exploit the benefits of investments made in their social and cultural infrastructure.

However, this should not in any way detract from the need to invest in and support border communities, especially as they are just beginning to deal with the changing and unnerving context resulting from Brexit. For minority communities in the border region the post-Brexit context is adding to pre-existing feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. It is a time requiring significant investment in the provision of relevant and reliable information that can offer border communities greater certainty and fill the vacuums created by the absence of such information, or even address misinformation that feeds into feelings of insecurity and creates artificial divisions between communities.

Above all, perhaps, the work undertaken for this scoping study has underlined the need for sustained investment in leadership in PUL communities in the border region. There are indications of members of those communities being ready to offer alternative means of leadership, and that those leaders should be sought among sections of those communities that are often marginalised. Equally, local government networks in the border region need to actively seek representation from such leaders, as well as from those from migrant communities, otherwise local structures will find themselves ill-prepared to equip their populations for the new context arising from Brexit and from the imperative to recover socially and economically from the current Coronavirus pandemic.

CONTACTS

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

39 Abbey Street, Armagh BT61 7EB

028 (048 from Republic of Ireland) 3751 1550

ccbs@qub.ac.uk

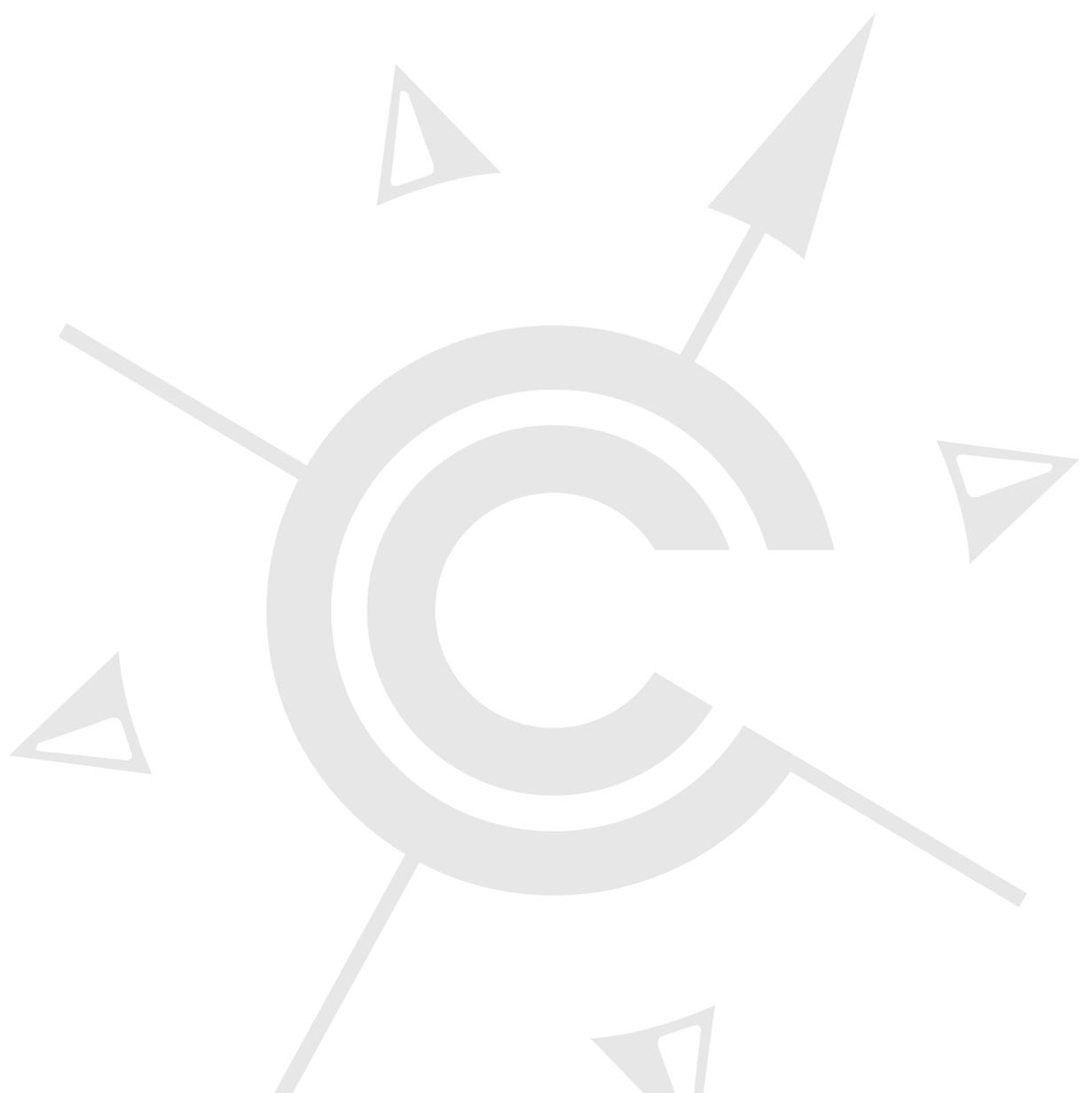
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