

Has the EU Ireland-Wales Interreg programme empowered sub-national networks?

Pre- and post-Brexit challenges of cooperation across the Irish Sea

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Introduction

The Ireland-Wales relationship, built around and across maritime geography, has often been neglected. If usually only implicitly, the social sciences start from land territories, defined by urban metropolises and remote peripheries. However, the case of cross-border cooperation across the Irish Sea presents several unique features. First, historically, cooperation has been built on a mixture of practices and cultural discourses, with the Irish Sea maritime border closely linked to hierarchical relationships between different levels of government – the national, the devolved and the regional level – connected by governmental and non-governmental actors. Second, the Ireland-Wales cross-border region, through the Interreg programme, was only formally institutionalised in 1994 by the European Union (EU). This new EU region assumed that shared common features, challenges, and issues would be handled more successfully on a cross-border basis. Third, policy networks and interest groups have shaped cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Ireland and Wales. Having established themselves to ‘make sense’ of the space, they disseminated awareness among local civil society and governmental organisations and mobilised actors to connect spaces and modes of interaction in their daily practices. Fourth, the EU provided both the financial resources for partnerships and collaboration to develop across the Irish Sea and the broader governance framework within which policy networks could develop and participate actively in the life of the cross-border region.

Even with the EU playing such a critical role, the top-down institutionalisation of the Ireland-Wales relationship did not ensure a widespread awareness among citizens on both sides of the maritime border about their common cross-border identity. The Brexit process was a pivotal factor in fostering an understanding of the depth of relationships between Ireland and Wales across the Irish Sea. When the UK transition period ended on 31 December 2020, the Irish and Welsh governments announced the publication of a *Joint Action Plan*¹ — announced on St David’s Day, 1 March 2021, by the Irish Foreign Minister, Simon Coveney, and the Welsh First Minister, Mark Drakeford. Ireland and Wales had never had a *Joint Action Plan* before. In the document, their connection was positioned explicitly in the context of changes “already brought ... [to] the Ireland-Wales relationship [and rooted] in a flourishing collaboration across the Irish Sea ... [promoted by] common EU membership and joint participation in EU programmes.”² However, even if it is at the core of the *Joint Action Plan*, the nature and the genesis of the

EU-sponsored Ireland-Wales cross-border cooperation have remained somewhat unexplored.

This article contributes significantly to our understanding of the genesis of Ireland-Wales cross-border cooperation and the role of the EU in shaping it. This investigation matters not only about the *Joint Action Plan* but also reflects on how, to a limited extent, cross-border cultural identities and shared political purposes between Ireland and Wales have emerged mainly in the aftermath of the 2016 Brexit referendum. Furthermore, the history of relationships across the Irish Sea envelops more recent political developments in the field of Welsh devolution and the East-West institutions created by the *1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* – especially the British-Irish Council, which was also invoked by the *Joint Action Plan*.³ Finally, instrumental responses to EU incentives, including the invention of new territorial units, dominate the history of collaboration between Ireland – dominated by the dynamic Dublin metropole, and the UK's relatively poor western periphery.

First, the article examines the early years of cross-border cooperation between Ireland and Wales and the EU's role in institutionalising it. Second, it considers the broader context of the Brexit debates and its far-reaching consequences on the future of such cooperation. Finally, the conclusion stresses how the creation, the geographical dimension, the thematic priorities and the governance mechanisms appear as key achievements brought by the Interreg programme to the Ireland-Wales cross-border region. Such achievements need to be upheld to ensure the future dynamism and the efficacy of bottom-up representation processes within the cross-border territorial context of the Irish Sea maritime region.

The genesis of the Ireland-Wales cross-border region: The EU Interreg Ireland-Wales programme

Before entering the empirical discussion, a short terminological note is necessary. Scholars who work on cross-border regions tend to emphasise specific spatial dimensions over others. In particular, 'scale' and 'level' are extensively employed terms. Both refer to similar dimensions. 'Scale' usually refers to a hierarchy of bounded spaces,⁴ while 'level' mainly describes territorially defined realms, focusing on competencies.⁵ Both typically mean

the local, the regional, the cross-border, the national, the European and the global sphere. However, cross-border regions emerge and evolve in and through all four and more described spatial dimensions. Regions do not just involve the ordering of scales or levels but also the organisation of territories, places or networks within. Territory grasps space segmentation; place refers to the local embeddedness of actors, issues or strategies; and networks capture the various cross-cutting connections and partnerships by governmental and non-governmental actors across borders.⁶ Understanding the multiple facets of cross-border regions allows for examining how strategic efforts, concrete outcomes and the changing balance of spatial aspects interact.⁷

The overarching EU policy driver for Ireland-Wales cross-border cooperation is the *EU Cohesion Policy* which has its legal basis in Articles 174 to 178 of the *Treaty on the Functioning of the EU* (TFEU). It aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion by reducing disparities in the level of development between regions. EU Commission President, Jacques Delors, introduced the Cohesion Policy, which provides the investment framework required to achieve the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the community. It is delivered through three European structural and investment funds, which together – including national co-financing – amount to €644 billion. One of these funds is the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).⁸ The ERDF aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the EU by correcting imbalances between its regions, particularly through thematic concentration. It focuses its investment on four priority areas, and the Interreg programme was initially developed in this context, in 1990, as a community initiative.

Ireland-Wales cross-border cooperation became eligible for Interreg funding in 1994, following the lobbying of organisations whose main objective was fostering linkages among those in Ireland and Wales interested in promoting cross-border cooperation. These were the Irish Sea Maritime Forum and the Central Sea Corridor.⁹ The involvement in a transnational framework was seen as linking those working in similar sectors across the Irish Sea, thereby providing ideas and models of best practices in cross-border cooperation. In addition, the programme had to achieve a strategic fit where policies intersected with specific cross-border needs and challenges. Therefore, the geographical organisation of the cross-border region was central to the initial discussions among actors and interest groups.¹⁰

Existing territorial demarcations influenced who could participate, thus producing effects of inclusion and exclusion, with distinct territorial claims related to ideologically motivated national projects. The defining physical feature of the area involved was the presence of the sea, which reflected centrality in the geographical organisation of the region. This comprised the central corridor of Dublin/Dun Laoghaire and Holyhead; the southern sea corridor of Rosslare/New Ross/Waterford; and Fishguard/Pembroke Dock and Milford Haven, with ports being of strategic importance and forming vital links across the sea border. Other areas involved are the Welsh counties of Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, Ynys Môn (Isle of Anglesey), Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire and the three NUTS III¹¹ regions in Ireland: Dublin, the Mid-East and the South-East. The major urban centre was Dublin, with the Irish part of the region having a higher population density (126 vs 70 persons per sq. km) and a considerably higher level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita than their Welsh counterparts, Ireland as a whole, and the EU.¹²

Specifically, it was the ‘place-based’ approach of Interreg, used by actors within the lobbying organisations above to legitimate the cross-border region’s specific interests and become eligible for EU funds.¹³ A ‘place-based’ policy is a long-term strategy to tackle persistent underutilisation of potential common resources and reduce ongoing social exclusion in specific places through external interventions and governance. A ‘place-based’ approach promotes the supply of integrated goods and services tailored to contexts and triggers institutional changes. In a place-based policy, public interventions rely on local knowledge and bottom-up mobilisation and consultations. These must be verifiable and scrutinised while considering linkages and partnerships among places.

Following this direction, authorities in Ireland and Wales presented matters of environmental protection and sustainable growth to the EU Commission as Ireland-Wales specific. They focused on enhancing cooperation through increasing the potential of the natural and cultural assets of the Irish Sea maritime area, by connecting it to a particular EU regional policy discourse. This strategically emphasised economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development to anchor local needs to the EU agenda. On the other hand, it also constituted an outcome of local consultations informed by grassroots interests. Hence, the first Ireland-Wales programme (1994-1999) was established on these foundations and focused on marine and economic development. Each subsequent programme built upon the same strategy,

focusing on, among others, sustainable growth and technical assistance (Interreg II, 2000-2006) or climate change and sustainable regeneration (Interreg III, 2006-2014).¹⁴

Successes were nonetheless moderate and the challenges highlighted are common to other Interreg programmes implemented in other cross-border regions of Europe.¹⁵ First, participants and policymakers found the low level of genuine cross-border projects funded and implemented through Interreg problematic.¹⁶ This was due mainly to the lack of administrative structures allowing for real joint management of the initiatives. Projects tended to be appraised and agreed within the local councils and according to the policy priorities for that specific Welsh or Irish administration. Subsequently, the working groups would form a third joint team, at which level information was exchanged regarding projects but involved relatively little overall collaborative planning and management. Second, there was generally not enough involvement from wider societal interests, who perhaps would also be interested in and affected by the decisions taken. Even in those areas of policy-making where one would expect much greater participation of local communities, the process was too closed and not cross-border enough.¹⁷ Third, the potential to deliver genuine cross-border projects depended on the relevant organisations' capacity to deliver. At the local level, business interests in Ireland and Wales needed greater access to information about potential opportunities. The local community level was in a similar position. Finally, organisations and networks at the local level experienced particular problems because Interreg initiated a growth surge in the sector but with little visible means of sustainability in the long term. Some networks depended only on EU money, and their survival was subservient to the different funds' rounds and their eligibility criteria. Consequently, political and institutional uncertainty and a shortage of funds during those years hampered efforts of local interest groups and civil society organisations to consolidate partnerships and posed a significant challenge to their future role in cross-border development across the Irish Sea.¹⁸

The changing political context of cross-border cooperation in Ireland and Wales

The end of the 1990s saw significant institutional changes in Ireland and Wales, which impacted positively on cross-border cooperation across the Irish Sea. Devolution transformed Welsh politics. Before the establishment

of the National Assembly in May 1999, Wales-focused public policy-making had been mainly the preserve of civil servants in the Welsh Office, operating as a department within the UK government's Whitehall system. Consequently, democratic scrutiny came from the forty Members of Parliament (MPs) representing Welsh constituencies.¹⁹

The introduction of a distinct Welsh devolved political system – the National Assembly for Wales and later the Welsh Government – also changed the management of EU Structural Funds.²⁰ During this period, a case was made for reclassifying the West Wales and the South Wales valley as an EU NUTS II region qualified as an Objective 1 area.²¹ It was argued that the historic north-south division in Wales was no longer empirically valid, as Wales now suffered from a new division based on an east (largely prosperous) and west (largely poor and deprived) split.²² Accepted by Eurostat, the change brought together the least prosperous parts of Wales, enabling an index of aggregate deprivation to be constructed for the first time. The Wales European Funding Office (WEFO) was consequently created and made responsible for managing all initiatives implemented in Wales, with a bilateral relationship with the EU Commission and the National Assembly.²³

Creating new territorial units in Wales mirrored what happened in the Republic of Ireland. Before 1999, the whole of Ireland was regarded as an Objective 1 area for EU regional funding. However, in the lead-up to the Agenda 2000 negotiations, it became clear that Ireland would lose its status if the whole state was considered one structural funding unit.²⁴ Following negotiations, in November 1998, the government applied to Eurostat for a change in Ireland's single region status.²⁵ As a result, the country was divided into two NUTS II regions: the Border Midland & Western Region and the Southern & Eastern Region.²⁶ Although prompted by an instrumental desire to maintain a high level of EU structural funding, regionalisation in the ROI particularly responded to 'bottom-up' demands from the west and the east for more devolved management of EU money and a higher level of local representation within the EU institutions.²⁷

These transformations in Ireland and Wales worked in parallel with the new 2006 regulations introduced by the EU in governing the structural funds to improve the capacity of the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme to impact positively on the life of the cross-border region.²⁸ Interreg became part of the new European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) framework. Its overarching objective was (and still is) to promote a harmonious economic, social and

territorial development of the EU as a whole, which has to be achieved through close cooperation between partners across the EU in finding shared solutions to common challenges. In addition, the EU Commission introduced new eligibility criteria, emphasising the need for new Interreg programmes and initiatives to be based on mechanisms such as partnership and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors. The interlocking of new devolved institutions, regionalisation processes and the new eligibility criteria created new opportunities and novel spatial frames in which policy networks in Ireland and Wales could, directly and indirectly, shape the life and focus of cooperation across the Irish Sea.

The new Interreg Ireland-Wales programme 2014-2020 was to be delivered by WEFO – the managing authority – in partnership with the Southern Regional Assembly and the Government of Ireland’s Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The programme’s vision was to provide a framework for organisations in the cross-border area to actively cooperate to address challenges and shared priorities on both sides of the Irish Sea, thereby contributing to Ireland and Wales’s economic and sustainable development. The focus on the Irish Sea included projects that brought together scientific expertise to increase capacity and research into the effects of climate change. Universities and colleges connected with businesses to stimulate collaboration in sectors including hospitality, marine & environmental sciences, and life sciences. The programme also utilised shared culture, resources and heritage to boost tourism and visitor numbers to the cross-border region.²⁹

The preparations for the new programme saw many backstage consultations and regular meetings. These played a fundamental role in facilitating interregional lobbying and fostered different actors’ influence within their areas of expertise.

Discussions focused on the programme guidelines, the views of potential beneficiaries and the preferences of the responsible authorities. Our working routine included actions such as setting the agenda and framing the local needs to make them compatible with the Interreg objectives. Our Irish counterpart did the same. Then, we wrote joint papers and declarations, focusing exclusively on common Ireland and Wales issues to address in the programme. This was followed by the drafting of the partnership agreement, which expanded upon the areas that had been identified and we also

*suggested ways of improvements, based on the previous experiences of working within Interreg.*³⁰

This quotation highlights how policy networks, made by governmental and non-governmental actors, were empowered by the new political contexts and by the new EU guidelines. They were extensively consulted to shape the concretisation of the specific cross-border issues to be addressed by the programme and framed in a way that made them eligible for funding under the new Interreg criteria. The resulting partnership agreement set up an administrative organisation of the cross-border region that represented the needs of all policy networks involved.

Furthermore, to positively address some of the problems highlighted in the past, the new Ireland-Wales Interreg adopted several strategies. First, the development officers became instrumental in implementing and functioning the programme on the ground. They were regularly tasked to assist local communities in delivering the funded initiatives.³¹ In addition, they liaised between them and the managing authority. They also became a fundamental resource in terms of information about possible co-funding sources and how to tackle different types of administrative hurdles, often facilitating a common understanding of the other organisational structures and cultures.³² Second, the new Interreg Ireland-Wales programme was harmonised with the WEFO IT system to enable transparency, bottom-up accessibility, and participation. Finally, the management structure attempted to create a loose, fluid administrative organisation of the cross-border region, representing all levels of society and where networks could build interconnections and gain a vertical communication channel with the EU.

Ireland-Wales governance arrangements represented territorial and socio-political elements to varying degrees and are evidence of how a relatively small group of policy networks could influence the shape of an EU programme in function of their distinct interests. At the same time, none of them could enforce its vision unconditionally. National and devolved governments also influenced the Interreg outcomes. Elements of the governance architecture, discourses, and interpretations constrained, shaped, and informed policy networks' participation in the life of the cross-border region. The experience has been adjudged extremely positive by the EU, which still considers WEFO as "the smartest and most valuable team we have ever worked with."³³

Brexit and the future of cooperation

UK recipients, including Wales, have continued to receive EU funding over the projects agreed upon within the 2014-2020 funding cycle. However, after that, the UK government has only ensured future commitment for the PEACE programme in Northern Ireland, thus undermining the future of the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme.

The 2017 conservative manifesto pledged to create a UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to replace European structural funds. This fund aimed to “reduce inequality between communities across the four nations and to deliver sustainable, inclusive growth.”³⁴ Moreover, the 2019 conservative manifesto promised that “£500 million of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund [will be] used to give disadvantaged people the skills they need to make a success of life.”³⁵

The UKSPF was launched in April 2022. The November 2020 spending review described the overall purpose of the UKSPF as “to level up and create opportunity across the UK for people and places.”³⁶ The spending review also said that UKSPF expenditure will amount to around £1.5 billion annually and “at least match current receipts from EU structural funds.”³⁷ It will also operate over multiple years to provide certainty and enable long-term planning.

The UK government has planned to operate the UKSPF through a single UK-wide framework, using new powers under the *UK Internal Market Act 2020* to distribute money directly to local partners across the UK.³⁸ However, in practice, this means that the devolved governments only play a marginal role in allocation decisions within their territories, even though the fund will spend money on matters that lie primarily within devolved responsibilities, such as transport, skills and economic development. In this regard, Wales Minister for Economy, Vaughan Gething, declared on 13 April 2022:

Despite [the] unfeasible timetable, we attempted to create a partnership approach to this Fund that respects the devolution settlement and aligns with the clearly expressed wishes of people and organisations in Wales the funding plans set out by the UK Government today do not reflect the distinct needs of Welsh communities. We are concerned that too little will reach those communities most in need. The Welsh Government proposed an

alternative formula which would distribute funding more fairly across Wales according to economic need, but this was rejected by the UK Government. The proposed role of the Welsh Government also falls short of a genuine co-decision-making function essential to maximising investment and respecting devolution in Wales.³⁹

This short statement shows how Wales had intended to preserve the mechanisms originated from the experience of working within the framework of EU structural funds, among which the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme promptly figures. The same was reiterated during the *Irish Sea Symposium* held by the Welsh Government on 8 June 2022 to explore alternative paths of cooperation across the Irish Sea.⁴⁰

It is evident how the re-centralisation of all implementation processes related to the UKSPF provisions cannot uphold the achievements of the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme. The participating cross-border policy networks' role in shaping the essence of the priorities to be addressed grounded the whole system.

Moreover, their presence in the committees, the governance arrangements and their use of the place-based approach to new cross-border policies indicated just how successful the strategy of WEFO had been. From developing cooperation across the Irish Sea to persuading public authorities of their capacity to play an enhanced role in Ireland and Wales's public life.

If EU membership was written through the statutes that established devolution, in the absence of well-developed domestic structures, the EU also provided an external scaffolding⁴¹ for the UK and its intergovernmental linkages (unfortunately still underdeveloped).⁴²

The success of policy networks in participating in public policy-making came with challenges and opportunities. Their knowledge of the local level is invaluable and cannot be substituted. Their participation remains highly dependent on funds and governmental support. However, the key question is: why not build on existing and successfully established structures and mechanisms, thus taking advantage of the invaluable institutional learning from the past? Such an approach seems more constructive than attempting to build new strategies and structures that bear no resemblance to past achievements and have no possibility of compromise.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that one of the most valuable achievements of the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme, over the years, has been its ability to bring partners across all levels of society together across the Irish Sea to:

- establish the Ireland-Wales cross-border region; and
- work collaboratively and attract EU funding.

Moreover, the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme became an instrument through which the EU empowered policy networks in Ireland and Wales to play a more active role in shaping the opportunities and constraints of cross-border cooperation across the Irish Sea. The Brexit process played a pivotal role in raising awareness among governmental and non-governmental actors of the importance of this cooperation for the life and future of the cross-border maritime region.

The Welsh and Irish governments have recognised the value of these collaborations on several key occasions and in many official documents. As well as the 2021 *Joint Action Plan*, re-establishing the Irish Consulate in Cardiff at the height of the troubled politics of Brexit in 2019 was in itself a sign of change. By digging beneath the general political and economic implications of losing shared EU membership, this article has demonstrated how the flourishing of Ireland-Wales relations may face more significant risks in the future. Focusing exclusively on the governments' high politics or following the implementation guidelines set up by the new UKSPF will re-marginalise policy networks' role and harden the maritime boundaries around which cross-border cooperation across the Irish Sea had been built. The specific contribution of the EU in convening several rounds of the Ireland-Wales Interreg programme was to create space for a wide variety of locally rooted relationships, connections and networks. Yet, for all the high-level political commitment to their relationship, it remains to be seen whether the Irish and Welsh governments can find ways to sustain the social, economic, and cultural cross-border life that Interreg has helped to engender.

It would be more constructive for the UK government to build on the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme achievements. Instead of erasing them, understand that they provide a much more solid foundation for new politics of relations across the Irish Sea, potentially including Northern Ireland and Scotland, after Brexit. Their blueprint could stand in strand three of the 1998 *Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* and the East-West institutions it set up.

Endnotes

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- ⁹ Zimmerbauer, K. (2016) 'Constructing supranational regions and identities through branding: Thick and thin region-building in the Barents and Ireland-Wales', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 3.
- ¹⁰ The National Archives: Public Record Office (TNA: PRO) (1992) Kew, Cabinet Office, CJ 4/10419, 'European Union Committee of the Regions: Impact on Northern Ireland', 16 January.
- ¹¹ NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) is a harmonised, hierarchical and nested classification of European territory at six levels (NUTS 0 to NUTS 6). Level 0 corresponds to the territories of the Member States and the EFTA member states associated with this classification. The regional level is divided into three parts, NUTS 1 corresponding to the most extensive regional level.
- ¹² For more information, please visit Ireland-Wales Co-operation Programme (2014-2020). Available at: <https://irelandwales.eu/sites/default/files/2016-04/150325citizensummary.pdf> (Accessed 3 January 2020).
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- ¹⁶ Anonymous (2019) *Interview with Wales European Funding Office – WEFO – Interreg Ireland-Wales project officer*, Cardiff, Wales. November 28; Anonymous (2019) *Interview with Regional Development Officer - Southern Regional Assembly*, Waterford, Ireland. December 4; Anonymous (2022) *Interview with European Commission Officer for cross-border cooperation*, Belgium. July 15.
- ¹⁷ Ibidem.
- ¹⁸ Lagana, G. and Wincott, D. (2020) 'The Added-Value of the Ireland-Wales Cooperation Programme', *Wales Governance Centre*, Cardiff University, p. 13. Available at: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/2441536-report-analyses-ireland-wales-cooperation-programme>.
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- ²⁰ TNA: PRO (1997) Kew, Cabinet Office, CJ 4/10417, 'Future North/South and East/West Institutional Arrangements', 13 May.
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- ²² Boland, P. (2004) 'Wales and Objective 1 Status: Learning the Lessons or emulating the Errors?', *European Planning Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 249-270.
- ²³ McAllister, L. (2000) 'Devolution and the New Context for Public Policy-making: Lessons from the EU Structural Funds in Wales', *Public Policy and Administration*, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 41.
- ²⁴ Bachtler, J. and Mendez, C. (2021) 'Cohesion Policy: Doing More with Less' in Wallace, H. *et al. Policy-Making in the European Union (8th edn)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 233-253.
- ²⁵ Laffan, B. and Payne, D. (2001) 'Creating Living Institutions: EU Cross-Border Cooperation after the Good Friday Agreement. A Report for the Centre for Cross Border Studies, Institute for British-Irish Studies', *UCD*, p. 80-82. Available at: <http://www.crossborder.ie/pubs/creatingliving.pdf>
- ²⁶ Ibidem.
- ²⁷ Anonymous (2019) *Interview with Regional Development Officer - Southern Regional Assembly*, Waterford, Ireland. December 4.
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- ³¹ Anonymous (2019) *Interview with the strategic director of an Interreg Ireland-Wales sub-initiative*, Swansea, Wales. December 8.
- ³² Anonymous (2020) *Interview with European Interreg Programmes Manager*, Pembrokeshire County Council, Haverfordwest, Wales. January 8.
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- ³⁷ HM Government (2022) *UK Shared Prosperity Fund: prospectus*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus> (Accessed: 23/07/2022).
- ³⁸ *Ibidem*.
- ³⁹ Welsh Government (2022) *Written Statement: The UK Shared Prosperity Fund*, Available at: <https://gov.wales/written-statement-uk-shared-prosperity-fund>
- ⁴⁰ The event reiterated the willingness and commitment of all Interreg Ireland-Wales partners to keep momentum. Unfortunately, conclusions did not go further than renewing the commitment to develop the ‘Agile Cymru’ approach (<https://gov.wales/7-use-agile-ways-working>), evolving the current International and Cross-Border Group to support that agenda and finding new sources of funds to support cooperation across the Irish Sea in the future.
- ⁴¹ Jessop, B., Brenner, N. and Jones, M. (2008) ‘Theorizing sociospatial relations’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 26, No. 3, p. 389–401.
- ⁴² McEwen, N. (2021) ‘Negotiating Brexit: power dynamics in British intergovernmental relations’, *Regional Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 9, p. 1538-1549.