The Potential For Cross-Border Exchange
And Learning About Change In The
Community And Voluntary Sectors In
Northern Ireland And The Republic Of Ireland

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The Centre for Cross Border Studies
Background

The Building Change Trust was established by the Big Lottery Fund with a National Lottery grant of £10 million as an investment for community capacity building and promotion of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.

The Trust is accepted as a charity by HM Revenue and Customs (XT11390). The Trust’s corporate Trustee; Building Change Trust Limited has 8 Directors drawn from different backgrounds across Northern Ireland and is registered as a company limited by guarantee in Northern Ireland (NI071182).

During the coming period, 2013 until 2018, our resources will be used to support the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland to achieve more and better collaboration, increased sustainability and to be a learning sector which identifies, shares and acts on the lessons from its own and others’ work and influences others’ actions.

Our work will be carried out across 6 thematic areas, Collaboration, Social Finance, Social Innovation, Inspiring Impact, Leadership and Creative space for civic thinking.

This opinion piece on the independence of the community and voluntary sector has been commissioned as the first piece of work under the latter theme and is offered as an opening contribution to a debate on the role and future of an independent community and voluntary sector in contemporary society.

This and the other opinion pieces to be commissioned in the future will each be accompanied by a public seminar and debate on their subject matter. We hope to enable a facility for online comments and contributions in due course but in the meantime if you have any comments on the content of this document please don’t hesitate to contact us by e-mail at info@buildingchangetrust.org

The Centre for Cross Border Studies

The Centre for Cross Border Studies, based in Armagh and Dublin, researches and develops cooperation across the Irish border in a wide range of practical areas, notably education, health, the economy, ICT and citizens’ information, and works with similar cross-border regional research bodies in other parts of Europe. Further information on the centre can be found at www.crossborder.ie

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Challenges and Changes in Northern Ireland

The Community and Voluntary Sector in Northern Ireland has been a key player in the peace process of the past two decades. The sector’s organisations ‘sold themselves, and came to be seen, as important building blocks in establishing and then sustaining the community-based elements that underpinned the paramilitary ceasefires.’ In the 1990s the British Government acknowledged that it had a responsibility to support community development in the province with a clear focus on community relations. As a result, third sector organisations came to see themselves as an essential element in the core task of government: the transition from conflict. This put the sector on the same side as government in a vital shared task, locking them into a partnership that led, among other things, to the setting up of the Civic Forum with its strong third sector representation.

Two other aspects of the unique Northern Ireland political context are emphasised by Nick Acheson: firstly, the weakness of third sector groups in articulating their interests in political ways which challenge the sectarian divisions which are at the heart of Northern society; and secondly, the lack of enthusiasm of the main ‘tribal’ parties – Sinn Fein and the DUP – for seeing the community and voluntary sector as anything other than another partner (along with the private sector) in supporting the Northern Ireland Executive in its primary responsibility for the social and economic development of the province.

Since the return of power-sharing in 2007, Acheson maintains that voluntary organisations have found themselves ‘drawn into a remodelling of welfare institutions’ to fit reducing budgets and serve the interests of a state-led strategy ‘informed by neo-liberal values of efficiency and the need to bolster private sector economic performance.’ This has been formalised in the renewal of a ‘compact’ between the Executive and the sector, led by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) in 2010.

There is another view, however, and it is one shared by many sector leaders, particularly those heading major voluntary organisations: that, in the words of one interviewee (not the head of a major organisation), ‘now, with more limited means, we have to prove that our work has benefits. It's a fundamental business principle: we must think about the benefits and outcomes of any project and how to plan to achieve these.’

In fact, the third sector in Northern Ireland is now two sectors: a voluntary sector led by large organisations who are enthusiastically and successfully involved in bidding for government service delivery contacts, and a community sector, which includes the many thousands of small grass-roots groups who would not be remotely interested in or capable of such work. The latter are particularly numerous and important in the peripheral small towns and villages of the largely rural border region.

Thus on the one hand there is Bryson Charitable Group, with an annual turnover of £35 million and 95% of its income from contracting the delivery of government services in areas ranging from recycling and energy efficiency to training, education, care and social services. Or there is Praxis Care, the largest charity in Northern Ireland, with 1,200 employees and a wide range of services – including residential and supported housing, domiciliary care and drop-in centres – in mental health, learning disabilities and dementia.

On the other there are a multitude of older people’s, women’s and mothers and toddlers groups, jobs clubs and education and training initiatives in villages along the length of the border and elsewhere in rural Northern Ireland – many of them in remote areas – which provide a vital service with annual budgets of under £5,000. Without such services, the great bulk of them delivered by volunteers, economic and social life in such places would be increasingly unsustainable, with younger and more educated people in particular moving away to the towns and cities.

The suspicion must be – although there is no breakdown available – that it is these smaller groups which are suffering most from government spending cuts. Indeed, figures used by Nick Acheson show that the income from the government to the sector as a whole between 2006-7 and 2010-11 actually rose by over 50% (from £259 million to £392.1 million), compared to a growth in come from all sources of 30% (from £570 million to £741.9 million).2

However this table also shows the growing dependence of the sector on income from government contracts as opposed to income from grants. Income from contracts in 2010-11 was 68% of total government income compared to 31.6% in 2003-04 and 7.7% in 2001-02. In striking contrast, income from grants fell from 92.3% of the total in 2001-02 to 32% in 2010-11. This was the period of successive New Labour governments’ ‘recasting of voluntary agencies as just another way of delivering public services and redefining citizens as consumers in a welfare market.’3 Many Northern Ireland organisations faced with the loss of EU PEACE and other funding repositioned themselves as government public service providers.

Acheson says: ‘Because of the substantial jump in government funding of the sector since 2006-7, overall cuts in public expenditure have had less of an immediate impact than they have had in England especially, where there has been a 30% reduction in local authority budgets.’4 However he notes that in the period 2011-2015 the Northern Ireland budget is due to reduce by around 8% in line with public expenditure cuts across the UK as a whole, while expenditure on social security (not part of the NI budget) is expected to decline by around £1 billion by 2017.

Northern Ireland has benefitted hugely from EU funding since the mid-1990s. However the decline in EU PEACE programme funding (see below), with a proposed PEACE IV programme due to be far smaller than its predecessors, and the disappearance from the scene within the next few years of Atlantic Philanthropies and the International Fund for Ireland, means that non-governmental funding will be thin on the ground in the future. British trusts and foundations may have returned to the province, but their £3-5 million annual grant total is miniscule in comparison.

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2 Acheson N., ‘Independence as a principle of voluntary action: Developing a new story about who we are: the challenge for voluntary action in Northern Ireland. Paper for Building Change Trust, 2013, Table One, p.9
3 Ibid, p 5
4 Ibid, p 10
Challenges and changes in the Republic

This relatively benign picture in Northern Ireland – albeit one increasingly dominated by the demands of government contracting and procurement – is dramatically different if we look southward. The voluntary and community sector in the Republic has always been less well developed, largely a function of its more limited welfare state, leading to its density being half that of the north. Only in recent years has a body emerged to match NICVA, namely The Wheel, which brings together nearly a thousand voluntary and community organisations. The Irish government struggled to reach a definition of the relationship between the state and the voluntary and community sector: first promised in 1976, it did not emerge for 24 years, something of a record (Supporting voluntary activity, 2002). This valued and affirmed the independence of the sector, announced voluntary-statutory units in each government department and promised not only more, but multi-annual funding.

Voluntary and community organisations were, in a sudden, unheralded strategic turn in 2002, brought under a hastily-formed Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, managed by two ministers with longstanding hostility to their activism. The sector has been in headlong retreat ever since, with Supporting voluntary activity swiftly repudiated. The flagship Community Development Programme, a European model, was closed down. When the economic and social crisis broke, voluntary and community organisations were disproportionately affected: although overall government spending fell only -4.3% from 2008 to 2013, their funding is estimated to have fallen -35%, with employment down from 53,000 to about 36,600 by the end of 2013. Many of the state agencies that supported them were extinguished, like the Combat Poverty Agency. The right to advocacy was curtailed, most health funding being accompanied by gagging clauses prohibiting groups funded by the state from undertaking advocacy work. Such re-drawings of the contours of state and sector have not been unusual in the British Isles, but this experience was extreme.

Voluntary and community organisations were ill-equipped to respond to these challenges. The Wheel contributed an annual analysis of the manner in which budgetary changes affected the voluntary sector, while the principal articulator of the community sector, the Community Workers Cooperative, was organisationally challenged when the government withdrew its last grants. In the Oireachtas, Sinn Fein emerged as its only champion, tabling motions and questions. Dublin community groups, led by the resource centre in St Michael’s Estate, staged a theatrical Spectacle of defiance parade led off by a grim reaper on horseback, standing out starkly in a sea of passivity.

7 Eamonn O Cuiv, minister and Noel Ahern, minister of state and brother of the Taoiseach.
Cross-Border Exchange and Learning

But are there ways in which the third sector could respond to the crisis on a cross-border or north-south basis? Except where voluntary organisations worked on a 32-county basis (or even an all-British Isles basis), cooperation between voluntary organisations north and south had historically been limited. Cooperation Ireland through its earlier iterations (e.g. Cooperation North) made a heroic effort during the worst period of the troubles to generate north-south cooperation, but it was, for the most part, point-to-point, twin-pair, short-duration exchanges in relatively ‘soft’ areas. During the 1980s, southern activists worked with the Northern Ireland Poverty Lobby in a united attempt to put issues of poverty and exclusion on the island’s agenda.10

Interestingly, their attempts to obtain funding from the then existing range of north-south philanthropic funders was so challenging as to merit a bewildered ‘no’, only to be rescued by the intervention of the Fine Gael Minister for Social Welfare, Gemma Hussey.

The introduction of the INTERREG cross-border programme of the reformed Structural Funds (1989-93; 1994-9; 2000-6; 2007-2013) and subsequent PEACE programmes (1994-9; 2000-6; 2007-2013) should have provided an impetus to north-south cooperation between voluntary and community organisations. In reality, they fell well short of their potential. The INTERREG programme was allocated largely to inter-governmental projects, ‘hard’ infrastructure and enterprise, with little if any scope for civil society cooperation. Even to this day, INTERREG IV largely funds public bodies: voluntary and community organisations account for only 4% of the initial funding requested and 3% of approvals.11

The PEACE programmes were used intensively by voluntary and community organisations and built up the community infrastructure in a region where it had been neglected. They made cross-border cooperation routine, though it is not without on-going challenges for projects’ management and handling currency differentials. Cross-border cooperation (i.e. in Northern Ireland and the six southern border counties) expanded hugely in 1995-2013 during the period of the EU PEACE and INTERREG programmes. A 2008 study of community development in the border region published by the Dundalk Institute for Technology found that most such groups worked generically with local communities, disadvantaged and socially excluded people. Their main targets were, in descending order, young people, older people and unemployed people.12 An examination of 20 case studies of cooperation found that they covered such diverse fields as ex-prisoners, generic community development, mental health, victims of the ‘Troubles’, peace-building and reconciliation, local development, the arts, second chance education, Travellers and the built environment. Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) chief executive Pat Colgan recently estimated that the PEACE programmes disbursed nearly £2 billion during that period for cross-community and cross-border cooperation.

These overall figures hide the rapidly decreasing number of projects supported, from 15,000 in 1995-99 to 450 in 2007-13, indicative of the change in emphasis from supporting ‘bottom up’ and often community-based projects in the 1990s to larger initiatives, many of them public sector or local authority led, from the early 2000s on. Voluntary and community groups found PEACE III prescriptive, even more bureaucratically heavy-handed than its predecessors and were terrified of making administrative errors for fear, in extremis,

of losing all their money. They fought battles as to what was ‘eligible expenditure’: e.g. an affiliation fee to a network outside the border counties was not. Monitoring was counting numbers, not issues nor policy. One had to disguise a networking event as a ‘study day’. North-South activity outside the border counties was neither encouraged nor permitted while ‘foreign work’ (e.g. Basque country) was ruled out, ‘making PEACE III even more insular than PEACE II: there was no open strand, nor scope for imaginative thinking’. At the start, half the PEACE III projects were estimated to have a high cross-border dimension.\(^\text{13}\) Activists, though, have the sense that this is now much less, a consequence of the radically reduced capacity of the voluntary sector in the Republic.

North-South cooperation (i.e. involving partners in the island as a whole) has been much less well-funded than cooperation across the immediate cross-border region. It is striking how little major North-South work there has been among the larger nationwide or province-wide third sector organisations since the beginning of the peace process, apart from the long-established church, sporting and cultural bodies and the very few all-island peace-building bodies, notably Cooperation Ireland.

Reasons given by sector representatives are various: the restrictions imposed by EU regulations, ruling out funding work in the 20 Southern counties outside the border region; the fact that until 2008 community and voluntary groups in the separate jurisdictions were relatively well-funded by their own governments; the failure to set up a North/South Consultative Forum (as proposed in both the Belfast and St Andrews Agreements) to bring civil society groups together on an all-island basis; and – most convincingly – a lack of visionary leadership which meant that 15 years on the north-south connections are much weaker in the third sector than in the business, health or education sectors (where the North-South dimension was often driven by committed and high profile individuals).

At the same time as the Dundalk IT study, a group of geographers and planners associated with the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) looked at three types of cross-border cooperation in towns and villages in Cavan, Leitrim, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Donegal. These largely successful projects in marginalised areas had grown out of dynamic partnerships between community, local authority and local business groups respectively. However in each case their sustainability was questionable without significant external funding. The researchers advised radical new arrangements involving area-based planning on a cross-border basis, a greater and more structured role for local government and a longer-term developmental approach to cooperation.\(^\text{14}\) One very experienced community leader in the border region feels that a lack of leadership at local level is also one reason why, after hundreds of millions of euros have gone to support projects in the region, there is a widespread feeling of disillusion that most of it went on ‘nice wee projects with no sustainability’. It is not helped by ‘the bucking-the-system mentality of many border people which is a barrier in that it produces a poverty of vision.’

Another problem is that Belfast-based government officials and public bodies charged with community development and community relations sometimes see border counties like Fermanagh and Tyrone as peripheral to their vision, let alone neighbouring counties across the border.

Cross-border cooperation looms very small in the official mind, either in Belfast and Dublin. Even in the early 2000s, when North-South cooperation was high on the political agenda in both capitals, one cross-border community tourism promoter was quoted as bemoaning ‘the conservative, short-sighted, very reactionary consipitated culture of so many institutions, both north and south, that has really inhibited any

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form of genuine healthy engagement, or exploration of synergy, between north and south.’15 The Dundalk IT study made the case that the lack of government strategies to support such grass-roots ‘people-to-people’ cooperation represented ‘an extraordinary example of a lost opportunity...the border region of the island provided an unusual example in Europe of an intense level of community development in a border region coming out of conflict, one where the Irish experience could be most useful to other countries.’16

If anything, limits were set to the civil society role: whereas PEACE I included a broad-based, strong, effective civil society forum, it was not included in PEACE II, airbrushed out without explanation, reminiscent of old Soviet history.17 Although PEACE II had originally included a civil society strand Open and informed dialogue for a sustainable democratic society, this was emasculated as a Northern Ireland-only Outward and forward looking region, most going to tourism.18 Peace III was colonised by the local authorities, who, according to critics ‘may have known how to build roads but knew little about community development’: one well-established, well-known and highly-regarded network even had to fight for a place on its local county-based peace partnership.

Although political resistance to north-south cooperation has largely melted away, the last remaining obstacle has seriously stymied civil society. The proposed North/South Consultative Forum, partly prompted by community activists in the Women’s Coalition, remains unimplemented, reportedly due to Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) opposition. The last government in the Republic made a gallant effort to re-table the issue, holding three conferences, but it does not appear to be of any interest to the government elected in 2011.

One of the problematics of the PEACE programmes was the degree to which they should fund cooperation that drew in organisations outside the immediate border area. PEACE generally limited such cooperation to Northern Ireland and the six southern border counties of the Republic, excluding the rest of the Republic. Arguments were made by a number of institutional players (e.g. Cooperation Ireland) and academics that the north-south axis had a role, even a limited one, in contributing to the process of peace and reconciliation.19 Even though they were not necessarily the same thing, north-south civil society cooperation was an important complement, they argued, to cross-border civil society cooperation.

A counter argument is that it is not the business of cross-border programmes, be they INTERREG or PEACE, to fund north-south cooperation between civil society organisations: governments should do that. Cooperation Ireland though, whenever it approached the two governments for such funding, was always referred back to these two programmes. Governments seemed to regard these programmes as an excuse not to fund north-south cooperation directly and continued to not do so as long as these programmes remained, although the Department of Foreign Affairs does fund a small Reconciliation and Anti-Sectarianism Fund. At the same time, both governments were prepared to invest substantially in building up the infrastructure of public bodies cooperating across the border, as any glance at INTERREG allocations shows.

Whatever about the supply, was there the demand for cooperation by civil society organisations? An important philanthropic funder of voluntary and community groups is the Ireland programme of the York-based Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, which has always been disposed to promoting voluntary and

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community action in and between the two parts of Ireland. Although its funding guidelines welcome proposals for north-south and cross-border activities, in practice almost all proposals are for self-contained projects in each separate jurisdiction. It receives a mere handful of proposals for north-south activities, of which it is able to approve only a couple each year (none in 2012). According to Celia McKeon of the trust, ‘this is a source of disappointment, but also a reflection of pressures facing organisations to meet immediate needs in their own jurisdictions’.

As for north-south cooperation, there has long been a relationship between The Wheel (7% of whose members operate in the north) and NICVA (3.1% of NI organisations surveyed by NICVA’s State of the Sector report operate in the South). They used to meet bilaterally to discuss north-south cooperation, but now do so twice a year as part of a rotating concordat called the ‘five nations’ (the two parts of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England), where they discuss a broad range of issues affecting the respective voluntary sectors and the policy and services issues arising. The NICVA-Wheel axis has focussed on information-sharing generally and on charities legislation in particular, especially at a time when such legislation had been presented in both parts of the island, a first joint seminar being held in Belfast. According to Deirdre Garvey of The Wheel, ‘many leaders of the various sub-sectors in the south now know their counterparts in the north’, which certainly marks progress, even if they can do little more than ‘share information, swap stories and share some solidarity’.

Some other, limited examples of north-south cooperation between voluntary and community organisations are known, for example in the area of migrant workers. The International Fund for Ireland community leadership programme trains up leaders on both sides of the border together. There are other examples of exchanges between loyalist community development groups on the one hand and, for example, youth groups in south Dublin and community development organisations in the north inner city. There has been long-standing cooperation in the women’s sector (e.g. Women’s Resource Development Agency and the National Women’s Council of Ireland).

An important issue is not so much the quantity of cross-border or north-south activity, but what is its quality? Does it lead to improved learning? The Dundalk IT study found that there was indeed a traffic in ideas and services: it was mainly southward, reflecting the more developed nature of both the public service and the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland, focussed on such areas as the built environment, volunteering and health, several large Northern housing associations and the Derry-based STEER mental health service being the best examples. There are a few examples of policy work emerging from the PEACE programme, such as the Rural enablers programme of Rural Community Network and Irish Rural Link, which presented a series of thoughtful policy papers. The Community Workers Cooperative in Donegal run the Collective action for positive peace programme to address social inequality across the border. There is also the INTERREG-funded, Donegal County Council-led Women into public life, a programme which should impact across business, administration and politics. These examples are good, but all too few.

When the Dundalk IT study looked at the organisational form of cross-border cooperation, it found that most took the form of twin-pair one-to-one engagements, rather than the more sophisticated, more demanding but infinitely more rewarding and impactful single-organisation development partnerships working across the border. From what we know, this organisational form has not progressed since.

21 The Migrant Rights Centre in Ireland (MRCI, Dublin) and STEER, Dungannon, co Tyrone.
But ferreting out these policy or organisational examples seems to be an idiosyncratic, exotic science. Without a policy dimension and mechanisms for sharing learning, there is a real danger that most cross-border activity will be, in the words of experienced commentator Dr Kathy Walsh, ‘interesting once-off work that doesn’t get built on and progressed’. There is indeed no place where the learning from cross-border, PEACE-funded or north-south cooperation can be formally captured, synthesised or analysed, even though the Special EU Programmes Body would appear to be ideally placed to undertake such a task. According to Francine Blaché-Breen of the Community Workers Cooperative in Letterkenny, ‘it should be possible to bring all this together and make it accessible’.

We are left with a picture of diminishing cross-border cooperation; little north-south cooperation; and few connections between them. The principal voluntary and community sector review of PEACE III and proposals for PEACE IV (there does not appear to be a comparative review of INTERREG) was primarily concerned with the programme being delivered in a more efficient, less bureaucratic manner and gave little attention to issues concerned with cross-border or north-south activity, or the voice of civil society. A distinct role for civil society cooperation does not feature in official PEACE IV proposals so far. Although consultation for a much smaller PEACE IV is officially under way, community groups have yet to be asked their opinion.

Some ideas for the future

Does this matter? The original proposition of Cooperation Ireland was that north-south civil society cooperation (sometimes called track 2 diplomacy), was an essential complement to intergovernmental efforts to end conflict and build peace - and, by extension, is still necessary to make for a prosperous, economically and socially fair island at peace with itself. Studies of other countries show how cross-border regions can be turned into zones of prosperity, the classic example being the Rhine region. The key driver was cross-border civil society, reinforced by wider Franco-German civil society.

The island of Ireland still lacks comparably strong civil society cooperation between its voluntary and community organisations. Contraction in the Republic under the onslaught of selective austerity may mean that the sector is focussed on self-preservation, and thus hardly likely to interest itself in cross-border cooperation or the north-south axis. Yet according to Francine Blaché-Breen, ‘this might make it the ideal moment for voluntary and community organisations to come together to find common ground and construct a vision for civil society on the island.’

Fifteen years after the effective end of the Northern Ireland conflict it is difficult to persuade people in the Republic, in particular, of its importance in these terms. Indeed, in the words of one rural community leader, even in Northern nationalist communities away from the immediate border region, ‘it is not people’s natural instinct to look across the border.’ With the third sector in the South shrinking and the still relatively well-insulated Northern sector having to deal with the twin challenges of continuing deep sectarianism and learning how to sustain itself through providing services for government, what do the two sectors have to talk about that is meaningful and useful to both of them? And what might a stronger relationship between the two sectors on the island offer?

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25 Dail Eireann, Debates, 18th April 2013, 141.
Nevertheless there are important things the authors believe the community and voluntary sectors in the two jurisdictions might learn from one another if there were a higher level of interaction. A series of North-South conferences and workshops to explore some of these could be highly productive. This is something that the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs’ Reconciliation and Anti-Sectarianism Fund might to open to financing. The Centre for Cross Border Studies would certainly be open to facilitating them. The conferences could cover some of the following areas:

1. Minimising wastefulness and duplication. A community development manager in a major all-Ireland sporting body suggests that there should be an all-island third sector conference on an annual or bi-annual basis to discuss mutual learning, minimising wastefulness and duplication caused by bodies such as his having to deal with two governments, and showcasing some of the genuine North - South and cross-border cooperation that continues, sometimes against the odds.

2. Innovation in the third sector. There is remarkably innovative work happening in border regions that few people in Belfast and Dublin know about. Two examples are the work of the Holywell Trust in Derry and the Fermanagh Trust in Enniskillen, themselves examples of what synergies can happen when a partnership of community groups comes together under one roof to share management, resources and ideas. The Holywell Trust is working to develop social enterprises around cultural activities and heritage sites in Derry which it believes can produce significant numbers of new jobs. The Fermanagh Trust is pioneering ‘shared education’ courses in history, science, literacy, art and drama in Catholic and Protestant schools, including a small number in County Cavan – to the extent that its local model (supported by politicians of all parties) is being championed by the NI Department of Education’s Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education. The Fermanagh Trust also has interesting plans to develop community energy projects along the Scottish model of transferring state assets into community ownership. Any of these important subjects would make for good North-South conferences that should also be of interest to Southern people.

3. Social enterprises. The North boasts some of the best social enterprises in these islands: three out of the four major awards in the Social Enterprise UK awards in the past two years have been won by Northern Ireland organisations. There should be considerable interest in the South in this and, because there are some equally dynamic social enterprises there (such as the Traveller social economy projects in insulation, furniture and traditional crafts in the Community Services Programme), significant mutual learning.

4. Social finance. The North has the Ulster Community Investment Trust (which operates throughout the island), Charity Bank and Triodos Bank. The South has Clann Credo. Do they ever meet and exchange experience and learning? If not, this would make an excellent and useful topic for an all-island conference on a new form of community-friendly finance which is becoming more significant and accessible as the private banks become discredited.

5. Managing all-island and cross-border organisations: opportunities and challenges. There are interesting examples of large voluntary organisations with headquarters in the South and a significant subsidiary in the North (e.g. Depaul Ireland); organisations with headquarters in the North and a subsidiary in the South (e.g. Extern); and organisations with an equal foot in both jurisdictions (e.g. Cooperation Ireland). The comparative experiences of major Northern Ireland housing associations with significant experience in the South (Oaklee, Clannmill, Fold) and all-island private sector companies like Diageo and BT could also be drawn on. At the cross-border regional level the Dundalk study’s different levels of organisation could be explored: ‘twin pairs’, trans-boundary, cluster and single company partnership.
6. Hinterlands. In the immediate cross-border region, the importance of places that have been cut off from their natural hinterlands by the border is an issue that comes up again and again in conversations with community leaders. Many of these people – particularly in western regions – also share a strong sense of being forgotten by decision makers in Belfast and Dublin. Some of the most successful cross-border projects (such as those explored in the ICLRD study mentioned above) have been in areas where natural hinterlands have been brought together and re-energised by cross-border people-to-people, business-to-business, and local authority to local authority partnerships. Cross-border educational and health initiatives, environmental schemes, tourism, women’s, children’s and old people’s groups and job creation schemes could be among the topics for a border region conference on this theme.

7. Philanthropy. Philanthropic sources of funding for the third sector will be in something of a crisis in the next few years in both jurisdictions (although from a much higher threshold in the North). Major foundations such as the International Fund for Ireland, Atlantic Philanthropies and the One Foundation are due to end their funding by 2020. According to one estimate, Atlantic Philanthropies and the One Foundation make up 86% of philanthropic funding going to non-profit groups in the South.27 The Northern Ireland third sector, with its experience of generous EU funding and greater access to UK foundations, might extend some of its learning to its Southern counterpart.

8. Local authorities. Will there be more opportunities for cross-border cooperation in the border region when local authorities North and South get more devolved responsibilities under reorganisation plans in both jurisdictions? The EU-funded cross-border local authority networks (East Border Region, ICBAN, NW Cross Border Group) are still in existence although less active than they should be. There were divided views about the role of local authorities (and their capacity for leadership) in community development and community relations among interviewees for this study.

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27 Judith Crosbie, ‘Winding down of philanthropic business will create €50m funding vacuum’, The Irish Times, 9 May 2013.
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