

**SUSTAINING CROSS-BORDER
COOPERATION: A CROSS-SECTORAL
CASE STUDY APPROACH**

Liam O'Dowd, Cathal McCall and Ivo Damkat

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ABSTRACT

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This paper is based on a set of case studies of cross-border co-operation, and focuses in particular on four of these: youth training, health, economic development and electricity generation. While each sector raises specific issues of its own, our aim has been to identify the generic factors which shape cross-border co-operation. One such factor is the question of sustainability—an issue which is now looming large for many practitioners as funding sources decline and the political momentum engendered by the Good Friday Agreement has diminished, if not stalled. The threat to the EU funding of cross-border co-operation is not specific to Ireland and is being experienced even in some advanced cross-border regions in western Europe. The paper highlights some key dimensions of sustainability in this context.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Liam O'Dowd is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Centre for International Borders Research (CIBR) at Queen's University, Belfast. Recent publications include *Culture and cooperation in Europe's borderlands* [European Studies, 19] (Rodopi, 2003); *New borders for a changing Europe: cross-border co-operation and governance* (Frank Cass, 2003), both co-edited with James Anderson and Tom Wilson, and "The changing significance of European borders", *Regional and federal studies* 12 (4) 2002, pp. 13-36.

Cathal McCall is Lecturer in European Studies at Queen's University, Belfast. Recent publications include *Identity in Northern Ireland: communities, politics and change* (Palgrave, 2001), and "Shifting thresholds, contested meanings: governance, cross-border co-operation and the Ulster unionist identity", *European studies: a journal of European culture, history and politics* 19, 2003, pp. 81-103.

Ivo Damkat is assistant statistician for the Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency, working at the Central Services Agency in Belfast. He was research assistant for the *Mapping frontiers* project at Queen's University, Belfast. The topic of his master's thesis ("Implementing European structural funds in Ireland") was the EU's Peace I and Peace II programmes.

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INTRODUCTION

The last two decades has marked a notable advance in cross-border cooperation in Ireland, when compared to the largely back-to-back development of both political entities on the island during the first 60 years of partition. This advance has been driven by an inter-governmental search for a political settlement, and more generally by the increase in regional cross-border cooperation associated with European integration. Somewhat paradoxically, globalisation and European integration, which are conventionally seen as challenging or transcending state borders, have stimulated the remarkable development of an inter-disciplinary field of border studies.¹ The overall thrust of this literature has been to challenge naïve notions of an increasingly borderless world and to concentrate instead on how borders are being reconfigured. In this context, there is a major international focus on the various dimensions of cross-border cooperation—political, economic, cultural and security related.

In Ireland, the study of cross-border cooperation has tended to cluster around two poles. The first is macro-level analysis of political and economic cooperation produced by academics (D’Arcy and Dickson, 1995; Tannam, 1998; Anderson and Bort, 1999; Kennedy, 2000; Bradley and Birnie, 2001; Hayward, 2005; Hamilton, 2001). The second is a diffuse and much less public literature associated with the practice of cross-border cooperation and with the monitoring and evaluation of specific projects. This tends to be produced by consultants and organisations working on the ground.²

This paper is partially aimed at bridging the gap between these two poles. It draws on a series of case studies in cross-border cooperation carried out under the aegis of the broader *Mapping frontiers, plotting pathways* (MFPP) project. Case studies are conceived here as illustrations of how the actual process of cross-border cooperation works within a changing macro-structural framework which both enables and constrains action. A qualitative case study approach takes into account the percep-

¹See, for example, the bibliography on Centre for International Borders Studies website: www.qub.ac.uk/cibr/; see also Anderson et al, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Coakley, 2003; Helliwell, 1998; Van Houtum et al, 2004; Wilson and Donnan, 1998.

² Examples include the output of third sector organisations involved in cross-border cooperation such as Cooperation Ireland, ADM-CPA, the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) and the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), as well monitoring and evaluation reports commissioned by individual projects. A major source for this material is the BorderIreland.Info project developed by CCBS (see www.crossborder.ie). For an example of a report which links the concerns of a specific project to wider structural factors see, Harvey et al, 2005.

tions and experiences of practitioners themselves and the ways in they perceive, and respond to, changing political and economic conditions. Our object was not to construct detailed and highly specific research profiles of each case studied—in any case we lack the enormous range of specialist expertise required to undertake this task. Rather our aim was to identify generic factors shaping cross-border cooperation—factors identified in earlier research carried out singly and collaboratively by the authors (O'Dowd, 1994; O'Dowd et al, 1995; O'Dowd and McCall, 2003). We have used our in-depth interviews to examine the significance of these factors and how they are perceived and addressed by practitioners actively involved in promoting cross-border projects.³ Our case studies were framed by the wider research literature on Northern Ireland and the impact of European integration on the island of Ireland, while drawing on the international border studies literature. They were also shaped by the research carried out contemporaneously by our colleagues in the wider MFPP project and by papers produced at the various workshops, conferences and study groups organised under its aegis.⁴

In this paper, we concentrate on one theme, or module, from our data—the issue of the sustainability of the current phase of cross-border cooperation. Sustainability is emerging as a critical issue at a time when there are signs that this phase appears to be coming to an end. Over the last two decades, the dynamic behind cross-border cooperation was driven by the search for a settlement of the conflict and by a generous transnational funding regime. The former has stalled, or at least has been only partially realised; the latter is diminishing.

The paper is organised as follows. The first section briefly sketches the historical framework and dynamics which have shaped the current phase of cross-border cooperation. In the second section we provide an outline description of our research project, the ten case studies undertaken and the four on which we concentrate for the purposes of this paper. The third section addresses the various meanings of sustainability and the factors which shape it. It draws on our interviews in order to examine what sustainability might mean within the main societal sectors—the state, economy and third sector—and in partnerships which bridge these sectors. We then use our interviews to specify more clearly the factors affecting the sustainability of cross-border cooperation. In the final section, we advance some tentative conclusions from the research and we explore their implications for cross-border cooperation more generally.

³ The bulk of the interviews for this project were carried out by Ivo Damkat.

⁴ The design of this project was shaped in part by the division of labour among colleagues within MFPP. For example, John Coakley, Robin Wilson and Brian O Caoidealbhain have studied the north-south implementation bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement; Eoin Magennis has carried out a mapping study of funding support for cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland between 1982 and 2005; Andy Pollak and Kevin Howard have studied the case of education and sport (cycling) respectively; while Jennifer Todd and Hastings Donnan have studied the relationship between the border and cultural identity (see www.mappingfrontiers.ie).

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORKS AND DYNAMICS

From partition to the Good Friday Agreement

The sustainability of cross-border cooperation in Ireland is currently part of the wider political question of how the peace process can be consolidated and its main institutional achievement, the Good Friday Agreement, implemented. Viewed through the lens of “high politics”, the history of formal cross-border cooperation is largely a mixture of missed opportunities and failed initiatives. The two jurisdictions established under the Government of Ireland Act (1920) refused to activate the Council of Ireland envisaged under the Act. For the next 50 years, the Stormont and Dublin governments, and local authorities in the border counties, typically maintained a cold-war style relationship, apart from engaging in a small number of practical collaborations in areas such as fisheries and drainage (see Kennedy, 2000). When the so-called Irish dimension took the form of a new Council of Ireland in the Sunningdale Agreement (1973), it quickly collapsed in the face of loyalist opposition and continued political violence.

New and more sustained inter-governmental cooperation between the British and Irish governments was to evolve subsequently as the Northern Ireland conflict endured. It was to become formally enshrined in the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 and the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Under the Good Friday Agreement, north-south relationships (Strand 2) were inter-locked with the two other strands linking the two communities within Northern Ireland (Strand 1), and Ireland with Britain (Strand 3). With the failure to fully implement the agreement, the north-south bodies established under Strand 2 have been put on a “care and maintenance” basis. The result is that cross-border cooperation is currently marking time, at least at a strategic level.

European integration and cross-border cooperation

Apart from inter-governmental cooperation in search of a Northern Ireland settlement, the other dominant influence on cross-border cooperation has been the process of European integration. Although distinct in terms of their origin and underlying dynamics, both of these influences have become increasingly inter-woven since the mid-1990s. Until the 1980s, the European Community (EU), in contrast to the Council of Europe, carefully avoided border related issues which were deemed to be internal matters for member states (O'Dowd, 2002). With the creation of the single European market and the gradual abolition of non-tariff barriers, the EC/EU began to support regional cross-border cooperation and transfrontier regions (or Euroregions) at the internal and external borders of the EU. The main vehicles used to promote regional cross-border cooperation were the Interreg initiatives beginning in 1989. The broader effect of the single market and the more region-specific impact of Interreg has provided a significant and sustained stimulus to cross-border economic collaboration in Ireland in ways which are often not directly linked to the search for a political settlement.

Research carried out between 1991 and 1994 in the Irish border region, underlined the importance of Interreg for stimulating local economic initiatives and the rhetoric of cross-border economic cooperation (O'Dowd, 1994; O'Dowd et al, 1995). While initial cross-border cooperation was more rhetorical than substantive, the strengthening of a discourse of cooperation was an important counter-balance to the contemporary discourse of conflict and division around the political violence, military fortifications, and closure of border roads. A survey of local councillors in all the local authorities contiguous to the border revealed a high degree of support of cross-border cooperation. Even among unionist councillors—supportive of road closures and border fortifications, and traditionally sceptical of cross-border links—there was a surprising degree of support for economic cross-border cooperation provided it had no “political” agenda. They were far more favourably disposed to Interreg which they saw as politically neutral, than they were to the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), which they saw as part of the political agenda of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The European Union as a whole, however, was gradually moving toward a more comprehensive borders' policy which added political and security concerns to its earlier focus on cross-border economic cooperation. This shift was encouraged by the EU expansion eastwards in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and the increasing prominence of intra-state divisions and wars in the Balkans and in the states bordering Russia. Commitment to expanding the free market brought with it a political focus on security threats linked to crime, illegal immigration and terrorism, all of which became important items on the agenda of the EU and its member states (McCall, 2006). This changing international context bolstered the rationale for the EU's sponsorship of the two Peace programmes, 1994-99 and 2001-07, although British-Irish intergovernmental support was critical to their introduction.

Supports, constraints and limits

The result of sustained levels of inter-governmental cooperation and the evolving process of European integration has helped stimulate a variegated panoply of cross-border links, projects and organisations within and across the main societal sectors and operating at various geographical and political levels. At inter-governmental and local government level, the scale of formalised cross-border cooperation since the mid-1980s contrasts dramatically with the previous 60 years of largely back-to-back state-building dating from partition. Alongside the IFI (to which the EC also contributed), EU funding initiatives have stimulated business and third sector cross-border networking on a island-wide basis and beyond (see Magennis, 2006). The various funding initiatives have helped construct a new border counties region incorporating the six counties of Northern Ireland and the six border counties of the Republic. The bulk of Interreg and Peace funding has been concentrated in these counties.

Tannam (2005) argues that the key driver of the upturn in cross-border cooperation has been increased political cooperation between the British and Irish governments rather than spillover from European economic integration. This partnership is very different from that which existed between 1920 and 1972 and from the tension-ridden relationship which characterised the early years of the Northern Ireland con-

flict. Katy Hayward (2005), in summarising her research into the impact of the EU on the Irish conflict, sees the EU, not as an independent actor, but more as a framework which enables and facilitates cross-border connections. Tonge (2005) sees the EU as having a role in conflict management in Northern Ireland even if it has functioned as an economic agent rather than an overt political manipulator. Hayward rejects the notion, however, that the EU can offer an alternative form of identity to unionist-nationalist identities in Northern Ireland and hence she suggests that the EU cannot transform the conflict, insofar as it is a deep-rooted identity conflict.

Clearly a more sustainable political framework for British-Irish inter-governmental cooperation has emerged since the mid-1980s. The Good Friday Agreement underpinned the constitutional recognition of partition and appeared to put north-south links (Strand 2) on a firm footing, embedding them within a broader complex of relationships linking the two Northern Ireland communities, and linking the island of Ireland with Britain. A supportive and sustained transnational funding regime has sought to underpin the peace process and consolidate the agreement. The outworkings of the single European market provided a rationale for cooperation to improve economic integration and competitiveness on the island.

Nevertheless, it is easy to exaggerate the importance accorded to building sustainable cross-border networks. Only 15% of the total Peace I and Peace II budget has been allocated to the cross-border dimension. Although ostensibly cross-border, Interreg I and II were characterised by a preponderance of back-to-back projects although Interreg IIIA has reflected a move towards more genuinely cross-border projects (Magennis, 2006). Although the funding regime has been transnational from the outset, most of the projects generated have been confined within the boundaries of each state on the island. Moreover, the overall resources provided for cross-border cooperation are a tiny proportion of the public expenditure in both jurisdictions.

While the relationship between the British and Irish government remains close at several levels, this does not necessarily translate into an effective and dynamic environment for developing cross-border cooperation on the ground.

The Good Friday Agreement has proved to be the high water mark of a policy framework for linking cross-border cooperation to the search for a political settlement. Several factors now threaten the sustainability of cross-border cooperation. These include the continued failure to establish a functioning power-sharing Assembly at Stormont and growth of polarisation and mistrust between the Northern Ireland political parties charged with its restoration. In the absence of the Assembly, inter-governmental cooperation has not extended to actively developing a joint overall strategy for crossborder cooperation through the north-south implementation bodies or by other means.⁵

⁵ While the SEUPB, with the active support of the EU Commission, has provided an administrative and financial management framework for EU funds, it has not been able to develop a strategy framework for future cross-border development (for an early discussion of SEUPB, see Laffan and Payne, 2001)

Peter Smyth (2005) has noted how the lack of ministerial direction has inhibited progress particularly in the areas of cooperation as designated under the Good Friday Agreement, while the implementation bodies have survived on a “care and maintenance” basis. While John Coakley (2005: 10) has advanced a number of reasons why the Implementation bodies will survive (because of human resources committed, the policy niches they fill, and the political cost of ending them), his analysis scarcely envisages a strategically dynamic future for these bodies either.

In this vacuum there are clear signs of regression to the old regime of missed opportunities and back-to-back developments in areas such as spatial planning, “community” or “good relations”, the reform of public administration especially in health and local government. These signs are given greater substance by the imminent decline, or even crisis, in the funding regime for cross-border cooperation. Both IFI and the Peace programmes are likely to end in the near future. While Interreg will continue, the EU borders’ policy is increasingly focused on the new member states and their external borders to the east and south. Moreover, pressures to limit and “re-nationalize” the EU budget, and the stalling of the momentum behind the continued deepening of European integration, means that the general environment for promoting cross-border cooperation is less favourable than it has been for the last decade. On the other hand, many cooperative projects have been initiated and a body of practitioners has emerged that is knowledgeable about the potential for, and obstacles to, cross-border cooperation. It is against this background that our case studies have been carried out.

THE CASE STUDIES

Outline of the Research Project

Our case studies were undertaken in 10 areas: vocational training, local authority cooperation, health, waterways, women’s issues, energy, business/enterprise, rural development, tourism and sport (see table 1). In-depth interviews were carried out with 35 key individuals and additional information was collected from published and unpublished documentary material in the areas examined.

While these case studies are not intended to be in any sense representative of the whole spectrum of cross-border cooperation, they were selected to include:

1. examples of cooperation within the three main societal sectors: the state or public sector, the economy or profit-motivated sector and civil society/third sector;
2. a range of different cross-sector partnerships
3. areas covered by the Good Friday Agreement implementation bodies, designated areas of cooperation under the agreement and areas not covered by the agreement
4. cooperation confined to the 12 border counties designated by the main funding programmes as well as examples of all-island cooperation
5. cooperation which was established prior to the agreement and as a consequence of it.

Table 1. Overview of case studies

Case	Origin	Geographical target area	Primary sector involved	Main funders
Vocational training (Border Horizons)	Pre-GFA	border counties	state/economy/ third sector	IFI
Waterways Ireland	Post-GFA	island-wide	state	government departments
Health (CAWT)	Pre-GFA	border counties	state	Interreg / Peace
Local authority (ICBAN/East Border Region)	Pre-GFA	border counties	state	Interreg/local authorities
Rural development (ROSA)	Pre-GFA	border counties	third sector	Peace
Women's sector (WEFT/Derry Well Woman Centre)	Pre-GFA	island-wide/ border counties	third sector	Peace
Tourism (Greenbox / Sliabh Beagh)	Post-GFA	border counties	third sector/economy	Peace / Interreg
Business / Enterprise (CBI-IBEC Joint Business Council Border Visions)	Pre-GFA	island-wide/ border counties	economy	business/Interreg / Peace
Energy (Coolkeeragh)	Pre-GFA	island-wide/ border counties	economy	business/EU structural funds
Sport (IRFU)	Pre-GFA	island-wide	third sector	self-funding

Note. "Pre-GFA" and "post-GFA" identify whether the initiative originated before or after the Good Friday Agreement. The designation "border counties" is applied to the 12 northerly counties on the island, where the bulk of cooperation funding has been targeted.

Data was collected via taped semi-structured interviews, between December 2004 and December 2005, organised in four main modules for each case study: (1) the history, nature and context of the cross-border cooperation involved; (2) funding, (3) issues of sustainability; and (4) the views of the individuals interviewed on the relationship between cross-border cooperation and the promotion of peace and reconciliation. In this paper, we focus on one of the four main modules in our data—the issue of sustainability.

Four illustrative cases

For the purposes of the following discussion, we will draw mainly on four of our ten case studies while using evidence from other case studies as appropriate (see table 2). The four cases chosen for more detailed scrutiny are Border Horizons, a decentralised, area-specific unit of the Wider Horizons programme funded by the IFI; Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT), an initiative originating in the four health boards (two on either side of the border) covering counties close to the border, the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN); and Coolkeeragh which refers here to a series of actions (a successful campaign to save the Coolkeeragh Power Station in Derry from closure under the privatization of energy generation in Northern Ireland, the initial management-union buyout, and its eventual redevelopment and acquisition by an arm of the Republic's electricity body, ESB International).

Border Horizons (BH) is a vocational training programme aimed at the young unemployed drawn from both Northern Ireland communities and both sides of the border. Its territorial remit is the north-west of Ireland including the counties of Donegal and Antrim. Its principal funder is the IFI supplemented by the two training agencies, FÁS (Republic of Ireland) and Department of Employment and Learning (DEL, Northern Ireland). As well as getting some support from Peace I, BH attracts a funding stream based on donations and fundraising, particularly in the US and Canada, which gives it extra flexibility. Its novel training dimension lies in its placement of trainees in overseas companies especially in North America, in order to improve their job prospects, while building cross-communal and cross-border relationships among the trainees. Our BH interviewees recognised that the IFI was looking for an exit strategy as it gradually reduced its funding. The second big threat to sustainability originated in the economy, in the falling unemployment rates in both jurisdictions and the fall-off in applicants because of the Celtic tiger boom in the Republic.

CAWT also represents a sustained exercise in cross-border cooperation. Formed when the chief executives of the health boards in the border corridor came together in 1992, it aims to improve the level of health care in its area. It has developed through a series of stages, establishing reciprocal relationships across the border, creating cross-border organizational structures via a secretariat and development centre and attracting support from the EU Peace and Interreg programmes (Clarke and Jamison, 2000). Senior staff from the health boards support and co-ordinate the work of CAWT in the secretariat on a part-time basis while the development centre is staffed by employees seconded from the northern and southern health services. Although the health boards provide financial and in-kind assistance to CAWT, as an initiative it remains heavily dependent on EU funding, notably on Interreg IIIA, and Peace II to a lesser extent. It promotes a diverse range of about 33 projects valued at £8m. While CAWT personnel develop strategic frameworks for cross-border health service provision, our interviewees underlined the difficulty of sustaining and mainstreaming projects which are dependent on short-term EU funding: "accessing European funding ... drives you down the road of projects".⁶

⁶ Interview, 15.12.2004, CAWT principal officer.

Table 2. Four selected case studies

Case	Border Horizons	CAWT	ICBAN	Coolkeeragh
Date of origin	1999	1992	1995	1992
Content	Vocational training for young unemployed	Improving health services in border region	Socio-economic development in Central Border region.	Re-development of power station as new gas-fired facility in Derry
Partners	FÁS, DEL, business (outside Ireland)	WHSSB, SHSSB, (Northern Ireland); NWHB, NEHB (Republic)	10 local authorities (Northern Ireland, Republic)	Coolkeeragh Plc, British and Irish governments, ESB
Political / administrative support	US government (via IFI), Republic / Northern Ireland training agencies, international companies, donations, fundraising	state agencies	Northern Ireland Executive; EU Commission	Northern Ireland Executive; British and Irish governments; EU Commission

Another interviewee suggested that not everything was dependent on funding. She pointed to the importance of good personal relationships across the border in sustaining the project. However, she noted the challenge of health service reorganisation on both sides of the border: “the thing is with the changes in the south, and the proposed changes in the north... we may need to reinvent the relationships”.⁷ For CAWT to be sustained and to develop in a more strategic manner, the potential problems arising from over-dependence on EU funding for short-term projects and from the increased centralisation of health services on both sides of the border need to be overcome.

Since its inception in 1995, ICBAN has sought to forge a role for itself as a “strategic broker and facilitator for development within the (mid-border) region and for the allocation of resources within the region”.⁸ It was funded initially by a levy on its local authority members. In acting on behalf of 10 local authorities in the mid-border region, it complemented the two pre-existing cross-border local authority networks: the North West and Eastern border regions. Interreg III, a much more decentralised and cross-border initiative than its predecessors, is crucial to ICBAN (and to the other local authority networks) in that it is now an officially designated delivery agent for Interreg monies that fund a great variety of projects and networks. ICBAN’s strength lies in its base in local government and its ability to promote and become involved in cross-border networks that include elected representatives, officials, business interests and the third sector. Its remit is diffuse—ranging from broadband

⁷ Interview, 1.2.2005, finance official SHSSB (NI).

⁸ Interview, 14.2.2005, Catriona Mullan, Programme Manager

access, minor border roads, civic and community networking cross-border company clusters in the food area, fisheries boards, water maintenance, independent living for people with intellectual disabilities and cultural heritage. In the wake of the Good Friday Agreement, it is funded through SEUPB and has acted as a coordinator for intra-regional lobbying and policy development. Threats to its sustainability include the possible diminution of EU funding, the radical local government reforms proposed for Northern Ireland, the mis-match of competencies with local authorities in the southern border counties and tensions in the relationship between unionist and nationalist councillors.

The Coolkeeragh project is rather different from the other three case studies in that it represents a clearly defined and time-limited project to save the Derry power plant from closure in the context of the privatisation of energy generation in Northern Ireland and moves to establish an island-wide energy market linked to the British energy network. As a relatively inefficient oil-fired plant, in the early 1990s, Coolkeeragh was mooted for closure by 2002 at a time when it employed more than 300 workers.⁹ When put up for sale in the privatisation sell-off of Northern Ireland generating stations, it failed to attract a private buyer. A management-employee buyout with the help of venture capitalists bought out the company in 1992. From 1993 onwards the new management launched a campaign to prevent the closure of the station. A very intensive campaign followed which mobilised a very broad coalition with the aim of bringing gas to the North-West and ensuring the survival of the sole generating station in the region. It involved all the political parties at local authority level as well as officials, two key Northern Ireland government ministers, Mark Durkan and Reg Empey, ministers and civil servants in the British and Irish governments, the Joint Business Council of IBEC-CBI, the trade union movement in Britain and Ireland and the EU Commission.¹⁰

As an exercise in cross-border cooperation, the Coolkeeragh project is distinctive in the context of our overall study. It represents by far the most inclusive, multi-level mobilisation of support networks spanning both communities, Northern Ireland political parties, powersharing Executive ministers, British and Irish government ministers, trade unionists in Britain and Ireland, local councillors in Northern Ireland and the EU Commission. This disparate coalition was mobilised with a clearly defined objective in view, the provision of gas supply to the north-west of the island and the survival and redevelopment of Coolkeeragh as the anchor customer for the supply. The campaign was successful in that it led to the buyout of Coolkeeragh by ESB International, the redevelopment of the plant as a modern gas-fired facility with a reduced workforce of 40, the building of a gas connector pipeline across the border, and a successful joint approach by the British and Irish government to the EU for structural funds to support the project.

⁹ Interview, 1.12.2005, Mickey Creswell, trade union representative.

¹⁰ A detailed account of the sequence of events was provided by Richard Sterling, the ex-managing director of the station under the buyout, at the SDLP conference on north-south cooperation in Derry, December 2005. Mr Sterling kindly provided Liam O'Dowd with a copy of his presentation and agreed to be interviewed subsequently.

As a measure of what coordinated action can accomplish it provides a salutary example for cross-border cooperation in general. However, in the shifting context of the energy market, its sustainability is threatened by a dramatic rise in gas prices, which has caused it to run at a loss since it opened. Although it has only begun generating electricity since March 2005, it is currently temporarily out of service because of a technical breakdown (*Irish Times*, 5 Jan. 2006). While, in a sense, privatisation of the electricity industry facilitated cross-border cooperation, its future may well depend on how both states on the island regulate the energy market in the context of the dynamics of the global energy market.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SUSTAINABILITY

The sectoral meanings of sustainability

The meaning of sustainability varies across the main societal sectors within which cross-border cooperation is organised. When cross-sectoral partnerships are involved a key issue is which definition of sustainability becomes dominant. Our selected case studies are drawn from the three main societal sectors, the state, the third sector and the economy and they also provide examples of a variety of cross-sectoral partnerships in cross-border cooperation.¹¹

Sustainability or survival is not a major problem for much of the state sector. Given the stability of state institutions on either side of the border, they provide, potentially at least, the most durable basis for long-term cross-border cooperation from an institutional and financial perspective. However, the institutional imperatives of the territorial state are more prone to consolidate the border as a line of division rather than as a bridge across which co-ordinated and harmonised cooperation might occur. The huge variation among states in terms of their size, origins, development and priorities ensures the material importance of state borders as markers of difference. The Irish border is no exception. These limits to cross-border cooperation associated with state sponsored cross-border cooperation are enhanced by mismatched competencies of state agencies on either side of the border and excessive bureaucratic regulation and centralization, especially when combined with high degrees of centralisation and institutional conservatism. When such factors co-exist with a legacy of inter-state and inter-communal antagonism as in Ireland, the barriers to cooperation are even greater.¹² As Tannam (2005) and Smyth (2005) among

¹¹ *The State sector* includes political parties and government including bureaucratic state administration; *The Economy* covers the profit motivated sector (such as private companies, corporations and market transactions between individuals). *The third sector / social economy* includes non-governmental organizations such as charities, community and voluntary groups, credit unions and cooperatives.

¹² Of course, even the most barrier-like state border is permeable. All states (including the UK and the Republic of Ireland) are connected by both inter-national and transnational networks. As Michael Mann (1993) points out, the formation of modern states has involved a "social caging" of pre-existing transnational networks. Globalisation and European integration have multiplied inter-national and transnational networks and hence, enhanced the opportunities and incentives for cross-border cooperation. In some cases, European integration has revitalised old transnational networks that are a legacy of imperial Europe. One example in Ireland is the renewed interest in Irish participation in the first world war in the south, a development which has been the subject of some funded north-south peace projects.

others have pointed out, political direction from elected representatives is crucial in advancing cooperation; but the short-termism, limited territorial constituencies and conflicting political ideologies of elected representatives can inhibit or preclude sustained support for long-term cross-border cooperation.

Sustainability in the profit-motivated economy is of a different order. The criteria of profitability and economic self-interest provides an in-built measurement of sustainability, although a tension remains between short-term profitability and long-term strategic considerations. This sector promises an underlying rationale for cooperation which is outside politics and blind to communal divisions. It is particularly attractive to those who are wary of politicians' involvement in cross-border cooperation or of the political implications of cooperation.¹³ The extent of cooperation may be constrained by the imperatives of competition and the vagaries of local, national and global economies. Nevertheless, advocates of social capital and the value of embedding economic relationships in cooperative relationships continue to insist on the mutual interdependence of cooperation and competition.

For the third sector, the issue of sustainability is omnipresent due its uncertain and multiple sources of funding. Over the last five years imminent changes in state and EU funding have promoted an intense concern with sustainability, although little attention has been paid to cross-border cooperation as such.¹⁴ The third sector has demonstrated a potential to mobilise cross-border cooperation at grass-roots level and to identify practical projects which are of mutual benefit to groups on either side of the border. The sector is also capable of identifying and responding to gaps in social provision and the consequences of market failure. Under the Peace programmes, its relative distance from the state and profit-motivated sectors has led it to take the lead in directly tackling issues of peace-building and reconciliation in particular. Its flexibility and mobilising potential is limited, however, by funding constraints, notably the difficulty of maintaining core funding, duplication and overlap of projects, the capacity of volunteers to commit their time and effort and by the extent to which the third sector itself mirrors the communal division in civil society and the different orientations of both jurisdictions.

In practice, however, cross-border cooperation has frequently involved two or more sectors, a process encouraged by EU promulgation of the concepts of "partnership"

¹³ The Joint Business Council (JBC) of IBEC and the CBI have cooperated to put pressure on the two governments to improve the general business environment in relation to telecommunications, energy, waste management, business education linkages, transportation, supply management, logistics, are cross-border labour mobility. One of our interviewees in the JBC noted that for individual companies, the issue was less cross-border cooperation *per se*, rather the aim was increased competitiveness on the island and internationally.

¹⁴ See for example recent discussions in Northern Ireland about the sustainability and resourcing of its large third sector which demonstrate the territorial boundedness of the third sector in Northern Ireland (NICVA, 2003, Department of Social Development, 2003). For an exception that directly addresses the sustainability of cross-border cooperation see Logue, 2003. Organisations like the Centre for Cross-Border Studies specifically established in 2000 to promote cross-border cooperation have faced periodic financial crises because of the difficulty of accessing core funding as distinct from project-related funding (see evaluation reports on www.crossborder.ie). For such organisations, sustainability pressures are a continuous concern.

or “networking”. For example, the third sector and the state have worked closely together on EU funded programmes with periodic involvement from the profit motivated sector. Similarly, much funding has been directed to partnership between government and the private sector.

Factors affecting sustainability

Our case studies and interviews allow us to clarify the key factors affecting the sustainability of cross-border cooperation. These include:

1. Political, administrative and funding context. One of the overarching factors affecting sustainability is the orientation of both national governments (and the Northern Ireland Assembly should that be re-established). Here the priority and commitment accorded to cross-border cooperation is critical, as is the extent to which both governments will compensate for the decline in EU and IFI funding.
2. The extent to which there is a demand or a need for the project which either pre-exists or is created and whether project then meets that demand in ways which ensure that it sustainable.
3. Effectiveness and relevant experience of project personnel and of personal networks
4. Degree and nature of institutionalization—measured by consolidation of funding arrangements, routinization or mainstreaming of cooperative activities, embeddedness of cross-border agencies in wider networks of institutions on either side of the border, and declining reliance on individual champions of cross-border cooperation.
5. The degree to which cross-border cooperation is underpinned by durable grassroots relationships capable of generating trust and viable, fundable projects.

In what follows we will illustrate the effects of these five factors from a number of our completed case studies.

Political and administrative context

At a general level, many of our respondents singled out the Good Friday Agreement as improving the environment for cooperation, noting the generally encouraging attitude of both administrations. A trade unionist prominent in the campaign to save Coolkeeragh was adamant that it would not have succeeded without the existence (at the time) of the power-sharing Executive and the support of key local ministers.¹⁵ Likewise, a southern respondent from Greenbox, a relatively new cross-border eco-tourism project, emphasised that ministerial direction was crucial to cross-border cooperation, suggesting that very few government or semi-state agencies have succeeded in bringing forward effective cross-border projects without being told to do

¹⁵ Interview, 1.12.2005, Mickey Creswell.

so by a government minister or ministers. He complained about excessive administrative regulation and centralisation as inhibiting effective cooperation and argued that senior managers, policy makers, chief executives of agencies, or secretaries general of government departments have low expectations of cross-border projects. They have “a very patronising view ...they do not expect them to deliver”. This respondent felt that few cross-border projects had been really successful and laid the blame on institutional culture:

the conservative short sighted very reactionary constipated culture of so many institutions, in fact both north and south, that really inhibited any form of genuine healthy engagement, or exploration of synergy between north and south. There is a huge impediment there, that impediment is the cultures within individual organisations, within government departments, within development agencies, etc. It's culture, culture, culture.¹⁶

Interestingly, this respondent was himself a development agency employee promoting an innovative project involving local networks.

There was an alternative view, however, which favoured a bureaucratic or technocratic approach which kept politicians at arms-length. Respondents in Border Horizons and CAWT saw politicians as an obstacle to cross-border cooperation in the period prior to the Good Friday Agreement while they acknowledged that the political climate had improved subsequently: “the best bet is to keep the politicians out of it. As soon as they are involved, the argument of politics or religion is put...it is doomed”.¹⁷ In the health sector, this respondent saw administrative cooperation between the health boards and hospitals on either side of the border as the best way forward (CAWT interview). While local politicians played a key role in ICBAN, our respondents here saw ICBAN as filling a niche which avoided political controversy at the level of “high politics” and diplomacy.¹⁸

Our respondents in CAWT, a cross-border health project, representing an established area of social provision, emphasised the importance of practical administrative cooperation on the ground. They saw the interest of both governments as benign but felt that the ideas for cooperation developed at a local and regional level among the four health boards involved. They suggested that health provision in the border area was not a top priority for the Dublin and Belfast administrations but they welcomed the official endorsement via the Interreg initiative, the cross-border local authority networks and the Institute of Public Health.

In all cases, we were struck by the extent to which very different partnerships and networks were dependent on IFI or EU funding and the degree to which the initiation of cross-border networks depended on the availability of such funding. Obvi-

¹⁶ Interview, 1.2.2005, Western Tourism Development Board official

¹⁷ Interview, 15.12.2004, Paul Maguire, Senior Administrative Officer, former North Western Health Board (Republic of Ireland).

¹⁸ Interview, 22.7.2005, David Clarke, former ICBAN chief executive officer.

ously, the implication is that the disappearance or elimination of such funding sources will seriously test the survival capacities of these projects.

The demand for cooperation projects

The more high profile and durable projects we examined were those which developed a niche role for themselves. For CAWT, their niche was responding to the needs of border residents (especially in the hwest) for access to hospitals and other health services. For Border Horizons, a sub-sector of the IFI Wider Horizon's programme, it was to address in an innovative way the training needs of unemployed young people who had underachieved in the formal education system of both states. The local authority networks such as ICBAN met a demand from the EU for more decentralised delivery of Interreg through genuine cross-border structures. "Demand", however, should not be construed as something that merely pre-exists, waiting to be discovered, or as automatically or naturally coming into existence in response to abstract notions of the market or social need. Part of the success of cross-border cooperation may be the ability to a create its own "demand", and to providing benefits successfully to people on either side of the border.

Nor can narrowly construed and short-term market demand be adopted as the sole criterion of sustainability as our Coolkeeragh and Greenbox case studies demonstrate. There may be multiple reasons for supporting projects that seem unsustainable when viewed within narrow administrative or market parameters. State support may remain critical either in terms of market regulation, administrative support or short-term subsidies. Of course, a demand for cross-border cooperation has also been generated by the availability of EU and IFI funds, but here the level of demand may decline with the diminution in these funds over time. There seems to be a role here for individuals and organisations act proactively as persuaders for new forms of cross-border cooperation while pointing to their potential benefits.

Effectiveness and relevant experience of project personnel and of personal networks

Our most active and durable projects were those which contained active champions of cross-border cooperation, with experience of working in, or with, both jurisdictions, and with personal networks which spanned the state, market and third sectors. In this respect, the cross-border cooperation activities of the last 15 years has produced a considerable human resource of individuals with experience of working in and across both jurisdictions. Increased cross-border contact in funded projects has generated experiences and knowledge of dealing with people and organisations in the "other" jurisdiction.

In the case of Border Horizons, which dealt with young unemployed people from deprived and sharply divided communities, it depended on support from influential people with extensive networks in these areas. Those involved in the initiation and further development of ICBAN, CAWT, Border Horizons and Greenbox, to a limited extent were either adept at generating new networks or were already connected to important networks of influence. Derry Well Woman Centre, for example, had in ret-

rospect benefited from the work of the manager of the cross border project who has been elected as the chair of the Western Health Board. The development and design of the Greenbox project has been ascribed to an individual with a long track record in many cross-border projects and with experience of working in both jurisdictions. One of our respondents underlined the importance of personal networks seeing them as vital to successful cooperation:

When it comes to cross border cooperation...it really has to do with personal networks. I know people, people trust me, I trust them, I know what I am capable of doing. I know if I want a problem solved, or if I want to propose an idea, I just have to phone them up, and I can talk it through with them. And that, if it is to our mutual benefit, we would do it. So, it is all to do with personal networks. If there is any message that I get through to you today: what is the key asset that will drive cross border cooperation, is the ability of individuals on the ground to network effectively with counterparts of the other jurisdiction.¹⁹

Degree and nature of institutionalization

Personal networks or the existence of a cadre of cross-border workers, however, cannot be sustained over the medium and long-term without effective institutionalisation. Even with established state institutions, employees are moved between jobs in ways which may impact on the organisation's commitment or experience of cross-border cooperation. Institutionalisation may be measured by the existence and/or consolidation of core funding arrangements, the routinization or mainstreaming of cooperative activities, and the embeddedness of cross-border agencies in wider networks of institutions on both sides of the border. In this respect, perhaps, one of the more successful examples of institutionalization is InterTrade Ireland, established as one of the north-south Implementation bodies under the Good Friday Agreement. Its remit involves improving the business environment on an all-island basis and it has taken up and developed many of the concerns of the Joint Business Council of IBEC and the CBI.

The weakness and uncertain future of the funding base is the overriding factor which affects the institutionalisation of cross-border cooperation generally. Much cooperation still constitutes niche activity for the organisations involved. As such it tends to be marginal rather than central to institutional priorities, an add-on because of the availability of funding, which will be dispensed with when funding runs out. On the basis of our work to date, we would hypothesise that cross-border cooperation ranks higher on the agendas of northern rather than southern organisations. While political commitment to cooperation is reiterated regularly at the highest political levels in the south, the institutional arrangements for cross-border cooperation are less impressive. One of our respondents in a southern government agency involved in cross-border cooperation sharply articulated the issue in pointing out that cross border cooperation was outside the mainstream interests of his agency: "so, it can

¹⁹ Interview, 1.2.2005, Western Tourism Board official.

hinder your career development, you are on a side walk. You are on a backwater, and nobody really knows about what goes on in this (cross-border) unit.”²⁰

In some respects, the differential emphasis of northern and southern organisations on cross-border cooperation is understandable given the relative size of the two jurisdictions and the fact that funding for cross-border cooperation is relatively more significant in the north.

Our interviews with projects dealing with women's issues demonstrated the other side of the niche problem. Women's issues span a broad spectrum both in terms of general policy and in terms of day to day concerns. Therefore, they could hardly be termed niche issues. On the other hand, weak institutionalisation of these concerns on each side of the border limits the scope and sustainability of cross-border cooperation. In one project in Derry, one of our respondents pointed out that she had success in raising consciousness of women's issues at the beginning of the project but over time organisational commitment waned. She also pointed to the problem of the personnel changes within organisations creating problems of continuity in cross-border cooperation.

Grassroots support and legitimacy

In the last two decades, even though the financial resource allocated to cross-border cooperation has been very small, there has been a mushrooming of cross-border projects, networking and organisations across a broad spectrum of activities at local, regional and national levels. It remains difficult to estimate the degree to which such cooperation has influenced popular perceptions and generated durable grassroots relationships capable of generating trust and viable cross-border projects in the future. Evidence from our respondents confirms the findings of previous research that there are many examples of cross-communal support within Northern Ireland for cross-border cooperation (such as Border Horizons, Coolkeeragh, and ICBAN). Many unionists are prone to be sensitive or sceptical, however, about the relationship between political and economic cooperation, unlike northern nationalists who actively welcome both. Although there are several individual champions of cross-border cooperation on the southern side of the border, there are also signs of apathy and disinterest, notably within state institutions.

Our respondents emphasised the extent to which the Good Friday Agreement, initially at least, created positive support for cross-border cooperation that percolated down to grassroots level. The subsequent divisions and impasse over the full implementation of the agreement has made it more difficult to sustain popular support. There is a danger that the conflictual zero-sum thinking characteristic of the post-Agreement period will attenuate the positive-sum dimension of cross-border cooperation. A malign scenario which combines unionist scepticism, southern disinterest and northern nationalist frustration with the fragmented, low-profile and non-dynamic field of cross-border cooperation has the capacity to erode its capacity to

²⁰ Interview, 15.9.2005, FAS project officer.

advance both the peace process and socio-economic development on the island. One of the characteristics of the Peace programme in particular, is that it has engaged with, and encouraged, cross-border cooperation at grassroots level. When the programme ends, there is a danger that cross-border cooperation will revert to being a more elite and inter-governmental activity again. The difficulty of building popular support and legitimacy for this type of cooperation is analogous to the problems of popular legitimacy facing the European integration process as a whole. The cooperation of elites generates constituencies of committed cross-border networkers, but excludes large sections of the people, who remain ignorant, apathetic and potentially hostile.

CONCLUSION

The current phase of cross-border activity seems to be coming to an end. The political and funding environment which has stimulated and sustained it over the last two decades is now altering rapidly. The Good Friday Agreement and its Strand 2 components, the North/South Ministerial Council, cross-border implementation bodies and areas of cooperation, have provided a supportive framework and a political space for a great variety of cross-border projects. The subsequent stalling of the Good Friday Agreement, combined with the uncertain future of EU funding, threaten existing projects while raising the question of long-term sustainability.

Against this background, we have used a qualitative case study approach to explore the issue of sustaining forms of cooperation developed over the last two decades into the future. Our aim here has not been to evaluate the effectiveness or desirability of particular projects or of the programme of cooperation in general. Rather we have attempted to explore in a number of different contexts, the factors affecting sustainability and what it might mean within and across the main sectors, the state, economy and third sector. Our findings would suggest that the sustainability issue is understood differently and treated with different degrees of urgency within the different sectors. As much cross-border cooperation is cross-sectoral, a key question is which understanding of sustainability will prevail in such projects. What criteria are to be employed and over what time-scale? Criteria might include, for example, crude "value for money" or "market-demand" criteria; calculations of social need, public interest or political acceptability; availability of funds; and zero-sum calculations of which community or jurisdiction benefits most. What seems clear from our case studies is that none of these sustainability criteria are self-evident; they have to be advanced by actors and organisations willing to act as persuaders and publicists for the strategic, long term benefits of cross-border cooperation. This means among other things highlighting the costs and disadvantages of non-cooperation.

Sustaining cross-border cooperation, therefore, is in the widest sense of the term a political task. Our case studies suggest that declining funds, lack of political direction, institutional inertia and poor institutionalisation of existing cooperation all undermine the prospects for sustainable cooperation in the medium and long-term. While low profile bureaucratic and technocratic forms of cooperation may avoid political controversy they have great difficulty in combating the institutional centralisa-

tion, inertia, and the back-to-back nature of the state sector in both jurisdictions. This would appear to confirm the importance of active and innovative political direction.

From our work to date, it would appear that those activities capable of maintaining flexible partnerships across the three main sectors, state, business and the third sector, are better placed to survive. Even then, however, much depends on the general political environment, personal networking and the capacity to institutionalise cooperation effectively. Perhaps even more important is whether both governments, and the Northern Ireland government if it resumes its existence, are willing to increase the resources for cross-border cooperation beyond their current very low level—compensating for the diminution of transnational funding in the process. They must avoid also developing back-to-back policies in areas such public administration, community relations and spatial planning. Rhetorical support for cross-border cooperation, however important, will scarcely suffice. A substantial human resource has developed, consisting of workers with a history of commitment and experience in cross-border working. One of the main dangers is that this resource will be dissipated in the impending funding crisis which faces cross-border cooperation generally.

Our interviewees explicitly and implicitly underlined the deep-rooted nature of divisions within Northern Ireland as well as the problems of bridging two separate jurisdictions. There is a keen awareness among practitioners at all levels that these divisions will not be tackled effectively by short-term expedients or projects. Andy Polak (2005) has even raised the prospect that effectively promoting peace and reconciliation through the educational system may take centuries rather than decades. Promoting cross-border cooperation goes against the grain in many respects. Apart altogether from unionist scepticism and resistance to such cooperation, there is a powerful institutional inertia rooted in the consolidation of partition over a long period, the development of two separate states, and, associated with this, the creation of separate official, media and popular mindsets as well as different policy agendas and priorities.

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