

Shared Island Shared Opportunity: NESC Comprehensive Report

COUNCIL REPORT

No.157 April 2022



NESC

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

An Oifig Náisiúnta um Fhorbairt Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Development Office NESDO

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An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
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An Oifig Náisiúnta um Fhorbairt Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Development Office NESDO

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Abbreviations

AD

Anaerobic Digestion

CAWT

Co-operation and Working Together

CNG

Compressed Natural Gas

CRU

Commission for Regulation of Utilities

CSO

Central Statistics Office

DAERA

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

DBEC

Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor

DCC

Donegal County Council

DCSDC

Derry City and Strabane District Council

DEIS

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DETB

Donegal Education and Training Board

DSP

Department of Social Protection

EAPN

European Anti-Poverty Network

ESRI

Economic and Social Research Institute

FDI

Foreign Direct Investment

GDP

Gross Domestic Product

GFA

Good Friday Agreement

GNI

Gross National Income

HRB

Health Research Board

HSE

Health Service Executive

Ibec

Irish Business and Employers Confederation

ICLRD

International Centre for Local and Regional Development

ICTU

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

IRC

Irish Research Council

I-SEM

Integrated Single Electricity Market

ISEN

Irish Social Enterprise Network

KPIs

Key Performance Indicators

LAF

Local Authority Forum

LEEF

Labour Employer Economic Forum

LYIT

Letterkenny Institute of Technology

MOU

Memoranda of Understanding

NALAB

Network for Adult Learning Across Borders

NDP

National Development Plan

NCI

Natural Capital Ireland

NERI

Nevin Economic Research Institute

NEWKD

North, East and West Kerry Development

NGOs

Non-governmental Organisations

NI

Northern Ireland

NIE

Northern Ireland Executive

NIEA

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

NIEL

Northern Ireland Environment Link

NILGA

Northern Ireland Local Government Association

NISRA

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

NPF

National Planning Framework

NSMC

North South Ministerial Council

NWGI

North West Gateway Initiative

NWMCR

North West Metropolitan City Region

NWPB

North West Partnership Board

NWRDG

North West Regional Development Group

NWSEA

North West Strategic Education Alliance

NWSGP

North West Strategic Growth Partnership

PBO

Parliamentary Budget Office

PHA

Public Health Agency

PPNs

Public Participation Networks

PPS

Purchasing Power Standard

PUP

Pandemic Unemployment Payment

RDS

Regional Development Strategy

RSES

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

SCoTENS

Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South

SDGs

Sustainable Development Goals

SEM

Single Electricity Market

SEMO

Single Electricity Market Operator

SENI

Social Enterprise Northern Ireland

SERI

Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland

SNP

Scottish National Party

SONI

System Operator for Northern Ireland

TCA

Trading and Co-operation Agreement

TSG

Tax Strategy Group

UR

Utility Regulator

USDAW

Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

UU

Ulster University

WFD

Water Framework Directive

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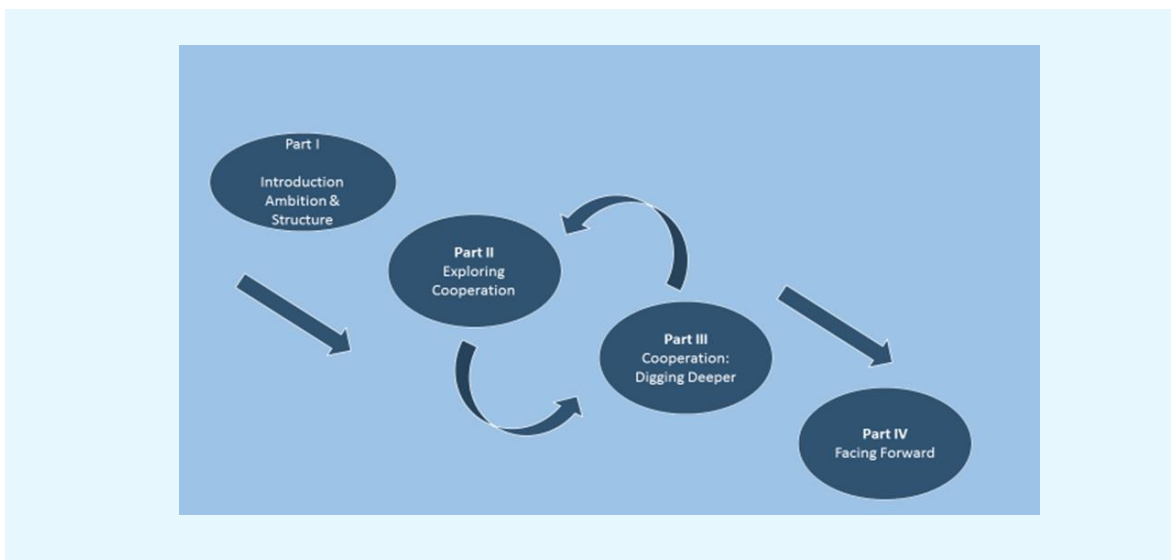
Any interpretation, omissions or errors are solely the authors' responsibility.

Executive Summary

Following the launch of the Government’s Shared Island initiative in October 2020, NESC was requested to produce a comprehensive report based on its mission of providing advice on strategic policy issues, relating to sustainable economic, social and environment development in Ireland, to the Taoiseach and the Government.

Report in Four Parts

Part I explains the ambition for and approach to this work. It is first and foremost an exercise in ‘listening and learning’. It is an analysis and synthesis of the existing knowledge, prevailing policy approaches, and understandings of key stakeholders, both north and south. Aware of the sensitivities, the work sought to understand and articulate perspectives, including concerns, on an inclusive basis. The work has been underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and absolute respect for the principle of consent. The research does not address the constitutional question, but focuses on sustainable economic, social and environmental development issues, in line with NESC’s strategic remit. NESC has approached the work on the basis of good neighbourliness.



Part II provides an overview of the shared context in a diverse range of areas. In the economic sphere it considers trade, income and output data, indicators of living standards, statistics on the labour market, good jobs, education, and regional variations between and within both jurisdictions. The social domain reviews poverty, mental health and social enterprise. Part II also considers the religious landscape and work on reconciliation and structured dialogue. The environment domain reviews climate and biodiversity – including water and marine issues, renewable energy, a just transition in rural farming communities, the circular economy, and regulation. The wellbeing dimension examines work on measuring progress using wellbeing frameworks, north and south. As well as these domains, information is provided on the shared institutional context.

Detailed consideration, drawing on examples, is given to the potential for further co-operation in four domains: economy, social policy, the environment and wellbeing.

Part III is a ‘digging deeper’ exploration in the North West to understand the ways in which co-operation works. The North West Region comprises the areas of Donegal County Council, and Derry City and Strabane District Council. Four online focus groups were held on: good jobs; green transformation; poverty and mental health; and mechanisms for co-operation.

Part IV draws out the conclusions and recommendations, and highlights the next steps.

Three Overarching Conclusions

First, there is very significant support, in practice, for an all-island approach to key economic, social, environmental, and wellbeing challenges. A solid foundation for the Shared Island initiative exists. This foundation is made up of working connections and relationships operating and evolving at various levels, from formal institutions to community-level networks.

Second, climate change and biodiversity loss provide a clear and urgent platform for ambitious all-island action and collaboration. The Council believes that this area is now ripe for further ambition, collaboration and action. Given the urgency and scope to protect and enhance the island's environment, and to maximise the available opportunities, the Council has made a series of recommendations to strengthen and deepen shared island collaboration on climate and biodiversity.

Third, the key factors which are shaping current and future collaboration are a shared agenda, resources, political certainty and support, legislative and regulatory coherence, and collaborative projects.

The Council found ample evidence of a shared agenda raising the profile and support for action in many areas, including on climate change, mental health services, and social enterprise supports. It also found that sustaining and deepening of resources, and legislative and regulatory coherence, is needed to strengthen co-operation.

The Council found that a conducive and certain political environment is fundamental to continuing all-island co-operation and engagement. The Council argues that in the period ahead, the main political actors – the Irish and UK Governments and the NI Executive – should seek and prepare for an opportunity to reset the context and agenda for north-south and east-west co-operation.

Finally, the Council found that, in order to deepen progress, efforts need to be focused on collaborative projects and outcomes which make a real difference to communities on the ground - on both sides of the border.

Recommendations in Five Key Areas

The Council recommends specific actions related to the economy and investment, social policy, climate and biodiversity, wellbeing measurement, and data co-ordination.

In relation to the economy the Council recommends that:

- Increased investment in infrastructure is needed to strengthen economic development, on an all-island basis and in the border areas.

- Further investment in the built infrastructure of the all-island energy network is needed, to ensure that the Eirgrid and SONI (System Operator for Northern Ireland) commitment to reach at least 70 per cent renewable electricity by 2030 can be achieved.

- A strategic working group should be established to explore the renewable energy opportunities – both economic and environmental – associated with solar, offshore wind, wave and tidal energy, and anaerobic digestion.

- The scope to mandate more strategic and collaborative working between the enterprise agencies should be considered, in order to better take-up opportunities to support enterprise growth and to attract investment on a cross-border basis.

- The work of the newly established National Clustering Policy Steering Group in Ireland should incorporate consideration of all-island opportunities, to identify the potential for interventions to achieve all-island economies of scale and scope.

- More joined-up approaches are required between the two administrations, to fully promote regional development and realise the vision for the regions set out in the Irish Government’s National Planning Framework (NPF) and the Northern Ireland Executive’s Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035. These would build on, for example, co-operation on spatial planning.
- Local authorities and the two administrations on the island should place a particular focus on the challenge of securing tangible benefits from co-operation.
- The two administrations and the tourism agencies should cooperate to grow local, sustainable tourism on a cross-border basis, as this would benefit both jurisdictions, particularly regions that attract lower levels of overseas visitors.
- Relevant departments or agencies north and south could be jointly mandated to develop a shared island good jobs agenda, building on their work on this issue to date.
- Further consideration should be given to the impacts of the trans-border workers’ tax relief for remote working, with engagement between the Department of Finance and other stakeholders, possibly within the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF).
- Although it would require agreement by the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, a more structured basis for consultation, co-operation and action by the two administrations on enterprise policy, and other economic development issues, should be considered.

In relation to **social policy**, the Council recommends that:

- The scope for periodic joint ministerial or joint departmental engagement with stakeholders in relevant sectors – to hear their views and expectations of what north-south co-operation needs to deliver – should be explored, to inform the development and updating of work programmes.
- The PEACE PLUS programme is an important opportunity to affirm the benefits of cross-border co-operation and interaction on a range of common social policy concerns. It provides a basis for mainstreaming and for further development over time, through north-south co-operation.
- North-south and cross-border collaborative events should be built into annual departmental and agency work programmes.
- The role of special initiatives in tackling concentrations of poverty on the island should be examined. The role of the annual summer school collaboration, between the Department of Social Protection (DSP) in Ireland and the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, could be explored as a means of initiating this dialogue.
- Both administrations, building on the platform already put in place, could explore the potential for greater recognition, support and development of the role of social enterprise on a cross-border and all-island basis.
- The successful experience of providing specialist services on an all-island basis should be examined. This could identify where scope exists for both administrations to provide a broader range of services on a more accessible, cost-efficient or higher-standard basis, through North South co-operation.
- The Government, working with the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE) and the UK Government, should encourage and support more strategic co-operation between further and higher education and training institutions – in order to enhance access, choice and experience for students, as well as contribute to institutional development and diversification.

In relation to **climate and biodiversity** the Council recommends that:

- Both administrations should take greater cognisance of the connected nature of the climate crisis and biodiversity emergency for the island of Ireland, and reflect this in a programme of co-ordination and joint action. This should utilise the capacity of the institutions and bodies of the Good Friday Agreement, in order to realise the tangible benefits of co-operation for this most urgent and common challenge for the shared island.
-
- A number of strategic working groups should be established to explore opportunities for future collaboration on key all-island climate and biodiversity concerns, including:
 - **sustainable agriculture:** to examine issues such as the further development of initiatives such as Farming for Nature;
-
- **the circular economy and bio-economy:** to examine the potential of an all-island approach to support the shift to a circular economy in Ireland and Northern Ireland;
-
- **renewable energy:** to explore the renewable energy opportunities – both economic and environmental – associated with solar, offshore wind, wave and tidal energy, and anaerobic digestion.
-
- **networks for nature:** to explore the potential to build on the progress of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan; and
-
- **marine and coastal impacts of climate change:** to focus on how to strengthen co-operation, and expand knowledge sharing.

In relation to developing **wellbeing measures** of progress the Council recommends that:

- There is scope and potential to develop co-operation around the shared interest in developing wellbeing measures of progress, which move beyond narrow GDP-based assessments.
-
- There is potential to use the wellbeing frameworks as a tool to facilitate engagement with a wide range of stakeholders across the island, to inform priorities in relation to key challenges, and to learn from each other.
-
- The Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) could cooperate in the development and application of wellbeing indicators and other measures.
-
- A north-south (and east-west) element should be built into groups that are set up to design and refine the respective wellbeing frameworks.

In relation to **data co-ordination** more generally, the Council recommends that:

- Both administrations could place a greater focus on interoperable statistical data and co-operation between the CSO and NISRA, for sectors which are important in terms of all-island co-operation or comparison, including environment, health and trade.

Next Steps

The Government's Shared Island initiative is focused on deepening mutually beneficial co-operation on the island of Ireland, by working north-south and east-west on significant shared challenges and opportunities, underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

This report and the potential areas for further action should now be considered by Government and the Joint Secretariat to the North South Ministerial Council, as well as by others with a role and interest in all-island co-operation and engagement – including political representatives, state agencies, all-island bodies, local authorities, civil society and community organisations.

Time will now be devoted to ensuring that this report – and its ambition to help identify scope to improve all-island ways of working, and areas where such co-operation seems likely to bear useful fruit – is widely shared.

The report will be launched in a manner that engages people across the island. It is an opportunity for NESC to engage with more stakeholders, citizens and experts in Northern Ireland. It also provides an opportunity to engage further with communities in the south on shared island possibilities.

The initial launch will be followed by a number of workshops across the island. These engagements will provide an opportunity for NESC, and by extension the Government's Shared Island Initiative, to continue to listen and learn.

They will offer an opportunity to consider, in depth, the areas where further research and work by NESC would add most value. The Council's current work programme includes a focus on agriculture and climate change, and wellbeing frameworks. These will also include an all-island focus.

PART I

Scene Setting

This section sets out the context, background and ambition for this work. It describes the NESC approach of 'listening and learning' to stakeholders, citizens, policy makers and experts in the south, and in the north and the rest of the UK.

Chapter 1: Introduction & Overview

Chapter 2: Listening & Learning

Chapter 1



1.1 Background and Ambition

The island of Ireland faces major challenges in the years ahead. These include: ensuring an inclusive recovery from the impacts of Covid-19; dealing with the consequences of Brexit; the climate change and biodiversity emergencies; and digitalisation and automation.

These are challenges which are shared across the island. The principle guiding the Shared Island initiative is that working together, with our nearest neighbours – north and south and east and west – to tackle challenging and complex issues is better than not working together.¹

The Shared Island is an initiative in the current Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, published in June 2020. The Taoiseach launched the initiative with an address on 22 October 2020, which set out the Government’s vision and priorities for a Shared Island and for working with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future, founded on the Good Friday Agreement (DoT, 2020).

The Government’s approach to a shared island involves:

- working in partnership with the NI Executive and the British Government to address the major shared challenges faced on the island of Ireland;

- further developing the all-island economy, working to deepen north-south co-operation in areas such as health and education, and investing co-operatively for the benefit of the North West and border regions; and

- fostering constructive and inclusive dialogue, and supporting a programme of research, to support the further development of a Shared Island agenda and the building of consensus on a shared future on the island underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

The Shared Island initiative is a whole-of-government priority, with important scope for contributions from local government and from civil society, across the island, with a broad, positive and practical agenda.

The Government established a Shared Island Fund, with €500m in capital funding to be made available over the next five years to 2025 and ring-fenced for Shared Island projects.

The three main objectives for shared island investment priorities and all-island partnerships, as set out in the revised National Development Plan (NDP, 2021), are:

- ***a more connected island*** – by investing in enhanced connectivity on the island to enable balanced regional development, sustainable economic growth, recreation and wellbeing;

- ***a more sustainable island*** – by north-south working and investment to protect the common environmental resources of the island, and to address the climate crisis and biodiversity challenges effectively; and

- ***a more prosperous island*** – through co-ordinated investment and co-operation in a number of areas, including research and innovation; higher and further education; and enterprise and tourism, to deliver a more regionally balanced and prosperous island for all.

Funding allocated from the Shared Island Fund will foster new investment and development opportunities on a north-south basis, and support the delivery of key cross-border infrastructure initiatives and commitments of the Shared Island initiative, as set out in the Programme for Government.

¹ Throughout the report the State is referred to as Ireland. Northern Ireland is used to refer to the northeast part of the island that is part of the United Kingdom. On occasions the terms north and south are used to describe Northern Ireland and Ireland respectively. Where ‘the island of Ireland’ or ‘all-island’ is used it denotes both Ireland and Northern Ireland. The terms ‘both jurisdictions’ and ‘both administrations’ are also used on occasion to refer to Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Shared Island Fund complements the Government's existing all-island commitments, including the North South Implementation Bodies, cross-border health services, and the Reconciliation Fund, as well as the Government's commitment to the EU PEACE PLUS programme which is coming on stream in 2022.

A Shared Island Dialogue series has been underway to foster constructive and inclusive civic dialogue on all aspects of a shared future for the island. To date, there have been eight dialogues, which have all taken place online: new generations, new voices; environment and climate; civil society; equality; economic recovery; health; education; and tourism. Box 1.1 provides a short overview of the dialogues.

Box 1.1: Overview of Shared Island Dialogues

New Generations, New Voices on the Good Friday Agreement

This dialogue took place on 26 November 2020 with 80 attendees, representing civic, student, sporting, faith, cultural, and youth engagement groups from across the island of Ireland. Key messages were a desire to have more opportunities for engagement on a cross-border basis on issues of shared interest such as mental health, education and climate change.

Environment and Climate – addressing shared challenges on the island

This dialogue took place on 5 February 2021 with more than 140 attendees, representing a range of civil society groups, business and agriculture organisations, as well as academic and research experts, local authorities, state agencies and departments from across the island. Key messages were the scope for greater co-operation and collaboration on environmental and climate issues. There was a strong focus on land use, biodiversity and nature-based solutions, and working for a just transition to a carbon neutral future. The role and development of networks was seen as important.

Civil Society – catalyst for connection and understanding on a shared island

This dialogue took place on 25 March 2021 with over 140 participants, representing a diverse range of civil society interests including the community and voluntary sector, business sector, academia, and the numerous religious faiths on the island. Key messages were the power of civil society to build trust, connections, and commonality of purpose across communities and traditions. There is already cross-border co-operation, which should be acknowledged and promoted. Culture and the arts play an important role in promoting better understanding. However, funding is essential to enable civil society and community organisations to build new connectivity, and to work together to ensure an inclusive and diverse shared island.

Equality on a Shared Island

This dialogue took place on 10 May 2021. More than 100 equality activists, campaigners and representative groups from across all the main communities and traditions on the island took part in the event. Key messages were the importance of the equivalence of rights across the island and here the Good Friday Agreement was seen to be important. It was acknowledged that any inequality experienced on the island is complex as the intersectionality between income, race, ethnicity, gender and ability are all factors that can contribute to unequal life experience, north and south. The role of civil society in advancing rights and equality was recognized, especially through community development approaches.

Building Back Better: economic recovery on a shared island

This dialogue took place on 2 June 2021, with over 140 stakeholders involved in business, enterprise and innovation. Key messages were the potential for greater north-south co-operation. It was argued that the twin challenges of Brexit and Covid-19 provide a unique opportunity to rebuild the economy on the island in a more inclusive and sustainable way. It was suggested that the common goal, north and south, of transitioning to carbon neutrality also presents significant potential for greater collaboration. In so doing, the importance of developing skills and innovation, and the importance of collaboration between government and industry was noted.

Working Together for a Healthier Ireland

This dialogue took place on the 8 July with over 120 people taking part, including patient representatives, health advocates, clinicians, practitioners and other health sector stakeholders. Key messages were that there are already many examples of successful north-south co-operation on health, with the potential for co-operation in more health areas. It was suggested that an over-arching strategy could be developed to help advance cross-border collaboration on health. The impact of Covid-19 on health systems north and south was noted. There is the potential to improve frameworks for sharing health data, north and south, and building on existing health networks.

Learning from each other: the future of education on a shared island

This dialogue took place on the 1 October 2021, with over 130 education and civil society stakeholders across a range of primary, post-primary, higher and further education, skills and research areas. Key messages were the potential for greater north-south co-operation across the education and training sectors, e.g. school and student exchanges; greater facilitation of lifelong learning; more use of distance and blended learning across the island; with scope for more co-operation in the higher education and training areas to meet skills needs. An existing model of such co-operation is the North West Higher and Further Education cluster. Education also has the potential to break down barriers and support reconciliation between different communities and traditions on the island.

Tourism on the shared island: Building on past success to create a sustainable future

The tourism dialogue took place on 20 January 2022, with over 160 participants from the private and public sectors concerned with the promotion of Ireland, as well as interested community and voluntary organisations. Tourism was held up as an example of what can be achieved when we work together – particularly in facing the challenges of the Covid pandemic for the sector – along with specific examples of successful initiatives. Issues were raised in relation to connectivity, particularly in relation to transport infrastructure; the skills/staffing needs of the sector; and sustainability. Conclusions related to the economic importance of tourism to the island; its benefits for mental health; its role in supporting community and social cohesion; and its value as a source of civic pride.

The final strand of the Shared Island initiative is a comprehensive research programme. NESC was asked produce a report on the Shared Island to inform the development of the Shared Island initiative as a whole-of-government priority. It has examined policy and co-operation in a number of key areas, including the economy, regional development, good jobs, social enterprise, poverty, mental health, climate and biodiversity, and wellbeing.

The NESC research will contribute to building a shared knowledge base and understanding about possible ways in which greater co-operation can emerge across a number of economic, social and environmental areas in Ireland, north and south, and also between these islands, east and west. The research has sought to engage with all the main communities and traditions on this island to build consensus around a shared future, with a focus on actionable areas of co-operation.

The work has been underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement and absolute respect for the principle of consent. The research does not address the constitutional question, but focuses on sustainable economic, social and environmental development issues, in line with NESC’s strategic remit. The findings are addressed to the Irish Government, and are intended to specifically inform the Irish Government’s approach to North South co-operation.

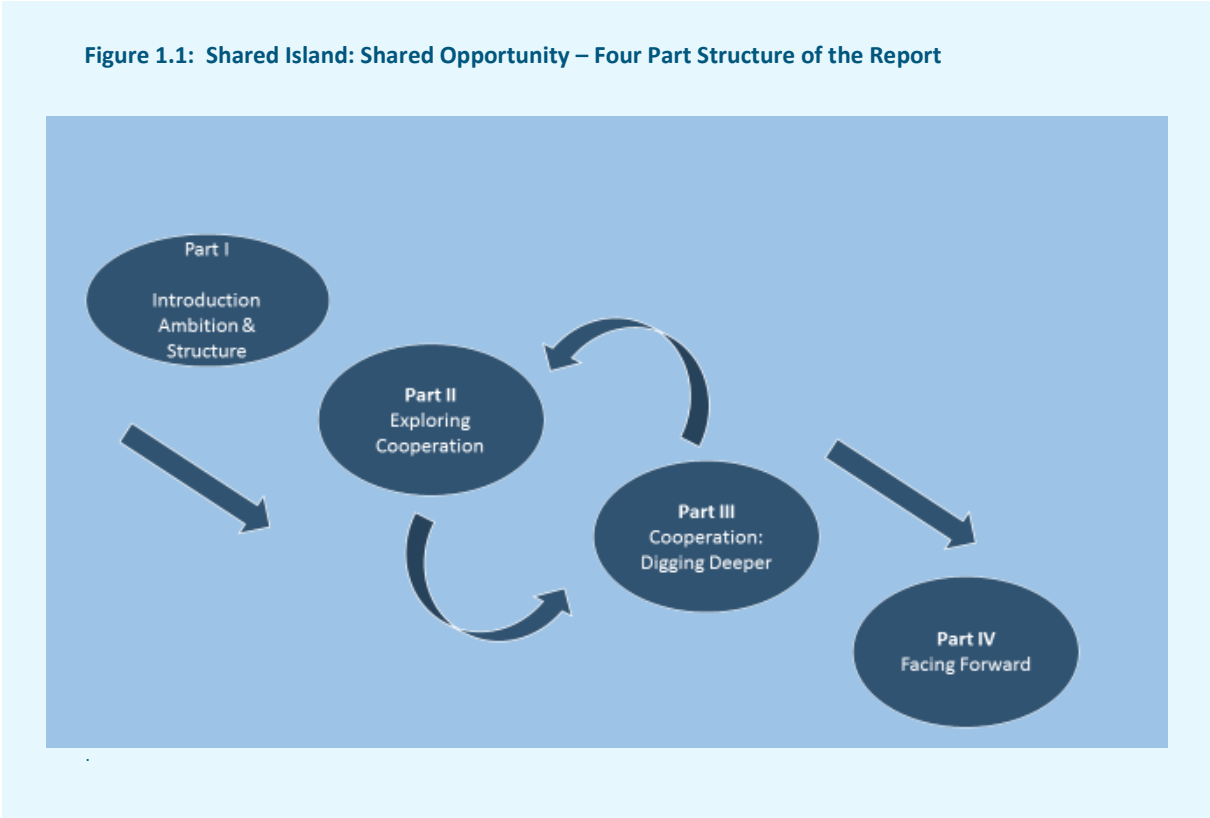
Other projects under the Shared Island research programme include ESRI research projects on: the all-island services economy; productivity linkages in the all-island economy; shared challenges and opportunities for health care systems, north and south ; and cross-learning and co-operation potential for education and training systems, North and South. The Shared Island Unit has also partnered with the Irish Research Council (IRC), the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South, (SCoTENS), and other partners, giving grant funding for research to provide an evidence base on opportunities to deepen mutually beneficial co-operation and exchange on the island, across economic, social, cultural, and political domains.

More broadly, in July 2021, the Government allocated €40m from the Shared Island Fund for a new North-South Research Programme to deepen links between higher education institutes, researchers and research communities on the island of Ireland, open to all research disciplines. The first round of funding under the programme is underway.

1.2 Structure of the report

Part 1 sets out the ambition and context for the NESC work. It also explains the structure and approach.

The overarching structure is captured in Figure 1.1.



Part I sets the scene for the research and dialogue on specific issues, with a view to developing a shared understanding of the potential to support and deepen all-island collaboration.

Part II explores a range of policy areas. It provides an insight into the state of play in key areas of economic, social and environmental policy, and of wellbeing. Detailed papers were developed in these areas² and these are summarised in Part II. They provide an insight into current policy and practice; practical examples; the potential for further collaboration; and enablers and challenges.

Part III examines aspects of collaboration in more detail. This ‘digging deeper’ piece was designed to develop a shared understand of the lived experience of all-island collaborative working. This included work in the North West region and a series of online focus groups on four topics: Good Jobs; Green Transformation; Poverty and Mental Health; and Mechanisms for Co-operation.

The work on Part II and Part III largely took place in parallel. Work on Part II shaped, for example, the selection of the North West region and the topics which were addressed. The emerging findings from the north west and the focus groups also shaped the analysis in Part II. For example, it provided detailed examples of collaboration, or specific insights on enablers.

In addition, given the urgency of the climate and biodiversity challenge, it should be noted that work in this area – as reported in Part II – included the results of detailed engagement, including a submission process.

Part IV faces forward. It draws out the key conclusions and recommendations from the NESC work on a Shared Island. It identifies three overarching conclusions about the nature and potential for all-island collaboration, and the issues which shape collaboration. It outlines NESC recommendations across five key areas. A final section provides an overview of the next steps.

² Links to these reports are available at <https://www.nesc.ie/work-programme/shared-island/>, accessed 25.02.22.

Chapter 2



2.1 Introduction

The NESC mission is to provide advice to the Taoiseach and the Government on strategic policy issues relating to sustainable economic, social and environmental development in Ireland.

The focus for NESC in this Shared Island work is to contribute to building a shared knowledge base and understanding about possible ways in which greater co-operation can emerge across a number of economic, social and environmental areas on the island of Ireland (NESC, 2020).

The work involved analysis and synthesis of the existing state of knowledge, prevailing policy approaches, and the understandings of key stakeholders. It included the results of consultation with the policy system and other stakeholders, both north and south. There has also been a strong focus on the lived and practical experience, on understanding issues from different viewpoints, and, in particular, on seeking to find ways to improve links between bottom-up and top-down perspectives.

The work has taken perspectives in Northern Ireland into account, through engagement with all the main communities and traditions. NESC is acutely aware of the sensitivities to this initiative, and has sought to understand and articulate perspectives on an inclusive basis, including concerns. As noted in the Scoping Report, NESC has approached the work on the basis of good neighbourliness.

This chapter outlines the NESC approach to its work on the Shared Island initiative.

2.2 NESC Approach to Shared Island

NESC was asked to undertake this work because of its working methods, its approach to research and evidence, and its role as a deliberative body. Of particular relevance is NESC's commitment to:

- i embracing a broad view of what constitutes evidence and research;

- ii deep engagement with diverse experts, practitioners, policymakers, stakeholders, service providers, representative groups, user groups and/or citizens; and

- iii linking bottom-up or frontline action with top-down views and perspectives.

These core research principles and practices are particularly relevant to the objectives of the Shared Island Initiative.

First, the very nature of the Shared Island Initiative requires that the work is progressed in an inclusive manner, engaging with all the communities and traditions on the island to build consensus around a shared future. This type of inclusive and intensive interaction can serve to build trust, deepen connections and foster new relationships between different communities and diverse traditions.

A number of individuals with considerable experience of both cross-border and cross-community projects highlighted that this was likely to be challenging, and would need to be approached in a sensitive and careful manner. Nonetheless, this process of engagement was pivotal to the NESC Shared Island work. It was, and is, seen by NESC as key to developing and deepening relationships, and fostering a shared understanding of common problems. Indeed, to an extent it can be considered as a project outcome in its own right.

Secondly, NESC's research examines complex policy issues – poverty, mental health, regional development, climate and biodiversity – on an all-island basis, within an overall focus on sustainability and connectivity. It is recognised that engagement, dialogue and problem-solving deliberation has the potential to foster a shared understanding of particular challenges, encourage new ways of working, and generate creative solutions to 'knotty problems'.

This approach also requires an acceptance that the way of solving a problem may not be clear at the outset, as NESC's work over almost 50 years has shown.

2.3 Overview of Research Methods

The theme adopted by NESC for this project has been ‘listening and learning’. This emphasis on inclusive engagement also informed the work on Part II, and the digging deeper work within the North West region.

Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the different ways in which this has been operationalised. It identifies five core aspects to the NESC work:

- interviews and bilaterals;

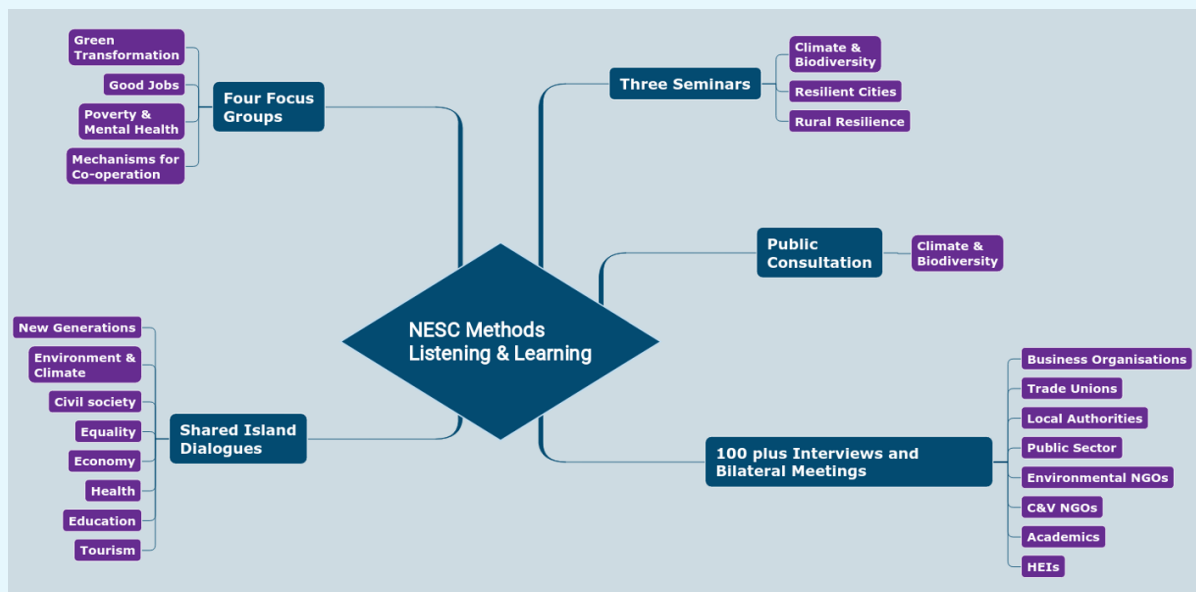
- Shared Island Dialogues;

- focus groups;

- public consultation; and

- webinars.

Figure 2.1: Overview of the NESC Working Methods



Each of the elements is briefly discussed below.

First, the foundational aspect of the work involved an extensive process of interviews with individuals and bilateral meetings with organisations. Over the 12 months, more than 100 meetings have taken place with practitioners, policymakers, academics and experts from a diverse range of institutions across the whole island. This has included business organisations and social enterprises, trade unions, and public and civic organisations – particularly in the areas of community development, health, social care, environment and enterprise development. It has included interviews with officials in government departments in both the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. It also included interviews with academics and policy experts in Ireland, and in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

Second, as part of its digging deeper work in the North West, NESCC organised four online focus groups on: Good Jobs; Green Transformation; Poverty and Mental Health; and Mechanisms for Co-operation. Approximately 60 individuals from across a range of civic, public, community/voluntary, and business sector organisations in the North West participated in these four workshops. See Box 2.1 for a brief overview of the focus groups.

Box 2.1: Overview of Focus Groups in the North West

Good Jobs – 28 September 2021

This focus group considered how good jobs have been created in the North West and in border areas in general; the obstacles which have had to be overcome; changes to current arrangements for creating jobs in the border region; and how these jobs can be made sustainable.

Green Transformation – 29 September 2021

This focus group discussed how important cross-border working is in the area of green transformation; the challenges of doing green transformation work on a cross-border basis; what would make things easier; and what needs to happen to help deliver that.

Poverty and Mental Health – 5 October 2021

This focus group considered poverty and mental health in border areas, such as the North West. It discussed the kinds of solutions that have worked well in tackling the root causes of poverty and mental health; and in supporting people to achieve a better quality of life.

Mechanisms for Co-operation – 7 October 2021

This focus group discussed what has been achieved to date through shared mechanisms for co-operation; the emerging challenges which may require new thinking; the limits of current mechanisms and enablers of co-operation; and what is needed to overcome these.

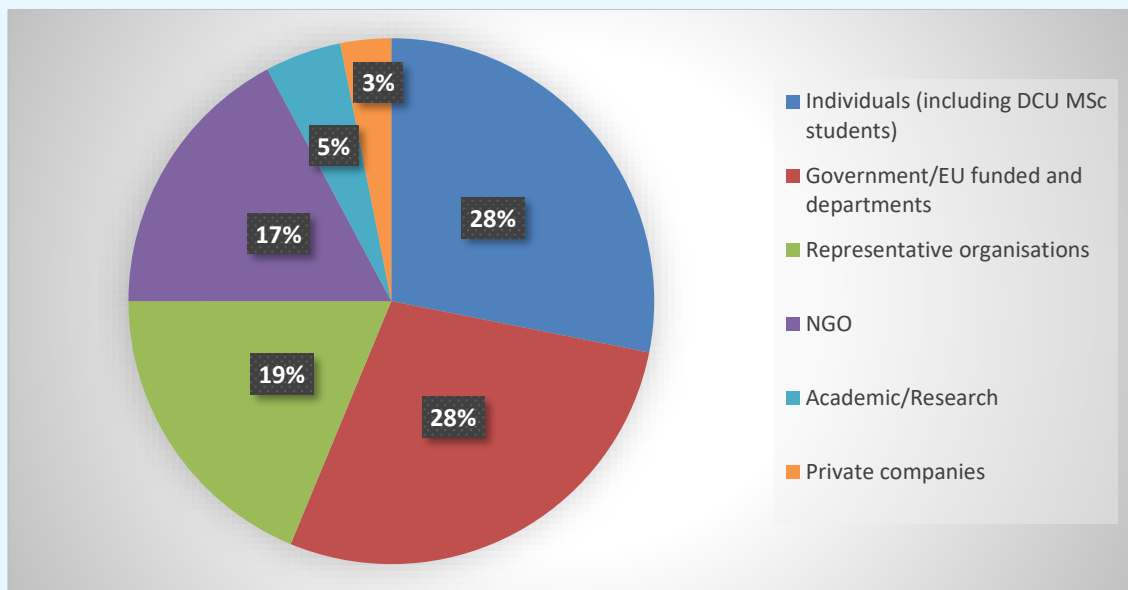
A third aspect was a public consultation on climate and biodiversity. A NESCC Secretariat consultation paper, *Climate and Biodiversity: Challenges and Opportunities*, published in February 2021, outlined key policies and developments in both jurisdictions, in some detail (Moore, 2021). It noted the severity and urgency of the problems across Ireland and Northern Ireland. It detailed areas of potential development including biodiversity, climate, renewable energy, rural resilience and farming, and resilient cities.

The paper formed the basis for an extensive consultation process. This involved 64 submissions, and 38 in-depth interviews, with people from a range of organisations and different areas of expertise. The submissions originated from across the island. However, most – 70 per cent (45) – were from people or organisations based in Ireland. A further 19 per cent (12) were from all-island organisations, and 8 per cent (5) were from Northern Irish organisations. The relatively higher number of submissions from the south may be a reflection of NESCC's more established networks in Ireland, and

the short time available to develop relationships with similar networks in Northern Ireland. Notable in the process was the participation of individuals and students, civil society groups and academics, north and south. These provided a voice to a range of actors who might not have engaged directly with NESC’s work on sustainability to date.

Figure 2.2 shows that over a quarter of submissions (28%) were made by individuals, and 28 per cent by government/EU funded organisations, including government departments. Nearly a fifth came from representative organisations, and 17 per cent from NGOs. Smaller numbers came from private companies and academics.

Figure 2.2: Source of Submissions



All of the submissions were carefully considered and drawn upon for the Council’s Shared Island report on climate and biodiversity. A summary overview of the main points in these submissions was also published as a background paper in October 2021 (Nic Coitir, 2021).

The consultation paper was presented at the Shared Island Dialogue on Environment and Climate, convened by the Department of the Taoiseach, on 5 February 2021. This event featured participation by Ireland’s Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan TD, and over 100 civil society groups, business and agriculture representatives, academic and research experts, local authorities, and environmental and sustainable development agencies.

Fourth, three webinars were hosted by NESC:

- Just Transition: Understanding Rural Resilience;

- Understanding Resilient and Sustainable Cities; and

- Climate and Biodiversity Ambition: Shared Island as a Catalyst.

These webinars were attended by up to 300 people in total. An overview of the webinars is provided in Box 2.2.

Box 2.2: Overview of Webinars held on Shared Island–related Issues**Just Transition: Understanding Rural Resilience – 12 February 2021**

This webinar took place to launch two papers on rural resilience, and to discuss their findings. One paper was on the *Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Ireland and the Agriculture Sector* by a research team from UCD (Kelly *et al.*, 2021) which sought to clarify different types of rurality. A key finding was the need to look positively at rural spaces, and to work with communities and farmers to ‘co-create’ solutions and local value. A second paper by TASC on *Economic Resilience in Sustainable Communities: Innovative Approaches in Public Spending to Maximise Local Benefits* (McCabe, 2021) examined how community wealth was increased in the UK city of Preston by a co-ordinated approach from local government to use procurement and job creation as a tool. The paper argues that the same approach has relevance in rural Ireland.

Understanding Resilient and Sustainable Cities – 15 April 2021

This webinar was based on a scoping paper by Maynooth University researchers on *Long-term Resilient and Sustainable Cities: A Scoping Paper* (Creamer *et al.*, 2021). This paper explores the meaning of resilient cities, and identifies several significant case studies, some of which were discussed at the webinar. There were contributions from Belfast and Bristol, along with inputs from Cork, Limerick and Derry. The work finds that resilience is rooted in action and not just high-level principles.

Climate and Biodiversity Ambition: Shared Island as a Catalyst – 8 December 2021

This webinar discussed the NESC Shared Island report *Collaboration on Climate and Biodiversity: Shared Island as a Catalyst for Renewed Ambition and Action* (NESC, 2021a). A range of stakeholders who contributed to the consultation process for the report participated in the webinar. They discussed the evidence to suggest that all-island collaboration can make a real difference to climate and biodiversity action; the opportunities and challenges; and what could be further developed.

The utilisation of these various approaches has enabled NESC to garner evidence from a diverse range of sources, including frontline actors and practitioners. They also have provided opportunities to potentially identify common problems, and to foster the co-design of shared solutions.

Fifth, the work has been informed by the Shared Island Dialogues. These have provided an opportunity to hear from a diverse range of stakeholders and citizens, see Box 1.1. The NESC work has also been used to support the Dialogues. In particular, NESC work on the Economy, and Climate and Biodiversity, were used as inputs/ background papers within some of the Dialogues.

In addition, during the course of the project NESC has produced reports which provided insight into the ongoing work:

- Shared Island: Projects, Progress and Policy: Scoping Paper (NESC Council Report No. 153, February 2021);

- Shared Island Consultation: Climate and Biodiversity Challenges and Opportunities (NESC Secretariat Paper No. 21, February 2021);

- Shared Island: Project, Progress and Policy – The Good Jobs Agenda (NESC Secretariat Paper, No. 23, March 2021);

- Shared Island: Project, Progress and Policy – The Island Economy (NESC Secretariat Paper, Report No. 25, May 2021);

- Collaboration on Climate and Biodiversity: Shared Island as a Catalyst for Renewed Ambition and Action (NESC Council Report No. 156, October 2021);

- Overview of Submissions in Response to Shared Island Climate and Biodiversity Consultation, (NESC Background Paper No. 156/1, October 2021);

- A Regional Perspective on Ireland, North and South (NESC Secretariat Paper, Report No. 27, November 2021);

- Sharing Knowledge and Lessons in Combatting Poverty (NESC Secretariat Paper, No. 28, December 2021); and

- A Shared Island Perspective on Mental Health (NESC Secretariat Paper, No. 29, January 2022).

Reports on social enterprise and on the focus groups in the North West are in preparation, and have informed the work in this report.

2.4 NESC Areas of Inquiry

NESC approached the work according to its mission of providing advice to the Taoiseach and the Irish Government on strategic policy issues relating to sustainable economic, social and environmental development in Ireland. The areas of research which were examined are shown in Figure 2.3.

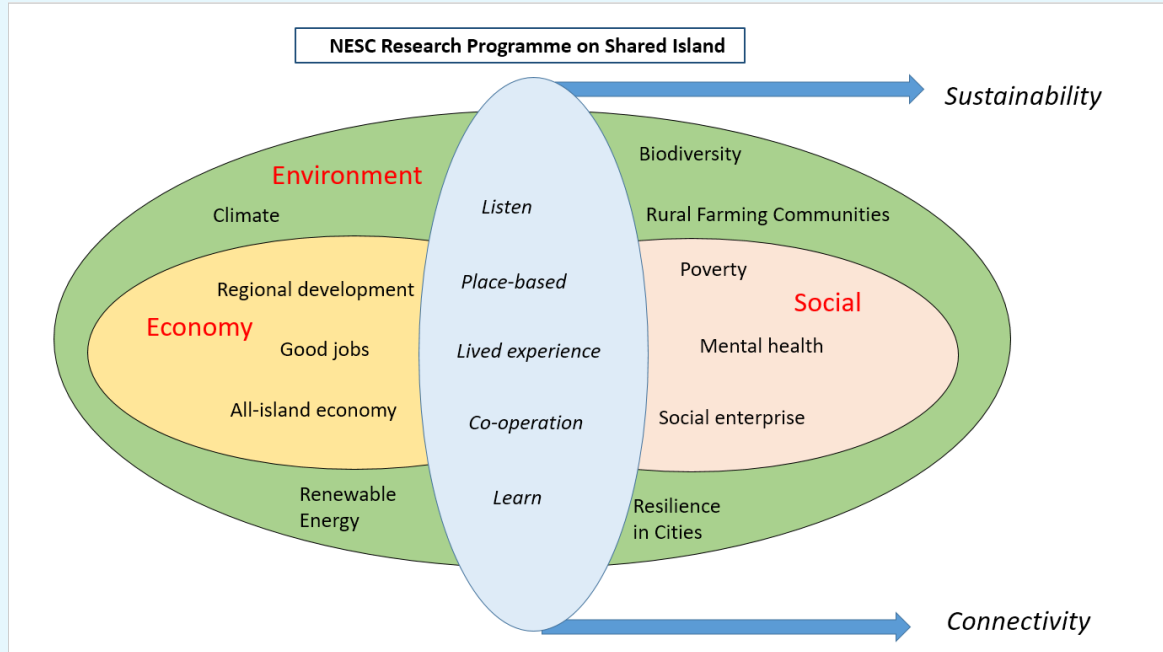
The economic sphere considers the all-island economy, regional development, and good jobs. The social domain considers poverty, mental health and social enterprise. The environment domain considers climate and biodiversity challenges and opportunities, in particular; but also includes broader consideration of water and marine issues; renewable energy; a just transition in rural farming communities; circular economy; and regulation. The report also examines work on measuring progress using wellbeing frameworks, north and south.

A particular dimension of the work is to consider the integration of these strategic spheres using a place-based approach³ with a cross-border element in the north west to provide a more in-depth view of the nature of cross-border co-operation. In this component of the work there is a particular focus on sustainability and connectivity.

Throughout the work, attention has been paid to engagement with people and organisations associated with the issues at national, regional and local levels, to gather a diverse range of perspectives. The focus has been on listening and learning, with a view to identifying common problems and discussing potential shared solutions.

³ A place-based approach is a way of planning and delivering services in a defined geographic location. It often involves a collaborative and integrated approach.

Figure 2.3: NESR Research Programme on a Shared island



PART II

Exploring Co-operation and Shared Interests

This section outlines the basis for thinking about economy, social policy, environment and wellbeing from an all-island perspective. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the shared economic, social, religious, environmental, wellbeing and institutional contexts.

Chapters 4 through 7 examine co-operation in practice and the potential for further collaboration. Chapter 8 identifies enabling factors and barriers to co-operation.⁴

Chapter 3: Shared Island: Shared Context

Chapter 4: Economy

Chapter 5: Social Policy

Chapter 6: Climate and Biodiversity

Chapter 7: Wellbeing Frameworks

Chapter 8: Summary Insights from Part II

⁴ The material in this part of the report draws heavily on Secretariat papers – listed in Part I. These are available at <https://www.nesc.ie/work-programme/shared-island/> accessed 25.02.22

Chapter 3

Shared Island: Shared Context

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the shared context which the Council believes provides a foundation for working towards a shared island.

It explores the economic relationship between Ireland and Northern Ireland, setting out some of the underlying parameters, including input and output, living standards, labour market and education, and good jobs. It outlines the similarities and differences in key areas that shape social policy – namely poverty, mental health, and social enterprise. It provides an overview of the religious context. It describes the commonalities in terms of the concern about, and approach to, climate change and biodiversity loss across the island. It also notes the emerging importance of wellbeing frameworks in both jurisdictions and in Wales and Scotland.

Finally, this chapter highlights aspects of the emerging shared institutional landscape, including bodies established on foot of the Good Friday Agreement.

The chapter is structured as follows:

- Section 3.2: Shared Economic Context

- Section 3.3: Shared Social Policy Context

- Section 3.4: Shared Religious Context

- Section 3.5: Shared Environmental Context

- Section 3.6: Shared Wellbeing Context

- Section 3.7: Shared Institutional Context

3.2 Shared Economic Context

In a 1992 speech to the annual conference of the Confederation of Irish Industry (since merged to form Ibec), Sir George Quigley⁵ introduced the concept of an ‘island economy’ for Ireland. He envisaged the island as an economic zone, ‘permeated by complex circuitry reflecting a network of market and non-market relationships’ (Quigley, 2013: 15). He cited a study for the Asian Development Bank on growth triangles in Asia: ‘this showed how, by exploiting economies of scale and integrating the resource endowments of their members, adjoining areas in neighbouring countries could together be far more competitive in sectors such as manufacturing and services (including tourism)’ (Quigley, 2013: 15). He noted that this type of economic integration in Asia was feasible among countries with very different political systems.

In 2018, D’Arcy and Ruane pointed to progress made towards realising this vision:

What was a ‘radical proposition’ in 1992 is an everyday business reality today for companies with high levels of all-island integration, for example, through input sourcing, production, service provision and supply chains (D’Arcy & Ruane, 2018: 7).

In his final interview, Quigley commented on the success of an enhanced north-south relationship:

Success can be measured in very practical ways. To mention but a few: the North’s sales to the South are now roughly the same as its sales to all the other European countries put together; there is close co-operation on

⁵ Sir George Quigley (1929 – 2013) was a senior Northern Irish civil servant and business leader. He chaired the Ulster Bank and was a Director of Shorts Brothers (now Bombardier Aerospace), among a number of Directorships. He also served on a wide range of public bodies, including the ESRI and the Institute of British-Irish Studies. He was an ardent advocate of cross-border and cross-community initiatives, and was the first to propose the concept of an ‘island economy’.

infrastructure development; and a Single Electricity Market is being developed (notwithstanding the absence of a north-south body in this area) (Quigley, 2013: 18).

In that interview he went on to say that he believed that there were still considerable potential benefits from further north-south co-operation. He pointed to public service provision, and cited Michael D’Arcy’s earlier research on the significant possibilities for gains from co-operation in areas such as health, higher education and research, energy, tourism, and water (D’Arcy, 2012).

This section provides an overview of the key dimensions of what Quigley termed the island economy. It outlines:

- income and output;

- living standards;

- labour market and education; and

- good jobs.

3.2.1 Income and Output

Macroeconomic measures of income or output per head are now considerably higher in Ireland compared to Northern Ireland. Strong economic growth in Ireland from the late 1980s enabled average income and output per head in Ireland to catch up with the EU average. The Northern Ireland economy has not experienced a comparable catching-up with the EU or UK level of output per head. Its GDP per head in 2018 was around 82 per cent of the EU (28) average.

Higher output per head of population in Ireland arises from a higher level of productivity (output per worker) compared to Northern Ireland. The standard measure of productivity, GDP per worker, exaggerates the productivity difference between Ireland and Northern Ireland due to measurement issues (related to the measurement of GDP, not specifically GDP per worker). The CSO now produces a more reliable measure that seeks to adjust for the distortions with GDP: modified gross national income (GNI*). This adjusted measure still indicates a productivity gap between Ireland and Northern Ireland.⁶

The larger part of the productivity gap arises from productivity differences between individual sectors rather than differences in sectoral composition. Multinationals play a major role in the higher productivity in Ireland. Turnover per employee in foreign-owned businesses in Ireland in 2015 was almost five times higher than among such businesses in Northern Ireland⁷ (McGuinness & Bergin, 2019). While this exaggerates the real productivity difference, it illustrates that multinationals in Northern Ireland do not have the same impact on productivity as those in Ireland.

The economy in Northern Ireland has been more stable compared to Ireland. The experience of the recession that began in 2008 was much less severe in Northern Ireland. While the annual average rate of unemployment reached over 15 per cent in Ireland, the highest corresponding rate for Northern Ireland was 7.5 per cent. Prior to the pandemic, the unemployment rate in Northern Ireland in 2019 was 2.7 per cent compared to 5.0 per cent in Ireland.

There are important differences in the export bases of the economy, north and south. Ireland has developed high-value sectors in goods and services that export on a very large scale to European and global markets. Exports have played a critical role in allowing Ireland’s economy to achieve strong growth in income and living standards from the 1990s, and they support highly-paid employment and generate a high level of corporate tax revenue. The Northern Ireland economy is less export-oriented and has a higher share of goods rather than services in total exports compared to Ireland.

⁶ In 2017, modified GNI* per head and per worker was still higher than the corresponding GDP measures for Northern Ireland (by 31.0% and 26.4% respectively).

⁷ For Northern Ireland, foreign-owned business are defined as non-UK businesses.

In both jurisdictions, there is regional variation in output per head and productivity.⁸ In Ireland, the broad Southern region (comprising the Mid-West, South West and South East) has the highest level of GDP per head and per worker. Regional GDP per head and per worker in Dublin are also far above the average for Ireland. The levels of GDP per head and per worker in the Border, West, and Midland regions are, to varying degrees, below the average for Northern Ireland. The Border region has the lowest level of GDP per head and per worker in the south. Productivity is mostly at a similar level in areas adjacent to both sides of the border, and below the average of the respective jurisdiction.

In 2017, output per head in Belfast was very high at 72.0 per cent above the average for Northern Ireland, and far higher than in any other district. The particularly high output per head in Belfast reflects the disproportionate concentration of output and employment there relative to the share of population. Belfast also has above average productivity. However, the gap between its productivity and the average for Northern Ireland is 4.2 per cent, much less than the gap in respect of output per head.

Productivity in the Mid and East Antrim district (north of Belfast) in 2017 was unusually high – more than 50 per cent higher than the average for Northern Ireland, and far higher than any other district. Productivity was marginally above average in Mid Ulster (101.4% of the average), and Lisburn and Castlereagh (100.6%), with all remaining districts being below average, and fairly close to the average of the Northern and Western region of Ireland. The lowest level of productivity in Northern Ireland was in Derry City and Strabane (85.4%), followed by Ards and North Down (88.7%), and Newry, Mourne and Down (90.5%).

3.2.2 Living Standards

Living standards depend on taxation and provision of public services and benefits, as well as employment, wages and prices. As measured by the average private consumption and government spending on services, living standards were estimated to be three per cent higher in Northern Ireland in 2016, due to higher provision of public services there (Bergin & McGuinness, 2021). However, this measure has some limitations. First, not all government consumption expenditure has a tangible effect on living standards. Second, it takes account of differences in housing costs, but the adjustment is based on average UK housing costs rather than Northern Ireland costs. It is not a comprehensive measure of the quality of life.⁹ In addition, the subvention to Northern Ireland from the UK government helps to support living standards, although its scale is debated, (see for example (Doyle, 2021). However, household disposable income was higher in Ireland than in Northern Ireland in 2017, after accounting for differences in prices between both jurisdictions (Bergin & McGuinness, 2021).

The regional variation in disposable income per head¹⁰ is much less pronounced than in GDP per head or per worker. This reflects the effects of taxation and government spending, while an additional factor is that disposable income is not prone to the accounting issues that affect GDP. While GDP per head in the Border and Midland regions was only around one-third of the average for Ireland, disposable income per head was 81.8 per cent of the average level in 2018 in each case. These two regions had the lowest average incomes. The highest disposable income per head was in the Dublin region, where income was 17.4 per cent above the average in 2018.

Up to 2010, regional differences in income were declining in Ireland, with above average growth in the Border and West regions and below average growth in Dublin. This has been reversed since then: over the period 2010 to 2018, the strongest income growth was in Dublin.

In Northern Ireland, the highest income districts are close to Belfast. Derry City and Strabane has the lowest income of any district in Northern Ireland (11.5% below average).

⁸ It was noted above that the CSO publishes an alternative measure for Ireland (modified GNI*) that seeks to adjust for distortions to GDP, but this is not available at regional level so GDP data is used here for regions.

⁹ A number of quality of life indicators are presented in this paper, drawing on Bergin and McGuinness (2021).

¹⁰ Disposable income is total household income less taxes and social insurance contributions.

Table 3.1: GDP per Head and GDP per Worker (Purchasing Power Standard) in Ireland and Northern Ireland, 2017

	GDP per head (PPS)	GDP per worker (PPS)
Ireland	54,500	121,986
Northern and Western	22,200	53,767
Border	20,800	53,191
West	23,400	54,225
Southern	66,100	154,209
Mid-West	n/a	n/a
South-East	33,300	86,275
South-West	n/a	n/a
Eastern and Midland	58,200	123,704
Dublin	78,800	149,961
Mid-East	32,200	87,947
Midland	25,000	54,036
Northern Ireland	25,800	59,846
Belfast	44,400	62,379
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	20,200	54,276
Newry, Mourne and Down	18,500	54,184
Ards and North Down	14,300	53,055
Derry City and Strabane	20,400	51,117
Mid Ulster	24,100	60,659
Causeway Coast and Glens	17,500	56,016
Antrim and Newtownabbey	25,000	56,281
Lisburn and Castlereagh	25,300	60,183
Mid and East Antrim	33,000	91,094
Fermanagh and Omagh	21,600	54,499

Source: Eurostat database.

3.2.3 Labour Market and Education

The share of the working age population (15 to 64) in employment in Ireland (69.5%) and Northern Ireland (70.9%) in 2019 were comparable to the EU (28) average. However, both were well below the UK (75.2%) and high-performing EU member states such as Denmark (75.0%). The share of the older population (65 years and over) in Ireland (12.0%) and Northern Ireland (14.9%) were both above the EU average (6.4%). A similar pattern is evident in labour force participation rates.

Within Ireland, the highest labour force participation rates in 2020 were in Dublin (64.3%), followed by the Mid-East (62.0%) and the West (61.1%), for those aged 15 years and over.¹¹ Within Northern Ireland, the highest participation rates (for those aged 16 and over) in 2019 were in two of the three districts closest to Belfast (Lisburn and Castlereagh, 68.0%; Antrim and Newtownabbey, 67.0%) and also in Mid Ulster (65.1%). Unemployment is lower in Northern Ireland compared to Ireland: in the first quarter of 2021 the seasonally adjusted rate of unemployment in Ireland was 7.3 per cent while the rate for Northern Ireland was 3.8 per cent.

Employment growth for the period 2000 to 2018 in Ireland (30.4%) was roughly double the rate experienced in Northern Ireland over the same period (14.4%). Within Ireland, the strongest employment growth over this period was in the Mid-East (41.4%), Dublin (37.2%) and the South-West (34.9%). Within Northern Ireland, the strongest employment growth was in Belfast, with an increase of 25.4 per cent.

The primary difference in the composition of employment between Ireland and Northern Ireland is that the public sector represents a larger share of employment in Northern Ireland (24.2 per cent, excluding public corporations in 2019) compared to Ireland (17.9 per cent, excluding commercial semi-states, in the same year). Within Northern Ireland, employment in public administration, health and education¹² is highest in Derry City and Strabane at 35.0 per cent, compared to a Northern Ireland average of 29.2 per cent. A high share (close to one-third) of employment in financial, professional and technical services, plus information and communications, is a shared characteristic of both Dublin and Belfast.

The share of the population with third-level education is considerably higher in Ireland (47.3%) than in Northern Ireland (40.6%), while the share for whom lower secondary level is the highest level of education achieved is lower in Ireland (16.3%) compared to Northern Ireland (23.8%). Ireland has one of the lowest dropout rates from education in the EU, while Northern Ireland has the second highest rate of early school leavers in the UK (after Wales).

In Ireland, the share of the population in Dublin with third-level education, at 62 per cent in 2020, was considerably higher than in any other region. The regions with the lowest shares of the adult population having third-level education were the Border (41%) and Midland (40%). In Northern Ireland, the districts with an above-share of third-level education are all close to Belfast: Lisburn and Castlereagh (51%), Mid and East Antrim (41%), Ards and North Down (41%) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (38%).

3.2.4 Good Jobs

Good jobs are needed on all parts of the island of Ireland. There is no one definition of 'good jobs', and it means different things to different people and in different places. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the high societal value placed on jobs in sectors such as healthcare, social care, public transport, retail, hospitality, and other essential services. However, for many individuals these jobs are low-income and higher risk.

Good jobs policy is focused on tackling sources of deepening labour market inequality. A good jobs agenda is a drive to improve the quality and productivity of work and the experiences, incomes and standard of living of workers (Thomas, 2021). It is focused on measures and actions to improve job quality within the labour market. In the context of Shared

¹¹ For regions within Ireland, data on participation of the population aged 15 years and over is used, as this is published by the CSO. The closest to this at regional level available for Northern Ireland is participation among those aged 16 years and over.

¹² Public administration, health and education is dominated by the public sector but also includes some private employment.

Island, these include a co-ordinated approach to skills and apprenticeships; labour market mobility; and, cross-border working.

There is co-operation between the two jurisdictions in relation to the latter, including trans-border tax relief – which was modified during the Covid-19 pandemic to accommodate increased remote working. Box 3.1 provides some data in relation to the extent of cross-border working.

Box 3.1: Estimates of Cross-border Working

Many people commute to work across the border, although there is uncertainty about the numbers involved.

The most comprehensive source for this is the census in both jurisdictions, but this information is dated. The 2016 census in Ireland shows that there were just over 7,000 workers in Ireland commuting to Northern Ireland, an increase of 10 per cent on 2011. In 2011 there were 6,300 people commuting from Northern Ireland to Ireland for either work or study.¹³ This only includes those travelling to a fixed place of work. Considerably more workers would cross the border in the course of their work.

A 2010 study by the Centre for Cross Border Studies estimated a higher number of people engaged in cross-border commuting for work – at 23,000 (O’Kane & Shiels, 2010). This estimate was based on a sample survey of employers, with the results extrapolated to the border region – defined as the area 30 kilometres either side of the border.

Ireland does not have a specific good jobs framework, but there is an implicit recognition of the economic and social benefits of supporting the creation of better jobs.¹⁴ The current Programme for Government articulates the need for a concerted policy focus on increasing the number of good quality and sustainable jobs in the labour market. The Government has also introduced the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 to improve the security and predictability of working hours for employees on insecure contracts and/or working variable hours.

The Northern Ireland Executive has also adopted strategies and policies that are supportive of the Good Jobs Agenda. In the New Decade New Approach agreement there is a focus on work quality, and better jobs is a key priority in the current Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework (2021). This priority commits to:

- the creation and development of more opportunities and better jobs, by tackling issues such as job security, wages and flexibility and giving employees a voice;
- improving employability and helping those who are unemployed into work, and ensuring the development of a workforce that is equipped and ready for employment; and
- protecting workers’ rights, and addressing ‘zero hours’ contracts and barriers to employment.

The UK devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales have introduced initiatives designed to substantially increase the incidence of Fair Work in their labour markets.

¹³ Northern Ireland held a census in 2021, while that for Ireland is taking place in 2022, so that more up to date information will be coming on stream.

¹⁴ *Future Jobs Ireland*, 2019, sets out an economic pathway for Ireland based on embracing innovation and technological change, improving productivity, increasing labour force participation, enhancing skills and developing talent, and transitioning to a low-carbon economy.

3.3 Shared Social Policy Context

3.3.1 Poverty

From a poverty perspective it is becoming clear that the pandemic and its aftermath is having a severe impact on many people, families and communities across the island, with an increase in poverty levels and inequality. Even before the pandemic, both jurisdictions were concerned about reducing poverty. In Northern Ireland, the most recent statistics for 2019-20 show that 17 per cent of people lived in relative income poverty (before housing costs), including 22 per cent of children.¹⁵ In Ireland, 13 per cent of the population was living in relative income poverty in 2019, including 15 per cent of children.¹⁶ The 13 per cent figure compares to an EU-27 average poverty rate of 16.5 per cent in 2019. Ireland is ranked 7th best of the EU-27 member states on this poverty indicator. The UK is no longer included in the EU poverty statistics following its withdrawal from the European Union.¹⁷

In terms of who is at risk of poverty, similar poverty trends have been identified in Ireland and Northern Ireland, with people who are unemployed, lone parents, and people with disabilities at greatest risk of poverty. Children and young people in both jurisdictions have a high risk of poverty, and have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions. Digital exclusion has also been highlighted by the pandemic. Other trends identified are the presence but invisibility of rural poverty, the increasing exposure of people in low pay to the risk of poverty, and the links between poverty and mental health. Some groups in the population are particularly marginalised and at risk of poverty, including people who are homeless, Travellers and migrants.

Though both derive from the Beveridge Report of 1942, the welfare states in the UK/Northern Ireland and Ireland have developed differently. In practical terms, the social welfare system in Ireland does well in reducing the risk of poverty, with the latest data showing that in 2019 social transfers (excluding pensions) reduced the risk of poverty from 30.6 per cent to 12.8 per cent – this represents a poverty reduction effect of 58.2 per cent.¹⁸ During the Covid-19 pandemic the introduction of special measures such as the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) helped to support people. However, there is a need to improve the service provision of health, education, childcare, housing and transport in Ireland to complement income support.

In Northern Ireland social security is a devolved matter, though in practice the social security system has been developed and maintained in close parity with the rest of the UK. In line with UK social security policy, many social welfare benefits are now administered through Universal Credit. There have been many problems with the implementation of Universal Credit, and in Northern Ireland some elements of the UK welfare reforms have been mitigated (NAO, 2018; Department for Communities, 2020; Johnson, 2021). Nevertheless, in Northern Ireland concerns have been raised about the adequacy of benefits. For example, the ‘five-week’ wait for payment of Universal Credit has been shown to increase food poverty and debt.

In relation to the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union, social welfare recipients will experience no change to the reciprocal social welfare arrangements between Ireland and the UK.

¹⁵ People are considered to be living in relative income poverty in NI if the income of their household is less than 60 per cent of the UK median household income. (Department for Communities, 2021).

¹⁶ People are considered to be living in relative income poverty in Ireland if their disposable income is less than 60 per cent of medium disposable income. See <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2019/> accessed 05.11.21.

¹⁷ See <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/156b21-social-inclusion-monitor/#2018-2019> accessed 13/11/21.

¹⁸ See <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2019/povertyanddeprivation/>, 13/06/21.

3.3.2 Mental Health

Health inequalities, the social determinants of health, and the links between poverty and health have become more prominent in the discourse around mental health. In parallel with the development of modern mental health services, there has also been a significant and positive shift in public perception, knowledge, and awareness around many aspects of mental ill-health. While it is difficult to quantify the effects of this shift, it is undoubtedly of huge benefit that more people now know, not only the signs of mental ill-health, but how to alleviate and even prevent them, and how to seek help to address them.

Northern Ireland has the highest prevalence of mental health problems in the UK. In 2018, the suicide rate there was 18.6 per 100,000 people. This was twice as high as in Ireland, where the rate was nine per 100,000 people for the same year (NISRA, 2018; HSE, 2021). In Northern Ireland, the legacy of the Troubles is still having a substantial impact on mental health, and there is a strong link between deprivation and high rates of mental illness in the areas most affected by the violence (O'Neill *et al.*, 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in demand for mental health supports, and it is expected that the full impact of the COVID crisis on mental health will continue to be revealed over the coming years. Impacts have included fear of contracting Covid-19, and the restrictions imposed to curtail the spread of the disease have led many people to experience loss of jobs, income and social contact.

3.3.3 Social Enterprises

Social enterprises provide services and employment in local areas. Essentially, social enterprises are businesses whose core objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact rather than maximising profit for their owners or shareholders. They often work to support disadvantaged communities such as the long term unemployed, people with disabilities, and Travellers, and/or to address issues such as food poverty, social housing, or environmental matters.

Social enterprises, like other businesses, have had to grapple with the economic and social challenges posed by the Covid-19 health crisis. Significantly, social enterprises in both Ireland and Northern Ireland have demonstrated a remarkable degree of resilience in responding to this public health emergency. In particular, the core values and organisational characteristics of social enterprises – their embeddedness in local communities; an overt focus on inclusivity; an inherent flexibility and agility; the capacity to mobilise both economic and social resources; and a tradition of developing innovative and tailored responses – has enabled them to pivot and adjust to these issues in an effective manner. This has served to reaffirm the social value of social enterprises.

Social enterprise is represented by a number of networks on the island of Ireland. The Irish Social Enterprise Network (ISEN) is the national body for social enterprise in Ireland and Northern Ireland.¹⁹ ISEN helps social enterprises and social innovators in getting their ideas off the ground, providing supports for development and making social enterprises more visible. It is the only network specific to representing social enterprises in all parts of the island of Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, Social Enterprise Northern Ireland (SENI) is an independent member-led organisation that functions as the representative body for social enterprises and social entrepreneurs. SENI is responsible for delivering the Department for the Economy's social enterprise support programme. SENI also plays a key role in raising awareness of the sector and building relationships with civil servants, local authorities, politicians and the private sector.

In Ireland, a new practitioner-led national representative body for social enterprises – Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI) – was established in July 2020. During the research and consultation that preceded the design of the Government's *National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022*, it was evident that the policy system required a coherent and cohesive voice from social enterprises. The CEO of SENI also participated in this consultative process, and their positive experience was influential in this move to establish SERI. Equally, there was a view from social enterprises that they needed to respond positively to the new national policy framework, and feedback from practitioners indicated

¹⁹ See <https://www.socent.ie/> accessed 14.12.21.

that a new national body would be a progressive step forward. SENI and SERI have had a very positive working relationship from the outset, and see themselves as effectively sister organisations.

In addition, Community Finance Ireland, which provides social finance to the community, voluntary and social enterprise sectors, operates on all-island basis.

3.3.4 Shared Religious Context

No study of Irish history, or survey of future prospects on the island of Ireland, is complete without an assessment of the role of religion. This section looks at three aspects of the religious context:

- religious landscape;

- joint work on reconciliation and the legacy of conflict; and

- structured dialogue with the religious communities.

Religious Landscape

The Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, and a number of other religious communities are organized on an all-island basis.

There is a strong secularizing trend, arguably more pronounced in Ireland than in Northern Ireland, but also growing religious pluralism. The Orthodox churches are well-represented on the island (for example, the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church). There are significant Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Bahá'í communities, as well as the Quakers and the long-established Jewish presence. The Dublin City Interfaith Forum (DCIF), which has connections across the island, has been developing steadily over nearly a decade.

The newly established Centre for Religion, Human Values and International Relations, at Dublin City University, is focused on fostering engagement among religious actors, and dialogue with political leaders and other stakeholders on interests of mutual benefit – including vision, climate change and SDGs, economics, and housing – on an all-island basis.²⁰ The pluralist dialogue which is taking place is focused on making a tangible contribution to social inclusion.

The inter-faith dialogue, and new forms of engagement, are a response to Covid-19; new challenges at the European and global levels; and the approaches advocated by religious leaders at the international level, including by Pope Francis. The present historical moment is seen by the religious communities as a moment to encourage religions and public authorities, as well as other stakeholders, to come together to re-calibrate responses to key challenges, including the impact of climate change.

In this sense, the emerging overarching religious context is one in which religious communities increasingly see themselves as seeking to place their way of life, and understanding of social relationships, at the service of society. Box 3.2 provides a recent example.

²⁰ See <https://www.dcu.ie/religionandhumanvalues> accessed 14.12.21.

Box 3.2: Religious Communities and the Future of Europe

The DCU Centre for Religion, Human Values and International Relations, the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM), and Dublin City Interfaith Forum (DCIF) together held a session on ‘religious actors and public values’ at a European Union Fundamental Rights Forum (Vienna, October 2021).

On 2 December, they hosted an online consultation on a Conference on the Future of Europe, with the participation of religious representatives from across the island of Ireland. The meeting was addressed by the Minister for European Affairs. A report was subsequently published, see https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/inline-files/EUROPE%2C%20VALUES%2C%20THE%20FUTURE.%20FINAL_2.pdf. More detailed in-person discussions are planned for early 2022.

Joint Work on Reconciliation and the Legacy of Conflict

The work of the churches in the area of reconciliation is weighted towards the historically prominent Christian denominations, with the centre of gravity of this activity in Northern Ireland.

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM), where the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and the Catholic Bishops Conference work together, supports the principles and relationships set out in the Good Friday Agreement. In addition, the IICM has been active since Brexit in undertaking policy research and defining areas of common ground.

The public contributions of the Church Leaders Group (CLG) are very similar in character to the work of IICM. The CLG comprises the Catholic and Church of Ireland archbishops of Armagh, the Presbyterian moderator, the Methodist president and the president of ICC.

In the period December 2018 – February 2019, four regional dialogue events were held in Northern Ireland under the auspices of the church leaders. This initiative arguably contributed to the restoration of the NI Assembly in January 2020.

Structured Dialogue

Structured dialogue in Ireland was initiated in 2005 in the spirit of Article 17(1) of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The EU institutions engage in regular structured dialogue with representatives of the churches, and with religious, non-confessional and philosophical organisations. The dialogue takes the form of high-level meetings or working-level discussions, and is focused on policy issues on the EU’s agenda. Article 17(1) of the TFEU provides that:

The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.

The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.

Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations.

In Northern Ireland, the dialogue between public authorities and religious communities is carried out effectively, though less formally. The Department for Communities plays a leading role.

3.4 Shared Environmental Context

There are multiple environmental challenges facing the island, notably the need to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and halt biodiversity loss. Biodiversity is impacted by habitat loss, changes in land use, pollution and climate change. To protect the climate, emissions have to come down in all areas, and protecting against climate impacts represents a significant challenge for both north and south (DAERA, 2021; EPA, 2020). Other environmental pressures have been documented in relation to water quality, marine conservation and air quality.

A key characteristic of environmental challenges is that they are problems that face both Ireland and Northern Ireland alike, but also lend themselves well to integrated and collaborative solutions. The NESC Secretariat paper sets out the broad state of play and current policy landscape in both jurisdictions (Moore, 2021).

The rationale for considering environmental issues from a geographical perspective and collaboratively is convincing. Climate change and biodiversity loss are global challenges and require co-operation among countries to address them effectively. For a small island, a defining characteristic of the collective climate and biodiversity crisis is its indifference to geographical boundaries. The land, waters, air and nature that this island supports are shared, and cannot be protected fully without co-operation and co-ordination.

Ireland and Northern Ireland may focus on different approaches to address these challenges. The environmental regulatory and policy context in Northern Ireland is complex and still unfolding (Gravey & Whitten, 2021). The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), which is an executive agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), is responsible for environmental regulation. More developments will follow now that the UK Environment Act 2021 has been brought into law.

Access to research funding has been impacted by Brexit, but the EU-funded PEACE PLUS Programme, designed to support peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, is one recent development with an important environmental sustainability dimension.²¹

3.5 Shared Wellbeing Context

Both Ireland and Northern Ireland have been developing wellbeing frameworks. While GDP has traditionally been used to measure economic performance and welfare, there is a growing consensus that it is limited in its ability to capture many critical dimensions of human life (Durand, 2018). There has, therefore, been a shift internationally to look beyond GDP, to bring a focus to measures that capture people's living conditions and quality of life (Durand, 2018). There is increasing recognition internationally that current and long-term wellbeing measures capture human experience and welfare more adequately than GDP (Boarini *et al.*, 2014).

There are many definitions of wellbeing, but essentially they all seek to capture a society's progress as being broader than economic measures – taking into account social and environmental elements, as well as objective and subjective perspectives. For example, the OECD looks beyond the function of economic systems to the experiences and living conditions of people, in order to measure wellbeing (Boarini & D'Ercole, 2013). Wallace *et al.* (2020) suggest that wellbeing needs to be measured from a personal and societal perspective. Personal wellbeing focusses on subjective measures, while societal measures are fact-based and observable, such as educational attainment. The multi-dimensional nature of the concept of wellbeing means it must be approached in a de-compartmentalised way. The complexity of wellbeing needs to be reflected in the policy approach (Trebeck & Baker, 2021).

While there may not be an agreed, defined approach to wellbeing, proponents of the approach agree that the ultimate goal of public policy should be to improve wellbeing for all citizens (Weijers & Morrison, 2018). A wellbeing approach should reframe the role of Government, in order to understand and measure the contribution that is being made to overall progress. This approach consists of a measurement framework and a set of public policy reforms which aim to improve wellbeing (Trebeck & Baker, 2021).

²¹ Special EU Programmes Body <https://www.seupb.eu/PEACEPLUS>, accessed 17/11/21

A wellbeing framework is the mechanism for communicating the changing role of Government, and for measuring performance. Wellbeing frameworks have a number of common features. A multi-dimensional approach that combines indicators focussing on economic circumstances, and on material living conditions, is used in all wellbeing frameworks. All frameworks include a measure of people’s subjective wellbeing, such as life satisfaction, as one of their key components (Durand, 2018). Subjective wellbeing can be defined as ‘good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences’ (Boarini & D’Ercole, 2013). Frameworks vary internationally in the extent to which they embed into policy-making (Wallace *et al*, 2020) and, in practice, there is no designated one-size-fits-all policy approach that governments can apply (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020).

3.6 Shared Institutional Context

There are already many areas of north-south co-operation on the island of Ireland, and of east-west co-operation across these islands, both within the formal frameworks of the Good Friday Agreement and more broadly.

A number of bodies already operate or take forward co-operation on an all-island basis, such as:

- the North South Ministerial Council, as a political institution of the Good Friday Agreement, overseeing the work of the North South Implementation Bodies;

- other bodies with a cross-border remit, such as Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) in the health sector;

- the Centre for Cross Border Studies, as a research body for all-island co-operation;

- the Royal Irish Academy; and

- a range of civil society groups, including sporting organisations and professional bodies.

There is also the array of connections and areas of co-operation on a cross-border basis across society, e.g. through business, the trade unions, farming and environmental organisations, the community and voluntary sector, and research institutions, as well as between government departments and state agencies north and south.

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was established under the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 to ‘bring together those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government, to develop consultation, co-operation and action within the island of Ireland – including through implementation on an all-island and cross-border basis – on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the administrations, north and south’. At meetings of the NSMC, ministers from both administrations discuss policy matters and practical co-operation, and the work of the NSMC is supported by a standing Joint Secretariat.

The NSMC operates in twelve policy sectors, in six of which North-South Implementation Bodies have been formally established to take forward co-operation:

- **Waterways Ireland** is responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of inland navigable waterways across the island of Ireland, principally for recreational purposes.

- The **Food Safety Promotion Board (safefood)** has a mandate for the promotion of food safety, research into food safety, communication of food alerts, surveillance of food-borne diseases, promotion of scientific co-operation and linkages between laboratories, and the development of cost-effective facilities for specialised laboratory testing.

- The **Trade and Business Development Body (InterTradeIreland)** promotes trade and business on an all-island and cross-border basis and works to enhance the global competitiveness of the all-island economy.

- The **Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)** manages and oversees the implementation of EU regional development funding programmes, including the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes and the upcoming PEACE PLUS programme.
- The North-South Language Body operates through two agencies. **Foras na Gaeilge** is responsible for the promotion of the Irish language throughout the island. The **Ulster-Scots Agency (Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch)** is responsible for the promotion of greater awareness and use of Ulster-Scots as a living language and of Ulster-Scots cultural issues, both within Northern Ireland and throughout the island.
- The Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission operates through the **Loughs Agency**, which has responsibility for the promotion and development of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough for commercial and recreational purposes in respect of marine, fishery and aquaculture matters.

The six further areas of co-operation currently within the remit of the NSMC, where co-operation proceeds through engagement between relevant government departments and their agencies in both jurisdictions, are the following:

- **Agriculture** – the NSMC has agreed a work programme which includes consideration of Common Agricultural Policy issues; animal and plant health, policy and research; and rural development.
- **Education** covers areas such as education for children with special needs; educational underachievement; teacher qualifications; and school, youth and teacher exchanges.
- **Environment** has a work programme that includes environmental research and reporting; environmental protection and sustainable development; water and wastewater management; and waste management.
- **Health** – the NSMC discusses accident and emergency planning; major emergency responses; co-operation on high-technology equipment; cancer research; health promotion; and child protection.
- **Tourism** – the NSMC oversees the work of Tourism Ireland, a publicly-owned limited company established to promote the island of Ireland overseas as a tourist destination.
- **Transport** has a work programme covering strategic transport planning, including sustainable transport management, as well as road and rail safety.

In terms of non-governmental co-operation and engagement, the Centre for Cross-border Studies has a comprehensive all-island and cross-border research and dialogue remit, including its well-used Border People website, and also provides the secretariat for Universities Ireland and the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South, (SCoTENS).

Other bodies such as the Ibec-CBI (NI) Joint Business Council promote all-island collaboration from a business perspective. They support this work through six pillars of activity: business operations; all-island labour market; skills, education and innovation; physical infrastructure; climate change; and institutional engagement.

Trade unions have an all-island perspective, particularly through ICTU, which is the umbrella organisation to which trade unions in both Ireland and Northern Ireland affiliate; while the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) undertakes research in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

As noted, there is also extensive co-operation between civil society and community organisations across the island of Ireland and Britain, reflecting north-south and east-west connections and interests.

Experience across Europe shows that border regions tend to be less prosperous and to have poorer public and private services than more metropolitan regions (East Border Region, 2020). Experience has shown that these disadvantages can be reduced or overcome by the active engagement of national, regional and local authorities and their public, private and community partners on both sides of a border.

Part III of this report provides an in-depth examination of co-operation in the North West Region. Chapter 4 describes the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor.

However, there are other bodies across the border region who cooperate on a regional basis: East Border Region (EBR) and the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN). Box 3.3 and Box 3.4 provide some details on each. These examples also provide lessons which have helped shape the findings of this report.

Finally, the extent of co-operation was captured as part of the Article 50 process for the UK's withdrawal from the EU. A mapping exercise of areas of north-south co-operation was undertaken in the autumn of 2017, and published by the European Commission in 2019. Some 149 areas of co-operation were identified, although this was a non-exhaustive exercise.

Box 3.3: East Border Region²²

Formed in 1976, the East Border Region is one of the longest-established local authority-led cross-border groups in Europe. EBR has mainly focused on utilising EU grants for the economic, social and cultural development of the region, which comprises six local authorities: Louth County Council, Meath County Council, Monaghan County Council, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, and Ards and North Down Borough Council.²³ EBR has spent over €150m in EU funding over 25 years.

The Board of EBR comprises 18 Directors (elected members), three from each member local authority and six advisers (the County Manager/CEO or nominated official), one from each local authority.

A notable instrument of co-operation is the EBR Charter which was affirmed on 31 June 2021. This innovative charter for cross-border co-operation in the region takes account of the fact that the UK is no longer a member of the EU, and sets out future priorities for co-operation in the changed institutional context. The East Border Region Ltd is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, jointly owned by the six local authorities. The Charter, which is member-led, and signed by the six local authorities, outlines the detailed working arrangements for strategic co-operation between the six local authorities.

The Charter commits the six local authorities to a 'smart, sustainable, and inclusive' cross-border region. Indicative actions under the three themes are as follows:

A smart, competitive region – through research and innovation, digital services, SME growth and competitiveness, tourism, and smart towns, villages and rural areas;

A sustainable region – addressing climate change, sustainable transport including greenways and blueways, sustainable communities, sustainable energy and energy efficiency measures, waste management and the circular economy, biodiversity, and coastal management; and

An inclusive region – tackling social exclusion, tackling labour market exclusion by providing new opportunities and upgrading skills, improving social, community and educational outcomes, tackling health issues including mental health, recognising and celebrating cultural diversity, developing new structures for involving local people in decision-making for their communities, and cross-border sharing of approaches to issues such as social inclusion and community cohesion.

²² See <https://www.eastborderregion.com/>, accessed 06.12.21.

²³ It is noted that two of the counties in the EBR, Meath County Council and Ards and North Down Borough Council, do not actually cover border areas.

Box 3.4: Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN)

ICBAN was established in 1995, following recognition by local authorities of the need for a cross-border partnership in the central border region of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It was founded to promote cross-border co-operation and communication at local government level on common regional development concerns. It also sought to give voice to the people of this mainly rural region, which has an outstanding natural environment, with an economy driven mainly by SMEs.

ICBAN comprises eight council areas:

- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon;

- Fermanagh and Omagh;

- Mid Ulster;

- Cavan;

- Donegal;

- Leitrim;

- Monaghan; and

- Sligo.

These council areas share common concerns, namely: a need to reinforce and expand infrastructure; a sense of distance from centralised decision-making; and a perceived peripherality from each jurisdiction’s capital city. ICBAN’s role is to help to address these challenges by facilitating local government and key stakeholders in the development of the central border region.

The management board comprises 27 councillors, and was established in 2001 in response to growing levels of activity and responsibility in the network. The appointments to the Board are made by the eight member councils in keeping with the organisation’s desire to be cross-community, cross-party and cross-border.

ICBAN provides financial management support and project delivery systems, especially for EU funding. Some €50m in funding has been delivered by ICBAN across the central border region since 2003. Current EU-funded projects cover the themes of enterprise, tourism and collaboration, including one on literary tourism and one on virtual reality marketing for SMEs.

A Framework Document for 2021-2027, launched in March 2021, sets out a strategic response that is attuned to the assets and characteristics of the region. Its priorities focus on five strategic pillars: supporting economic development; infrastructure and connectivity; human capital development; promoting liveable communities; and greening the region.²⁴

A recent study from the central border region, undertaken by researchers from Queen’s University Belfast, found that the impact of Brexit is worse than expected for participants in the survey (Hayward & Komarova, 2021).

²⁴ For more information, see <https://icban.com/>, accessed 06.12.21.

Chapter 4

Economy

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines economic aspects of all-island co-operation. It focuses on trade links, regional development, cross-border working and energy. It suggests that potential to do more exists in relation to trade, enterprise development and investment in infrastructure.

The challenge on the economic front, particularly in the context of Brexit, is to look beyond borders to how the island economy that was envisaged by George Quigley can prosper.

This chapter focuses on four ways in which collaboration can be used to support the further development of an island economy. These are:

- a concerted focus on finding new opportunities for north-south trade;

- re-invigorating enterprise development linked with entrepreneurial firms and dynamic cross-border clusters or eco-systems;

- co-ordinated investment in infrastructure across key areas including energy; and

- addressing barriers to a more integrated all-island labour market.

Working on these areas will require significantly more collaboration across agencies and departments working in the economic arena. A view which emerged during the research is that a shared island economy is already in place to some extent, with many companies already operating on an all-island basis in terms of logistics, supply chains and organisational structure. It has been noted that an all-island labour market also operates for certain sectors, professions and counties (particularly in the border area).

In addition, Ibec-CBI (NI) Joint Business Council has been active in promoting the all-island economy since the early 1990s, with a particular focus on infrastructure projects. It is producing a report which will set out business priorities for the Shared Island, namely: a shared labour market; education, innovation and skills; climate change; infrastructure; supply chains; and the work of institutions. In relation to the last of these issues, it has been suggested that institutional arrangements and policy need to 'catch up' with economic and labour-market developments.

4.2 Co-operation in Practice

This section looks at co-operation in four areas:

- tourism;

- north-south trade;

- regional development; and

- energy.

4.2.1 Tourism

The external marketing of the island of Ireland as a tourism destination is undertaken by a joint body, Tourism Ireland CLG. It operates under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC), and its sponsor departments are the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland, and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in Ireland. Its board of directors is appointed by the NSMC.

In 2019, there were 11.3 million overseas visitors to the island of Ireland, comprising 9.7 million visitors to Ireland and 2.7 million to Northern Ireland.²⁵ An estimated 70 per cent of overseas visitors who come to Northern Ireland travel via Ireland (Ibec/CBI, 2018).

Total revenue from overseas tourism in 2019 for the island was €5.85bn. The revenue generated in Ireland was €5.2bn, compared to €677m in Northern Ireland. The British market is substantial both for Ireland (€1bn or 19.3 per cent of overseas revenue) and even more so for Northern Ireland (€424m or 62.6 per cent of external revenue). The largest share of revenue for Ireland is generated from the EU and wider global markets (€4.2bn or 80.3 per cent of overseas revenue), while these wider markets play a more modest role for Northern Ireland (€252m or 37.2 per cent of overseas revenue).

Ireland is an important tourism market for Northern Ireland, generating revenue of £142m or €162m in 2019, which was 19.4 per cent of external tourism revenue. There were 756,000 overnight visitors from Ireland to Northern Ireland in 2019, just over one quarter of all external overnight visitors. There were 1.28m tourist visitors from Northern Ireland to Ireland in 2019, who generated revenue of €402m. This represented 7.2 per cent of external tourism revenue.²⁶

4.2.2 Trade

Trade, and its growth over time, is one of the most tangible indicators of the degree of co-operation that exists between the economies, north and south.

Barriers to north-south trade have declined in the long term. This began with the Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement of 1966, and culminated in the introduction of the EU Single Market in 1993. Northern Ireland remains in effect in the EU Single Market for goods but not services. Cross-border trade has expanded, with the fastest growth occurring during periods of strong economic growth, although this trade has not grown as fast as Ireland's economy. In 1973 goods exports to Northern Ireland were 2.7 per cent of Ireland's GDP, while imports were 1.2 per cent of GDP. By 2019 goods exports had fallen to 0.7 per cent, and imports to 0.5 per cent of GDP, respectively. However, over the past decade trade has been more stable relative to growth in the economy.

The total value of cross-border trade in 2019, as estimated by InterTrade Ireland, was €8.4bn, comprising trade in goods of €4.6bn and trade in services of €3.9bn.²⁷ The value of total exports of goods and services from north to south was an estimated €5.05bn, while the value of exports from south to north was an estimated €3.285bn. Food and drink is the dominant component of cross-border trade in goods in both directions, representing over 40 per cent of this trade.

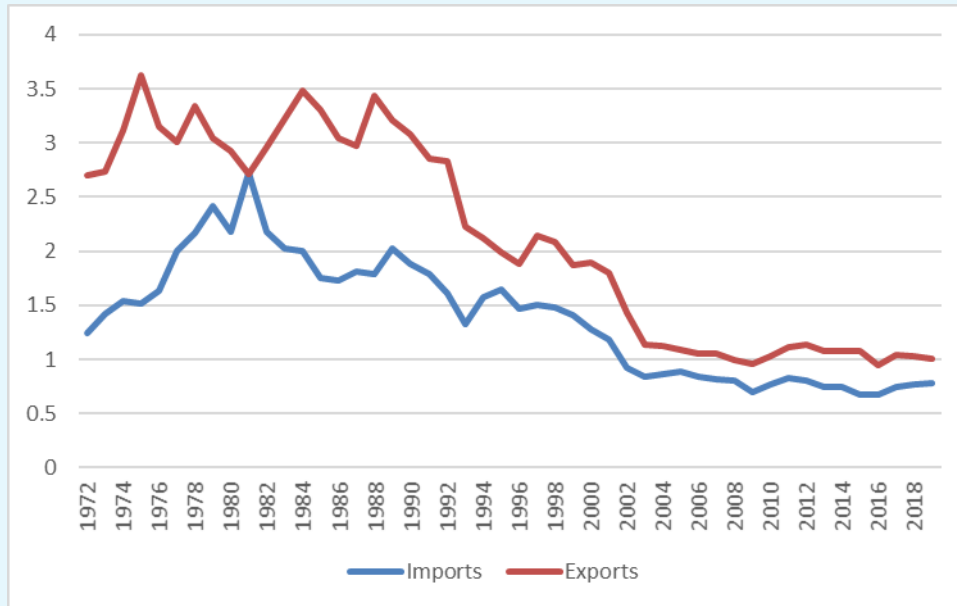
Ireland's exports are more service-intensive: services represented 59.2 per cent of the value of Ireland's exports in 2019, compared to 30.7 per cent of Northern Ireland's external sales. However, services exports are growing rapidly in both jurisdictions: over the period 2012 to 2019, services exports grew by an annual average rate of 15.4 per cent for Ireland, while Northern Ireland's external services sales grew by 11.4 per cent annually.

²⁵ Some visitors start their visit in one jurisdiction and then visit the other. Tourism Ireland adjusts for this in compiling figures for the island to avoid double-counting.

²⁶ Excluding receipts by carriers of passengers to Ireland and Northern Ireland.

²⁷ InterTrade Ireland treats retail and wholesale as trade in services rather than goods.

Figure 4.1: Ireland’s Trade in Goods with Northern Ireland as a Percentage of GDP



Source: Calculated from CSO Database.

The importance of Ireland as an export market for Northern Ireland is evident in the fact that exports of goods and services to Ireland in 2020 (€4.1bn) represented almost one-fifth of all external sales by Northern Ireland in that year. After sales to Britain (51.5% of external sales), Ireland is the most significant market for companies in Northern Ireland. Exports to Ireland in 2020 substantially exceeded Northern Ireland’s exports to the rest of the EU in 2020 (€2.2bn) (excluding Britain). For companies in Ireland, cross-border sales represented 1.5 per cent of the gross value of goods exports in the same year.

Cross-border trade is of particular value for small firms. Research by InterTrade Ireland (2013) found that almost two-thirds of the exports of small firms in Northern Ireland went to Ireland, while almost a sixth of the exports of small firms in Ireland were to Northern Ireland. For almost three-quarters of businesses across the island (73 per cent), cross-border sales represented their first export market; this applied to 90 per cent of Northern Ireland firms and 63 per cent of firms in Ireland.

Brexit has had a substantial impact on trade for Ireland, Northern Ireland and Britain. One effect to date has been an apparent increase in north-south trade. Goods exports from Ireland to Northern Ireland in the first 11 months of 2021 increased by €1,078m (48%) compared to the same period in 2020, while imports from Northern Ireland increased by €1,440m (64%). Imports from Britain to Ireland fell by €3,272m (-21%) while there was an increase in exports to Britain of €2,271m (+20%). It is understood that some of the fall in imports from Britain, and the simultaneous rise in imports from Northern Ireland, arises from a re-routing of trade: some goods that would otherwise have been imported via, for example, Dublin Port, are diverted to ports in Northern Ireland and then imported into Ireland from there. According to the Chief Executive of Dublin Port, this is motivated by the desire of hauliers to avail of less stringent border controls in northern ports compared to Dublin (Carswell, 2022). However, this effect is unlikely to explain the rise in exports from Ireland to Northern Ireland. During this time period (i.e. up to November 2021) the UK had not yet introduced checks on goods entering Britain, so there was not an immediate incentive to redirect exports in this manner.

4.2.3 Regional development

Ireland's long term vision for the development of its regions is set out in the National Planning Framework (Government of Ireland, 2018). The framework for regional policy in Northern Ireland is set out in a 2010 document, *Regional Development Strategy 2035* (DRD, 2010).

A framework for co-operation on spatial planning issues between the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland was published in 2013. The framework affirms that government departments will continue to work at a strategic level to share approaches in the development and implementation of their respective spatial strategies, and in the strategic planning of key infrastructure, with a view to maximising the value of investment in shared infrastructure.

Ibec and the ESRI have commenced a research programme which will see the development of an all-island macro-economic model. This will aid the wider understanding and knowledge of how the all-island economy functions, and also support policy priorities for the all-island agenda, in the aftermath of Brexit and Covid-19. It is envisaged that the new model will be used to produce economic forecasts on an all-island basis, and to provide a framework to analyse the impact of a range of issues and public policies of relevance to business. These issues include, but are not limited to: business operations; the all-island labour market; skills, education and innovation; infrastructure; and climate change. The modelling framework will be able to capture cross-border spillover effects resulting from changes across a range of policy variables in either (or both) jurisdictions (Ibec/ESRI, 2021).

The remit of economic development agencies, such as Invest NI, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, is to focus on their respective jurisdictions, north and south. However, in its current strategy, IDA Ireland also expresses its commitment 'to supporting the Shared Island mission set out in the Programme for Government to enhance, develop and deepen north-south co-operation and the all-island economy' (IDA Ireland, 2021: 37). InterTrade Ireland is distinctive among development agencies in that it operates on an all-island basis. Its role is to assist small business to explore new cross-border markets and to develop new products, processes and services.

There is co-operation among local councils in the border area. This is particularly the case for the North West. A formal partnership, jointly led by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, has been established to seek to advance the development of the North West City Region, an area centred on Letterkenny, Derry and Strabane. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) of the Northern and Western Region incorporates and supports the idea of a partnership approach to developing this region. This report, in Part III, examines challenges and opportunities for development in the North West.

The roadmap prepared by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, following the OECD Review of SME policy, acknowledged the need to strengthen policy instruments on collaboration and enterprise networks. In the view of Bradley and Best, collaboration among enterprises so that they become more competitive is critical:

It is the crucial element in building a successful indigenous enterprise strategy and needs to be brought centre stage. Knowing what enterprises are present in a region is the start. But the fact that clusters of similar manufacturing activities exist in a region does not tell us if the constituent firms are focussing on core capabilities and partnering for complementary capabilities in a way that creates an organic and highly competitive entity referred to as an entrepreneurial district (Bradley & Best, 2018: 196).

Clustering is a strategic focus for both Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, as a mechanism to promote balanced regional growth and to strengthen enterprise linkages and spillovers. Recent supports for clustering include the Regional Technology Clustering Fund, linking enterprise and regionally based Institutes of Technology/Technological Universities, and the incentivisation of regional industry-led clusters through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund.

Despite the emergence of various formal industry groupings and clusters in Ireland, from local networks to nationally significant R&D collaborations, the extent to which firms in Ireland – who may be sectorally and/or spatially aligned – are making enduring connections with each other on the ground, and with other actors who are of potential relevance to them, varies considerably. It is also the case that potential relationships internationally – that are so important in the

context of global value chains – could be more extensively developed through cluster-to-cluster engagement with counterparts overseas.

4.2.4 Energy

The energy sector is one in which there has been successful and sustained cross-border co-operation.

The electricity market is organised on an all-island basis and will continue on this basis despite Brexit. The Single Electricity Market (SEM), a wholesale market for electricity for the whole island, was established in 2007. It was the one of the first such arrangements in Europe (Commission for Energy Regulation, 2011).

The I-SEM is operated by the Single Electricity Market Operator (SEMO), a joint venture between the grid operators in the two jurisdictions (EirGrid and the System Operator for Northern Ireland, SONI). It is governed by the SEM Committee. This was established by Irish and UK legislation and has the decision-making authority for all SEM matters. The committee consists of representatives from the energy regulators north and south: the Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) in the south and the Utility Regulator (UR) in the north, along with an independent and deputy independent member.²⁸ On 25 February 2014, the two energy regulators signed a memorandum of understanding that sets out how they will maintain effective and beneficial co-operation and collaboration (Eirgrid, undated).

The I-SEM has generated substantial benefits. It has enhanced efficiency, reduced costs for consumers and improved energy security (FitzGerald, 2015; Gorecki, 2013). In the judgement of John FitzGerald, the SEM is probably the most successful of all north-south co-operation projects.

In the context of Brexit, the Northern Ireland Protocol provides for the continued operation of the I-SEM. However, the trading of electricity in the I-SEM has become less efficient. This is because the trading of electricity over the interconnectors (between Northern Ireland and Britain or between Britain and the EU) is ‘no longer carried out according to a single set of rules’ (Cross, 2021). The Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) states that new trading arrangements, governing trade in electricity between Britain and the EU, are to be put in place by April 2022. These new rules will be very complex and this deadline is challenging, according Cross (*ibid* 2021).

It is notable that Eirgrid and SONI have jointly committed to reaching at least 70 per cent renewable electricity by 2030 (Eirgrid and SONI, 2021). Their recent roadmap, *Shaping our Electricity Future: A roadmap to achieve our renewable ambition*, sets out a pathway to achieving the energy and climate ambitions and objectives for both jurisdictions. Energy and climate policy in both jurisdictions contemplates an overall transition to net zero by 2050, and the roadmap provides an outline of key developments to support this transition. To reach at least 70 per cent renewable electricity by 2030 will require actions from a network, engagement, operations, and market perspective. It is accepted that some of the challenges identified will be demanding, including the building of additional network infrastructure.

4.3 Potential for Further Economic Co-operation

This section focuses on the potential to expand co-operation. It focuses on four areas:

- new opportunities to expand north-south trade;

- re-invigorating enterprise development;

- investment in infrastructure;

- an all-island good jobs agenda; and

- cross-border and remote working.

²⁸ The deputy independent member may attend meetings but can only vote in the absence of the independent member.

4.3.1 New Opportunities to Expand North-South Trade

Following Brexit, there has been a large increase in north-south trade, with exports of goods up by 48 per cent, and imports by 64 per cent, in the first eleven months of 2021, as noted above. The long term impact of Brexit on north-south trade is not yet clear but it may lead to an ongoing higher level of trade compared to the pre-existing trend.

The largest potential for expansion of trade may lie in services. Recent work by the ESRI shows that services make up 26 per cent of the total trade going from Northern Ireland to Ireland, and 16 per cent of the trade going from Ireland to Northern Ireland. Lawless concludes that this suggests considerable scope for greater development of all-island services links.²⁹ It is worth noting, however, that Brexit may create new challenges for north-south services trade, which is not covered by the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

4.3.2 Re-invigorating Enterprise Development

This section argues that an all-island focus can help to stimulate enterprise development.

First, there is potential for enhanced co-operation in certain sectors, with a view to seeking to strengthen clusters³⁰ of economic activity at the level of the island of Ireland. Central to the concept of clusters are external economies: these are benefits that a company gets from being in a cluster that are external to the company itself: for example, the benefits to a company of being located in Silicon Valley. Effective clusters can enhance learning, productivity and innovation.

A study by InterTrade Ireland examined the presence of all-island concentrations of activity ('sectoral ecosystems' was the term used in that report). This research identified three economically significant sectors that may potentially benefit from enhanced co-ordination in relation to research, innovation, education and training (Magennis & Gough, 2015):

- pharmaceuticals;

- medical devices; and,

- software.

The National Development Plan gives a commitment to support clustering and development of high potential sectors for the island, including the bio-economy, advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences, and the green economy.

For these reasons a National Clustering Policy Steering Group has been established by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, to oversee the development of an overarching National Clustering Policy and Framework in Ireland. This will support clustering as a co-ordinated policy tool to deliver enterprise policy objectives around economic recovery, enterprise competitiveness and resilience, and the green and digital transition. The work also aims to maximise the development of international business linkages at EU level and beyond, and through the development of all-island and cross-border clusters.

Second, there is also potential to build connections with entrepreneurial firms. In a major study in 2012 of the border area (north and south) Bradley and Best found several examples of successful entrepreneurial firms; they referred to some of the firms they encountered as 'quite extraordinary' (*ibid.*, 189). They noted the intelligent manner in which they made full use of the single island market (within the Single European Market), the more open post-Belfast Agreement environment, and the dramatic improvements in some aspects of north-south physical infrastructure (Bradley & Best, 2012: 204). However, the problem they drew attention to is that there are too few of such firms. They argued that policy in Ireland and the peripheral regions of the UK is not well-focussed on creating the environment to support innovation in entrepreneurial firms.

²⁹ The ESRI has recently undertaken research on cross-border trade in services, see (Lawless, 2021).

³⁰ Clusters are defined by Porter as 'geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field' (Porter, 1998).

Bradley and Best set out three propositions concerning the role of entrepreneurial firms and industrial policy in promoting regional development:

(First), entrepreneurial firms are the drivers of successful regional growth policies. The second proposition is that SMEs do not compete individually in the global marketplace but as members of networked groups that foster cluster-dynamic processes. The third is that successful industrial policy needs to focus attention on fostering extrafirm infrastructures and not on grants and subsidies to individual enterprises (Bradley & Best, 2018: 184).

Third, while foreign direct investment (FDI) is concentrated in Dublin and other cities, this does not mean that the border regions cannot benefit from this type of investment. In 2020, there was permanent, full-time employment of 10,450 people in foreign-owned companies supported by the development agencies in the Border region of Ireland (Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, and Monaghan) (DETE, 2021c).³¹ In Northern Ireland, around half of full-time employment in externally owned companies supported by Invest NI (the main economic development agency in Northern Ireland) is in the Belfast local government district (around 29,700). There is full-time employment of this type of around 4,900 in the North Western region (Derry and Strabane; Causeway Coast and Glens) of Northern Ireland, around 16,350 in the Western region (Fermanagh and Omagh; Mid Ulster; and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon), and around 4,750 in the Southern region (Newry City, Mourne and Down; Lisburn City and Castlereagh; and North Down and Ards) (Invest NI, 2012).³²

Multinationals operate successfully in the border region and there may be scope to increase this type of investment. However, a substantial improvement in the economy of the border region will require achieving a stronger performance from indigenous enterprises.

Fourth, research commissioned by local authorities in the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor initiative also pointed to the potential of regional or local clusters along the Corridor. The authors propose that, 'Agreement on a common understanding of what we mean by 'clusters' and on a number of sectoral priorities – from among those identified by different Councils – might be the most suitable starting point for the Corridor' (Blair *et al.*, 2021: 75). Box 4.1 provides more details.

Fifth, there is potential to develop the North West. Part III of this report focuses in more detail on the work underway on the economic characteristics of that region and the collaborative work underway.

Finally, there is scope for additional co-operation to advance tourism on the island, beyond the current arrangements for international marketing carried out by Tourism Ireland CLG, a North-South body. For example, the Wild Atlantic way meets the Causeway Coastal Route in Derry, which is a great opportunity as there is a natural stopover point. The Greencastle-Magilligan ferry is also a potential link between the two tourist routes. Currently, Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane Council are running a tourism development programme where they work with 30 businesses across the border (15 from each) to develop collaborative visitor experiences. This co-operation on the ground could be formalised through national structures and joint marketing internationally.

³¹ This employment is primarily in IDA Ireland companies but also includes employment in foreign-owned companies that are supported by Enterprise Ireland, and some employment in Údarás na Gaeltachta companies.

³² Externally-owned companies in Northern Ireland include businesses in which the parent group is based in both Britain and Ireland. Thus, employment in externally-owned NI businesses includes, for example, those employed by Kerry Group and O'Neill Irish International Sports. Employment in hotels is included in the Northern Ireland employment figures but not in those for Ireland as hotels are not part of the remit of IDA Ireland.

Box 4.1: Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor

One of the proposals in Sir George Quigley's original lecture to advance the island economy was the idea of promoting a Dublin-Belfast economic corridor. The idea was that realising the potential of the island economy required development of the normal economic and business connections that would be expected between two cities only a hundred miles apart. He emphasised that it should be a corridor and not a 'tunnel', so that places between these cities would also benefit.

In 2018 a network of eight councils located along the corridor, and two universities, came together to find ways of realising the potential benefits of further development of the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC). This network commissioned a study to provide a profile of the current state of the economy along the DBEC, and the potential for further development and co-operation. This study was published in March 2021 (Blair *et al.*, 2021).

The study found that significant progress had already been made: 'Economic growth, the numbers in employment, improvements in transport connectivity and greater levels of interaction have all been realised' (Blair *et al.* 2021: 16).

The study documents the strong demographic and economic profile of the DBEC. The eight council areas concerned have a combined population of two million, which has increased by 12 per cent since 2006. The area had a buoyant labour market prior to the disruption of Covid-19. While there are variations in the skills level of the population within the area, the overall picture is of a well-educated population available for work. Up to the recent recession, demand for higher-level skills along the DBEC exceeded supply. The demand for skills is underpinned by a strong pipeline of inward investment.

The report identifies numerous possibilities for further potential co-operation. These cover the themes of skills development, promotion of sectoral strengths, enterprise supports, infrastructure, research and innovation. It is intended that these will be subject to further development by the network of councils and universities, before being tested with a wider group of stakeholders.

4.3.3 Investment in Infrastructure

One of the conditions needed to strengthen economic development in the border area is increased investment in infrastructure. There is now an opportunity for deeper collaboration to make effective use of the substantial funding available to promote balanced regional development on the island and in the border area.

The establishment of the Irish Government's Shared Island Fund will support the delivery of key cross-border infrastructure projects in co-operation with the Northern Ireland Executive, including the Ulster Canal restoration, the Narrow Water Bridge, the A5 upgrade, and investment commitments on higher education and development opportunities in the North West and border regions. There is a commitment of €500m to this fund for the period to 2025. Substantial funding is also being provided through the new PEACE PLUS programme for Northern Ireland and the Border region in Ireland (€1bn for the period 2021 to 2027), delivered by the EU, UK Government, Irish Government and NI Executive.

Ireland's recently published new National Development Plan (NDP) incorporates the Shared Island Fund. It sets out how multiple funding streams (the Shared Island Fund, PEACE PLUS, and the Project Ireland 2040 funds)³³ will be combined to fund investment in support of three objectives: (i) a more connected island; (ii) a more sustainable island; and (iii) a more prosperous island.

³³ The Project Ireland 2040 funds consist of four funds: the Urban Development and Regeneration Fund, the Rural Regeneration Fund, the Climate Action Fund and the Disruptive Innovation Technologies Fund. These funds are for projects in Ireland but the projects supported include cross-border projects.

A new long term Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland is in train, with a draft strategy published by the Executive for consultation on 26 January 2022. The border area will also benefit from the UK programme of city and growth deals. City and growth deals in Northern Ireland are match-funded by the UK Government and NI Executive supported, with agreements reached on long-term funding for a city or region (10 years or longer). The Derry City and Strabane city deal involves a total investment of £250m, while funding of €1bn has been agreed for the Belfast deal.³⁴ There are also growth deals in the Mid-South-West (£250m) and Causeway Coast and Glens (£72m).

Finally, in relation to realising the potential of north-south electricity co-operation, for the SEM to achieve its objectives also depends on the degree of physical interconnection on the island. Limited interconnection capacity is a constraint on this. A new north-south interconnector has been planned for several years. This would have substantial benefits. It would improve the security of the electricity supply, facilitate more wind-generated electricity and create cost savings for consumers.

Planning permission has been secured in both jurisdictions. In Ireland, the project has received approval from An Bord Pleanála; subsequent objections have been rejected by the High Court. However, in November 2020, a campaign group initiated a legal challenge to the decision of the Northern Ireland Infrastructure Minister to approve the interconnector. Hence, the delivery of this major infrastructure project remains uncertain.

NESC's recent report, *Collaboration on Climate and Biodiversity: Shared Island as a Catalyst for Renewed Ambition & Action*, identified the future of renewable energy development, on land and at sea, as a significant area of opportunity for north-south co-operation and collaboration. This is one of five areas in which the Council considers it worth establishing a strategic working group to explore opportunities for mutual benefit. This working group could explore areas such as solar, anaerobic digestion (AD), offshore wind, wave and tidal energy, building co-operation, sharing expertise and seeking solutions. There is also scope to re-visit an all-island approach to research, investment and governance (NESC, 2021a).

4.3.4 An All-Island Good Jobs Agenda

From stakeholder consultation, there was consensus that the good jobs agenda is an appropriate and important theme for both jurisdictions and that there is potential to progress it within a shared island framework.

There is a link between the creation of high-value jobs and the availability of a highly skilled, adaptable work force. Flexible and responsive educational and training institutions to work with the business sector are key in this regard.

A good jobs agenda could help to address in-work poverty and labour-market inequality. Again, supportive education and skills systems are key in preparing people for an all-island labour market, especially in border areas.

Covid-19 has focused attention on both the key role played by essential workers, and the fact that many such workers experience less favourable pay and conditions. While this has been creating more debate about labour-market inequality, it is recognised that making any substantial progress on this issue would require sustained and focused action by relevant stakeholders.

There is potential for collaboration on developing an understanding on the key components and measurement of good jobs, building on existing information. Interviews with stakeholders in Ireland and Northern Ireland finds strong support for an all-island approach to good jobs.

There is already some collaboration in this area. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions' Retail Sector Group, which comprises unions representing workers in retail and distribution across the island of Ireland (Mandate, SIPTU, Unite, USDAW and the GMB), has initiated a campaign to address low pay and insecure work, and rebuild the sector post-

³⁴ The £250m for Derry City and Strabane District Council is comprised of £210m from the City Deal and Inclusive Future Fund from the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive and approximately £40m from the Council and its project partners. The £1bn Belfast Region City Deal involves £350m commitment by the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive and £150m from City Deal partners and private sector investment.

Covid-19. The unions have called for a renewed focus on decent work, premised on improved pay and conditions, trade-union representation, collective bargaining, and access to training and upskilling (ICTU, 2020).

The establishment of a tripartite Retail Stakeholder Group, comprising trade unions, retail employers, and key government departments, is viewed as an appropriate forum for developing this new blueprint for the retail and distribution sector.

The creation of good jobs, suitable to the economic, social and environmental context, depends on a co-ordinated and collaborative approach. It needs to be owned by networks of public and private coalitions, in a given area or region. These networks need a deep commitment to intensive interaction, learning and review. They need to work with business, agencies, citizens and stakeholders, communities, and experts to figure out how to improve the quality of jobs and the opportunity to earn a decent living.

In Northern Ireland, there is the potential to reconfigure the labour market and economic policy around an increased focus on the creation of good jobs that provide decent wages. This configuration would serve to address the root causes of poverty and inequality in Northern Ireland.

In addition, undertaking work on a shared island dimension would be more impactful if the relevant departments or agencies in the north and south were jointly mandated to do so.

There is also potential to liaise further on an east-west basis, in particular with Scotland and Wales.

4.3.5 Cross-Border and Remote Working

One of the challenges in cross-border working is the complexity of two taxation regimes. A general principle of taxation is that income tax is paid in the country where one lives. However, for cross-border workers, taxation and social security contributions are normally deducted by their employer on behalf of the tax authorities where the person works. Cross-border workers also have potential income tax liabilities in the country in which they live. Ireland and the UK have a double taxation agreement in place, which means that a cross-border worker living in either Ireland or the UK receives full credit for any tax paid on the other side of the border. This ensures that there is no liability to pay income tax twice on the same income.

In addition, residents in Ireland can avail of the 'trans-border workers' tax relief'. This relief means that cross-border workers do not have any additional tax liability in Ireland in respect of their cross-border earnings. There is no equivalent tax relief in the UK so that some cross-border workers resident in Northern Ireland may have an additional tax liability, depending on their income level (Border People, 2021).³⁵

One of the conditions to avail of the trans-border workers' tax relief is that all of the employment must be performed outside the State, apart from 'incidental duties'. However, due to the exceptional nature of the Covid-19 crisis, cross-border workers who were required to work from home in Ireland were permitted to continue availing of the trans-border tax relief in 2020 and 2021³⁶ and continuing into 2022 at the time of writing.

A paper by the Department of Finance Tax Strategy Group (TSG) (Department of Finance, 2021) notes that there have been calls for this temporary concession to be made permanent. The paper examined this in detail and highlighted a number of issues and ramifications.

It would have the effect that a person could live and work full time in Ireland without having any potential income tax liability within Ireland. It highlighted the implications for equity in that Irish residents working in Ireland, but employed by an employer outside the State, could have a lower tax liability compared to other Irish residents with an employer based in Ireland. It noted competitiveness implications for employers in Ireland, in that it could enable employers

³⁵ Border People (2021), 'FAQs: Taxation', <https://borderpeople.info/a-z/taxation.html>

³⁶ Department of Finance (2021), Trans-Border Workers' Relief, Tax Strategy Group – 21/04.

outside the State to employ Irish residents working from home with lower tax liabilities, relative to what the same workers would pay if employed by an employer within the State.

The Department of Finance Tax Strategy Group (Department of Finance, 2021) report concluded that:

it appears impracticable from a legal perspective, in terms of taxing rights, as well as challenging from a policy perspective when having regard to the interests of the wider body of taxpayers encompassing all Irish resident employees and employers, to place the concessional treatment on a statutory footing (Department of Finance, 2021: 28).

The Department of Finance paper also notes that the issue of the global mobility of individuals may feature in the OECD tax agenda in future and Ireland would participate in any such discussions.

The TSG paper also highlights that those engaged in cross-border working are not subject to any tax disincentive. Under the Double Taxation Agreement, workers can work outside the jurisdiction, pay tax liabilities in that jurisdiction and have those payments recognised in calculating any additional tax liabilities which arise because of where they live.

The modifications to the trans-border workers' tax relief showed a willingness to think very openly about how to respond to the specific needs of cross-border workers during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important to note that the modifications applied to all countries with which Ireland has a double taxation agreement. It is clear that making these modifications permanent is not practical. There are significant consequences, which the TSG paper highlights.

However, given the ambitions underpinning Shared Island and the likelihood that remote and hybrid working will continue over pre-pandemic levels, further research, analysis and consultation would be useful.

This work needs to reflect wider international work, which is likely to consider the impacts of remote and hybrid working on trans-border work across Europe.

The Council recommends that further consideration should be given to the issue in Ireland, with engagement between the Department of Finance and other stakeholders, possibly within the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF). The issues which should be considered and should form the basis for further engagement, include:

- identifying and reviewing the ways in a shared island perspective could shape the tax treatment of Ireland-Northern Ireland cross-border working, and require or enable it to be viewed as distinctive from working across other borders;
- examining how to encourage and facilitate investment and job creation that is more cross-border in nature, and the practical challenges of doing so;
- examining cross-border working, between Ireland and Northern Ireland, in terms of its scale and reporting, and changing nature and trends; and
- monitoring and understanding post-pandemic remote working practices, and differences in geographic areas and across sectors.

Chapter 5

Social Policy

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines co-operation in social policy. It considers the levels of existing collaboration in key areas of social policy including poverty, social welfare, mental health and social enterprise.

The chapter also considers a number of practical ways in which co-operation might be further developed. It discusses how the geographical scope of collaboration might be enhanced; broadening and deepening collaboration in key areas of social policy; and working to remove potential data gaps.

5.2 Co-operation in Practice

5.2.1 Introduction

This section examines aspects of co-operation on selected aspects of social policy. The areas covered are:

- strategies to reduce poverty;

- engagement on shared experiences in social policy;

- emerging mental health strategies;

- partnerships for mental health; and

- social enterprise co-operation.

5.2.2 Strategies to Reduce Poverty

Both jurisdictions have anti-poverty strategies in place or in development. In Ireland the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 has the overarching ambition to reduce the national consistent poverty rate to two per cent or less of the population (from 5.5 per cent in 2019) and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive states in the EU by 2025. A feature of the roadmap is explicit recognition of a cross-government approach, with the integration of relevant departmental strategies within the roadmap.

In Northern Ireland a co-design process, where members of civic society work with government officials, has been put in place to prepare an anti-poverty strategy. An expert panel has prepared recommendations for an anti-poverty strategy, with the intention to have the strategy finalised in late 2021/early 2022, following consultation. The main recommendations of the expert panel include: that the NI Assembly passes an Anti-Poverty Act, and that the Act should contain provisions for an Anti-Poverty Commission; that income should be adequate; that there is a new non-taxable weekly child payment; and that greater attention is paid to eradicating destitution. The expert panel was concerned mainly about 'putting money in people's pockets' through benefits, work, and by reducing the costs facing people.

There is limited co-operation between the two jurisdictions in the development and implementation of the anti-poverty strategies.

Local and community development plays an important role in tackling poverty in both jurisdictions. In Ireland, a number of strategies were published in recent years to help to address disadvantage and promote social inclusion, along with specific funding programmes. This follows a period when the funding for many initiatives in disadvantaged areas was cut following the 2007-08 recession, resulting in social, economic and environmental challenges which remain to this day. It is acknowledged that this deficit needs to be addressed, as specified in a number of the UN's sustainable development goals.

In Northern Ireland, support programmes are available to target social need through social, economic and physical regeneration; neighbourhood renewal; supporting disadvantaged and rural women; and funding support for the community and voluntary sector.

There are initiatives to tackle concentrations of urban disadvantage in both jurisdictions. Again, there is limited co-operation between the two jurisdictions in relation to local and community development strategies.

However, some co-operation is evident in two key areas: educational disadvantage, and food poverty.

First, there are interesting parallels in the approach to tackling educational disadvantage. In Ireland, the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme provides additional support to schools in disadvantaged areas. DEIS provides additional funding, literacy and numeracy programmes, the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, the School Completion Programme, and assistance with school planning for schools in disadvantaged areas (Smyth *et al.*, 2015). In Northern Ireland, the Fair Start Action Plan proposes a new programme for reducing educational disadvantage. It sets out 47 actions, involving a number of government departments and public agencies, to tackle educational disadvantage (Department of Education, 2021). Specifically, the plan proposes a new programme for reducing educational disadvantage (RED), which is a targeted intervention encouraging partnerships with the community and voluntary sector, as well as with other schools. The RED proposal reflects elements of the Irish DEIS initiative, as well as similar programmes in Scotland and Wales.

Second, there is co-operation in relation to food poverty. The All-Island Food Poverty Network was established in 2009 to provide a co-ordinated and strategic approach to tackling food poverty on the island of Ireland. Food poverty is defined as ‘the inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of affordability and access to food, with related impacts on health, culture and social participation being felt’. Food poverty therefore not only affects what people eat, it also impacts on people's lifestyles, social interactions and health. It is a core experience of poverty.

The All-Island Food Poverty Network is co-chaired by the North South Implementation Body *SafeFood* and the Food Standards Agency of Northern Ireland. Its membership includes government departments and agencies, local authorities, academia and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who all have a shared goal to reduce food poverty in Ireland. *SafeFood* publishes reports on the costs of healthy food baskets in Ireland and Northern Ireland for different family types.

Through *SafeFood*, the All-Island Food Poverty Network supports the development of consensus on related issues, collaboration and shared learning. For example, a webinar in October 2020 shared the challenges and learnings from responses to tackling food poverty/insecurity during the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK, Northern Ireland and Ireland (SafeFood, 2021).

5.2.3 Engagement on Shared Experiences in Social Policy

Despite the lack of collaboration on the development of social policy, there is significant engagement between civil servants.

Collaboration has taken place between the Department of Social Protection in Ireland and the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland through annual summer schools, since the early 2000s. These involve civil servants from both jurisdictions coming together for a week, in either Ireland or Northern Ireland, to listen to inputs on a range of social welfare issues including poverty and social inclusion, and undertaking group projects. It is an opportunity for the staff of both departments, and related agencies, to come together to explore topical issues of social policy facing their departments and our societies more generally.

A core aspect of the summer school is the north-south dimension, which provides opportunities to develop a comparative approach. The north-south focus enables a reflection on the common policy objectives pertaining within each system, including focusing on similarities and differences in how the social welfare systems deal with changing economic and social circumstances. The core underlying purpose is to initiate debate and facilitate dialogue between the two parts of the island, and to share experience and lessons learned.

In education, there is a Shared Education programme at early years, primary and post-primary levels, and co-operation between the respective education inspectorates. The Shared Education programme – funded by Peace IV, the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, and the Irish Department of Education – is designed to bring children from different communities together in an educational setting, in order to build a society in which the cycle of segregation is broken. The programme provides funding for education partnerships within Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland; and for cross-border education partnerships. There are two main elements to the programme: shared education delivery to children and young people through the school partnerships; and professional learning to increase the capacity of the education workforce to deliver high-quality shared education experiences to children and young people. The Peace IV Shared Education Programme is due to run to June 2022.

For the education inspectorates, there is ongoing co-operation at a number of levels between inspectors from the Department of Education in Ireland, and the Education and Training Inspectorate in Northern Ireland. Inspectorate exchanges have taken place, as well as some joint work on inspections and sharing of practice – for example, in inspecting how schools are addressing bullying. There is also collaborative engagement in staff development conferences and other initiatives.

It is also noteworthy that, in relation to adult and community education, the Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB) – a partnership of adult and community education organisations in Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales – advocates for educational equality for adults across the five jurisdictions, and shares best practice and challenges in both policy and practice.

With regard to social inclusion, both Ireland and Northern Ireland were part of a European-funded project on mainstreaming social inclusion, which ran from 2003 to 2007. The project was undertaken in two phases. The initial phase of the project examined the meaning of mainstreaming social inclusion and the various elements needed for the process to be successful. The key findings stressed the importance of understanding how public policy is developed across different political and administrative structures; and how all the relevant actors, including people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, NGOs working against poverty and social exclusion, and other relevant civil society organisations are involved in the process of policy-making (O’Kelly & Litewska, 2006).

Phase 2 of the project evaluated the mainstreaming of social inclusion in seven EU member states (the UK and its devolved administrations, Ireland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, France, Portugal, Netherlands), an accession state (Bulgaria) and an EEA state (Norway). The evaluation findings indicated that governments were committed to tackling poverty and social exclusion regardless of the role of the EU in co-ordinating member state policies, (O’Kelly, 2007).

Finally, Corrymeela is an innovative example focused on sharing experiences. Based in Ballycastle, Co. Antrim, Corrymeela is a professional reconciliation centre employing around 40 full-time staff, which has begun sponsoring low-key discussions around health services, education systems, political structures, and the pastoral implications of possible constitutional change.

5.2.4 Emerging Mental Health Strategies

In both parts of the island the links between poverty and mental health issues are evident. Poverty increases the risk of mental health problems, while mental health is influenced by the social, economic and physical environments, including the inequalities, within which people live.

There has been considerable all-island co-operation and research on many health issues at national and local levels, including in relation to primary and secondary health provision. Less has been done on mental health, however. NESC research has examined mental health in Ireland and Northern Ireland over the last decade, and found that the broader ambitions for mental health services have been similar in both jurisdictions.

In relation to mental health policy in the two jurisdictions, it is apparent that many of the problems, and the proposed solutions, in the articulation and execution of mental health policy are shared. The move from institution-based care towards community-based interventions has taken place gradually over a number of decades in Ireland and in Northern

Ireland. Over the course of the last four or five decades, mental health policy and service provision has been influenced by a number of reports and movements in the wider health services in both countries.

Both jurisdictions have relatively new mental health strategies. *Sharing the Vision* was published in Ireland in 2020, and Northern Ireland published its very first strategy, *Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031* in 2021. The preparation of both strategies involved extensive stakeholder engagement, and they both emphasise a person-centred, trauma-informed delivery of services. However, neither contain any stated overall commitments to cross-border or all-island working.

The main differences between the strategies overall are not found so much in the individual chapters and actions, but in the wider context in which they are framed. In Northern Ireland, the legacy of the Troubles and its long-term effects on communities and their mental health, high rates of suicide, and consistently underfunded mental health services provide some of the backdrop. In Ireland, the vision for reform of health services under Sláintecare is the dominant framework. As a comparator, in Scotland there is a strong emphasis on the links between poverty and mental health in their mental health framework.

A notable development in Northern Ireland has been the appointment of a Mental Health Champion, Professor Siobhan O'Neill, in 2021. The Mental Health Champion's role is to advise and assist in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing through all policies and services throughout Northern Ireland. The Champion will be a public advocate for mental health, communicating the collective voices of people with lived experience, their families and carers, and communities impacted by mental health inequalities; and acting as a positive conduit between government and service delivery.

While mental health policy may be designed and delivered on a single jurisdictional basis, there are a number of cross-border mental health services, many of which are supported by EU funding programmes.

5.2.5 Partnerships for Mental Health

Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) is a cross-border health and social care partnership, supported by INTERREG funding.

Formed in the early 1990s, the CAWT partnership involves five statutory health and social care organisations, four from Northern Ireland (Western Health and Social Care Trust, Southern Health and Social Care Trust, Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency) and one from Ireland (the HSE). CAWT covers Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, and seeks to improve health and social care services through collaboration across the border.

In the mental health area, CAWT has led the development of recovery colleges through the Innovation Recovery project. Recovery colleges are a large-scale cross-border initiative part-funded through the INTERREGVA Programme, and match-funded by the Departments of Health in Ireland and Northern Ireland. They support people in recovering from mental ill-health by taking an empowering and inclusive educational approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing. Three cross-border recovery colleges have been established in the west, south and east of the 12 border counties of Ireland and Northern Ireland. As of March 2021, over 3,000 people have taken part in a diverse range of courses. All courses are designed and delivered by people with lived experience of mental health issues, in tandem with health professionals. Courses are delivered both in person and through Zoom, and in June 2021 the first online cross-border recovery college was launched to complement existing services. It is noteworthy that recovery education is included in the current mental health strategies in both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Other partnership arrangements are the ChatPal and Our Generation projects, funded by the Northern Periphery and Arctic 2014-2020, and PEACE IV, programmes respectively. ChatPal is a free app that gives users a personal text-based tool to manage their mental health. It has been developed as a partnership between Finland, Sweden, Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland. Our Generation is a cross-border project focused on stopping the intergenerational impact of trauma, by delivering programmes to school-aged children in a school or community setting.

5.2.6 Social Enterprise Co-operation

At a policy level, the Department of Rural and Community Development in Ireland published the first-ever government policy for social enterprises, *The National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022*, in 2019. This policy has the three key objectives of: (i) building awareness of social enterprise; (ii) growing and strengthening social enterprise; and (iii) achieving better policy alignment. While Northern Ireland does not yet have a formal policy, it is active in promoting social enterprise, and has an All Party Group on Social Enterprise. Overall, responsibility for the development of social enterprise policy in Northern Ireland resides with the Department for the Economy, but the Department for Communities also provides key supports to the sector as part of its urban regeneration and rural development mandate.

There is a good level of co-operation on social enterprises between policy actors and stakeholders, north and south. For example, departmental officials in the Department of Rural and Community Development have good relationships with their counterparts in the Departments of Economy and Communities in Northern Ireland, liaising on policies and programmes. This close working relationship helped in the development of the Irish *National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022*. In a similar vein, officials from the Department of Rural and Community Development were invited to address the Northern Ireland Assembly's All Party Working Group on Social Enterprises.

Social enterprise networks of social enterprise practitioners and supporters also have good working relationships, exchanging information and holding meetings.

5.3 Potential for Co-operation

5.3.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the potential to expand co-operation. It focuses on three key issues:

- broadening the geographical scope for social policy collaboration;

- cross-border and deeper engagement on social policy; and,

- working to remove cross-border data blind spots.

5.3.2 Broadening the Geographical Scope for Social Policy Collaboration

There is potential for the development of cross-border work across a wide range of domains under the new PEACE PLUS programme, which runs from 2021 to 2027.

While the programme applies mainly to the core areas of Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth in Ireland, there is flexibility to include partners or activities outside the core area, in a wider functional area, where appropriate.

There are six themes within the €1bn programme, a number of which will contribute to tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion, addressing mental health issues, and supporting social enterprise. The six themes are:

- building peaceful and thriving communities;

- delivering economic regeneration and transformation;

- empowering and investing in young people;

- healthy and inclusive communities;

- supporting a sustainable and better connected future; and

- building and embedding partnership and collaboration (Special EU Programmes Body, 2021).

A number of these themes contain investment areas, for example, in empowering communities; building positive relations; skills development; shared learning together education; youth mental health and wellbeing; rural regeneration and social inclusion; as well as maintaining and forging relationships.

5.3.3 Collaboration and Deeper Engagement on Social Policy Issues

As outlined across key areas of social policy review – poverty, educational disadvantage, mental health, and social enterprise – both jurisdictions have plans and strategies in existence or in development.

However, in most cases there has been little liaison across jurisdictions in the development of the plans and strategies, or in the promotion of shared actions. As noted, there are some exceptions, particularly in relation to mainstreaming social exclusion, addressing educational disadvantage, and developing the Irish social enterprise strategy.

There is scope for more collaboration between the two jurisdictions in these areas of work. For example, the North-South Social Welfare Summer Schools involve key officials from departments sharing experiences. There is potential for more knowledge exchange, shared learning, and relationship building, through the hosting of conferences, summer schools and other joint working on a north-south and/or east-west basis, including through the use of secondment, and exchange and training programmes. This is also the case in relation to shared education programmes and the work of the education inspectorates, where existing co-operation could be widened and deepened. Similarly, support for existing collaboration on adult and community education could be developed. The North South Implementation Bodies could potentially have a role in promoting such initiatives.

Although many such initiatives are happening, there is a case for building such events into organisations' annual work programmes. With the development of online events, such events could be hosted online as well as in person, or as hybrid events. It is noted, however, that in-person events are preferable with respect to building relationships.

There is also potential to use networks, partnerships and cross-border agencies to deepen collaboration on social policy. Networks such as CAWT, the All-Island Food Poverty Network, and the SENI and SERI social enterprise networks, illustrate that all-island agencies, partnerships and networks can contribute to the adoption of joint approaches to addressing issues, when there is a common or shared ambition. There is a richness in building relationships, and exchanging knowledge and information on issues of common interest. There is potential for the further development of these forums on a shared island basis.

An additional issue is ensuring that the development of policy, both north and south, is informed by greater engagement with NGOs, and those impacted by policy. As noted, both Ireland and Northern Ireland were part of a major European study on mainstreaming social inclusion. As well as officials from the relevant social welfare departments, and researchers, the project included the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), an NGO representing people experiencing poverty. The evaluation element of the project showed that there was a lack of understanding at lower levels of administration and among NGOs of what is happening at central level, and a failure of communications between the different levels of administration and interested organisations within the various countries and jurisdictions (O'Kelly, 2007).

The development of the Northern Ireland Fair Start Action Plan to tackle educational disadvantage is an example of liaison on elements of specific plans and strategies. As noted, the plan has strong similarities with the Irish DEIS programme and programmes in Scotland and Wales.

5.3.4 Working to Remove Cross-Border Data Blind Spots

There is a good working relationship between the Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). There is a recommendation in the Irish National Statistics Board Strategic Plan 2021–2026 *Quality Information for All – Numbers Matter* that ‘data collection should include collaboration with agencies such as NISRA to support a shared island approach to official statistics, where appropriate’ (NSB, 2021: 34).

However, there are a number of gaps in the collection and collation of statistics on an all-island basis. There is potential for greater co-operation to provide better information to inform policy, practice and services in both jurisdictions and on a shared island basis.

This section provides three examples – in the areas of poverty, mental health and social enterprise – to illustrate the scope for improvement.

First, there could be more alignment on poverty measurement, so that we have an all-island perspective on the extent and nature of poverty. This particularly relates to the potential use of some common deprivation measures. Also of interest is the NIE’s use of measuring access to a range of public and private services, which could be usefully be considered in Ireland. A number of commentators have suggested the use of a persistence of poverty measure. Irish poverty measures are closely linked to European measures through Eurostat. In the longer term there will be a question mark on the extent to which the UK, including Northern Ireland, is engaged with the Eurostat system.

Second, mental health data is collected by both jurisdictions separately. In Ireland, some data relating to mental health is provided by the CSO and the Health Research Board (HRB), who publish in-patient data on a regular basis. The HSE also provides service-related data, notably around waiting lists for mental health services. In addition, a number of the main data resources on health include some data on mental health.

The majority of Northern Irish official statistics on mental health are published by NISRA. Some mental health statistics are also published by the Northern Ireland Department of Health, with the Public Health Agency (PHA) producing some statistics on health and social care (OSR, 2021). NISRA, in common with the CSO and the HRB, collect data in hospital settings, so while there are historical and current figures for admissions and discharges, there are gaps in knowledge around non-hospital-based activity. Shortcomings of data gaps, data quality, and data accessibility have been identified in a review of mental health statistics in Northern Ireland (OSR, 2021).

There is potential to address these data deficiencies, and for co-operation between data agencies in Ireland and Northern Ireland, in order to gain a more complete picture of how people are accessing mental health services, outcomes for service users, and how to prevent poor mental health. The current Irish mental health strategy *Sharing the Vision* includes strong commitments to improving data and accountability across services, as does the mental health strategy for Northern Ireland. Co-operation between the data agencies in both jurisdictions would help to provide a more complete picture across the island.

Third, in relation to social enterprise, there is limited empirical evidence and data about the size, scope, prevalence and contribution of social enterprises in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2019). While a number of local mapping projects have provided useful data for particular geographical areas, and helped to develop technical capacity and useful methodologies, there remains no authoritative data on key metrics such as the number of social enterprises, employment levels, trading patterns, income levels, turnover, gross value-added, and business activities/sectors. It is recognised that seeking to build awareness of social enterprises – and realising their full potential to address social, economic and environmental problems – will necessitate addressing this knowledge gap. Importantly the National Social Enterprise Policy commits the Government, in collaboration with stakeholders, to improving available evidence by improving data collection relating to the extent of social enterprise in Ireland, and to areas in which social enterprises operate.

Policy dialogue about the design of a possible national exercise to give effect to these commitments is currently ongoing. It has also been tentatively suggested that this is a policy action which could have an all-island dimension. Experience from Scotland, which has conducted three national social enterprise census surveys since 2014, indicates

that this is complex issue that requires a high degree of professional and technical capacity, and the allocation of appropriate resources.

In Northern Ireland, a report published by SENI in 2019 indicates that the social enterprise sector in Northern Ireland has continued to grow in the period 2013-2019, and that it makes an important economic and social contribution to the state. A substantial increase in the number of social enterprises in this five-year period in part reflects the increased support provided to the sector from the NIE, local councils and SENI. Although this compilation of information provides a useful overview of the nature and scale of the social enterprise sector in Northern Ireland, including how it has evolved in recent years, it is recognised that there is scope to develop a more comprehensive analysis similar to the surveys undertaken in Scotland, possibly on an all-island basis.

Chapter 6



6.1 Introduction³⁷

Sustainable development is fundamental to the future prosperity and resilience of all countries. As an integrated, collaborative challenge, sustainable development lends itself well to an all-island perspective.

The challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss cannot be addressed single-handedly by any one country, particular when there is common geography, rivers, flora and fauna, and oceans. There is a strong basis for co-operation and collaboration across the island, and the need to act is urgent.

Both Ireland and Northern Ireland are increasing their ambition, and focusing on action to reduce emissions, protect against climate impacts and biodiversity loss, and achieve societal preparedness and support for the journey to net zero.

This chapter provides an overview of collaboration linked to ambition on climate and biodiversity; co-operation through the NSMC; improving water quality and biodiversity; research; and civil society.

The chapter also examines the scope for further collaboration. It discusses the potential for deepening the shared ambition for urgent action, enhancing existing networks and creating new momentum in key areas, and a shared island approach to research.

6.2 Co-operation in Practice

Close collaboration has been achieved in many environmental areas. This section provides an overview. It outlines:

- shared ambition on climate and biodiversity;

- environmental co-operation through the NSMC;

- learning from water quality collaborations;

- co-operation on biodiversity;

- shared research; and

- the role of civil society.

6.2.1 Shared Ambition on Climate and Biodiversity

Both Ireland and Northern Ireland face climate and biodiversity crises and have declared climate emergencies in the Dáil and the Northern Ireland Assembly. There is growing momentum to ratchet up ambition to deliver on climate and biodiversity commitments before 2030.

In Ireland, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 commits Ireland to a 51 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, compared to 2018 levels. Sectoral budgets will be set out periodically to underpin a significant shift in overall ambition. The Climate Action Plan 2021 sets out specific initial actions to deliver an average seven per cent per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2021b). In Northern Ireland, climate policy is currently underpinned by the UK Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019, and is in line with the requirements of the Paris Agreement. However, a legislative process is underway to introduce a Northern Ireland climate act for the first time.

³⁷ In October 2021, NESC published a report, as part of its work on Shared Island, on the potential for all-island collaboration on climate and biodiversity (NESC, 2021a). This chapter draws on that report.

Both jurisdictions have binding national and international commitments towards which to work, under the Paris Agreement, a legally binding international agreement on climate change, and the targets set in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity for 2030 and beyond.³⁸ Another significant framework is the UN's 2030 Agenda, based on achieving the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which also represents a basis for a shared focus for sustainable development on the island of Ireland.³⁹

The All-Island Local Authority Forum (LAF) supports the exchange of learning and practical experience around shared objectives, with over 340 people from across the island attending events and seminars during the year. The town recovery and regeneration sub-group in the LAF is exploring the possibility of all local authorities across the island agreeing to reflect the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in their new development plans.

There are also significant regional partnerships focused on climate action. Part III of this report highlights the North West Regional Development Group which, among other work, developed a North West Climate Action Plan and a co-ordinated focus on biodiversity through the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

Ireland's membership of the EU will continue to significantly influence environmental policy and regulation. The Irish Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future* (June, 2020), notes the potential to explore an all-island approach to environmental issues such as climate breakdown and the biodiversity crisis (Government of Ireland, 2020). While co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland on these issues is already evident, the potential for future environmental divergence post-Brexit remains a concern.

Finally, there is also a benefit in considering east-west alignments as well as north-south. For example, opportunities for co-operation between Scotland and Ireland have recently been explored, through the Ireland-Scotland Joint Bilateral Review, in areas such as marine renewable energy (Government of Ireland, 2021b).

6.2.2 Environmental Co-operation through the North South Ministerial Council

The formal structures established through the Good Friday Agreement, coupled with informal networks and collaborations on environmental issues, demonstrate the multiple connections that already exist between Ireland and Northern Ireland on different levels.

Formal co-operation exists through the structures and institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement, including a focus on environmental protection, pollution, water quality and waste management. The North South Ministerial Council includes environmental issues as one of six areas of co-operation (NSMC, 2020). Implementation bodies such as Waterways Ireland and the Loughs Agency have established an all-island approach to protection and pollution (MHC, 2019).

Other areas of co-operation include the management of areas of nature conservation, invasive species, the Water Framework Directive, energy, and monitoring of migratory birds, among others. A body of knowledge exists amongst agencies in the environmental sphere in the border region as to how cross-border approaches can and should be taken.

Close collaboration has been achieved to date, and cross-border co-operation exists in many environmental areas. The value of all-island collaboration in managing the environment has been recognised through the establishment and work of the Environment Sector of the North South Ministerial Council.

This sectoral configuration of the NSMC meets at ministerial level to discuss co-operation on environmental protection, pollution and water quality management in a cross-border context, with the participation of the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications, and the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the Irish Government side; and the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs representing the Northern Ireland

³⁸ See Convention on Biological Diversity, <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/COP-15>, accessed 09.2.21.

³⁹ The UN SDGs provide a 'shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future' (UN, 2015). The SDGs are unique in that they provide a platform for considering public policy within the context of multiple pillars – the environment, economy, and society – together, underpinned by a partnership approach to policy implementation (Doyle, 2020).

Executive. This area of co-operation has a current work programme which focuses on environmental research and reporting, environmental protection and sustainable development, water and wastewater management, waste management in a cross-border context, and EU funding for environmental initiatives.⁴⁰ The British-Irish Council also has an Environment Work Sector.

6.2.3 Learning from Water Quality Collaborations

There is valuable collaboration arising from the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), and from the bodies who are working together and co-operating to implement that regime.

This involves sharing of information and knowledge to address common challenges in relation to water quality. For example, the North South Rivers and Lakes Technical sub-committee, chaired by EPA and NIEA, works well with other NI water and environment agencies. Cross-border working has been hugely important for the development of effective responses to catchment care, where water systems cross jurisdictional borders. For example, Inland Fisheries Ireland participate in many cross-border groups, such as those working to deliver the WFD. The INTERREG programme has been particularly instrumental in supporting cross-border initiatives that enable shared approaches to be developed, tested and refined.

North South Implementation bodies such as Waterways Ireland and the Loughs Agency have delivered all-island approaches to protection and pollution in their areas of responsibility. Many loughs and coastal areas across the whole island of Ireland act ecologically as a single resource, particularly for migratory birds. Wider cross-border management approaches would be valuable for our wider marine environment.

An innovative EU-funded (Interreg) project, CatchmentCARE (Community Actions for Resilient Eco-systems), aims to improve freshwater quality in cross-border river basins, across three cross-border catchments. This is a collaboration between two local authorities – Donegal County Council (lead partner) and Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council – working with academics from Ulster University, as well as the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, and specialists from the British Geological Survey, the Loughs Agency, Geological Survey Ireland, and Inland Fisheries Ireland. Insights from this project can inform future collaborations, building on this rich and diverse skill-set.

6.2.4 Co-operation on Biodiversity

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan is an innovative framework for co-ordination. The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan for 2021-2025 is a five-year road map that was first developed by a 16-member voluntary steering group. It now receives support from a range of statutory organisations including the National Parks and Wildlife Service; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Heritage Council; and An Bord Bia in Ireland; and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and the NI Environment Agency, in Northern Ireland.

Its implementation is being co-ordinated by Ireland's National Biodiversity Data Centre. The all-island framework is supported by governmental and non-governmental partner organisations who share responsibility for delivering the plan's 186 actions. Local authorities, north and south, have signed up as partners under the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan Partnership Framework.⁴¹ It provides an example and potential model for developing bottom-up, expert-led but multi-actor initiatives. Its contribution to date, and ways to strengthen its impact, have been noted. For example, it has been suggested that the plan could be underpinned by statute and legislation, coupled with stronger national legislation in terms of biodiversity.

In addition, Natural Capital Ireland (NCI) is a group of over 900 organisations and individuals from academic, public, private and NGO sectors, interested in the development and application of the natural capital agenda in Ireland, on both sides of the border. As of 2021, there are two NI representatives on the Steering Committee, from NI Environment Link and the Ulster Wildlife Trust. NCI is actively working with these partners to develop cross-border projects, for example

⁴⁰ See <https://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/areas-of-co-operation/environment>, accessed 26.10.21.

⁴¹ See <https://pollinators.ie/councils/council-partners/>, accessed 23.09.21

under EU LIFE and PEACE PLUS programmes. This type of co-operation can be replicated by other organisations with an interest in climate and biodiversity on the island of Ireland.

6.2.5 Shared Research

All-island research collaborations have been building momentum. Examples include: the All-Island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network, an initiative that brings together researchers from a wide range of disciplines across the island of Ireland, who are undertaking research in climate and biodiversity topics;⁴² and the development of the forthcoming EU PEACE PLUS programme, which has a strong focus on supporting a sustainable future on the island.

Another example is the Five Agencies ShARE Programme, in which the EPA works with NIEA in a collaborative forum for identifying and progressing shared knowledge needs between the environment agencies of Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, England and Ireland.⁴³

6.2.6 The Role of Civil Society

Integrating local knowledge into decision-making through participative approaches complements scientific expertise, and there is a growing evidence base that such approaches foster better outcomes. Interesting models exist for broad societal engagement at a local level in Ireland, such as the Dingle Peninsula 2030, a multi-partner initiative on the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry, involving the Dingle Creativity and Innovation Hub; ESB Networks; North, East and West Kerry Development (NEWKD); and MaREI (MaREI, 2018).

There is also significant collaboration among civil society groups working on climate and biodiversity.

CRNI and NIRN work in close collaboration to support reuse and repair across the island. Together, they represent 50 community-based reuse, repair and recycling members. Networking events have been held that have led to the sharing of knowledge and practices, and have linked organisations such as the Belfast Repair Cafe, Belfast Tool Library (tool lending), and Derry and Strabane Council (the first Zero Waste area, with a Zero Waste Strategy and a Circular Economy strategy); as well as the Rediscovery Centre (National Centre for a Circular Economy, paint reuse scheme), Roscommon Women's Network (CycleUp project), and An Mheitheal Rothar (bicycle refurbishment).

A number of active voluntary and business networks engage on environmental issues on a cross-border basis. For example, regular collaboration exists between Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL),⁴⁴ with more than 60 full members representing 190,000 individuals, and the Irish Environmental Network, an organisation representing close to 35,000 members.⁴⁵

6.3 Potential for Further Environmental Co-operation

This section outlines areas where there is potential for further environmental co-operation, as follows:

- develop and deepen shared ambition on climate and biodiversity;

- enhance existing networks and collaborative work;

- working groups to drive additional collaboration; and

- all-island research.

⁴² Townhall Meeting, see <https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/all-island-climate-and-biodiversity-research-network-town-hall-meeting-tickets-157803686073>, accessed 23.09.21.

⁴³ See <https://www.sepa.org.uk/about-us/how-we-work/our-research/five-agencies-share-programme/>, accessed 23.09.21.

⁴⁴ Northern Ireland Environment Link <https://www.nienvironmentlink.org/>, accessed 20.12.21.

⁴⁵ Irish Environment Network <https://ien.ie/>, accessed 29.01.21.

6.3.1 Develop and Deepen Shared Ambition on Climate and Biodiversity

There is a need to progress climate and biodiversity in an urgent, ambitious, integrated and holistic way. The Council has recommended the development of a shared and inspiring vision for integrated climate and biodiversity action across the island, including its inland and surrounding waters (NESC, 2021a). There is potential for a coherent, co-ordinated and ambitious expression of common purpose to align climate targets and regulatory approaches. Such a statement and approach could outline a way forward, built on co-operation and mutual interest.

Given the key role of societal engagement on environmental issues, creative approaches could be employed to encourage communities across the island to develop stories of the sustainable futures we could all enjoy. All-island story-telling projects of future low-carbon and thriving nature and society should be supported. It is worth exploring how to provide young people with avenues to contribute and engage on climate and biodiversity on an all-island basis.

For the island of Ireland, a targeted approach focused on responding to specific environmental challenges could make real progress. Specifically, collaborative action to further biodiversity conservation, restoration and value is recognised as crucial to effectively address loss and future risks. Shared climate challenges, and ways of sharing solutions, in agriculture, the marine, coasts and fresh water warrant closer co-operation and can bring added value.

Networks are working across the island in areas such as pollinators, energy, and environmental research; and collaborations are evident between local authorities, environmental NGOs, social enterprises and business. There is much to be learned from this experience of sharing good practice. It also is evident that strengthening these relationships and structures would enhance the ability of both jurisdictions to address these common problems. There is significant scope to build on and enhance shared experience and knowledge (including among institutions).

The further sharing of good practice within and across sectors and jurisdictions would be valuable and help to identify future potential for sharing of expertise, collaborative projects and to support and develop societal engagement. A focus on sharing good practice should not be limited to small scale pilot projects or add-ons, but should support ambitious new thinking.

Working towards a common set of challenges across a small single biosphere, can only be strengthened by a shared island perspective. These policy challenges can be approached creatively and collaboratively, such as by bringing together nature-based solutions and climate action, and marine conservation with renewable energy development.

A deep capacity exists within NGOs, local authorities, businesses, public agencies and the public, north and south, to work together to support nature; and to manage the risks from invasive alien species, illegal waste, coastal erosion, biodiversity loss and extreme weather events. Expertise is evident in many spheres, with ecologists, scientists and researchers, among others, sharing ideas on issues such as rewetting bogs and peatland restoration, afforestation, community energy, pollinators, and marine carbon sequestration.

This expertise, if combined with effective means of broader public engagement, could be used to deepen dialogue on the current context and future. It also could help to portray a deeper understanding of the environmental contribution of the institutions and structures established under the Good Friday Agreement. These indispensable forums provide a structured framework for consultation, co-ordination, and action to address environmental challenges on the island.

Increased visibility and recognition for environmental NGOs and the multiple networks across the island, which are working to address a range of environmental challenges is a key enabler. Creating more links between formal and informal practices would be of value, such as structured engagement between the Environment Sector of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and civil society groups on a periodic basis.

Finally, there is value in the further development of a series of all-island conferences, initially on the themes of: circular economy and bio-economy; renewable energy; marine conservation and adaptation; and water quality and management. Other conferences could explore climate and agricultural emissions; nature recovery networks; and approaches to public climate engagement.

6.3.2 Enhance Existing Networks and Collaborative Work

There are considerable shared opportunities, and multiple ways in which all-island collaboration could be at sufficient scale to attract green transition investments in both jurisdictions. The Council, in its recent report (NESC, 2021a), made the following recommendations.

First, particularly for priority areas, existing collaborations and networks should be enhanced; made more visible and linked; and scaled up where appropriate. One such area is comparative and all-island research to address shared environmental challenges. The Council supports the All-island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network, and new funding opportunities such as the North South Research Programme. For example, one specific area that will be critical is all-island collaboration and data-sharing on flood forecasting and warning services.

Second, there are barriers to co-operation that will need to be carefully monitored and tackled if the benefits are to be fully gained. These include regulatory divergence or policy differences that can undermine, rather than mutually support, efforts to transition away from fossil fuels and restore nature.

Third, it is important to seek to align or co-ordinate regulations that can drive the transition in both jurisdictions in complementary (but potentially distinctive) ways, e.g. through fossil fuel subsidy fade-out; carbon pricing; green skill development; and training and job creation.

6.3.3 Working Groups to Drive Additional Collaboration

In its report, published in October 2021, the Council recommended the establishment of a number of strategic working groups to explore opportunities for future collaboration.

Operating for a fixed period, such as six months, they would include representatives from academia, relevant departments, business and NGOs. Each Working Group could be hosted by a university, and stakeholders would optimally include representatives of both jurisdictions. A short report would be produced to identify a number of key areas of mutual interest and potential for further exchanges.

A number of strategic working groups with a broad focus are suggested, but this number could be reduced in consultation with key stakeholders. The Council recommends that consideration be given – as part of the Government’s Shared Island initiative, and in appropriate consultation with the Northern Ireland Executive – to how these Strategic Working Groups could most productively be established, and how best to include representatives from Northern Ireland.

The Council recognises that there are a number of ways in which such groups could be convened, while still meeting the objective of providing a setting for forward-looking discussion and formulation of advice. However, the overarching purpose is that they would explore the opportunities and modes for progressing value-added co-operative approaches, to the pressing and shared environmental challenges, that face both jurisdictions on the island. It would be important that these groups include relevant expertise, including environmental NGOs, and that they be supported to participate, where necessary.

The five suggested strategic working groups are:

Sustainable Agriculture: Expanding Shared Areas of Interest: The agricultural sector was frequently mentioned as being appropriate and necessary to examine from a climate perspective, given the many similarities in the two jurisdictions. There were calls for a common vision for nature-based or wildlife-friendly farming, and a recognition that working with farmers, listening to and visioning with them, is the way forward for both climate and biodiversity. Wider issues of mobility and rural resilience would also need to be considered.

Solutions must underpin land management and land use policy, including our approach to dealing with agricultural emissions – an issue that is especially challenging on the island of Ireland by comparison with other countries.

Existing initiatives such as *Farming for Nature* could be explored further. Peatland restoration was identified as a key area of work, north and south, given the trans-boundary implications for carbon storage levels and inventory reporting.

All-Island Opportunities from a Circular Economy and Bio-economy: An all-island approach has the potential to support the shift to a circular economy in Ireland, and in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, given the potential economies of scale and the resulting opportunity to gain competitive advantage. As both jurisdictions are developing circular economy strategies, it is a good time to examine ways of maximising benefits for both countries.

Specific initiatives could include all-island producer-responsibility initiatives, e.g. for tyres; an all-island waste strategy; an all-island approach to the circular economy; and a shared island approach to reuse and repair. Existing networks and platforms, such as TCD's AMBER centre, CRNI/NIRN and Circuléire, could inform the work of this group.

Collaborations on Renewable Energy: The Council considers future renewable energy development as a significant area of opportunity for north-south co-operation. This is reflected in the consultation material, which emphasised technical and pragmatic reasons such as offshore wind development and the Single Electricity Market, but also the societal and governance challenges of planning, community engagement and support for a transition of this scale.

There is value in developing or strengthening networks for particular renewable energies, such as solar, anaerobic digestion (AD), offshore wind, wave and tidal. There is also scope for building co-operation, sharing expertise, and seeking solutions in the areas of research, investment and governance. For example, Ireland would benefit from policy and incentives to boost production of renewable energy from AD, and bring it to levels comparable to those in Northern Ireland. Another example, given the lack of public refuelling infrastructure for compressed natural gas (CNG) or hydrogen in Northern Ireland, is the opportunity to share knowledge between the two jurisdictions to examine the role and development of this technology across the island.

Valuing Networks for Nature: The Council sees considerable potential to build on the progress of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, and to further discussion on issues such as nature recovery networks and a wildlife web, developing linkages or corridors of natural vegetation between existing conservation areas. Consultees pointed to the potential of a focused approach to hedgerow corridors, and a 'necklace of peatlands' along the border. These would knit the landscape together through common biodiversity objectives, restoration actions, and community buy-in, working collaboratively to deliver large and visible benefits. The potential increase in natural carbon storage (peatlands/wetlands) is a valuable nature-based solution. Mapping of urban green spaces could also be a focus, as could marine nature-based solutions, including the sequestration and mapping of blue carbon sources (e.g. the role of kelp forests).

The working group could also examine the importance of addressing biodiversity alongside climate change, and the potential of natural capital and valuing nature as useful policy tools. There are governance and policy challenges in both jurisdictions regarding how to effectively embed biodiversity, and this is an area that would benefit from co-operation and sharing of good practice.

Another suggested biodiversity area, that could potentially be explored, is the management of invasive alien species where there are efforts to further develop all-island approaches under PEACE PLUS, in the border counties and Northern Ireland.

Marine and Coastal Climate Adaptation and Impact: The Council considers there is value in strengthening co-operation, and expanding knowledge and shared practices, in relation to the marine and coastal impacts of climate change; and in relation to all-island approaches to adaptation. The focus of the working group could include specific challenges such as: flood water management; coastal erosion; and the impacts of a rise in sea-levels.

A number of potential opportunities are underway that could be developed to progress this, and which could inform the work of a strategic working group. The Council welcomes recent collaborations between the EPA, Met Éireann and the Marine Institute, and suggests that such alliances could be developed to include Climate NI, Irish Lights, and other relevant bodies and departments. The possibility of carrying out an all-island review of risks, assets and infrastructure could also be explored.

Opportunities also exist in relation to the significant gap in information on changing ocean and climate. An all-island marine knowledge and innovation programme of research could be developed and resourced, in conjunction with the Marine Institute, as well as the development of all-island climate services; safe and sustainable food from the ocean; healthy marine environment and ecosystems; and building a sustainable blue economy.

6.3.4 All-Island Research

There is considerable potential and value in building an all-island research community, and developing a consistent approach to research supports across both jurisdictions, as well as exploring funding for shared island research challenges (e.g. such as in the areas of climate, biodiversity and our changing ocean and coastlines). Comparative and all-island research to address shared environmental challenges can be strengthened through the All-island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network, and new funding opportunities such as the new North South Research Programme. For example, one specific area that will be critical is all-island collaboration and data-sharing on flood forecasting and warning services.

Chapter 7

Wellbeing Frameworks

7.1 Introduction

There is growing and widespread recognition of the limits of existing approaches to the measurement of progress. The progress of countries has traditionally been measured using GDP – a measure of the value of goods and services produced by a country.

Globally, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is championing work on the development of a wellbeing framework for countries, and in comparing progress.

The OECD framework comprises both objective and subjective aspects of current wellbeing outcomes, and resources and risks for future wellbeing (related to stocks of natural capital, social capital, economic capital and human capital).

A wellbeing approach provides a more comprehensive and grounded assessment of progress. NESC work argued that the core strengths of a wellbeing framework are: to view progress through the lived experience of citizens; to focus attention on cross-departmental outcomes; and to seek to embed external stakeholder views into the policy process (NESC, 2021b). It is in essence an attempt to create a more open policy-making process.

In the context of a shared island there is significant potential to consider how a shared approach to wellbeing might provide a longer-term basis for a grounded and data-rich discussion about the lived experiences of people living on all parts of the island.

The work on implementing wellbeing frameworks is at an early stage in both jurisdictions. For this reason this chapter is laid out differently. It provides an overview of developments in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

The work by NESC suggests that there is an appetite on both sides of the border for a wellbeing approach, where the limitations of GDP as a measure of progress are recognised. Having such a shared agenda and common purpose could lend itself to further co-operation. The chapter concludes with a preliminary discussion about the prospects for further collaboration on wellbeing frameworks.

7.2 Wellbeing Developments in Ireland

The Irish Government is currently engaged in the introduction of an overarching wellbeing framework. However the concept is not new: the first major report on wellbeing in Ireland was published by NESC in 2009; work on performance budgeting has been underway since 2012; and there are a range of different types of wellbeing initiatives across the policy system at national and local levels.

A number of Irish frameworks focus on wellbeing in a multi-dimensional way. For example, *Healthy Ireland* outlines how the key health challenge in Ireland now is chronic diseases, many of which are impacted by multiple policy areas. The rationale recognise that wellbeing is multi-dimensional and influenced by many policies and, therefore, requires collaboration between cross-sectoral policy makers and implementers. *Better Outcomes Better Futures* aligns government commitments to children and young people against five national outcomes. The framework recognises that almost all policy areas have a direct or indirect effect on children and young people's lives. The wellbeing statements adopted by the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) show significant crossover between wellbeing domains, for example, the domain of health (physical and mental) extends beyond the need for decent healthcare, and incorporates the importance of the environment, infrastructure, and social connections (SJI, 2020: 6).

The 2020 Programme for Government announced the intention to create a set of wellbeing indicators for use in driving policy and evaluating outcomes. It highlighted the potential of the Covid-19 pandemic to increase poverty and inequality and the potential role of wellbeing measurement to ensure a fair and balanced recovery. It outlined this intention as follows:

We will develop a set of indicators to create a broader context for policy-making, to include:

- a set of indices to create a well-rounded, holistic view of how our society is faring; and
-
- a balanced scorecard for each area of public policy, focused on outcomes and the impact that those policies have on individuals and communities. Initially, this will be focused on housing, education, and health. ...

Once developed, we will ensure that it is utilised in a systematic way across government policy-making at local and national levels, in setting budgetary priorities, evaluating programmes and reporting progress (Government of Ireland, 2020: 12).

The objective is to develop a multi-dimensional approach to understanding the impacts of public policy and, over time, to use a wellbeing framework as a complement to existing economic tools across policy-making – including setting budgetary priorities, evaluating programmes, and reporting progress (IDWG, 2021). The development of a wellbeing framework is being led by the Department of the Taoiseach and jointly sponsored by the Department of Finance, and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The detailed work on developing the framework is being undertaken through a Departmental Working Group chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach. The work of this group is taking place through a phased and iterative process.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Mid-year Expenditure Report 2021 included a chapter on wellbeing and public policy. The report states that:

It is important to go beyond presenting high-level indicators by developing a knowledge base around wellbeing as a policy objective and integrating wellbeing metrics into the various stages of the policy-making process (Government of Ireland, 2021d).

In July 2021, NESC published a consultation report on wellbeing. The consultation process involved 20 interviews with stakeholders, experts, and local and regional actors. A survey was also used to garner views from stakeholder organisations representing sectoral pillars, and groups working with particular population groups, with 450 survey responses received. The work and consultation was supported by a stakeholder and expert group.

The consultation revealed three overarching and inter-linked priorities: equity, agency and sustainability.

Equity reflects a desire to ensure that a spirit of equity, or social friendship, is more evident in Ireland. Survey respondents frequently linked equality with ensuring societal wellbeing: a fair and equitable society is needed to ensure citizens' wellbeing and to enable taking collective decisions in the common interest.

Agency is concerned with the meaningful engagement of citizens in identifying priorities. The consultation and research, in Ireland and internationally, showed that wellbeing is complex, multi-faceted, and personal and societal, and is therefore best understood through deliberative and deep dialogue with citizens. Wellbeing frameworks that do not sufficiently engage with citizens, risk becoming a technocratic exercise with limited public buy-in, and limited capacity to create social capital.

Sustainability emerged as a key priority in the consultation, both among members of the stakeholder and expert group, and in the wider survey. Key concerns related to identifying and resolving potential trade-offs between dimensions, in particular short-term economic wellbeing (according to some measures) and environmental sustainability.

The NESC report made recommendations in four broad areas:

- Additional research into understanding how wellbeing frameworks actually change outcomes is needed.
-
- A deeper understanding of equity in an Irish context should be fostered – equity being identified as an overarching goal for an Irish wellbeing framework.

- Processes and institutions should be developed to support and embed the framework, including additional consultation with the public and stakeholders.
- Data and reporting should be improved, especially on sustainability and environmental sustainability, in particular (NESC, 2021b).

NESC continues to work in the area of wellbeing, and the next report on wellbeing will focus on implementation and international experience.

At the same time as the first NESC report, the Department of the Taoiseach published the *First Report on a Well-being Framework in Ireland*. This reports sets out a vision for an over-arching framework that will guide its development over time. This vision is: ‘enabling all our people to live fulfilled lives now and into the future’ (Government of Ireland, 2021a: 2). The report also illustrates the conceptual framework and dashboard for wellbeing in Ireland. These are reflective of the OECD’s *How’s Life* model.

The Irish wellbeing framework has 11 dimensions:

- subjective wellbeing;
- mental and physical health;
- income and wealth;
- knowledge and skills;
- housing and local area;
- environment, climate and biodiversity;
- safety and security;
- work and job quality;
- time use;
- community, social connections and cultural participation; and
- civic engagement and cultural expression.

The framework is accompanied by a dashboard of indicators, linked to the greatest extent possible to the explicit aspects set out within each dimension. This approach to the Irish wellbeing framework allows for meaningful international comparison, but includes indicators that are specific to the Irish context. The report also includes a list of indicators that can accompany existing economic indicators for policy-making and budgeting. The Department of the Taoiseach has subsequently commenced stakeholder consultation, with the intention of garnering further views to inform the Government’s approach to wellbeing.

In October 2021, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) launched the Wellbeing Information hub. The hub flows from the overarching framework published by the Department of the Taoiseach. This offers a ‘helicopter view of how Ireland is doing’. It brings together 34 different indicators, allowing users to access a range of factors that influence quality of life in Ireland.⁴⁶

The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) has also published *A Well-being Framework for Ireland – the Parliamentary Perspective*. In this, it is suggested that ‘new policy announcements include a statement on the well-being dimension(s)

⁴⁶ See <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wbhub/well-beinginformationhub/>, accessed 20.12.21.

from the Framework that they plan to address, how and what impact the policy is intended to have, especially on the chosen indicators in that dimension’ (PBO, 2021). The PBO also organised a presentation on the wellbeing initiative to Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas in November 2021.

In addition, the Irish Council of Churches/Irish Inter-Church Meeting (ICC/IICM) is working on a collaborative project with the Centre for Religion, Human Values and International Relations at Dublin City University and the Dublin City Inter-faith Forum. The project, ‘The Economics of Belonging’, is exploring how the experience of faith communities can help shape the development of more effective wellbeing indicators, across the island of Ireland. In this project there has been significant engagement with the NESC work on wellbeing.

7.3 Wellbeing Developments in Northern Ireland

7.3.1 National Level

Through the support of a Scottish based charity, Carnegie (UK) Trust, Northern Ireland embarked on a wellbeing project in 2013. The Carnegie Roundtable on Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland, a partnership between the Carnegie (UK) Trust and Queen’s University Belfast, took its lead from the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission.⁴⁷ The 18 members of the roundtable comprised civil servants and individuals from business, the third sector, youth, academia and local government in Northern Ireland, plus a NESC analyst from Ireland (Coutts *et al.*, 2021). Following extensive engagement with civil society, and through parallel engagement from the children’s sector on outcome-based accountability, the Northern Ireland Executive published an outcomes-based Programme for Government in 2016. There have now been three iterations of this Programme for Government, the first and second both issued in 2016, and a third ‘working draft’ thereafter.

The approach adopted aimed to create a shared, unifying vision for a post-conflict society and to assist the power-sharing Northern Ireland Executive to work together for shared outcomes. The wellbeing framework aimed to create a conversation and common language that sat outside constitutional debates, whilst acknowledging that tensions exist. The framework contained 12 outcomes with 49 indicators. The collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive in early 2017 stalled progress. However, a new Programme for Government with updated and revised outcomes is currently being developed. It is notable that local government and community leadership have played an integral part in wellbeing developments in Northern Ireland and this work is outlined in the next section.

7.3.2 Local Level

There have been developments on wellbeing at local government level in Northern Ireland, supported by Carnegie (UK) Trust. As a backdrop, the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 gave the 11 newly created local authorities (down from 26) the responsibility for leading community planning processes for their respective districts.⁴⁸ In doing so they had to identify: (a) long-term objectives for improving the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the district; and (b) how their long-term objectives would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in Northern Ireland. The purpose of the reform of local government was to create efficiency savings (to be reinvested into services), strengthen the coherence of local public services, and provide local government with the key role in relation to community planning (OECD, 2016).

As noted by Carnegie, the language of sustainable development and wellbeing in the legislation cannot have been accidental. However, given the paucity of commentary on this aspect of the change (with most reports focusing on the reduction of council entities), the transformative nature of the legislation may not have been fully realised until some way into implementation. The resultant Community Plans extend beyond the local government electoral cycle, with six

⁴⁷ The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, generally referred to as the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission after the surnames of its leaders, was established by the French government in 2008 to examine how the economic and social progress of a nation could be measured without relying on GDP alone. Their report was published in 2009.

⁴⁸ Community planning aims to improve the connection between all tiers of government and society through partnership working to jointly deliver better outcomes for everyone.

plans looking forward as far as 2030, and four to 2032. The Plans act as local wellbeing frameworks in which local authorities and their partners, as Community Planning Partnerships,⁴⁹ must take account of wellbeing at a local and Northern Ireland level. As early as 2017, there were concerns that support for implementation had been limited to statutory guidance for the operation of community planning from the Northern Ireland Executive, with limited funding to provide short-term support. The Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) called for more budgetary certainty to support longer-term council investment decisions designed to assist in the delivery of the Programme for Government and community planning (Coutts *et al.*, 2021: 23).

As noted above, Carnegie UK-supported wellbeing work at national level in Northern Ireland was curtailed by the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2017. Thus, Carnegie (UK) Trust took the decision to shift their focus from the Northern Ireland Executive and public bodies to local government. From independent research Carnegie (UK) Trust had found that all of the Community Plans had adopted the language and substance of wellbeing, but that local government was charged with responsibility for delivery with little support. Therefore, in 2017, Carnegie (UK) Trust committed to providing some support to local authorities to improve wellbeing in their areas.

At the outset, an Advisory Group was established that included representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE), the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), civil society, and key stakeholders with a wellbeing interest based outside Northern Ireland, including a representative from Ireland.⁵⁰ The role of the Advisory Group involved: supporting the project design and delivery, including the application process and the development of the packages of support for the project partners; and supporting the dissemination of project learning to other Community Planning Partnerships in Northern Ireland and their counterparts in other parts of the UK and Ireland (Coutts *et al.*, 2021).

Following an open call to which all 11 councils responded, the following three Community Planning Partnerships were selected for financial and in-kind support:

- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council;

- Derry City and Strabane District Council; and

- Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council.

The project supported the Community Planning Partnerships to overcome challenges in implementing their Community Plans. As part of the three-year programme, a suite of activities took place. These included:

- support for the three selected Community Planning Partnerships on co-production⁵¹ and shared leadership;⁵²

- peer-to-peer sessions, provided for the community planning officers from all 11 council areas;

- study trips to Wales and New York, USA;

- more than 200 people becoming members of an online peer support network; and

- Carnegie UK and NILGA training on the use of data and evidence for elected members.

⁴⁹ Community Planning Partnerships in each local authority area comprise representatives from the council, statutory bodies, agencies, and the wider community, including the community and voluntary sector.

⁵⁰ Helen Johnston from NESC was the Irish representative on this group.

⁵¹ Co-production means sharing responsibilities and power equally between service users and those who advocate on their behalf, and service providers across all sectors, to improve services and local communities to everyone's benefit.

⁵² Shared leadership is where leadership is distributed amongst a set of individuals instead of being centralised in the hands of a single individual who acts in the role of leader.

Each of the three Community Planning Partnerships received support for a number of activities. The activities included:

- participatory budgeting;

- putting in place governance structures for partnership;

- shared leadership in the community and voluntary sector;

- the production of a co-production tool kit; and

- the establishment of a natural capital account in Derry City and Strabane District Council (discussed in Part III of this report).

There were a number of obstacles encountered during the project, including:

- Not everyone can come to the table. There is a need to acknowledge this and try to be as inclusive as possible.

- Not everyone at the table has power, so that there is a need to acknowledge the power relationships and dynamics – for example, with respect to funding.

- The lack of access to data, yet there is a need for information to understand the current situation.

- There is a need to be able to share budget information, and to have resources and time allocated for community planning.

7.4 Scotland⁵³

Scotland was the first of the three UK devolved legislatures of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to embark on developing a wellbeing framework. In 2007, the Scottish government designed a National Performance Framework with 11 National Outcomes, which were to be collectively delivered by all governmental departments and public bodies. The National Performance Framework has grown in prominence and impact since 2007 and has increasingly been linked to policy-making for inclusive growth. The latest version, which was published in June 2018, has transitioned from a performance management tool to a wellbeing framework. The wellbeing framework contains 10 desired outcomes, with 81 indicators. The framework is now aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it is a statutory document.

The origins of the National Performance Framework were rooted in outcomes-based performance management. Its development over more than a decade is noted as being the result of the commitment and leadership of the Scottish government, the continued involvement of a wider group of stakeholders, and a desire for Scotland to be seen as a leading nation in public sector reform and sustainable development.

After 10 years in operation, there are contradictory views on its success. Whilst within the civil service there is a strong belief that the framework has been transformative, for others, the scale of the change sought has not yet been realised. However, there is some evidence of a link between a wellbeing framework and advocacy, policy and social change in the justice service. One of the key overall strengths of the National Performance Framework is the fact that it is a whole-of-government approach. However, the success of the tool for vertical integration has been hindered by the number of competing initiatives, and by ongoing austerity which has impacted on local services in unpredictable ways.

⁵³ The review of wellbeing developments in Scotland and Wales draws on work by Wallace who reviewed wellbeing frameworks in the devolved UK administrations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Wallace, 2019).

7.5 Wales

Wales is considered to be at the global forefront of legislation on sustainable development, and has gone further than Scotland and Northern Ireland by requiring public bodies to safeguard the interests of future generations.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a legal duty on all public bodies to carry out sustainable development to improve and achieve economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing. The Act, which places equal weight on all aspects of wellbeing, challenges economic dominance in policy-making. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals, with 46 indicators, and is aligned to the SDGs. In its implementation there is an emphasis on performance management in public services. There are early indications of the Act having a positive impact, especially in relation to the development of thinking and practice on adverse childhood experiences.

The original focus on environmental wellbeing remains prominent, especially through the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. It is contended that there is a need for greater involvement of the community and voluntary sector in service and policy planning.

7.6 Scope to Deepen Co-operation on Wellbeing

While there has been limited co-operation on the development of measures of progress and wellbeing frameworks across the island of Ireland, some areas where there has been co-operation are as follows:

- the involvement of an Irish NESC representative on the Carnegie Wellbeing Roundtable and on the Advisory Group for the embedding of wellbeing in local government programme in Northern Ireland;

- consultation with Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh personnel involved in wellbeing in the preparation of NESC's consultation report on wellbeing (NESC, 2021b).

- engagement by local authorities in Northern Ireland in their wellbeing work through the Community Planning Partnership – for example, the work undertaken by Derry City and Strabane District Council through the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, where they work co-operatively with Donegal County Council and other partners,⁵⁴ and

- the development of both the Irish and Northern Irish wellbeing frameworks, which have been informed by the OECD work on wellbeing, in particular the use of an indicator dashboard. The respective statistical agencies – the CSO and NISRA – have been involved in this work and have had ongoing liaison.

As well as these specific examples, there is co-operation between individuals and organisations interested in the development of measures of progress and wellbeing frameworks. For example, the Wellbeing Economy Alliance Ireland (WEAll Hub Ireland) began in late 2020, when a number of Irish charities and interested individuals formed the core of the Hub. Their vision resonates with the wellbeing initiatives being taken in both parts of the island, with a stated aim to promote the concept of a wellbeing economy within Irish society, north and south.

There is the scope to deepen co-operation on wellbeing across the island in a number of ways.

The development of wellbeing frameworks and plans generally involves consultation, with a view to engaging with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible. As such it offers an opportunity for both jurisdictions to consult on a north-south basis, as well as east-west.

The use of a common approach based on OECD wellbeing work is an important enabler, as there is the potential for both statistical offices and other data collectors and analysts to cooperate in the development and application of

⁵⁴ Part III discusses the work of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership in more detail.

indicators and other measures. However, the absence of UK statistics from Eurostat may hinder the outcomes of such work.

The use of a wellbeing framework is an important tool in meeting the challenges countries are currently facing, such as the impact of the pandemic, climate change and digitalisation. The use of the framework can help facilitate engagement with a wide range of stakeholders to inform priorities. In this context, there is the opportunity for both jurisdictions on the island, and across the islands east-west, to work together to learn from each other. In the longer term, there may be the opportunity for the wellbeing frameworks, north and south, to become more aligned on common and shared concerns.

At local level, there are clearly advantages to co-operation on wellbeing developments, especially in the border areas. Such co-operation could be advanced through the work of the Community Planning Partnerships in Northern Ireland and the Public Participation Networks in Ireland.

There are also a number of inhibitors or challenges to greater north-south co-operation. For a wellbeing approach/framework to be transformative it needs to be integrated into policy-making and budgeting, and given the different legislative authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland the extent to which this can happen on a shared island basis may be limited.

Chapter 8



8.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters in Part II have set out areas of north south co-operation, and potential co-operation, on the economy, social policy, the environment, and wellbeing. It is evident from this analysis that there are some factors that enable co-operative working and some factors which inhibit it. It is also clear that there are varying degrees of co-operation – from occasional communication or liaison, through informal networking, to more formalised structures, shared agendas and joint decision-making. This chapter sets out the main insights drawn from the work in the preceding chapters, drawing attention to the main enablers and barriers.

8.2 Shared Agenda and Willingness to Work Together

The most fundamental enabler of cross-border collaboration is a shared ambition or common agenda. This is key to co-operation and there is ample evidence of this raising the profile and support for action in many areas, including climate change, mental health services, and social enterprise supports. It is also evident in the exchange of knowledge on the two social welfare systems in operation on the island at the social welfare summer schools, and through the shared education programme and co-operation between the respective education inspectorates.

Part of people coming together with a shared ambition is about getting to know each other and each other's perspective. Personal relationships are formed, and these deepen over time with ongoing engagement and trust developing. Trust is a key foundation on which co-operation, partnership and collaboration can be built. This is evident in the work of CAWT, where trust has been built up over many years in delivering health and social care services in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

These shared island relationships are in evidence in the establishment of networks that share a common interest or aim. Such networks enable the exchange of information and knowledge on shared interests, the hosting of events, and the promotion of their particular agenda. This approach is apparent in the All-Island Food Poverty Network and the Social Enterprise Networks – SENI and SERI.

While the building of relationships and networks can take place informally, the setting up of more formal arrangements can enable co-operation on a more enduring basis. Examples of these more formal arrangements are the All-Island Food Poverty Network, which is co-chaired by the North South Implementation Body *Safefood* and the Food Standards Agency of Northern Ireland; the cross-border health and social care partnership CAWT; and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), such as the MOU between the Departments of Health in Ireland and Northern Ireland in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. These formal arrangements are underpinned, at least to some extent, by the NSMC.

It is also worth noting that time is an important factor, as relationships and trust are built up over time and allow informal and formal structures to be established to facilitate co-operation, knowledge exchange and shared learning.

The sense of shared ambition was most strikingly evident in relation to climate and biodiversity. Deepening co-operation and collaboration on urgent environmental challenges represents a significant and timely opportunity for Ireland and Northern Ireland, but also underpins the reality that the climate and biodiversity crises will not be resolved by governments or countries alone. The consultation undertaken by the Council provides a strong demonstration of the value of engagement and sharing of good practice, highlighting existing networks and areas where progress has been delivered through co-operation. It has also brought to light how the land, sea, air, water and nature we share require integrated, holistic and collaborative solutions.

Key lessons from the Council's work on environmental challenge and opportunities point first to the shared experiences identified in local authorities, NGOs, social enterprise and business, practitioners, and civil servants working to address common issues; second, to the shared ambition to deliver more ambitious and integrated climate and biodiversity action; and third, the need to take advantage of and further progress the multiple economic, social and environmental benefits of co-operating to develop priority areas of opportunity. While the journey to net zero will be driven by international commitments and national action, a shared island perspective can maximise and deliver on areas where

the potential exists to be leaders – for example, in relation to renewable energy, valuing nature and the circular economy.

It is also important to state that, while the urgency for climate and biodiversity action is clear, as already noted, there is awareness that strengthening co-operation takes time and requires public engagement and participation. Nevertheless, it is now timely to deepen action given the considerable legislative and policy development across the island, and the increasing international focus on both climate and biodiversity action.

In addition, work reported in Part II highlights that the development of co-operation requires supporting the key enablers and mitigating the challenges. While much co-operation takes place at local level, through personal relationships and networks, in some areas there is potential for more structured relationships to be put in place.

There are a number of important enablers which have helped to support and develop co-operation across key environmental areas. These include the establishment of formal structures, as outlined in Section 6.2.2, arising from the Good Friday Agreement institutions, but also in relation to the energy market, water quality, and other areas that have been underpinned by EU structures and supports. Another set of enablers stem from cross-border resources such as INTERREG and successive PEACE programmes, along with other research funding.

A further enabler is resourcing and building the capacity to work collaboratively to address environmental challenges. For example, supporting and strengthening forums/networks in key areas such as climate, data, and regulation – for example, the EPA is part of a wider network across the UK and Ireland that facilitates such co-operation. This capacity to respond and build networks is not always there, due to a lack of resources or a lack of a clear strategic focus.

In this sense, funding is a key supportive factor that enables this shared ambition to translate into action on the ground. EU funding to support cross-border co-operation has been of critical importance. The PEACE PLUS programme provides the opportunity to continue this work, which can usefully be matched and/or complemented by national and local funding.

A further enabling factor is ‘going digital’, which has been ramped up by the Covid-19 pandemic, and can support co-operation across borders. This is evident in the development of online services in mental health, including education and training, as well as making it easier to access mental health services. However, it is important to ensure that some sections of the population are not digitally excluded.

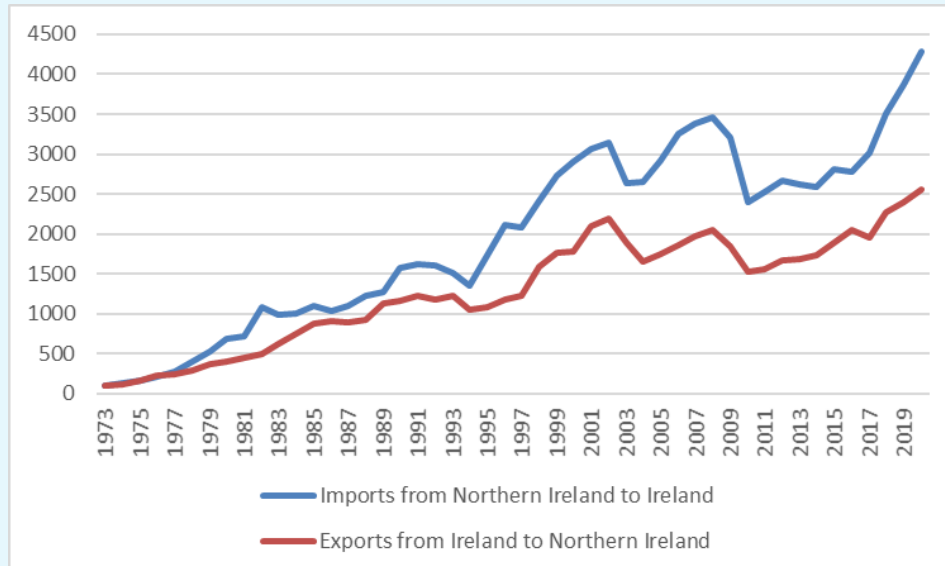
8.3 Managing Brexit-Related Uncertainty and Grasping Opportunities

An uncertain political situation can destabilise efforts to work on a co-operative basis. Following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, in particular, co-operative working relationships were built up on a north-south, and east-west, basis within and across these islands.

The mainstreaming social inclusion project, noted in Chapter 5, is just one of many examples of how such relationships can flourish in a stable political situation. However, as evidenced in the poverty and mental health reviews for this research project, there are enduring trauma, ill-health and poverty issues associated with the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The UK’s withdrawal from the European Union places uncertainty on long-established co-operation and knowledge exchange. Examples of the potential of Brexit to impact cross-border co-operation is seen in the collation of statistics, particularly at a European level, for example in the measurement of poverty.

The benefit of stability is also evident in trade statistics. Cross-border trade has been expanding for several decades. The reduction in trade barriers on the island began with the Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement in 1938, and then continued with Ireland and the UK joining the European Union in 1973, while remaining barriers were eliminated with the introduction of the European Single Market in 1993, see Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1: Trend in the Value of Cross-border Trade in Goods, 1973 to 2019, 1973 =100

Source: CSO Database, Trade Statistics.

Cross-border trade by small companies has been specifically facilitated by InterTrade Ireland – a North South Implementation Body under the Good Friday Agreement – by helping small businesses in Ireland and Northern Ireland to explore new cross-border markets; develop new products, processes and services; and become investor-ready.

The UK decision to exit the EU raised concerns around disruption of north-south trade and the all-island economy. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland was agreed between the UK and EU as part of the Withdrawal Agreement, to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland. Concerns have been raised about the related introduction of checks on goods being moved from Britain to Northern Ireland, and one party in the NI Executive has taken a position of non-participation in the NSMC until the concerns are addressed. In October 2021 the European Commission published proposals that would greatly reduce the extent of checks and paper work on goods entering Northern Ireland from Britain. Discussions on these proposals are ongoing between the EU and UK.

There is a risk that disagreement between the UK and EU in relation to the Protocol could lead to a trade dispute between the UK and the EU, or ongoing political uncertainty in relation to the operation of the Protocol. This could disrupt trade between Ireland and the UK, would make it difficult for Northern Ireland to harness the economic benefits of the Protocol, and could continue to impact north-south co-operation.

The Protocol does not apply to services, but political uncertainty pertains here also. According to InterTrade Ireland, there are expected to be few immediate changes for most services traded across the border, since most of the regulations will at least initially remain highly aligned and similar; and the Common Travel Area facilitates free movement, including for service providers. However, in some services, companies in Northern Ireland had used single EU-wide authorisations and licenses to do business across the EU. These types of service providers now need to be authorised to do business with any EU member state, including Ireland. Such services include certain financial services, communications, transport and a few other sectors (InterTrade Ireland, 2021). As noted earlier, recent research has indicated scope to considerably expand mutually beneficial cross-border trade in services on the island (Lawless, 2021). However, a conducive political environment would be important in realising this growth potential, including by agreeing supporting policy co-operation/co-ordination actions.

Recognition of professional qualifications is another essential underpinning of much trade in services. Brexit has meant the ending of automatic mutual recognition of professional qualifications between the EU and UK. Those whose UK professional qualifications were already recognised in Ireland prior to the ending of the transition period (up to 31 December 2020) will continue to have their qualifications recognised in Ireland (and the rest of the EU). The Irish Government has encouraged regulatory authorities in Ireland, some of which operate on an all-island basis, to engage with their counterparts in the UK in order to manage the process of continued recognition of UK qualifications in national law in Ireland.⁵⁵

Brexit also means that EU rules on public procurement no longer apply in the UK. However, the EU-UK Trade & Co-operation Agreement (TCA) supports continuation of public procurement between the EU and the UK. The TCA provides that both the EU and the UK will treat providers from the corresponding jurisdiction 'no less favourably than the most favourable treatment accorded, in like situations to providers in their own jurisdiction' (OGP, 2021: 42). However, tenders from third countries including the UK must demonstrate proof of compliance with EU rules and regulations.

It is important not to overlook the fact that Brexit also presents opportunities in some sectors on the island. Northern Ireland has a particular opportunity, in that it is the only jurisdiction that enjoys no trade barriers to either the EU or UK markets, in relation to goods. This offers a particular opportunity to attract FDI investment in Northern Ireland.

8.4 Capturing All-Island Economic Potential

The review of economic co-operation in this report details areas of co-operation including in trade, energy, and spatial and regional development. The creation of the I-SEM on the island of Ireland represents a major achievement in north-south co-operation and, as noted, there is considerable potential in further co-operation on energy matters. The I-SEM has generated substantial benefits. It has enhanced efficiency, reduced costs for consumers, and improved energy security. It is lauded as one of the most successful north-south co-operation projects. Notably, Eirgrid and SONI have now committed to reaching at least 70 per cent renewable electricity by 2030, in line with the energy and climate ambitions of both jurisdictions.

There has been strong growth in north-south trade and considerable progress in the realisation of an all-island economy. There is a memo of understanding in place on spatial development. However, the strategic direction to date has not fully capitalised on the potential for co-operation on regional development.

The Border region of Ireland is one of relatively low income (18% below the national average in 2018) and low labour-force participation (56% in 2020 compared to the average for Ireland of 61%). Lower income levels are also evident in some adjoining Western counties and in the Midland region. There is no official equivalent to the Border region in Northern Ireland, but the lowest income district on the northern side of the border is Derry City and Strabane, where income was 11.5 per cent below the Northern Ireland average in 2018. In Ireland, County Donegal has the lowest income (22% below the average for Ireland).

In order to promote regional development, and realise the vision for the regions set out in National Planning Framework and Regional Development Strategy 2035, a more joined-up approach is required.

Currently, the remit of the economic development agencies – IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, and InvestNI – is to focus on their respective jurisdictions, north and south; although IDA Ireland has committed to supporting the Shared Island mission in its current strategy. While there are some important operational interactions between the agencies on a cross-border basis, there is scope to mandate more strategic and collaborative working between the enterprise agencies. This would enable a better take-up of opportunities to support enterprise growth and attract investment on a cross-border regional basis.

⁵⁵ See <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/869e17-studying/#professional-qualifications>, accessed 21.12.21.

As noted, the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor represents a significant concentration of people and economic activity on the island, and offers opportunities for further collaboration. Furthermore, there are more opportunities to deepen collaboration and, through the effective use of available funding, to promote balanced regional development and rebalance infrastructure deficits.

8.5 Wellbeing as a Focal Point for the Shared Island

In 2021, Ireland published a wellbeing framework with an associated indicator dashboard. Northern Ireland, with the support of Carnegie (UK) Trust, has been developing such a framework since 2013 and has seen a number of iterations. However, in recent times more attention has been given to the development of wellbeing initiatives at local government level, through community planning partnerships.

There has been limited co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland in the development of their wellbeing frameworks, though there has been engagement between the respective statistical offices, and some limited consultation and representation on advisory groups.

There is potential, however, for further co-operation in a number of areas, which would capture progress across the island as well as within the two jurisdictions, and at a local level. This could include the use of the wellbeing frameworks as a tool to facilitate engagement with a wide range of stakeholders across the island, to inform priorities in relation to key challenges, and to learn from each other. There is also the opportunity for engagement on data and indicator development, for representation on advisory groups to include a north-south and east-west dimension, and for greater co-operation at local level – for example, between Community Planning Partnerships in Northern Ireland and the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) in Ireland.

8.6 Understanding the Day-to-Day Complexities which Shape Collaboration

As well as enablers, there are barriers and challenges to co-operation between the two jurisdictions on the island.

A challenge can arise from public spending cuts, with scarcer resources allocated to core activities, and cross-jurisdictional activities being limited. This can result in so-called ‘back-to-back’ developments rather than cross-border co-operation, with some examples of this seen in the mental health and poverty areas during periods of retrenchment.

In addition, legislation which does not take account of the need for interaction with a neighbouring jurisdiction can limit co-operation across borders. For example, in relation to mental health, there is no legal framework for detention in the other jurisdiction, making it difficult to move individuals for treatment across the border. The Mental Capacity Act (NI) 2016 allows for the transfer of patients but the legislation has not been commenced in Northern Ireland, and there is no equivalent legislation in Ireland. If the statutory provision was better attuned to the cross-border context, facilities could be shared and utilised more efficiently in some areas. For example, Derry Mental Health unit, which has a 30-bed capacity, could accommodate patients from across the border were it legally possible.

The breakdown or diminishing of relationships – either through disagreements, key people moving on, or new policy or practice mandates – can hinder co-operation built up over time. Elements of relationship breakdown are evident in places across the social policy areas considered, but these can be tempered by putting in place more formal arrangements, such as official structures and agreements.

A further limitation to cross-border co-operation for some organisations is adherence to key performance indicators (KPIs) agreed for their organisation, which do not include cross-border work. These often apply only within their jurisdiction, so that achievements in another jurisdiction would not be registered as part of their performance. This approach can limit supports for co-operation in the social enterprise, and community and voluntary sectors.

It is important that barriers to co-operation are carefully monitored and tackled if the benefits are to be fully gained. On environmental issues, these include regulatory divergence or policy differences that can undermine, rather than mutually support, efforts to transition away from fossil fuels and restore nature. With many environmental policy and

regulatory changes in progress north and south on the island, post Brexit, there are potential risks from different approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation policy, renewable energy, and other areas of significant investment.

For those working to build co-operation and collaboration across the border through research or practice, resources and data can be lacking. For example, examining issues comparatively or from an all-island perspective takes time and effort, given the lack of accessible sources or single points of contact.

PART III

Digging Deeper Into Co-operation

This section uses the North West Region to illustrate how cross-border co-operation works in practice.⁵⁶ The section introduces the work from the North West, follows this with a focus on strategies and structures, and then actions and outcomes, before drawing conclusions.

Chapter 9: Digging Deeper – Methodology

Chapter 10: North West Region – Strategies and Structures

Chapter 11: North West Region – Actions and Outcomes

Chapter 12: Conclusions

⁵⁶ Other cross-border regions, such as the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN), the East Border Region (EBR), and the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) also demonstrate how cooperation can work in practice. However, only one region could be considered in-depth within this research project.

Chapter 9



9.1 Why a Place-Based Approach?

A place-based approach inquiry was designed to explore in-depth the ways in which co-operation worked, the barriers, and the enablers. The focus was on the lived experience of people in border areas, with the aim of exploring two integrated thematic issues – sustainability and connectivity – within a specific border region.

The work focused on the question of how sustainability is understood, captured and supported in the policy process in both jurisdictions. This place-based approach also sought to consider connectivity in terms of the connections of people and places, with a particular focus on the lived experience.

The aim of the research was to take the findings from the analysis in Part II of the research, on co-operation on economic, social, and environmental issues, and to dig-deeper to develop a more grounded understanding of co-operation in a region. It is a case study of practice rather than a case study of best practice.

9.2 Why the North West?

Following analysis, and discussions with a number of key actors, the North West Region was chosen as the location for this strand of the NESC project. The North West Region comprises Donegal County Council, and Derry City and Strabane District Council. When taken as one region, the North West is the fourth-largest urban agglomeration on the island of Ireland, incorporating Letterkenny, Derry and Strabane, with a population of approximately 400,000.

There were a number of reasons why the North West was selected for this area-based project.

First, it has a long tradition of cross-border co-operation, especially between local government bodies, dating back to the 1970s. Cross-border collaboration on regional issues began in the 1970s when Donegal County Council and Londonderry District Council initiated a dialogue process that aimed to explore issues they could potentially work on together.

This initiative, which was known as the North West Region Cross Border Group, was primarily about ‘getting to know each other’. Through this mechanism, council officials and elected officials jointly engaged in activities ranging from advocacy and lobbying around regional priorities, to securing EU funds for initiatives addressing regional issues (ICLRD, 2016). This process was reasonably informal with co-operation dependent more on the identification of practical issues of shared interest rather than the existence of any formalised structures and strategies. This cross-border grouping evolved into a network of councillors concerned with the economic and social progress of the region, an objective they pursued through a combination of lobbying and the active targeting of EU funding opportunities (ICLRD, 2016).

Second, based on the informal collaboration, an innovative place-based governance framework was developed. This framework incorporates the North West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP) and the North West Regional Development Group (NWRDG), and was established to support the sustainable economic and social development of the North West Region.

Third, the North West Region faces particular challenges across a number of key metrics. In an analysis of regional development, both the north-west of Ireland and of Northern Ireland lag behind the development of other parts of both jurisdictions. Both Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council have the lowest incomes within their respective jurisdictions⁵⁷ and below-average labour-force participation. In addition, poverty and deprivation indicators in Northern Ireland show that some of the most deprived areas are in the north-west, in the Derry City and Strabane District Council areas in particular; and in Ireland, the Pobal deprivation index shows high levels of rural (and urban) disadvantage in Donegal.

⁵⁷ For example, County Donegal had the lowest disposable income per person of any county in Ireland in 2018 at €16,490 (compared to a national average of €21,2700), see <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/cirgdp/countyincomesandregionalgdp2018/>, accessed 25.02.22; in Northern Ireland, Derry and Strabane District Council Area had the lowest Gross Disposable Income per head in 2019 at £15,331 compared to a NI figure of £17,331, see <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/economic-output-statistics/gross-disposable-household-income>, accessed 25.02.22.

Reflecting these challenges, support for regional development in the North West has been a feature of various strategy and policy documents published by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. In addition, the objective of investing co-operatively for the benefit of the North West is referenced in the Irish Government's Programme for Government commitments on a Shared Island.

Finally, there has been significant progress with potential for further development. There has been improvement in income levels, tourism, natural resources, renewable energy potential, and emerging new sectors/clusters; and vastly increased potential for remote working and the attraction of online businesses.⁵⁸

9.3 Four Supporting Focus Groups

As outlined in Chapter 2, four online focus groups were held, as follows:

- Good Jobs

- Green Transformation

- Poverty and Mental Health

- Mechanisms for Co-operation.

Participants were invited from a range of civic, public, community and voluntary, and business sector areas.

Box 9.1 outlines the key findings from the focus groups. The work helped to inform and shape the understanding of cross-border co-operation in a border region, in particular in relation to how to realise the opportunities and benefits of co-operative working.

9.4 Additional Methods Used in the Digging Deeper Work

In addition to the lessons drawn from the focus groups, analysis was undertaken of relevant documents in relation to cross-border activity in the North West, along with interviews with individuals who have been working on developing co-operation in this region.

The remaining chapters in this part of the report set out the strategies and structures, and actions and outcomes, for co-operation in the North West, before drawing some conclusions.

⁵⁸ See North West City Region Ireland/Northern Ireland *Statement of Regional Priorities Submitted at the Request of the North South Ministerial Council*, February 2021, Derry and Strabane District Council & Donegal County Council.

Box 9.1: Four Thematic Focus Groups

Good Jobs

This focus group considered how good jobs have been created in the North West, or in border areas in general; the obstacles which have had to be overcome; changes to current arrangements for creating jobs in the border region; and how these jobs can be made sustainable. The importance of FDI was highlighted with reference to IT security and FinTech, and the need to take a collaborative approach to attracting FDI. Part of attracting good jobs to an area is to have a good infrastructure, with the need for improvements in broadband, plus rail and road transport. Providing the skills required for good jobs is seen as necessary, with the need to broaden education systems for a wide range of opportunities, especially for those with lower levels of education and for more vulnerable groups. Support for entrepreneurship was seen as important, especially for those in non-traditional sectors.

Overall, a holistic growth model, building on the assets of the area, and which can accommodate the people of the area was seen as necessary. In this context, additional attention should be given to the needs of those most distanced from the labour market and, in particular, to developing pathways to good jobs for young people from communities with high levels of complex deprivation. Social enterprise plays a role here, and an example is Creggan Enterprises in Derry, which adopts an intermediate labour-market model.⁵⁹

Green Transformation

This group focused on the challenges of doing green transformation work on a cross-border basis, what would make things easier, and what needs to happen to help deliver that. There was a recognition that climate breakdown does not recognise borders, and of the importance of adopting a science-led approach. Such knowledge and experience should be shared across national governments, local authorities, and those working to address environmental issues – such as water quality and climate mitigation. It was recognised that there is a need to focus on transformative change and policies that look at wellbeing, and not just at economic growth, as an indicator of success.

There is the potential to take a cross-border look at agriculture, regenerative farming, and renewable energy, as well as considering a just transition – with work in Inishowen cited as an example.

Cross-border working in water quality and river basin catchments is supported through EU regulation, notably the Water Framework Directive, and EU funding such as Interreg. A body of knowledge exists amongst agencies in the environmental sphere in the border region as to how cross-border approaches can and should be taken. However, the challenge of sourcing funds for collaborative environmental research and practice was noted. Sharing and aligning data was identified as a significant issue. Data gaps exist in relation to greenhouse gas emissions, and ecosystems services; and it is not always possible to compare NI and Irish data directly.

Poverty and Mental Health

This focus group considered the relationship of the border to poverty and mental health. It also looked at what we need to specifically understand poverty and mental health in border areas, such as the North West. The focus group also considered the kinds of solutions that have worked well in tackling the root causes of poverty and poor mental health, and in supporting people towards a better quality of life.

⁵⁹ The intermediate labour market is a way of supporting people who are long-term unemployed into the waged labour market through specially designed programmes.

A number of poverty issues specific to the North West were highlighted. These included cuts to Universal Credit in Northern Ireland, food and fuel poverty across the area, and the need for a greater awareness of rural poverty and disadvantage – particularly for children and young people. Transport links are vital for children and young people’s access to activities, and poor and disconnected public infrastructure exacerbates poverty in the North West. Lack of childcare provision is also a factor which affects everyone, but especially lone parents.

On health, the importance of a public health model that responds to health inequalities was highlighted. This applies especially to the health inequalities experienced by Travellers, and other ethnic minority communities and groups. The further exploration of the cross-border shared services agenda in the areas of health and mental health was thought to be beneficial, e.g. building on models like the North West Cancer Centre. In an environment with poor economic opportunities and little hope for young people, poverty and mental health issues present a specific risk to young people vulnerable to involvement in paramilitary or criminal activity. Thus, healthy alternatives to damaging risk-taking behaviours need to be provided, such as the arts and music, sports, and outdoor pursuits.

The community and voluntary sector plays a vital role in supporting disadvantaged communities. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the most successful and resilient responses were those developed by this sector working with local government, according to an asset-based, locally-connected model. However, the community and voluntary sector has borne a particularly challenging burden over the last three decades in the border region, and there is a need to address succession and sustainability in the sector.

Mechanisms for Co-operation

This focus group discussed what has been achieved to date through shared mechanisms for co-operation; the emerging challenges that may require new thinking; the limits of current mechanisms and enablers of co-operation; and what is needed to overcome these. There are a wide range of co-operative relationships in the North West, some of which have been formalised. The North West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP), and the North West Regional Development Group (NWRDG), have been established to support sustainable economic and social development in the North West. There is joined-up spatial planning in the North West through the NWSGP, and liaison between senior planners.

In relation to the business sector there is co-operation between the Londonderry and Letterkenny Chambers of Commerce, formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2020. There is also co-operation between economic development actors in the North West in terms of attracting FDI. The Cross Border Local Enterprise Partnership, a network of SME support agencies in the wider border region, has played an important role in fostering relationships for enterprise support. In addition, Community Finance, an integrated north south social financing organisation, helps to build community and business cohesion.

There is a connected approach to education, training and research through the North West Strategic Education Alliance, which signed a MOU in 2018. Some of this work is supported through the North West Regional Development Fund. Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT) is an important cross-border partnership of health and social services; while the Loughs Agency, a North South Implementation Body set up under the Good Friday Agreement, undertakes environmental conservation, management, promotion and development of the fisheries and marine resources of the Foyle and Carlingford areas.

Brexit has the potential to challenge some of these collaborative approaches, with efforts at local level to maintain good co-operative relationships and practices that have been built up over the years.

Chapter 10

North West Region – Strategies and Structures

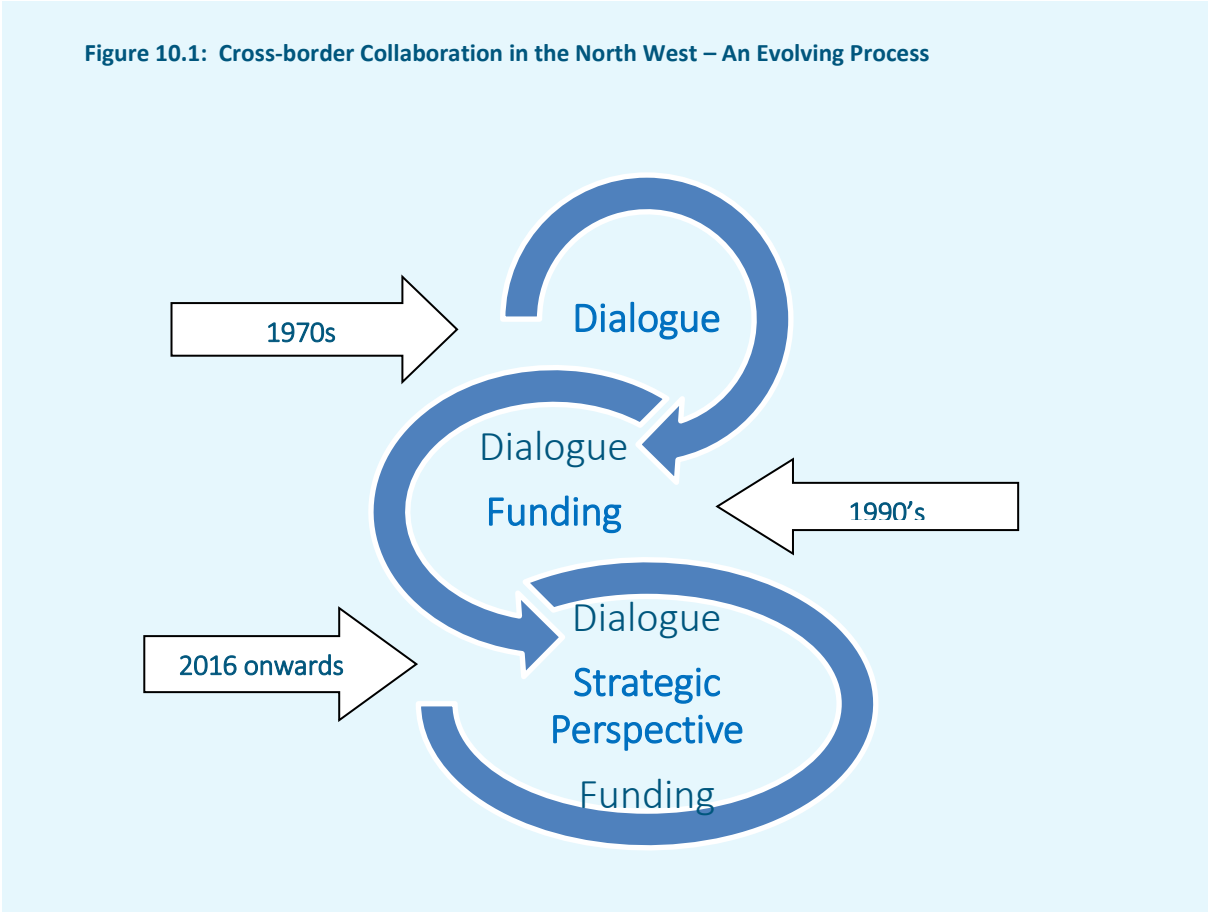
10.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the evolution and development of cross-border collaboration in the North West Region of the island of Ireland. In particular, it focuses on the experience of the strategic place-based partnership model that has been established to drive sustainable economic, social and environmental development in the region.

Cross-border co-operation on regional development has been an evolving and experimental process, that has incorporated the co-design of various innovative governance structures, strategies, and project-based activities. It is accepted that it takes time to build trust and to forge a more robust shared understanding among different institutions and actors. At the same time the leadership recognises the importance of continuing to ‘push the agenda’ without being too controversial, and also the need to continue to make incremental progress.

A view expressed by one observer was that the model that now exists ‘was fifty years in the making’. Another individual, with extensive experience of cross-border co-operation, characterised it as an evolving process that began with dialogue, then moved to a focus on securing EU funding for joint projects, before eventually transitioning to the co-design of a new partnership based strategy and governance structure (see Figure 10.1). It is also important to note that the wider political climate was not always necessarily conducive towards cross-border collaboration, but that in the local area relationships built up over time were sustained.

In the earlier stages, there was a strong focus on seeking funding support from the EU’s INTERREG Programme, which came on stream in the 1990s. This approach led to the establishment of the North West Regional Development Group (NWRDG) to manage INTERREG funding in the region. The NWRDG functioned as a sub-group of the local authorities with its own dedicated secretariat and staff. Although employed by the councils, these staff members reported directly to this cross-border institution in practice. While the NWRDG helped to deepen co-operation, the need to constantly secure new funding to maintain staffing resources created tension, and a lack of alignment between its activities and the strategic priorities of the two councils.



In 2005, the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference announced the establishment of the North West Gateway Initiative (NWGI) as the primary mechanism for driving the ongoing socio-economic regeneration of this region. The NWGI was designed to build on existing formal and informal collaboration, by providing a stronger institutional and strategic basis for policy dialogue. This would be focused on aligning the priorities for cross-border collaboration, and identifying key initiatives and actions with potential to deliver mutual benefits. While the NWGI continued to highlight some of the long-standing structural challenges facing the region in terms of underinvestment, unemployment and peripherality, there was also an increased focus on the need to better harness the growth potential of key shared assets and strengths within the region.

In 2011, Donegal County Council/Donegal County Development Board and Derry City Council/Derry Strategy Board, established the North West Partnership Board (NWPB), with the aim of advancing strategic co-operation and ensuring a more co-ordinated and collaborative approach to the NWGI. The NWPB consisted of senior council officials, elected representatives from the Donegal County Development Board and Derry Strategy Board, and senior representatives from other regional stakeholders – these included the Chambers of Commerce, the HSE, IDA Ireland, Letterkenny Institute of Technology and Ulster University. This membership reflected the need to develop a more inclusive approach to regional development, which could tap into the knowledge, skills and leadership capacity of other key institutional actors in the region. The NWPB functioned as an effective mechanism for fostering a greater level of strategic regional dialogue, and for identifying areas for co-operation as well as strategic projects.

It was also important that the thematic priority areas for cross-border co-operation articulated in the NWGI – a high-value North West economy, a high-quality working and living environment, and a connected and sustainable region – closely aligned with the priority issues identified in the various local development plans of the councils. This strengthened the linkages between local and regional development, and reinforced political and civic support for cross-border collaboration on issues of shared interest.

The collaborative process has also benefited from the emphasis on cultivating soft, and at times informal, policy spaces that foster deliberation, innovation and creativity. Projects that received funding often included informal mechanisms that emphasised experimentation and creativity. At the same time these ‘soft spaces’ gave officials the confidence and opportunity to act as thought leaders, and to develop progressive policy outcomes. One example of such soft engagement is the development of a green transformation statement of intent by the North West Green Transformation joint working group.

The remainder of this chapter identifies insights into the evolving architecture in the North West. It focuses on three features:

- effective partnership between regional leadership and the central governments;
-
- a strong coherent regional voice; and
-
- an asset-based approach.

10.2 Effective Partnership Between Regional Leadership and the Central Governments is Critical

Although the NWGI and NWPB provided a degree of additional integration at the regional level, at the same time there was a growing awareness that harnessing the full potential of the region was not possible without the development of a more comprehensive and strategic approach, premised on a partnership between the regional leadership and the central governments. Significantly, by 2016, a number of factors coalesced that enabled such a transition in the scale and nature of cross-border co-operation to be put in place, with the design and adoption of a new model of regional development for the North West region of the island of Ireland (ICLRD, 2016).

This led to the establishment of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership (NWSGP) in 2016 through the North South Ministerial Council. The NWSGP brought together senior government officials from all government departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland, to meet Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council about

delivering on the strategic priorities for the North West region. The NWSGP is led by the two councils, supported by ICLRD.

The impetus for this new approach to cross-border collaboration came from the leadership of the two local authorities – Donegal County Council (DCC) and Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC). As a result of local government reform initiatives in each jurisdiction, particularly in Northern Ireland, by 2016 a landscape of larger or consolidated local authorities with enhanced and/or additional responsibilities in key policy areas – such as planning, regional development and community development – was now in place. The emergence of two local government units, with like-for-like functions, served as a key enabler for more effective cross-border co-operation on mutually agreed priorities.

At the time, the CEOs of the two councils viewed this as an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive, integrated and strategic approach to regional development – focused on maximising the full potential of key assets and strengths within the North West region, while also addressing long-standing systemic challenges including peripherality, skills and under-investment. Both CEOs also recognised that innovative place-based governance arrangements involving local, regional and central government actors would be required to enable a functional economic region of this scale, incorporating a national jurisdictional border, to realise its full potential as a contributor to economic development on the island of Ireland.

The momentum for the emergence of a more co-ordinated and strategic approach also reflected the ongoing policy dialogue and engagement by regional stakeholders with political representatives in Dublin and Belfast; and with senior officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and the NI Executive Office in the context of the NWGI. The emerging new strategy, and associated governance arrangements, were framed as putting into practice the agreed high-level goals articulated by the NWGI.

The evolving policy dialogue around a new approach to regional development was facilitated and shaped by the expertise and insights of the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD), who have operated as the technical partners for cross-border regional development in the North West since 2014. Between 2014-2016, and subsequently, the ICLRD have supported the evolution of cross-border co-ordination on regional development through strategic facilitation; acting as an advisory sounding-board for the two CEOs; and engaging in relationship building with senior officials in Irish Government Departments and the NI Executive.

A key enabling factor for collaboration within the region is the leadership within the two councils. While there is a history of collaboration between the local authorities at political and official levels, the current CEOs in both councils, and DCC's former CEO, have fostered and formalised stronger relationships between the councils. This has consistently secured political support from each council.

In continuing to articulate shared objectives and priorities, both CEOs remain committed to addressing policy issues in a collaborative manner. This sends a strong signal to officials within both organisations, and has the effect of creating supportive spaces in which officials have permission to act, and are encouraged to engage with their relevant counterparts in the other authority, as well as with regional stakeholders. From a practical perspective, co-operation is viewed as enabling officials to do a better job, and in this regard can become 'the way we do our business'.

In addition, the cross-border regional growth model has benefited from the almost unanimous political support of local elected officials in both jurisdictions. This has served to foster a strong and coherent political voice in favour of the North West Region, which has helped to maintain the momentum, and to secure central-level political supports and commitments. The fact that NWSGP has operated as a committee of the councils has equipped this process with a strong degree of democratic legitimacy and accountability. This, in conjunction with its ability to add value to work of the councils, have been key factors in building the high degree of cross-party support.

The achievement of strong cross-party support in both jurisdictions has provided the regional growth model with a degree of protection from broader, more contentious, constitutional and identity issues. One interviewee stated that 'no matter what is going on at the national level, at the local level there is an intrinsic understanding of the interdependencies economically, culturally and socially between the two areas'.

Local level political support for deepening north-south co-operation has been even more important at those times when central-level political relationships – north-south or east-west – have been less conducive to pushing this agenda forward.

At the same time, the North West regional growth model would not have continued to evolve without the political endorsement of the Irish Government and the NI Executive. As noted, the strategic partnership model was formally endorsed by the NSMC in 2016. In addition to providing ring-fenced funding for collaborative activities through the NWDF, this endorsement provided a mandate for the ongoing engagement of departmental officials in this partnership model. Both Governments have also signalled their ongoing support for the North West region, and the concept of a North West Metropolitan City Region, by including them in key policy documents such as Project Ireland 2040 – the NDP and NPF; the 2020 Programme for Government: Our Shared Future; the Northern Ireland Regional Investment Strategy; the North West Regional Assembly’s Economic and Spatial Strategy; and the New Decade New Approach Agreement.

10.3 Strong Coherent Regional Voice

A key weakness evident in the engagement that had taken place with government since the late 1990s, and prior to the establishment of the NWSGP in 2016, was the lack of a single authoritative and coherent voice for the region.

In response, the ICLRD worked intensively over a two-year period, from 2014 to 2016, with a core group of senior officials from the Irish Department of Environment and Local Government, the Department of Regional Development in Northern Ireland, and the NSMC to explore ‘what was needed to create a strong coherent regional voice’. This deliberative process directly shaped the new governance arrangements that were put in place, and ensured strong buy-in from senior government officials, who had in effect helped to co-create them.

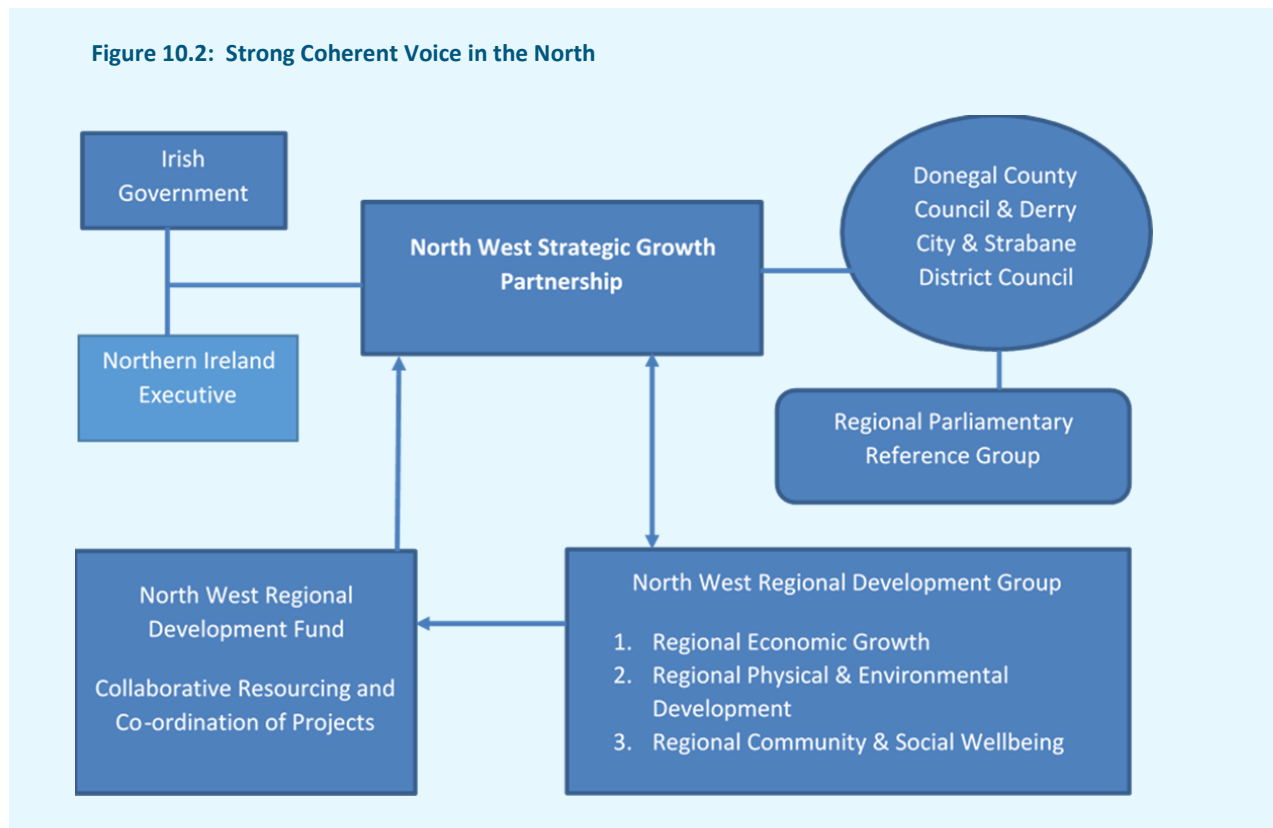
Critically, this proposed new model of regional development was formally endorsed by the Irish Government and the NI Executive at the November plenary of the NSMC in 2016 (NSMC, 2016). The securing of ministerial support provided a formal mandate for the involvement of government departments with local government in this partnership-based process.

Central to this new model for sustainable economic and social development was the adoption of unique and innovative placed-based governance arrangements, that embodied this formal strategic partnership between the two local authorities, the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive (see Figure 10.2). In practice, this has involved the North West Regional Development Group (NWRDG) and the North West Strategic Partnership (NWSGP) effectively operating as the linked governance structures for the sustainable development and growth of the North West Region, in a manner that is designed to benefit not only the region itself but also the two economies on the Island.

The NWRDG is a support to the coherent voice of the NWSGP. The NWRDG comprises elected representatives and senior officials from both councils. From the beginning, it has operated as a joint committee of the two councils, which is a marked departure from how cross-border groups were normally constituted in the region. This has enabled it to function as a strategic policy committee, with the same status as other strategic policy committees within the individual councils. The NWRDG develops, agrees, implements, monitors and reports on work programmes across three areas: regional economic growth and investment; regional physical and environmental development; and regional community and social wellbeing. Under this partnership model, the NWRDG has specific and delegated authority for certain decisions, in particular, the management and distribution of the North West Development Fund (NWDF).

The NWDF, as initially established, had funding of €5m. A supplementary contribution from the Irish Government has now brought that total to €6m. The fund enables the collaborative resourcing and co-ordination of projects that support the strategy’s three pillars: economic growth and investment; physical and environmental development; and social and community cohesion.

Figure 10.2: Strong Coherent Voice in the North



The NWSGP consists of the two mayors, the chair and deputy chair of the NWRDG, and senior officials from relevant departments in the NI Executive and Irish Government. This relatively new structure provides a single institutional focus for government departments and agencies, allowing them to engage and consult with regional stakeholders, and vice versa. This has been key in building trust-based relationships, securing central buy-in for the partnership’s activities, and facilitating a closer alignment between regional initiatives and national strategies across various policy areas. This unique governance model has been described as providing an interlocuting soft space between central and local-level statutory institutions, within which participants have an opportunity to co-design policy actions aimed at stimulating regional growth.

The linkages to central government actors within this strategic partnership are mirrored by the strong connections to local government. A former member of the NWSGP has stressed the importance of keeping the governance arrangements of this institution under the auspices of the two councils. This serves to align the partnership’s strategic priorities and policy actions with the goals and objectives of the two council’s local development plans and strategies. Indeed, it has been important that the respective CEOs have been able to demonstrate how the partnership arrangements add value to the councils’ own work, by harnessing the potential of the Border Region in a way that a single jurisdiction, working on its own, could not. For example, the CEOs have championed the need to adopt a model of civic place-based leadership, see Box. 10.1.

Box 10.1: Joint CEO Support for a Model of Civic Place-based Leadership

To help achieve the shared goals and objectives within the North West’s regional strategy, both local authority CEOs have championed the need to adopt Hambleton’s (2020) model of civic place-based leadership (see Figure 10.3).

This model seeks to harness the skills, expertise and resources of a range of regional actors and institutions – for example, educational institutions, community groups, health organisations, trade unions, private companies, and business representative organisations – in seeking to achieve more sustainable economic and social development. This type of focused and structured engagement is viewed as having the capacity to create zones of innovation, that can improve the quality and effectiveness of public policy dialogue and action.

The stakeholders have also sought to position their strategy in the context of the Project Ireland 2040 strategy, and the NI Regional Investment Strategy. In particular, they have highlighted the spatial significance of developing a strong metropolitan city region at the core of this new approach to cross-border regional development. Finally, a key strength of the North West regional growth model is the emphasis it has placed on ensuring close alignment with local, national and EU policy agendas. This creates a context in which the effective delivery of the growth strategy is viewed as adding value to existing policy frameworks, and contributing to the delivery of key policy objectives in both jurisdictions.

Figure 10.3: Hambleton’s Civic Leadership Framework



The ability of the NWSGP to add value, as well as democratic accountability, has contributed to the virtually unanimous cross-party support within both councils for this innovative place-based model. Furthermore, the strategic partnership model, by complementing the work on the ground of the two councils, allows for the *de facto* development of an EU region on the island of Ireland.

Although personal relationships between leaders have been an integral part of the evolution of cross-border collaboration in the North West, it was recognised that the new governance structures need to support continuity in the working arrangements between the two councils. It is suggested that mechanisms that provide a formal context for collaboration, linked to the core work of each council, have ensured that ‘the structure now drives relationships rather than vice versa’, and that progress is not lost when people move on from their positions.

As indicated above, this model of place-based governance arrangements was designed to drive growth and development in a border region. Importantly, despite the fact that the wider political context has become more challenging in recent times, the North West's complementary governance arrangements for territorial development and cohesion have actually deepened and matured over the last five years.

Although the development of an effective institutional and administrative structure has been an integral part of the North West's evolving approach, it should be noted that cross-border co-operation in the region is more than an 'exercise in diplomacy'. Rather, it can be viewed as a territorial lab or practical working experiment for deepening and enhancing north-south co-operation, in a manner that seeks to deliver tangible benefits and positive outcomes for all stakeholders. Ultimately, the value and sustainability of such a model of co-operation is dependent on the realisation of tangible benefits and progress, by the region as a whole, in economic, social and environmental domains.

The co-design of innovative and unique place-based governance structures has been a pivotal factor in the ongoing evolution of the North West's regional growth model. The NWRDG and the NWSGP have, since 2016, functioned as complementary governance arrangements for territorial development and cohesion. The evolution of these linked governance structures has represented a deepening and maturation of the strategic partnership between the two local authorities, the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, that is at the heart of cross-border collaboration in the North West.

These governance arrangements have provided a supportive institutional framework that has facilitated collaboration and ongoing policy innovation and implementation. Collectively, the NWSGP and the NWRDG have contributed to the emergence of a unified political voice for the North West, and fostered a robust shared understanding of the strategic priorities for the region. The NWSGP has provided a single institutional focus for government departments and agencies, enabling them to engage and consult with regional stakeholders and vice-versa.

Furthermore, the evolution of these governance structures has also provided a more formal context that supports continuity in the working arrangements between the two councils, and makes co-operation less dependent on the relationship between particular personalities. The development of an effective institutional and administration structure is an integral part of the North West's journey, but co-operation in the region is more than an exercise in diplomacy – rather it is a territorial lab for co-operation between north and south.

10.4 Asset-Based Approach

The North West regional development strategy is premised on a strong asset-based approach. This continues to recognise the challenges posed by long-standing issues of peripherality and underinvestment. It could be argued that as well as sharing assets, the North West also shares these deficits. However, the development strategy has emphasised the regions' existing and emerging strengths. The strategy has highlighted how, if these assets were nurtured and harnessed more effectively, it would benefit the whole island and contribute to both economies. In this context, the more integrated and comprehensive regional development strategy identified three interconnected pillars:

Economic Growth and Investment: with a focus on facilitating the planning, monitoring and implementation of major-public expenditure projects, and growth and development initiatives;

Physical and Environmental Development: with an emphasis on facilitating the planning, monitoring and implementation of initiatives focused on maximising spatial infrastructural connectivity; sustainable management and development; and protection of shared environmental resources. There is recognition of the importance of exploring the economic potential of the Green Economy, particularly in relation to renewables; and

Social and Community Cohesion: this takes a population-based approach to the key building blocks: shared approaches to social and health inequalities; co-operation on civic participation and social inclusion; and area-based approaches to community and social wellbeing.

The NWDF was set up to provide seed funding for development activities and strategic co-operation linked to these growth pillars. In the longer term it will be important to assess the outcomes from this work, and to consider a long-term funding strategy if the outcomes are positive.

Such an asset-based approach can also inform how social development can be implemented locally, with a potential role for coalitions like the Public Participation Networks.

10.5 Conclusion

The evolution of cross-border collaboration has been underpinned by a strong commitment to dialogue and collective problem-solving. Over the decades this has transitioned from an emphasis on informal dialogue aimed at ‘getting to know each other’ – which of course still has a role to play – to a more structured and intensive form of engagement characterised by collective problem-solving. These deliberative mechanisms and forums have become more inclusive, due to the involvement of a wider range of civic actors and institutions. There is also a strong sense amongst regional stakeholders that the key issues facing the region – climate change and adaption; the need to create more good jobs; tackling inequality; improving connectivity; and addressing infrastructural deficits – are in fact shared challenges and opportunities that are best approached in a co-ordinated and co-operative manner.

The deepening and maturation of the partnership-based governance arrangements have sought to ensure that structures are in place that make collaboration less dependent on the personal relationships between key individuals. This has been important in ensuring that progress is not lost when people move on from their positions.

At the same time, it is evident that cross-border collaboration has benefited from the development of strong trust-based and highly personalised relationships between key individuals. The committed and dedicated manner in which many individuals have engaged with the issue of north-south collaboration, also reflects a strong vocational attachment to the region to a degree, in that there is a real desire to make things better. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the unique governance arrangements have provided a supportive context for collaboration and policy innovation. It is also evident, however, that the interests, strategies and preferences of the actors involved have been key to exploiting the opportunities provided by these governance structures. In this context, the nature and evolution of the North West’s model of cross-border collaboration shows an ‘actor-centred institutionalist’ perspective.

Chapter 11



North West Region – Actions and Outcomes

11.1 Introduction

An integral part of the evolution of cross-border co-operation on regional development in the North West has been the increased emphasis on putting the strategy into action through the development of a range of joint projects.

One participant described this as ‘project(ising) the higher level vision and strategy’. Since 2016, the €6m NWDF has enabled the collaborative resourcing and co-ordination of a range of joint projects, particularly those involving the councils and for which single-jurisdictional approaches were neither logical nor feasible. These joint projects, supported directly or indirectly through a cross-border partnership approach, have included the following initiatives:

- a Green Transformation Strategy;

- a North West Regional Energy Strategy;

- regional spatial planning;

- the development of green infrastructure and shared public realm;

- the joint analysis of the impact of Brexit on the North West cross-border economic functional area;

- the co-design of SME export support programmes;

- joint FDI investment promotions and trade missions;

- the signing of an MOU between the North West’s third-level and further education institutions;

- the co-design and joint implementation of tourist initiatives;

- the establishment of a natural capital account of green spaces;

- a cross-border sports development programme; and

- the development of joint arts, culture and heritage initiatives.

The remainder of this chapter will, describe a small number of these projects first, before discussing the key characteristics and learnings from the project-based approach to cross-border collaboration.

11.2 Foreign Direct Investment

The translation from strategy into action is illustrated by the work on cross-border FDI.

Given long-standing challenges in the regional development strategy, a concerted focus on policy initiatives designed to attract FDI can support the creation of good jobs in the region.

It is recognised that to attract FDI there is a need to increase cross-border co-ordination of the activities of the various statutory agencies with a remit for job creation, and for attracting inward investment. This needs to be complemented by supporting indigenous enterprise and business growth through skills development, capacity building and financing.

As part of the North West Investment Strategy, funded by the NWDF, three programmes have been implemented to support economic investment and job growth:

- the USA FDI Lead Generation Programme;
- the Ireland Northwest Trade & Investment Mission Programme; and
- Ireland's North West Gateway to Growth Export Development Programme.

It is envisaged that collectively these three targeted programmes could deliver a range of potential job-related outcomes for the region including:

- improving the investment proposition offered by the region;
- an increase in FDI enquiries in the North West Region;
- an increase in North West businesses export relationships; and
- an improved educational linkage between further and higher education institutions and their counterparts in Massachusetts.

The collaborative governance arrangements adopted in the North West have allowed for more formalised collaborative structures on the key issue of attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), including a concerted focus on what else can be done together as a city region.

The two local authorities have increasingly sought to develop practical initiatives, to address the challenge of supporting economic investment and job growth in a functional economic region, which incorporates a jurisdictional border. This has included designing a joint inward investment strategy, and participation in joint FDI promotional visits in the US. An innovative feature of these visits is the way in which the region has been marketed as a single location to potential inward investors. In this context, the two councils have worked together to provide an integrated cross-border talent solution platform for potential investors, who wish to locate, expand or support business growth in the region. A North West City Region Pilot Talent Mapping Initiative is being developed to further support inward investment. It will explore opportunities to better collate and disseminate timely and accurate data to potential investors on the skills and expertise of the region's workforce.

Importantly, the leadership in both councils believe strongly that inward investment in one county benefits the other, as the region shares a workforce. As one stakeholder said, 'If there are jobs created in Donegal this creates more wealth and money which is spent in Derry and vice versa. We don't make a distinction and jobs in the region are good for both council areas'.

One of the challenges of attracting FDI to the region is the remit of the respective state agencies, the IDA in Ireland and InvestNI in Northern Ireland. Their job is to bring investment to their respective jurisdictions, not necessarily on a cross-jurisdictional basis. An approach that would see them working together on a more collaborative basis to bring investment to the border areas – in sectors or locations where an enhanced offering can be made on a cross-border regional basis – would seem warranted. This would require them to be mandated to do so, and their key performance indicators (KPIs) adjusted accordingly. Such an approach could be piloted in the North West initially, as a way of assessing the potential benefits of collaborative working in bringing investment and good jobs to this peripheral region.

11.3 Sustainability, Climate Action and Biodiversity

Since 2016, there has been a concerted focus within the NWSGP and the NWRDG on putting sustainability at the centre of the North West regional strategy for economic, social and environmental development.

The work in the North West confirms the more general finding in NESC's work on Shared Island – that climate and biodiversity are very fertile areas for collaboration.

The work in the North West includes a series of collaborative initiatives and projects focused on climate action and biodiversity, including:

North West Green Transformation Joint Working Group,⁶⁰ and the adoption of a Green Transformation Statement of Intent: Published in March 2021, this strategic policy document incorporates existing environmental strategies and is a clear articulation of the North West Region's ambition to embrace a green transformation.

It stipulates that such a green transformation will enhance the environmental, economic, social and quality of life attributes of the region, in a way that will do no harm, and ensure no place or person is left behind. The overarching goal of the green transformation is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045, five years before the national target in Ireland (ICLRD, 2021).

The statement of intent was produced by a multi-disciplinary working group, comprising relevant departments and units within Donegal County Council, and Derry City and Strabane District Council, and facilitated by the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD). This group started as a relatively informal forum, as the objective was to create a soft space that would help to build relations between council officials by providing a safe and non-contentious working environment.⁶¹ The work was shaped by multi-disciplinary and cross-directorate inputs. The outcomes from this stakeholder engagement and deliberation are now feeding directly into the cross-border planners forum.

North West Regional Energy Strategy: Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) and Donegal County Council (DCC) both recognise the need to transition towards a smart, low-carbon economy, that can deliver sustainable prosperity for individuals, communities, businesses and the local environment within the North West Region.

To fulfil this goal, at the request of the NWSGP, both councils collaborated to develop a co-ordinated Regional Energy Strategy for the North West Region – the first cross-border regional energy strategy on the island of Ireland. This joint energy strategy was the product of two years of collaboration between the two local authorities, along with the inputs of regional stakeholders from a series of engagement forums. Regional stakeholders, in particular, highlighted that, as the issues to be addressed in both jurisdictions were similar, a joint alliance and strategy would strengthen the capacity of both councils to develop practical responses to shared challenges and opportunities. There was also a formal public consultation on a draft of the joint energy strategy.

This strategy involves the two councils taking a leading role, and facilitating local and regional stakeholders to move towards a decentralised smart energy system, capable of meeting regional energy needs, and achieving a regional goal of net zero emissions by 2045. This system includes addressing past and future challenges, including security of supply; ageing infrastructure; the costs of importing energy; and providing connections in rural areas – while at the same time seeking to identify and exploit the many opportunities that will be generated by a green transition.

North West Greenway Network Project: This cross-border project is led by DCSDC working in partnership with DCC, the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland, and Sustrans (a UK-based walking and cycling charity).

The project aims to construct 46.5kms of greenway and cycling/walking routes across the North West – six kilometres have been delivered to date. The project is predominantly funded by INTERREG Europe, with additional support from the Department for Infrastructure (Northern Ireland) and the Department of Transport (Ireland). This project aims to

⁶⁰ This group is an example of the types of 'zones of innovation', referred to in Box 10.1, that a civic leadership model can generate.

⁶¹ This included a commitment to not issue minutes of the meetings as it was thought that this could stifle open debate and creative thinking.

improve connectivity within the region in a manner that delivers sustainable social, economic and environmental benefits.

11.4 Training and Research

The North West Strategic Education Alliance (NWSEA) was formally established in 2018 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the four higher and further education institutions in the North West Region - Ulster University (UU), Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT), the Donegal Education and Training Board (DETB) and the North West Regional College.

While there was a long tradition of collaboration between the various institutions in the region, the level of engagement and activity had been quite variable, and it was largely premised on informal personal relationships. The signing of an MOU, and establishment of a formal governance structure with specific agreed objectives, was a tangible step up in terms of both deepening collaboration and the scope of ambition.

By establishing a formal alliance, the four institutions have sought to cement their civic and economic roles within the emerging regional growth model for the North West Region. By building on the work of the individual partner institutions, the MOU seeks to address the higher and further education needs of the region by enabling added-value approaches in education, training, innovation, and research and development. The MOU represents an articulation of the partners' roles as anchor institutions for growth within the North West Region's strategic place-based growth model.

It is envisaged that this strategic alliance will enable the institutions to widen the access opportunities available to people in the North West, and ensure they play a co-ordinated role in supporting regional economic development. In the first instance, collaboration has focused on programme mapping and the provision of progressive education and training pathways. For example, while there has been a joint programme between the business schools in LYIT and UU for approximately 15 years, under the MOU both institutions are looking to expand their current offering in areas such as cross-border accountancy and taxation. Collectively, the four educational institutions have, through the MOU, committed to co-operating on a broad range of actions and measures over the coming years including:

- the design and delivery of new courses and programmes to support economic and social development in the North West;

- improving economies and efficiencies in research and teaching programmes;

- sharing staff and facilities where appropriate;

- developing teaching and learning provision, including online and blended learning;

- enhancing technology transfer and intellectual property protection;

- encouraging participation by non-traditional and part-time students;

- international marketing;

- supporting joint procurement and shared corporate services; and

- increasing engagement with business representative bodies and individual companies.

The MOU also provides a mechanism for both governments to engage with the four institutions to deliver on shared higher and further education commitments and ambitions. Consequently, in seeking to meet the higher and further education needs of the region, the strategic alliance also supports activities that can enable the delivery of strategic policy outcomes in both the Irish and NI higher education strategies.

The NWSEA represents the development of a regional knowledge and technical transfer/innovation ecology. In terms of supporting specific sectoral strengths, the educational sector has focused on Fintech, Medtech, Advanced Manufacturing and Artificial Intelligence. More recently, it has sought to grow innovation in the Arts and Cultural sector. The establishment of a Graduate Entry Medical School at UU Magee, along with the decision by UU to locate its entire school of health sciences in Derry, has also significantly enhanced the educational sector's capacity to contribute to the cross-border regional economy.

Although personal relationships between senior decision makers in the various educational institutions were always generally good, participation in the MOU and other regionally-based activities has served to strengthen and enhance the level of trust between individuals. For example, participation in FDI missions to the US provided an opportunity, outside of core day-to-day institutional activities, to develop relationships and foster a stronger shared understanding of the role of education in supporting regional development. It also helped to forge a strong sense of regional identity, in that the overall aim of the mission was to collectively represent the North West Region.

The NWSEA, in essence, represents a sectorally specific demonstration of how a combination of trust-based relationships and appropriate governance structures can foster deeper collaboration. It has functioned as a strategic counterpart and complement to the two councils' work on skills and workforce development. The capacity and willingness of the educational institutions to transition to a new phase of formal cross-border collaboration has been dependent on a high level of support from the leadership in the two councils and the NWSGP. Although the educational institutions are not members of the NWSGP, they are periodically invited to present their work and ideas to this body. This has helped to secure buy-in for their co-operative work and reinforced their commitment to deliver their agreed objectives. A senior representative from one of the region's FE/HE institutions described the NWSGP as 'the glue that holds everything together and for us it has provided a strong framework of support for our co-operative work'.

Overall, all the partner organisations, as well as other key regional stakeholders, view the development of the connected North West approach to education, training and research as a positive development, with the potential to make an important contribution to social and economic development within the region.

Furthermore, while invariably attention has tended to focus on the innovative aspects of cross-border collaboration, the NWSEA also highlights the potential benefits of forging a closer strategic and operational relationship between further and higher educational institutions in the same jurisdiction. At the same time, several participants, while recognising the progress that has been made, stressed that it is critical that the MOU starts to deliver on this ambition, in terms of delivering specific outputs that provide socio-economic benefits to the region.

11.5 North West Metropolitan City Region

A further means of magnifying the assets is a focus on building a more dynamic and resilient North West Metropolitan City Region (NWMCR), particularly since 2016.

This concept of a core metropolitan city region has been endorsed and incorporated into Project Ireland 2040 – the NDP and NPF – and also the North West Assembly's Regional Economic and Spatial Strategy (RESS). Building on a strong tradition of co-operation and engagement between planners in both local authority areas, and driven in part by the activities of the Planners Forum, a North West Metropolitan Area Spatial Plan has now been developed. This plan represents the sub-regional integration of spatial planning, economic and community development, and infrastructure investment. It is envisaged that this plan will play a key role in guiding the growth of the region and attracting inward investment. It has been designed to complement the priorities of the North West Strategic Growth Partnership.

The vision articulated in the plan is:

By 2038, the North West City Region Metropolitan Area and Letterkenny Regional Centre will be Connected, Vibrant, Resilient and Inclusive (NWSGP, 2019: 89).

The plan names four strategic outcomes that are closely aligned with the national strategic outcomes and priorities of the National Planning Framework (NPF), and the eight strategic aims of the NI Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035. These outcomes are:

- building inclusive and compact places;

- investing in connected and accessible places;

- planning for a vibrant economy and nurturing communities; and

- creating resilient places and low-carbon infrastructure.

To deliver on this vision, DCC and DCSDC have indicated their commitment to working within the collaborative structures of the NWSGP and the NWRDG.

Chapter 12

Digging Deeper: Conclusions

The evolution of co-operation on regional development in the North West has been driven by the fact this is a functional cross-border economic unit/region. Notwithstanding the 100-year existence of a national jurisdictional border, it is important to recognise that the geographies of Donegal and Derry are intrinsically intertwined – economically, historically, socially, environmentally and culturally.

A common theme that emerged from the various individual and group consultations was the fluid nature of border, as people highlighted the magnitude of daily cross-border journeys for work, to shop, to engage in tourist and leisure activities, to avail of education, health and other public services, and to visit family and friends.

In a study, co-sponsored by DCSDC and DCC, researchers from Harvard University described the border as ‘largely invisible, recognisable through slight bumps in the road caused by the change in the asphalt, signage changes from metric to imperial and mobile phone signal switch but otherwise the border line is invisible’.⁶²

Both local authorities continue to display a settled view of the place as an integrated functional region. This mind-set of a functional region with strong and ongoing economic, political and environmental interconnections ensures that stakeholders are not only comfortable with, but see the benefits of, approaching issues within a single regional context.

According to one interviewee ‘the place-based approach respects the border from a political perspective and then disregards it from an economic, social and environmental perspective’. Similarly, it has been suggested that the governance structures and strategies that have been put in place since 2016 are an example of the institutions and policies finally catching up with the reality of many individuals’ daily lived experiences in the North West Region.

Drawing on these lived experiences, including findings from the focus groups, has provided insights which will help shape the evolution of the Shared Island initiative in the years ahead. It has drawn attention to the patient and reflexive evolution of working arrangements and institutions; partnerships between the regional and the central governments; cross-party political support; the importance of a strong coherent regional voice; assets-based strategies; and actions and projects, linked to FDI, climate and biodiversity, and education and training, in particular.

Projects are an opportunity to put the high-level strategy into action. One participant described the approach as ‘weaving together incremental projects to deliver the higher-level strategy and vision’. The North West Development Fund has been an important enabler of this range of collaborative activities, particularly those involving the councils, and for which single-jurisdictional approaches were neither logical nor feasible. While the availability of additional seed funding has been a beneficial factor, stakeholders in the region also stressed the critical importance of the place-based governance arrangements - the NWSGP and the NWRDG. These unique governance arrangements provided the necessary support and structure for individuals to develop initiatives and engage in collaborative working.

The collaborative working approach, led by the two CEOs, has also helped drive this process and created a context in which individual officials have the confidence to explore new policy possibilities with officials in another jurisdiction, and with a range of regional stakeholders. Informal mechanisms and exploratory procedures are integral features of these activities, as in many instances the projects have functioned as soft spaces for experimentation, deliberation and creativity. The overarching governance structure has given officials at different levels the permission to act, and fostered a mind-set that the region has an opportunity to help shape its identity and future.

⁶² See Atlas for a City Region at <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/project/atlas-for-a-city-region/>, accessed 05/12/21.

As one participant noted:

This approach fosters spaces in which there is creativity, and people become comfortable with this way of working, and this leads to other conversations, and gradually a momentum builds around cross-border collaboration.

The various projects have also represented an opportunity to put into practice the inclusive civic leadership model that has been championed by the two CEOs. Importantly, this has demonstrated to policy makers the benefits of not only working with each other, but also engaging with other regional stakeholders – from business, public bodies, education, health and local communities. This engagement with the wider range of expertise, knowledge and opinions has created project-based zones of innovation, with the potential to improve the quality and effectiveness of projects.

The project-based dimension of the regional growth strategy highlights the importance of having a supportive governance structure in place, along with a collaborative leadership style, and the willingness and confidence to invest in informal and innovative mechanisms that foster a collaborative and creative style of working. As already noted, this has created a momentum around cross-border collaboration to the extent that it has become ‘the way we do things’. There is merit in the view that the commitment amongst a cohort of regional actors, to developing and deepening cross-border collaboration, is driven by a sense that ‘it’s the right thing to do’.

At the same time, in order to sustain and build on this momentum, it is essential that all stakeholders begin to see tangible benefits from the investment in, and commitment to, cross-border dialogue and collaboration. The setting-up of structures and collaborative working takes time and resources, so that there is a need to assess the most productive ways of working to achieve the desired outcomes.

Fostering and sustaining wider civic and political support for such collaborative activity depends on its capacity to effectively address issues, and to deliver tangible benefits for the region. For example, investing time and resources in creating safe spaces, that encourage creativity, dialogue and experimentation, is only justifiable if this produces better quality and more effective policy outcomes. An integral part of the two CEOs’ advocacy for the place-based partnership approach has been the ongoing requirement to show their respective elected and public officials that this cross-border model adds value to their own strategies and activities. This represents a form of ‘outcome legitimisation’, that is acceptance of the outcomes.

In this context, a major challenge for the regional growth model will be its ability to move to the next level, in terms of enhancing its capacity to deliver further positive outcomes for the region and its various stakeholders.

As with other regions, the development of the border area, including the North West, needs to be based on an understanding of its resources, and the capabilities of the sectors and enterprises in the area. This should inform decisions on public investment to strengthen the area’s economy. The same rationale can be applied to other border regions, such as the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN), the East Border Region (EBR) and the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC). For example, there may be less structured co-operation in the Irish Central Border Area, but it may offer potential in other aspects.

While the relevant bodies in the North West Region work closely together, and there are obvious mutual benefits to collaborating on regional issues, the councils and other regional institutions face certain barriers that can constrain cross-border co-operation.

These have been identified as follows:

- political uncertainty and instability;

- data availability; and

- differing remits and powers.

Part IV of this report will use these insights to consider the enablers and barriers to further cross-border collaboration.

PART IV

Facing Forward

This section draws out the key conclusions and recommendations from the NESC work on Shared Island.

It identifies three overarching conclusions about the nature and potential for all-island collaboration, and the issues which shape collaboration. It outlines NESC's recommendations across five key areas. A final section provides an overview of the next steps.

13.1: Introduction

13.2: Three Overarching Conclusions

13.3: NESC's Recommendations in Five Areas

13.4: Next Steps

Chapter 13



13.1 Introduction

This report has documented the rich connections that exist between both jurisdictions on this island, across Ireland and the UK, and Europe. This chapter focuses on three overarching conclusions about the nature, depth and potential of those connections.

First, it argues that it is these working connections – operating at various levels, from formal institutions to community-level networks, and their evolution and ongoing change – that provide a solid foundation for a Shared Island. Second, it highlights that climate and biodiversity is a key area, where collaboration is working to address a shared commitment to act with urgency to bring about change. Third, it shows what enables and what hinders collaboration. It illustrates the importance of a shared agenda and set of interests; the need for resources to support efforts to collaborate; the impact of political uncertainty and support; and legislative and regulatory coherence or divergence. It also shows the need to focus on collaborative projects that deliver meaningful results to communities.

This chapter also sets out NESC's recommendations. In the economic arena, it highlights the need for further investment in infrastructure projects, including in energy infrastructure and renewable energy. It sets out recommendations related to key aspects of enterprise policy – including foreign direct investment, clustering, regional development, tourism, and trans-border workers' tax relief.

In relation to social policy, it makes recommendations on enhancing engagement with civil society; investment and support for social policy and collaborative work; tackling concentrations of social disadvantage; social enterprise; cross-border shared services including mental health; and further and higher education.

The report, drawing on the Council's 2021 work on climate and biodiversity (NESC, 2021a), recommends that shared ambition could be enhanced through the development of a joint statement on the climate and biodiversity challenges. It also recommends the establishment of strategic working groups in key areas, including sustainable agriculture; renewable energy; circular and bio-economy; networks for nature; and marine and coastal climate adaptation and impact.

The report recommends that wellbeing frameworks be used as a shared learning tool. It highlights the scope for further collaboration between the respective statistical agencies, CSO and NISRA, and for all-island consultation to be a feature of work on refining and developing frameworks in both jurisdictions.

The report also recommends a greater focus on ensuring that data is available to support collaboration and co-operation more generally.

The final section of the chapter notes the next steps, including the launch of this report and a commitment to deeper engagement within Northern Ireland and Ireland.

13.2 Three Overarching Conclusions

There are three overarching conclusions from the NESC research and consultation. These are:

- First, there is very significant support in practice for an all-island approach to key economic, social and environmental, and wellbeing challenges.
- Second, climate change and biodiversity loss provide a clear and urgent platform for ambitious all-island action and collaboration.
- Third, the key factors shaping current and future collaboration are a shared agenda, resources, political certainty and support, legislative and regulatory coherence, and collaborative projects.

This section discusses each one.

13.2.1 Support for the Shared Island

This report has shown the vital all-island and cross-border connections that exist in economic, social, environmental, and wellbeing spheres.

These connections, and the various forms they take, suggest that there is very significant support in practice for an all-island approach to key economic, social and environmental challenges. This was strongly confirmed by the consultation across the island undertaken as part of this work, and represents an important conclusion.

A solid shared agenda exists and there is a strong willingness to work collaboratively, especially at ground level. Many of the successful initiatives have been shown to involve a place, a network, and a shared agenda, and these are connected. A key challenge is to realise the full potential benefits of existing connections, and develop such initiatives more widely for mutual benefit, north and south.

The multiple connections include trade and initial exports of SMEs; cross-border value chains; clusters and working patterns; and very significant collaboration on energy. There are similar experiences of the welfare state; poverty and deprivation; shared education initiatives; and evidence of co-operation in areas such as mental health and social enterprise. The two jurisdictions share similar greenhouse gas emissions profiles, natural habitats and ecosystems. The connections also include emerging work on assessing progress in more holistic ways linked to wellbeing frameworks. This is happening in both jurisdictions, and in Scotland and Wales.

These connections take many forms. There is the political structure of the North South Ministerial Council, which oversees six areas of north-south co-operation and the North South Implementation Bodies. There are other connections between government departments and state agencies, north and south. There are all-island working arrangements such as those linked to the All-Ireland-Pollinator Plan, and the All-Island Food Poverty Network. There are bodies and groups with a specific focus on cross-border issues and co-operation, such as the Centre for Cross Border Studies, the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, and Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT). Connections are also established through all-island networks, which have been put in place by professional bodies including employers, trade unions, community and voluntary groups, environmental, and farming organisations. Finally, there are connections rooted in civil society groups, including sporting, cultural and faith organisations.

The type of connections and co-operation undertaken by organisations and groupings have evolved in interesting ways over time. For instance, the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan started as a bottom-up voluntary initiative involving 16 organisations, and evolved into a plan with 186 actions across six objectives. The East Border Region Ltd is another long-standing cross-border initiative. It is jointly owned by six local authorities, and has recently affirmed a renewed charter which came into effect on 31 June 2021. The charter identifies future priorities for strategic co-operation between the six local authorities, including on how to realise the opportunities and overcome the challenges of Brexit.

Finally, forging links has been enabled by digital technologies, which have come more to the fore during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is evident in the development of online services in mental health, including education and training, and in accessing mental health services. However, NESC's work in Ireland has highlighted the need to attend carefully to digital exclusion, especially among older people and people in rural areas (NESC, 2021c).

13.2.2 Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss as a Priority

The consultation and shared island work undertaken to date strongly suggested that the most significant and increasing collaboration is occurring on climate change and biodiversity loss. The Council believes that this area is ripe for further ambition, collaboration and action now.

Given the urgency and scope to protect and enhance the island's environment and to maximise the available opportunities, the Council has made a series of recommendations to strengthen and deepen shared island collaboration on climate and biodiversity.

There are a number of reasons why this is the case, including:

- The scale and impact of climate change and biodiversity loss is universally accepted as posing an existential threat to the human race.

- Climate change, adaptation to climate change, and biodiversity loss do not respect human boundaries.

- Addressing climate change and biodiversity loss in an integrated and holistic way requires co-operation to be effective.

- Collaboration at ground level, among citizens, environmental NGOs, community and voluntary groups, experts and researchers, and local authorities has forged ahead of policy.

- Research has found that the pressure and momentum for collaboration on environmental issues is growing and has not been diluted by political uncertainty.

- Both jurisdictions are committed to deliver on international climate and biodiversity targets.

- Agriculture influences the scale and profile of emissions in both jurisdictions similarly, in a way that is unique in Europe.

- Collaboration on environmental issues, while noted in Article 11 of the NI Protocol, is less contentious than other aspects of the trade agreement.

- There are economic and social opportunities from collaborative approaches to the low-carbon transition including in renewable energy, and the circular and bio-economy;

- Agreement on environmental issues, such as food and agriculture standards – for example, those linked to Origin Green – could help reframe trading and export issues.

- Younger people on both sides of the border are increasingly getting involved to find solutions, and have shown a commitment to participating in dialogue and practice, which is evident throughout the Shared Island work.

In addition, the detailed examination in the North West confirms this finding that climate and biodiversity are very fertile areas for collaboration. It provided a vivid illustration of how action in these areas is making tangible differences, often despite the absence of legislation or detailed policy to support cross-border collaboration. For example, Northern Ireland does not so far have climate legislation that applies to local councils, and climate action is an NIE department responsibility. Yet, NI councils do carry out work in this area, with many producing climate adaptation plans without explicit financial support or guidance.

13.2.3 Factors Shaping Collaboration

A core concern in NESC's work has been to identify what enables or hinders efforts to collaborate. In practice, the work found that collaboration is shaped or enabled by a number of factors, but also that collaboration itself shapes those factors. The main factors identified are:

- shared agenda;

- resources;

- political certainty and support;

- legislative and regulatory coherence; and,

- collaborative projects.

Each is discussed briefly.

Shared Agenda

The Council believes that a shared agenda and set of interests is a key enabler of cross-border collaboration. It found ample evidence of this raising the profile and support for action in many areas, including on climate change, mental health services, and social enterprise supports.

The in-depth examination of practices in the North West brought to the surface the mind-set of a functional cross-border region. This mind-set focused on the region as a group of strong and ongoing economic, political and environmental interconnections. This means that stakeholders are not only comfortable with, but see the benefits of, approaching issues within a regional context. It suggested scope to both respect and transcend the border: respecting it fully politically, while working on a functional basis from an economic, social and environmental perspective.

The sense of shared ambition was most strikingly evident in relation to climate and biodiversity. But it also exists in other spheres where people sought to realise the economic, social and environmental benefits of co-operating to develop greater opportunities – for example, in the work underway on mental health within the CAWT project.

Leadership styles, personal and organisational relationships, and trust are integral to developing this shared ambition and working collaboratively. The willingness to work together takes time to develop, and this is evident across the many networks described in Part II of this report. The in-depth look at the North West helped to bring the key features of working together across borders into sharp relief. This illustrated how a more co-ordinated and strategic approach emerged out of ongoing policy dialogue, involving regional stakeholders along with both administrations.

The report shows that formal structures – of the Good Friday Agreement institutions and bodies, the Single Electricity Market, and those relating to funding sources (such as EU PEACE and INTERREG and the PEACE PLUS programmes) – are significant in helping these working arrangements to emerge and to flourish.

Finding ways of creating links between formal and informal practices would be of value and should be developed. This conclusion is reflected in the Council's recommendation to develop a process for structured engagement between the Environment Sector of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and civil society groups on a periodic basis; and the development of a number of strategic working groups on climate and biodiversity.

Resources

The Council considers it is important to emphasise that, in the absence of dedicated funding being available, resources tend to be allocated to core activities, and thus cross- jurisdictional activities are likely to be limited. Sustaining and deepening resources to strengthen co-operation would increase capacity and help deliver on the potential identified in this report.

In this respect the Irish Government's Shared Island Fund, and the PEACE PLUS programme, are placed to be drivers of co-operation for the years ahead. For example, initiatives such as the €40m Shared Island North-South Research Programme will help to deepen links between higher education institutes, researchers, and research communities on the island of Ireland. The first round of funding has been substantially over-subscribed, illustrating the demand for this type of funding.

More generally, examples throughout this report have shown how funding and resources can drive certain cross-border initiatives, e.g. through the successive EU INTERREG and PEACE funding programmes, as well as some of the initiatives underway in the North West. Alternatively, without funding support it may not be possible to initiate or sustain co-operative programmes, thus highlighting the need for financial underpinning to support collaborative efforts. This is particularly the case in disadvantaged areas, where a historic lack of resources can stymie developmental and collaborative initiatives.

Political Certainty and Support

An uncertain political environment can destabilise efforts to work on a co-operative basis on the island for mutual economic, social or environmental benefit.

The Council believes that a more conducive and certain political environment is fundamental to continuing all-island co-operation and engagement. In the period ahead, the main political actors – the Irish and UK Governments and the NI Executive – should seek and prepare for an opportunity to ‘reset’ the context and agenda for north-south and east-west co-operation. This should seek to move beyond the instability and drift of recent years and reassert an overarching dynamic of political support, through which the clear potential of continuing co-operation in economic, social and environmental domains set out in this report could be taken up.

The report shows that, particularly following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, co-operative working relationships were steadily built up on a north-south, and east-west, basis within and across these islands. As noted, the benefit of a conducive political environment is evident in trade statistics for instance, with an acceleration in the value of exports visible since the Good Friday Agreement.

However, institutional co-operation since the Good Friday Agreement has been affected by the recurrent instability or non-functioning of its political institutions. Even when institutions are functioning, the necessary political buy-in to advance beneficial cross-border initiatives has often been absent.

The three-year absence of the Northern Ireland Executive between 2017 and 2020 created political uncertainty and policy stasis with regards to cross-border initiatives. In addition, the UK's withdrawal from the European Union has placed uncertainty on north-south co-operation that was often framed around implementation of common EU policies and programmes, for instance in the environment sector; and also uncertainty on the trading situation.

As such, there has been sustained and multi-level uncertainty in the political environment over recent years, which continues today, and which has not been conducive to the deepening of mutually-beneficial economic, social or environmental engagement on the island.

The case study in the North West illustrates the importance of political support from local elected officials in both jurisdictions. The achievement of strong cross-party support in both councils has provided the regional growth model with a degree of distance from more contentious political and identity issues. At the same time, it also shows that the North West regional growth model would not have continued to evolve without the political endorsement of the Irish Government and the NI Executive. As noted, the strategic partnership model was formally endorsed by the NSMC in 2016.

Legislation and Regulatory Coherence

Legislation which does not take account of the need for interaction with a neighbouring jurisdiction can limit co-operation across borders. Different sets of legislation can make co-operation difficult and Brexit makes regulatory alignment more difficult.

For example, in relation to mental health there is no legal framework for detention in the other jurisdiction, making it difficult to move individuals for treatment across the border. The report also notes that in relation to environmental issues, regulatory divergence or policy differences can undermine, rather than mutually support, efforts to achieve shared goals, such as a transition away from fossil fuels.

More generally, with many environmental policy and regulatory changes in progress, both north and south, there are potential risks post Brexit from different approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation policy, renewable energy, and other areas of significant investment.

The operation of two taxation regimes on the island can lead to complexities, especially for cross-border workers. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted this issue for such workers working remotely. The Council recommends that further consideration should be given to the issue, including through engagement between the Department of Finance and stakeholders, possibly within the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF).

Legislative differences can also be problematic at a local or regional level. The case study in the North West illustrated that differing legal powers between the two local authorities can pose issues, and cause delays, on specific projects. For example, it noted that Donegal County Council has responsibility for road maintenance and upkeep and can compulsorily purchase land outside of national roads and motorways. In Northern Ireland these responsibilities and functions reside with the Department for Infrastructure. This has been a challenge for the North West Greenway Project, as DCC has had to work with the Department for Infrastructure on route selection rather than the DCSDC, with whom they have a stronger working relationship. In such cases, modes of co-operation that facilitate identifying and overcoming the barriers raised by different statutory structures are needed.

Collaborative Projects

The fifth factor which shaped progress was a focus on collaborative projects. The research found that to deepen progress, particularly in a context of finite administrative resources, co-operative efforts focused on projects and outcomes that made a real difference to communities on the ground – on both sides of the border.

Given the troubled history of the island, there is undoubtedly merit in the view that the commitment to developing and deepening cross-border collaboration is driven by a sense that ‘it’s the right thing to do’.

At the same time, fostering, sustaining and deepening wider civic and political support for such collaborative activity is also dependent on its capacity to effectively address issues and to deliver tangible benefits.

Cross-border initiatives are time-consuming and challenging. In this context investing time and resources in building relationships and creating soft policy spaces and networks that are designed to encourage creativity and dialogue, are only sustainable if they eventually deliver better quality and more effective policies for addressing poverty, mental health, environmental pressures, balanced regional growth etc. Initiatives such as mainstreaming social inclusion, and the mental health recovery colleges, are examples of cross-border projects aimed at improving policies and services.

Digging deeper into cross-border co-operation has illustrated the importance of outcomes and tangible projects. The North West case study showed that fostering and sustaining wider civic and political support for such collaborative activity depends on its capacity to effectively address issues and to deliver tangible benefits for the region. An integral part of the two CEOs’ (from DCC and DSDC) advocacy for a place-based partnership approach has been the ongoing requirement to demonstrate to their respective elected representatives that this cross-border model adds value to their own strategies and activities.

This represents a form of ‘outcome legitimisation’, and to date there is clearly a rationale to continue to invest time and resources in developing these collaborative processes, which have been shown to deliver. At the same time, a major challenge for the cross-border functional model in all of the regions will be the ability to move to the next level, in terms of delivering further positive outcomes for the region and its various stakeholders.

In the North West, this is visible in the focus on a range of joint projects linked to the three pillars – economy, environment and social cohesion – and in the commitment to what are called project-based zones of innovation, centred on improving the quality and effectiveness of projects. Similarly, the renewed EBR Charter prioritises tangible outcomes in areas including research and innovation; digital services; SME growth and competitiveness; tourism; greenways and blueways; sustainable energy and energy efficiency measures; waste management; coastal management; creating new opportunities and upgrading skills; and improving social, community and educational outcomes.

13.3 Recommendations in Five Key Areas

This section of the report identifies NESC recommendations across five areas:

- Economy
-

- Social Policy
-

- Climate and Biodiversity
-

- Wellbeing
-

- Data

13.3.1 Economy

In relation to the **economy on the island** the report highlights a number of areas that could be further progressed.

Infrastructure

The Council recommends that increased investment in infrastructure is needed to strengthen economic development, on an all-island basis and in the border areas.

Substantial funding is now available to take forward agreed infrastructure investment priorities, including through the Irish Government's Shared Island Fund; and the new PEACE PLUS programme for Northern Ireland and the Border region in Ireland, which is funded by the EU, the UK and Irish Governments, and the NI Executive.

The Council recommends that other funding could also be directed to agreed all-island investment projects, including the Irish Government's Project Ireland 2040 funds, and the City and Growth Deal programmes in Northern Ireland, which are co-funded by the UK Government and the NI Executive.

Work at national levels and within the border regions, for example, by ICBAN, highlights the critical need to reinforce and expand infrastructure on a more integrated cross-border basis. An all-island strategic rail review by the Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive is underway, to conclude later in 2022. The UK Government's Union Connectivity Review, published in November 2021, recommended support for the all-island strategic review and its implementation.⁶³ The Northern Ireland Executive's updated Investment Strategy is due to be published shortly.

Energy

The I-SEM has generated substantial benefits, such as enhancing efficiency, reducing costs for consumers, and improving energy security; and it will be essential to maintain these benefits in the years ahead given the energy and climate change demands in both jurisdictions. The Council recognises that this will require additional network infrastructure to be built.

The I-SEM is recognised as one of the most successful of all north-south co-operation projects. Realising the full potential of north-south electricity co-operation would be enhanced by a new north-south interconnector, which has been planned for several years. This would have substantial benefits, improving the security of the electricity supply, facilitating more wind-generated electricity and creating cost savings for consumers. The Eirgrid and SONI commitment, to reach at least 70 per cent renewable electricity by 2030, supports energy and climate policy ambitions in both jurisdictions to transition to net zero by 2050.

⁶³ The UK Government's Union Connectivity Review, led by Sir Peter Hendy CBE, is a study that aims to improve transport connectivity across the UK, including the establishment of a multi-modal transport network. Its recommendations are informed by the UK's government's ambition to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Renewable Energy

The Council recommends the establishment of a strategic working group to explore renewable energy opportunities associated with solar, anaerobic digestion, offshore wind, wave and tidal energy. The work of this group would focus on technical aspects, but also the societal and governance challenges, of planning, community engagement and support associated with a transition of the scale required.

This would support the commitment in both jurisdictions to significantly increase the proportion of renewable energy. There is also a need to enhance co-operation, share expertise, and seek solutions in the areas of research, investment and governance as part of re-orienting the energy mix around renewables.

The report highlights that Ireland would benefit from policy and incentives to boost production of renewable energy from anaerobic digestion (AD), and bring it to levels comparable to those in Northern Ireland. Another example, given the lack of refuelling infrastructure for compressed natural gas (CNG) or hydrogen, is the opportunity to share knowledge between the two jurisdictions to examine the role and development of these technologies across the island.

Foreign Direct Investment

The Council recommends that the scope to mandate more strategic and collaborative working between the enterprise agencies should be considered, in order to better take up opportunities to support enterprise growth and to attract investment on a cross-border regional basis.

The remit of the economic development agencies, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, and InvestNI, is to focus on their respective jurisdictions. The report shows that there are some important operational interactions between the agencies on a cross-border basis. It also noted that the IDA have committed to supporting the Shared Island mission in its current strategy.

Clusters

The Council recommends that the work of the newly established National Clustering Policy Steering Group in Ireland should incorporate consideration of all-island opportunities, to identify the scope for interventions to achieve all-island economies of scale and scope.

In addition to drawing on the experience of Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland to date in fostering clusters, there is also scope for the new clustering policy to be informed by the experience of InterTrade Ireland in promoting clusters across the island, and the work of the all-island Cluster Research Network.

This work would help ensure that clustering policy, and related investment and actions by enterprise agencies, north and south, would take cognisance of the opportunities which exist, including through the Irish Government's National Clustering Policy Framework, which is being developed for introduction later in 2022.

Research points to significant potential on a cross-border basis associated with enhanced clustering in certain sectors, including pharmaceuticals, medical devices, and software (Magennis and Gough, 2015). Subsequent research on the pharmaceutical sector (van Egaraat and Curran, 2021) has confirmed this potential, but also found continuing obstacles to realising the potential benefits of greater all-island integration for this sector.

In addition, recent ESRI research has shown that there is considerable scope for greater development of all-island services trade, noting that policy actions that would support expansion of services trade include: focusing on the coherence of regulatory frameworks; co-ordination of supports to the internationalisation of services firms; and enhancement of the digital delivery of services and associated skills (Lawless 2021).

Regional development

To fully promote regional development, and realise the vision for the regions set out in the Irish Government’s National Planning Framework and the Northern Ireland Executive’s Regional Development Strategy 2035, more joined-up approaches are required between the two administrations, building on the co-operation on spatial planning for instance.

This report shows that cross-border local authority-led initiatives have significant potential to support regional prosperity through more integrated co-operation and support for economic development, that would otherwise not be fully realised and should be supported.

It also highlighted the value and further potential of key cross-border local authority initiatives, including such as the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (Chapter 4), the work of the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) and East Border Region Ltd. (EBR) (Chapter 3), and the North West City Region initiative (Part III).

The Council recommends that local authorities and the two administrations on the island place a particular focus on the challenge of securing tangible benefits from co-operation, to foster a sustainable, self-reinforcing dynamic to all-island co-operation in economic, social and environmental domains.

Tourism

The Council recommends that the two administrations and the tourism agencies should cooperate to grow local, sustainable tourism on a cross-border basis, as this would benefit both jurisdictions, particularly regions that attract lower levels of overseas visitors.

This should include linking up the landmark tourism routes of the Wild Atlantic Way and Causeway Coastal route, with Derry as a gateway and connecting hub for both. It should also focus on developing new coastal and inland tourist trails, and other value-creating initiatives, on a cross-border basis, which could be considered and taken forward by tourism promotion agencies, in co-operation with local authorities and sector stakeholders.

This work would help capture some of the significant opportunity that exists to deepen the approach to tourism co-operation, building on the hugely successful overseas marketing of the island as a whole by Tourism Ireland. It would reflect the broad support for deeper co-operation in the tourism sector, north and south, that emerged during the NESC research and consultation.

Co-operation on Enterprise Policy

In overall terms, given the significance of the all-island context for trade, enterprise development, and balanced regional growth, it is striking that, outside of the tourism sector, consideration of trade and business issues at the North South Ministerial Council is limited to making decisions on policies and actions to be implemented by InterTrade Ireland.

While it would require agreement by the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, a more structured basis for consultation, co-operation and action by the two administrations on enterprise policy and other economic development issues should be considered.

This could also oversee and mandate enterprise promotion agencies to take more co-operative approaches on agreed initiatives, such as those specified in the areas of FDI, clustering, regional development and good jobs.

All-island good jobs agenda

The Council recommends that relevant departments or agencies in the north and south could be jointly mandated to develop a shared island good jobs agenda, building on their work on this issue to date.

This should focus on supportive education and skills systems, which would prepare people for an all-island labour market, especially in border areas. There is also scope to liaise on an east-west basis, in particular with work ongoing in Scotland and Wales.

This work would help promote an understanding of the key components and measurement of good jobs; help to address the shared concern to provide that work is rewarding; and contribute to addressing inequality.

Trans-border workers' tax relief

The Council recommends that further consideration should be given to the impacts of trans-border workers' tax relief for remote working, with engagement between the Department of Finance and other stakeholders, possibly within the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF).

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a concession on the application of trans-border workers' tax relief so that it remained available to workers who ordinarily crossed the border for work but were unable to do so due to public health restrictions. Further consideration of this issue needs to reflect wider international work, including the impacts of remote and hybrid working on a trans-border basis across Europe.

The issues which should be considered, and form the basis for further engagement, include:

- identifying and reviewing the ways in which a Shared Island perspective could shape the tax treatment of Ireland-Northern Ireland cross-border working, and require or enable it to be viewed as distinctive from working across other borders;
- examining how to encourage and facilitate investment and job creation that is more cross-border in nature, and the practical challenges of doing so;
- examining cross-border working, between Ireland and Northern Ireland, in terms of its scale and level of reporting, and its changing nature and trends; and
- monitoring and understanding post-pandemic remote working practices, and differences in geographic areas and across sectors.

13.3.2 Social Policy

In relation to **social policy**, the Council highlights the following areas which should be progressed:

Civil society stakeholders

The Council recommends that the scope for periodic joint ministerial or joint departmental engagement with stakeholders in relevant sectors – to hear their views and expectations of what north-south co-operation needs to deliver – should be explored in order to inform the development and updating of work programmes.

The Council recognises that resourcing is required for these formal cross-border structures to be more accessible to, and inclusive of, civil society organisations. This will be needed in order to enable civil society organisations to participate in such structures and associated consultative processes.

Acting on this recommendation will help capture a shared interest in seeing that the development of policy, both north and south, is informed by wider engagement. The consultation by NESC, and more generally by the Shared Island Dialogues, highlights the value of greater engagement with civil society organisations, and those directly impacted by policy and cross-border co-operation.

The report also highlights two resources that may help improve engagement. First, the New Common Charter for co-operation within and between these islands, developed by the Centre for Cross Border Studies, is a useful reference document to empower civic society to engage in shared island work. In order for NGOs and civic society to fully engage in this work, resources are needed for capacity building, as is attention to succession planning.

Second, Hambleton's civic leadership framework (summarised in Box 10.1, in Part III), which aims to use structured engagement to harness the skills, expertise and resources of all the relevant stakeholders – political and public sector leaders, trade unions, business and the community and voluntary sector – has been shown to create zones of innovation that can improve the quality and effectiveness of public policy dialogue and action.

PEACE PLUS programme

The Council believes that the PEACE PLUS programme is an important opportunity to affirm the benefits of cross-border co-operation and interaction on a range of common social policy concerns, and that it provides a basis for the mainstreaming and further development of successful initiatives over time through north-south co-operation.

The new PEACE PLUS programme runs from 2021 to 2027. It is funded by the EU, the UK and Irish Governments, and the NI Executive, and will provide over €1bn to support peace and prosperity in the core area of Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

Under PEACE PLUS – including social policy themes of healthy and inclusive communities; empowering and investing in young people; and building peaceful and thriving communities – there is flexibility to include partners from outside the core areas in a wider functional area, where appropriate. This would help to ensure that the lived experience of those addressing social policy concerns is reflected in collaboration and learning across a wider geographical area.

Collaboration on social policy

The Council recommends that north-south collaborative events should be built into annual departmental and agency work programmes.

Building such collaborative events into annual work programmes is a useful means of maintaining and developing cross-border engagement across a range of social and other policy areas.

There is potential to do more in terms of knowledge exchange, shared learning, and relationship building through the hosting of conferences, summer schools and other joint working on a north-south and/or east-west basis, including secondment, and exchange and training programmes.

The annual summer school collaboration – between the Department of Social Protection in Ireland and the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland – shows the benefit and potential of social policy interaction, given the connections, shared concerns, and circumstances that often pertain.

This is also the case for the shared education programme and co-operation between the education inspectorates, as well as north-south and east-west collaboration on adult and community education through NALAB.

Concentrations of disadvantage

The Council recommends that the role of special initiatives in tackling concentrations of poverty on the island should be examined, and that the role of the annual summer school collaboration, between the Department of Social Protection in Ireland and the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, could be explored as a means of initiating this dialogue.

This dialogue could focus on the extent to which there are similarities between the factors that contribute to violence and anti-social behaviour (and drugs) in disadvantaged communities in Ireland, and the factors that lead to violence and paramilitary activity in deprived communities in Northern Ireland. It could also consider to what extent some, but not all, of the solutions are similar.

The dialogue could also be informed by work on regeneration. Intensive regeneration initiatives have been undertaken in Limerick and in North East Inner City Dublin in recent years, which could offer a basis for open learning and exchange with comparable exercises in Northern Ireland, involving people from affected communities.

In some instances, a partnership approach between the NI Executive and the Irish Government and/or UK Government could introduce a positive and new dynamic, through the resources, expertise, learning, and the wider training, educational and employment opportunities that could be drawn on.

In addition, the regionally based focus groups drew particular attention to the importance of attending to the needs of those most distanced from the labour market and, in particular, to developing pathways to good jobs for young people from communities living with high levels of complex deprivation. The focus groups highlighted the role of social enterprise in creating and providing pathways to good jobs, noting the example of Creggan Enterprises in Derry.

Social enterprise

The Council recommends that both administrations, building on the platform already put in place, could explore the potential for greater recognition, support and development of the role of social enterprise on a cross-border and all-island basis.

This work would enhance the important role social enterprises have in providing services and employment in local areas. The report highlights that they have a track record in addressing issues such as food poverty, social housing, and environmental issues. This has been particularly evident and important during the Covid-19 pandemic in supporting disadvantaged communities and vulnerable people.

Public servants and social enterprise networks already have a good level of co-operation across the island in the development of policy and delivery of services. This recommendation seeks to build and deepen this.

Cross-border shared services and specialist services

The successful experience of providing specialist services on an all-island basis should be examined, to identify where scope exists for both administrations to provide a broader range of services on a more accessible, cost-efficient or higher-standard basis through north-south co-operation.

This work would examine successful models such as the North West Cancer Centre, the All-Island Congenital Heart Disease Network, and the Middletown Centre for Autism; and would help identify the potential to further develop a cross-border shared services agenda between the two administrations, including in the areas of health and mental health, for more accessible and effective provision of services on a co-operative regional basis.

Further and higher education and training

The Council recommends that the Government, working with the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government, should encourage and support more strategic co-operation between further and higher education and training institutions to enhance access, choice and experience for students, as well as contribute to institutional development and diversification.

This should include co-operation by governments and higher and further education and training institutions to enhance student mobility, including through joint provision of courses and exchange programmes.

There is a real appetite in institutions for much greater cross-border and all-island collaboration on education and training. The Royal Irish Academy Higher Education Futures Taskforce has developed a series of papers which can inform discussions. In addition, the work in the North West also highlights the value of developing and deepening co-operation between higher and further education institutions. This is a model that could be replicated in other border regions, by local authorities and higher and further education institutions working together on a cross-border basis.

This work would help address student mobility on the island, and between Ireland and Great Britain. This remains at a low level, which represents a missed opportunity to build connections between young people on a cross-border and cross-community basis. There would also be benefits in retaining students, and therefore talent on the island, in order to contribute to addressing skills shortages and to progress the good jobs agenda.

13.3.3 Climate Change and Biodiversity

In relation to **climate and biodiversity** the report highlights a number of areas that could be further progressed.⁶⁴

Shared Ambition

The Council recommends that both administrations take greater cognisance of the connected nature of the climate crisis and biodiversity emergency for the island of Ireland, and reflect this in a programme of co-ordination and joint action – utilising the capacity of the institutions and bodies of the Good Friday Agreement – to realise the tangible benefits of co-operation for this most urgent and common challenge for the shared island.

A joint statement on the shared climate and biodiversity challenges would be a positive development, setting out a commitment to work collaboratively across sectors and communities on mitigation, adaptation and restoration – including territorial, water, coastal and marine.

This would support the development of a shared and inspiring vision for integrated climate and biodiversity action across the island. For the island of Ireland, a targeted approach, focused on responding to specific environmental challenges, could make real progress.

The work under this recommendation would help to provide a strategic framework for the many projects and networks identified in this report. A focused review of environmental areas for further collaboration between Ireland and Northern Ireland would be a key input. This should include an assessment of the all-island remits or mandates within agencies on both sides of the border.

This work would help maximise the potential that is evident and help identify further opportunities, including in relation to funding.

It would also reflect the enhanced level of ambition for collaborative cross-border public investment, and the need for co-ordinated approaches to climate and biodiversity action, in Ireland's revised National Development Plan (NDP) (Government of Ireland, 2021c). The preparation of, and reflection on, such a statement of common purpose would further help to inform and progress the Irish Government's commitment in the Programme for Government to seek to develop an all-island strategy on climate and biodiversity.

Strategic Working Groups

The Council recommends the establishment of a number of strategic working groups to explore opportunities for future collaboration on all-island climate and biodiversity concerns.

Consideration should be given – as part of the Government's Shared Island initiative, and in appropriate consultation with the Northern Ireland Executive – to how these strategic working groups could most productively be established.

These working groups would operate for a fixed period, such as six months. They would include representatives from academia, relevant departments, business and NGOs. Each working group could be hosted by a university, and stakeholders would optimally include representatives of both jurisdictions. A short report would be produced to identify a number of key areas of mutual interest and potential for further exchanges.

The Council recognises that there are a number of ways in which such groups could be convened, while still meeting the objective of providing a setting for forward-looking discussion and formulation of advice. However, the overarching purpose is that they would explore the opportunities and modes for progressing value-added co-operative approaches to the pressing and shared environmental challenges that face both jurisdictions on the island.

It would be important that these groups include relevant expertise, including environmental NGOs, and that the NGOs be supported to participate, where necessary. This report shows that expertise is evident in many spheres, with

⁶⁴ The Council published a separate report 'Collaboration on Climate and Biodiversity: Shared Island as a Catalyst for Renewed Ambition and Action' (NESC, 2021a), which outlined areas of work in relation to climate and biodiversity.

ecologists, scientists and researchers, among others, sharing ideas on issues such as rewetting bogs and peatland restoration; afforestation; community energy; pollinators; and marine carbon sequestration. The strategic working groups also provide an opportunity to make networks that are working across the island – in areas such as pollinators, energy, and environmental research – more visible.

The Council recommended that strategic working groups be established in the following areas:

- **Sustainable Agriculture:** The Council recommends that existing initiatives such as *Farming for Nature* could be explored further. It notes that peatland restoration was identified in the consultation as a key area of work, north and south, given the trans-boundary implications for carbon storage levels and inventory reporting. In addition, the Green Transformation focus group in the North West highlighted agriculture and the potential role of regenerative farming and renewable energy; and just transition, citing work in Inishowen as an example.

- **All-Island Opportunities from a Circular Economy and Bio-economy:** An all-island approach has the potential to support the shift to a circular economy in Ireland, and Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, given the potential economies of scale and the resulting opportunity to gain competitive advantage.

- **Collaborations on Renewable Energy:** As noted in Section 13.3.1, future renewable energy development is a significant area of opportunity for north-south co-operation.

- **Valuing Networks for Nature:** There is potential to build on the progress of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, and to further discussion on issues such as nature recovery networks and a wildlife web, as well as developing linkages or corridors of natural vegetation between existing conservation areas.

- **Marine and Coastal Climate Adaptation and Impact:** There is value in strengthening co-operation, and expanding knowledge and shared practices, in relation to the marine and coastal impacts of climate change; and in relation to all-island approaches to adaptation. The focus of the working group could include specific challenges such as: flood water management; coastal erosion; and the impacts of a rise in sea-levels.

13.3.4 Wellbeing Measurement

In relation to developing wellbeing measures of progress, the report highlights a number of areas that could be further progressed.

Wellbeing frameworks as a shared learning tool

The Council recommends that there is scope and potential to develop co-operation around the shared interest in developing wellbeing measures of progress that move beyond narrow GDP-based assessments.

The report notes that there is potential to use the wellbeing frameworks as a tool to facilitate engagement with a wide range of stakeholders across the island, to inform priorities in relation to key challenges, and to learn from each other.

The Council also notes that there is potential to use the work of the Community Planning Partnerships in Northern Ireland and the Public Participation Networks in Ireland to advance co-operation on wellbeing frameworks at local levels.

In the longer term, there may be the opportunity for the wellbeing frameworks, north and south, to become more aligned on common and shared concerns.

Data collection

The Council recommends that the respective statistical agencies, CSO and NISRA, could cooperate in the development and application of wellbeing indicators and other measures.

The Council notes that the absence of UK statistics from Eurostat may hinder the outcomes from such work. In the longer term, there is the possibility to consider including indicators for greater co-operation across the island, north-south, and between the islands, east-west, in line with the Good Friday Agreement, in the wellbeing frameworks.

Co-operation and consultation

The Council recommends a north-south (and east-west) element should be built into groups that are set up to design and refine the respective wellbeing frameworks.

In addition, consultation exercises should take on board the views of people and communities, on both parts of the island of Ireland, and across these neighbouring islands (east-west).

13.3.5 Data

The Council recommends that both administrations could place a greater focus on inter-operable statistical data and co-operation between the CSO and NISRA, in respect of sectors which are important in terms of all-island co-operation or comparison, including on environment, health, and trade.

The Council's research found that data is frequently lacking for those working to build co-operation and collaboration across the border through research or practice.

Notwithstanding good relationships between the CSO and NISRA, there are a number of gaps in the collection and collation of statistics on an all-island basis. The ability to undertake comparative analysis will be constrained by the UK's withdrawal from the European Union and thus Eurostat, so that the UK will no longer be included in EU comparative statistics.

The report found that, examining issues comparatively, or from an all-island perspective, typically takes time and effort given the lack of accessible sources or single points-of-contact, which would often be available for national-level comparative research.

Despite the fact that the geographies of the two jurisdictions are intrinsically interlinked, official statistical data collection stops either side of the border, and often takes little or no cognisance of the value and need for inter-operable data sets. The lack of all-island data and research on the environment, sustainable development, and climate and biodiversity, for instance, is a clear barrier and challenge to collaborative working.

As a result, there are gaps in knowledge and understanding in many areas, such as the impacts of climate change on our oceans and coastlines; agriculture and climate mitigation; and water quality. Data gaps exist in relation to greenhouse gas emissions, and ecosystems services, and it is not always possible to compare NI and Irish data directly. There is currently no central co-ordinating hub for the island that can collate and create access to all relevant data and climate research evidence on an open access basis.

This is also the case in relation to poverty measurement, mental health data and information on social enterprise. The lack of integrated regional data undermines the evaluation and monitoring of strategies and projects across a number of policy areas. It also constrains the capacity to engage in evidence-informed policy dialogue. Similarly, the capacity to use data to identify particular policy challenges is also constrained by data considerations.

13.4 Next Steps

The Irish Government's Shared Island initiative is focused on deepening mutually beneficial co-operation on the island of Ireland, by working north-south and east-west on significant shared challenges and opportunities, underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

The Council's report can inform the Government's commitment, under the Programme for Government and the revised National Development Plan, to work for a more sustainable, connected and prosperous island, in partnership with the NI Executive, the UK Government, local authorities and civil society across the island of Ireland.

This report has provided a tangible foundation for the Shared Island: active, productive co-operation in practice, focused on the key challenges facing communities on both sides of the border, across a wide range of policy areas.

It is recommended that this report and the potential areas for further action should now be considered by Government and the Joint Secretariat to the North South Ministerial Council, as well as others with a role and interest in all-island co-operation and engagement – including political representatives, state agencies, all-island bodies, local authorities, civil society and community organisations.

It is important that time is now devoted to ensuring that this report, and its ambition to help identify the scope to improve all-island ways of working and areas where such co-operation seems likely to bear useful fruit, is widely shared.

The nature of the work under the Government's Shared Island Initiative is inclusive, and underlines the importance of engaging with all the communities and traditions on the island. This report reflects this commitment, in that it has sought to deepen understanding of how people work together well in a range of cross-border or all-island settings.

The report will be launched in a manner that engages people across the island. It is an opportunity for NESC to engage with more stakeholders, citizens and experts in Northern Ireland. It also provides an opportunity to engage further with communities in the south on shared island possibilities.

The initial launch will be followed by a number of workshops across the island. These engagements would provide an opportunity for NESC, and by extension the Government's Shared Island Initiative, to continue to listen and learn. They offer an opportunity to consider, in depth, the areas where further research and work by NESC would add most value. The Council's current work programme includes a focus on agriculture and climate change, and wellbeing frameworks. These will also include an all-island focus.

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No.	Title	Year	No.	Title	Year
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