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A Spatial Planning Initiative



# **IRISH CENTRAL BORDER AREA NETWORK (ICBAN) LTD**

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## **A POSITION PAPER: REVITALISING BORDER TOWNS & VILLAGES**

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**October 2015**

**ICLRD**

## 1: INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Irish Border Region is predominantly rural in nature, characterised by a dispersed population and distance from major urban centres. The network of towns, villages and hamlets across the region, together with its many environmental assets and associated quality of life attributes, provide the region with a distinctive character. At the same time, it is a region characterised by persistent weaknesses in infrastructure and economic development, resulting in peripherality and disadvantage. Across the Irish Border Region, dedicated partnerships were established from the 1970s onwards in response to the difficulties imposed by the Border. These include local authority-led cross-border networks which have been accredited with making significant contributions to the increasing interactions between local government, the community and voluntary sector and the business sector. One such network, the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN), is made up of eight local authorities spanning the Irish border: Donegal County Council, Sligo County Council, Leitrim County Council, Cavan County Council and Monaghan County Council from Ireland and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Mid-Ulster District Council and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council from Northern Ireland.
- 1.2 Approximately one third of the population within the ICBAN region live in settlements over 1,500 population, and two thirds in smaller settlements and open countryside. The largest town in this region has a population of 21,000. This makes the region quite 'rural' – with all the associated challenges for 'critical mass' and the cost of services provision. There are in excess of 50 villages of over 1,000 population, with a greater number of small villages and hamlets of less than 1,000 population (ICBAN, 2013). Geographically, the area covered by the region is quite diverse in terms of its natural and built environment - and this can lead to a lack of cohesiveness around shared identity. And as the rural crisis play out across the island of Ireland, it is increasingly recognised that there are a unique set of challenges facing border towns and villages across this region as public and private services are centralised in larger centres and are increasingly being delivered to citizens and customers remotely. In addition, many of these towns face challenges of predominant physical dereliction and building vacancies, high out-migration - especially of youth ('young flight') - and loss of services through rationalisation such as banking, policing, post-offices and schools. The cumulative effect is the dilution of function, sense of place and by association, sense of identity.
- 1.3 The low rate of urbanisation across the region implies the continued importance of safeguarding commercial centres in villages and dispersed communities as local service hubs. It also offers the potential to promote the region on the basis of the attractions of rural living. In this vein, the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) delivered a Spatial Planning Initiative for the Central Border Region under the INTERREG IVA Programme. This included the development of a 'Regional Strategic Framework for the Central Border Region' (RSF) - launched in September 2013 - which referenced the importance of rural towns, villages and areas through the following opportunities:

- Supporting representations to safeguard rural service provision, highlighting the need for national economic policies to address issues of isolation and the lack of appropriate services in rural areas (Page 28);
- Supporting new approaches to integrated service delivery in smaller communities, perhaps using a variety of community or social enterprises to deliver local services in a more sustainable manner, for example, providing multiple services through local schools as an alternative to their closure (Page 29);
- Developing new approaches to the regeneration of towns and villages. A regional regeneration programme could draw on best practice examples and this could include Identifying and supporting key regional commercial centres and Embracing new sustainable development concepts (Page 29);
- Developing a role for towns and villages as multi-functional centres supporting a range of uses and capable of attracting and sustaining private sector investment, for example, by being regional destinations for leisure, recreation, tourism, cultural heritage and healthy living (Page 29);
- Promotion and development of Age-Friendly Communities (Page 29); and
- Participating in EU networks; recognising that the Central Border Region could learn from other regions by participating in EU and wider networks on inclusive growth and which would be of value to local businesses and regional development (Page 29).

1.4 In support of the RSF, and in particular its focus on major towns and villages emerging as centres of provision of public and private services to their rural areas through new models of service delivery, ICBAN commissioned the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) to develop a briefing note and position paper on 'revitalising border towns and villages'. A key focus of this work programme was to consider the key issues facing councils and communities in terms of future town and village renewal in light of the changing dynamics within and between small towns and villages - with a particular emphasis on what will enhance local opportunities.

1.5 The briefing paper, published in July 2015, noted that the revitalisation of border towns and villages is a core challenge for all councils/counties with the main issues highlighted as being:

- Employment opportunities: including currency differentials and associated impacts on local trade and well as exporting opportunities, family succession within businesses, overall business confidence in an area - tied to community deficits (see below) and the ongoing debt burden of local entrepreneurs;
- Connectivity: including broadband, infrastructure - road, rail, air access and ports, and public transport including rural transport schemes;
- Access to services: including rationalisation of services, business closures linked to out-migration and reduced footfall, and budget cuts leading to reduced disposable incomes;

- Community deficits: including education deficits (linked to 'young flight'), low incomes, lack of equality of opportunity (incorporating gender inequality), general aesthetics of place including dereliction and vacancy which in turn has implications for future investment; and
  - Depopulation: including 'young flight' through national and international migration and ageing profile of population of the region with associated implications for the planning for, and type of services required in towns and villages in the future.
- 1.6 Successful regeneration is largely based on making (maximum) utility from the strengths that exist in our towns and villages. All councils in the ICBAN region recognise that there are two core elements to economic sustainability - jobs and income - with economic sustainability in turn nurturing social cohesion and growth. What is increasingly evident is that new approaches to the regeneration and thus revitalisation of border towns and villages are called for; and this requires an integrated approach to service delivery - including on a cross-border basis - comprising, for example, social innovation and social enterprise.
- 1.7 The briefing paper concluded that the opportunities and challenges facing border towns and villages must be considered within the unique context of existing assets and potentiality whilst, at the same time, being set against a strategic backdrop. This includes national planning policies, local development plans, and emerging community plans / local economic and community plans (and into the future Regional Spatial Economic Strategies) as well as other relevant 'non-statutory' strategies such as the RSF.
- 1.8 The following paper picks up on the increasingly recognised need for approaches to economic, social and physical regeneration of border towns and villages to be multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-scalar.

## 2: RURAL EUROPE IN TRANSITION - LITERATURE REVIEW

- 2.1 Given that the 'rural' is characterised by a myriad of different type spaces and development happens at an uneven pace across it, there can be no 'single' coherent vision for rural society. Nor does it appear possible to agree one single definition of 'rural'. While rural areas have embraced a 'diversity of function' agenda - ensuring a 'living countryside' - this has further contributed to the difficulties of defining and categorising what constitutes 'rural' (McDonagh, 2012). This is not overly surprising. Rural areas are highly complex, non-homogeneous spaces; the development of which is increasingly associated with inter-county and intra-regional connectivity and an evolving relationship with neighbouring urban centres and regions (Creamer et al, 2009). Within the EU and within member states, economic and social progress continues to travel a very uneven path. Economic decline has not been homogeneous; with some communities over others being particularly disadvantaged by, for example, land quality and associated agricultural productivity, population decline, underemployment and associated income levels, and distance from markets (Stead, 2011). As noted by McDonagh (2012), while the transformation of rural spaces and their rural economies has been driven by growth in neoliberalism, the global economic crisis has brought about a refocusing of attention on the 'local' in terms of the change processes at play and their role in the revitalisation of the rural economy.
- 2.2 The very vitality of our rural areas is dependent on the vibrancy of those small towns and villages located within it. As noted by ECOVAST

"Small towns are a vital asset to Europe. Their role has evolved and changed over the years and their vitality has fluctuated in response to historical forces of all kinds. Change will continue and there is a crucial need to understand the challenges they face in a modern world. Small towns cannot be 'frozen' or preserved in aspic" (2013: 4).

Small towns and villages play a critical role in the well-being of their rural hinterlands - with their respective futures as vibrant and sustainable communities being very much bound together (ECOVAST, 2013). Indeed, successful and dynamic cities also benefit from self-motivated and energetic small towns and their hinterlands by creating a mutually supported environment that can attract business and enable business growth and retention (Scottish Borders Council, 2007). But what do we mean when we speak of small towns and villages? How do we define them - or indeed does this matter? Recent research by ESPON on small and medium sized towns conclude that there are few explicit definitions of what constitute small and medium sized settlements throughout the EU. Yet they account for a significant fraction of the population in many regions across Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan - and with their different settings comes different needs, challenges and opportunities (Mayer & Knox, 2010). The definition of such settlements is, thus, based on a tacit understanding at national level (ESPON, 2014, 2006).

- 2.3 As a result of globalisation and EU enlargement, rural communities have become characterised by diversification in employment away from the land and a fluidity around the movement of people, goods and services. They suffer from economies of scale and continual threats of further centralisation and rationalisation of services (ECOVAST, 2013). As noted by the ESPON 'TOWN' project - focusing on the hidden potential of small and medium-sized towns - small and medium sized settlements throughout Europe demonstrate a diverse range of economic profiles (ESPON, 2014); with geographic location *vis-a-vis* larger metropolitan centres and scale impacting on a town's ability and capacity to create jobs, to provide a wide range of services, to attract population and to engage in innovation networks. In the case of Ireland, the TOWN Project notes an 'overrepresentation' of population living in smaller settlements (ESPON, 2014); this is tied to historical development patterns and wider macro/regional trends.
- 2.4 The new rural paradigm, recently updated by the OECD (2015), encourages a shift away from sectoral policies to more spatial-oriented policies. Drawing on evidence from over thirty countries in advocating spatial (i.e. area-based) over sectoral approaches, as well as the execution of integrated strategies and the pursuit of collaborative governance, this new approach promotes endogenous development including bottom-up innovation and territorially-based (or place-based) integrated rural development (McDonagh, 2012; OECD, 2006). For many rural communities, this involves transcending the administrative county boundary to work in what Breathnach *et al.* (2013) describe as a 'functional' area. This involves pooling of assets and know-how and considering the totality of resources across an area, rather than dealing with one or a limited number of sectors.
- 2.5 The *European Spatial Development Perspective* (ESDP) (1999), and subsequent independent reviews and evaluations of various regional and territorial development approaches and practices, highlight the importance of small and medium-sized towns in the promotion of balanced territorial development (Haughton and Counsell, 2004; Molle, 2007; ESPON, 2009 and 2014; O'Keeffe, 2015). They duly note the various impacts on rural areas of promoting inter-regional connectivity and competitiveness. In response to initiatives supporting concepts such as city-regions and polycentricity, rural regions are increasingly obliged to foster innovation (in their own right), and to collaborate both inter- and intra-regionally (O'Keeffe, 2015). This implies that rural towns must achieve competitiveness, become anchors of key public services, and promote economic diversification; this is to be achieved not by competing against one another, but by collaborating with one another, on the basis of shared interests and resources, and through partnership governance (O'Keeffe, 2015). As such, policy instruments - whether EU, national, regional or local - need to be increasingly flexible to the social, economic and environmental needs of small towns and villages in rural areas (The Highland Council, 2006).
- 2.6 Small towns and villages cannot be viewed in isolation; rather their needs must be examined in the context of how they relate to city-regions and their wider rural hinterlands (The Highland Council, 2006). A core challenge for small towns is that the resources available to unleash the capacity of small towns and village communities is very limited.

- 2.7 The revitalisation of rural communities requires inter-sectoral, inter-institutional and inter-jurisdictional cooperation. The governance surrounding such cooperation can take the form of both formal and informal governance arrangements (OECD, 2013). Indeed, it is becoming increasingly clear that local actors play a dynamic role in enhancing rural economies and societies (Creamer et al, 2009; McDonagh, 2012); that collaborative efforts require a new approach to governance (Mayer & Knox, 2010). The extent and vibrancy of settlement links are highly dependent on the availability and enthusiasm of active local actors to drive forward projects.
- 2.8 The capacity or indeed willingness to collaborate between neighbouring settlements can, however, often be weak - a situation driven by lack of insight and understanding of current situations and/or not having strategic oversight in terms of future proofing development trends. This scenario has in turn been fuelled by the outmigration of a disproportionate share of the most educated and energetic young people; leaving behind an ageing population that is often parochial in outlook (Mayer & Knox, 2010). Rationalisation of services together with globalisation and fiscal retrenchment has further impacted on the vitality of communities and their sense of place/identity. Together, this can result in communities losing the capacity to understand and address the various influences on their overall well-being - declining economies, environmental degradation and so on (Mayer & Knox, 2010).
- 2.9 Any move towards the development of a revitalisation agenda should also include an in-depth analysis of the local economy in terms of local assets, comparative advantage, entrepreneurial activity, etc. thus demonstrating what is contributing to / driving the local economy (ESPON, 2014) - and indeed, what is not. Communities, with local authorities, must understand the origins - as well as the impacts - of the decline being experienced. Only by understanding this can effective solutions be devised and rolled-out. Too often an extensive array of plans and strategies are developed on a sectoral basis with different objectives, timetables and end-goals. Yet, they impact on the same place; thus leading to a lack of transparency and often, duplication of effort. Increasingly there is consensus that 'whole of town' strategies need to be developed which are cross-sectoral and cross-agency in their focus (van Leeuwen, 2008; Scottish Borders Council, 2007). Such an approach will highlight to both local government and communities alike the factors that are relevant to the local economy and possibly how they should be further developed in a sustainable manner. Key to the success of undertaking such an analysis is to achieve an appropriate balance between internal and external factors - of avoiding the 'trap' of being too 'inward looking'.
- 2.10 While globalisation, for example, has in many instances undermined the economic base of small towns and villages, it has also created opportunities. Market liberalisation, as a case in point, has led to enhanced labour mobility and increased flexibility in terms of how and from where we work. The shift towards information and knowledge economies (over traditional manufacturing and low-added value services) has led to a myriad of supports being put in place to nurture local entrepreneurship which, in turn, leads to self-employment. Such a scenario, together with options around remote working have become a more viable option

for those wishing to live in rural settings - particularly where quality broadband services are in-situ.

- 2.11 With innovation-driven growth being, according to the OECD, a major objective of the post-crisis recovery, 'place' is becoming increasingly important in the economic development and growth debate - irrespective of the presence of borders (2013). A first step in better fitting policies to place is the process of defining the 'functional area' for cross-border communities. Such areas, which will most likely constitute a 'sub-region', should be founded on a strong evidence-base or other forms of policy intelligence. Adopting a sub-regional (or regional) approach to regeneration can help small towns avoid competing for the same investment; with this wider approach benefitting a whole region as opposed to a single town. Trust issues within the collaborative environment will be one of the tougher barriers to be overcome in the development and roll-out of revitalisation initiatives.
- 2.12 Branding and marketing of the endogenous - often latent - assets of rural communities is also key to their revitalisation (Hague, 2013). While small rural towns and villages are important contributors to the economies of both Ireland and Northern Ireland, they are more than just their town centres which generally speaking, are the home of retailers and other businesses such as solicitors, banking, post office, accountants, cafes, etc. Their built environment and associated quality of retail and housing units, the design and management of streets, the range and creativity of community and cultural activities, and their innovativeness in diversifying the economy all play a part in sustaining rural communities (Hague, 2013). Their distinctiveness can create opportunities for "rural tourism, improvements to local services, local food supply, local energy supply, culture and places for providing learning and skills" (ECOVAST, 2013: 4).
- 2.13 The historic environment of our rural towns and villages, for example, can play a vital part in the revitalisation of our rural towns and villages; it is part of their character, their identity (Hague, 2013). Conservation projects, for example, play an important role in small town regeneration. Working with the historic assets of a community also opens up tourism possibilities - culture tourism, slow tourism - based on historic trails, genealogy, etc. In a similar vein, rural communities - with their proximity to an often diverse natural environment - offer many opportunities for developing tourism offerings in organics, agri-food, slow food movements, eco-tourism, greenways/blueways, etc.
- 2.14 In terms of funding for rural development, outside of those areas characterised as 'less favoured areas', there are few if any specific policies relating to small towns and villages at EU - or even national government - level. Rather, in recent years the emphasis has tended to be on the needs of specific vulnerable groups within society, including rural communities; for example, migrants, youth, elderly. Rural Development Programmes by and large have tended to be centred about specific habitats - more so than area-focused - with few if any opportunities for locally-led schemes; although there appears to be a shift in intentions in respect of this latter point. As a new 7-year EU funding programme period is entered, opportunities will present themselves to promote the well-being of small towns and villages - provided there is a push from local stakeholders within each member state to influence

agendas. Central to such a push will be the argument that small towns and villages are the backbone of rural areas - and whether such settlements are located at the heart of rural areas or in peri-urban settings, they can and do contribute to local, regional and national economies (ECOVAST, 2013). They are not only places to live but also places in which to do business; they have many assets upon which to develop a diverse employment base - from agri-business to tourism to green energy to creative industries to name but a few.

- 2.15 In summation, small towns and villages (can) provide valuable services to their local rural hinterlands - and indeed to larger city-regions (depending on their location and surrounding geography). Small towns and villages can act as drivers for the local and (sub)regional economy. They have their own traditional employment base that they often wish to sustain but which have been embattled over recent years because of wider national and international policies and events. There are growing issues of physical decay and vacancy throughout towns and villages - linked to retail changes and business closures, the lack of funding for public realm improvements over the past decade, the incompatible nature of old buildings with new business needs, and wider challenges linked to changed economic conditions. In recognition of the changing ways in which people work, live, and relax, small towns and villages are adapting by exploiting economic opportunities based on their endogenous and latent assets - whether skills-based, environmental, heritage/cultural, existing industry, emerging green credentials, and the growing opportunities afforded by advancements in technology and broadband accessibility (the digital economy). In addition, there is a growing awareness of the need to sustain local services and retail - while recognising that the way people now shop and access services is evolving.
- 2.16 In response, key issues in rural regeneration are (a) the need for a strategic vision set within a top-down framework that is (b) delivered in partnership at local level and which (c) embraces a holistic approach (Creamer et al, 2009). This involves identifying and harnessing the local asset-base, supporting SME development, building local capacity and utilising the potential of the natural environment. It is local solutions - largely the result of indigenous enterprise and innovation - which are key to the future, long-term and sustained development of rural settlements. The local knowledge of assets, challenges, inter-relationships between different events/families /businesses needs to be better harnessed in the development of socio-economic and indeed, land-use, strategies (Creamer et al, 2009). The revitalisation of our rural towns and villages is dependent on local authorities working in partnership with private businesses and community and voluntary groups to develop joined-up, town-wide approaches to the regeneration of place that includes the quality of the built environment, the delivery of services, the diversification of employment opportunities, delivering on a skills-jobs match, and addressing the needs of a changing demographic.

### 3: IRISH BORDER TOWNS AND VILLAGES

- 3.1 Rural Ireland is diverse - not only geographically but also in terms of its landscape and the types of challenges it faces. It is acknowledged that rural Ireland has been 'under pressure' since the 1980s; with the current challenges not linked entirely to the global financial crisis - they are much more embedded than that in changing economic and social practices, and external consumer demands<sup>1</sup>. The Irish Border Region has felt the negative impacts of moving from a traditional (over)reliance on agriculture to a multi-functional landscape and, as part of this, an overreliance on other vulnerable sectors such as traditional manufacturing and construction. Since 2009, economic growth has contracted sharply, unemployment has risen and public finances have been in a difficult position (Border Regional Authority, 2010). For the Irish Border Region, these challenges have been heightened by decades of underinvestment in strategic infrastructures - thus heightening the vulnerability of the region. As with much of rural Europe, the variety of issues facing rural Ireland today, including the Border Region, range from the ongoing restructuring of the agriculture sector, remoteness and peripherality, poor service provision and, depending on location, the challenge of depopulation versus in-migration - a counter-urbanisation agenda being fuelled by greater mobility and accepted increases in commuting distances, city congestion and decreased quality of life - and associated pressures on the natural environment (van Leeuwen, 2008).
- 3.2 Across the island of Ireland, a substantial proportion of the population live in small towns and villages which not only serve as both inputs to the surrounding farm economy but also act as focal points for their surrounding hinterland (O'Donoghue et al, 2013). As noted in Section 1.2, the ICBAN region is very rural in its make-up (with two-thirds of the population live in small settlements and open countryside) and this can - and does - create challenges around achieving critical mass. Despite this, rural towns and villages in the region continue to play a central role in rural development agendas and, reflecting changing EU policy and practice, the emphasis of such programmes is increasingly being placed on the revitalisation of place rather than sectors. Since 2007, a core objective of Rural Development Programmes across all member states including Ireland and Northern Ireland has included the diversification of the rural economy; with the associated LEADER programme aiming to foster economic development through partnership working. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s rural development initiatives were largely entrusted to the LEADER 'Local Action Groups' (LAGs) - partnerships of local government, community agencies and other development bodies as relevant who were charged with the physical and socio-economic regeneration of rural communities based on the enhancement of their local resources. Such an approach, however, is increasingly criticised for fuelling uneven rural development as no account is taken in such a model of the capacity of LAGs to take on such an expansive and critical agenda (Woods, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the impact of the economic downturn has been particularly pronounced in Irish towns and villages. Research by O'Donoghue et al (2013) notes that unemployment rose nationally by 150% following the downturn, but in towns with between 3000 and 4999 inhabitants, it rose by over 200%

3.3 The economy of the Border Region - and indeed many rural areas - is dominated by small businesses. The past decade has been a particularly traumatic time for rural towns and villages in terms of loss of functions, out-migration/emigration, the decline of the small retail outlets, a weakening agriculture sector, and fall-off in range of services of offer locally while, at the same time, consumers having raised expectations and opting to travel longer distances to work (and avail of services / retail options elsewhere also). Interestingly, research by social and economic consultant Trutz Haase has found that a key factor in determining a town's affluence (or deprivation) is proximity to urban centres; the counties most affected by economic decline being those that were not within commuting distance of a major town or city (*Irish Times*, 31 December 2014). On a more positive note, congestion in cities and quality of life opportunities afforded by more rural areas is increasingly becoming a 'locational' factor for both businesses and workers alike. As noted by Johnson,

"Rural areas with significant natural amenities, recreational opportunities or quality of life advantages have the greatest opportunities for growth and development" (2006; quoted in O'Donoghue et al, 2013).

3.4 While there is not much that a rural area can do about its location, they can - and are - increasing marketing themselves based on 'local comparative advantage'; a supply driven model of economic growth based on local economic activity stemming from the availability of resources - whether labour, capital, markets, raw materials, etc. For many rural communities in the Border Region, its comparative advantage is its natural environment (and associated 'green credentials') and increasingly (albeit slowly), improved accessibility both in terms of road network and broadband quality. An emphasis has been placed on each region to build on its strengths - on being innovative and creative. A core challenge now for rural communities is to know in which direction to build the local economy.

### **A Changing Policy Landscape**

3.5 The 2014 report by the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) recognises the diversity of rural Ireland's landscape and its people; noting that this is also the backbone of its potential. The report further acknowledges that there is an abundance of natural, physical, human and capital resources and high quality assets across rural Ireland that must be leveraged to support the development of these communities as well as national economic growth. The report goes on to argue that the interrelated nature of the challenges facing rural Ireland – irrespective of borders – can only be addressed through an integrated strategic and operational approach that aligns the goals of national level economic plans with regional, county and local (bottom-up) strategies. For the Irish Border Region, there are a number of policies, strategies and frameworks in-situ which could act as a starting point for such an integrated whole-of-place approach.

3.6 The *Border Regional Planning Guidelines*, published in 2010, acknowledges that vibrant rural communities which are sustainable are critical for the region. While agriculture is still a significant sector for the border corridor, the region must respond to the changing nature of agriculture and the food sector in order to survive; with emerging economic drivers including

renewable energy/clean products, agri-food industries, maritime related enterprises, life sciences, tourism and internationally traded services. Other sectors noted as potentially proving important to economic growth in the region were creative industries, the caring sector (given the Border Region's ageing profile), and the retail sector - although currency differentials can negatively impact on this potentiality.

Over the coming year it is expected that the Regional Planning Guidelines will be recast as 'Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies'. These strategies will act as a bridge between the new National Planning Framework (NPF) - the successor to the NSS, due in 2016 - and local authority plans and programmes.

3.7 ICBAN's own *Regional Strategic Framework 2013-2027* recognises the many strengths and assets of the Irish Border Region - from natural environment to cultural heritage to the resilience of its people in the face of decades of underinvestment and lost generations. Through this joint strategy and agenda, the councils of the Central Border Region come together with a shared vision of a sustainable region that has a critical mass to be:

- a) a smart and internationally competitive region that supports local businesses and trade and engages in R&D and innovation;
- b) a people centred and inclusive region that promotes higher education and the knowledge economy;
- c) a sustainable region that strives to achieve progressive development while also protecting the environment; and
- d) an accessible and connected region that can engage in smart growth practices and do so while maintaining its 'green' credentials.

Achievement of this shared vision is dependent on towns and villages throughout the region becoming centres of service provision - both public and private - for their wider hinterlands or 'functional areas'. ICBAN's framework can be viewed as a first step in developing a strategic vision for the region in terms of its future socio-economic growth and development.

3.8 Complementary to ICBAN's Framework is the concept of the 'Border Development Corridor' and the *draft Solidarity Charter for the Economic Revitalisation of the Irish Border Development Corridor*. The concept, progressed between 2013 and 2015, represents the unified position of many people and organisations, including ICBAN, on how best to capitalise on the economic, social and environmental assets of the Irish Border Region and redress the economic disadvantages that are a legacy of our troubled history. The Charter promotes the principle of subsidiarity and is designed to complement and support the work of existing agencies with a local and regional development remit in the Irish Border Region including local government and local development partnerships. The Charter focuses on seven priority thematic areas and their potential to strengthen the economic and social development of the entire Border Region:

- Critical Infrastructure: advancing critical infrastructure projects, particularly roads and broadband, to facilitate the economic and social development of the Border Development Corridor;
- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI): give more determined priority to locating new FDI in the Border Region;
- SMEs with Export Potential: encouraging knowledge transfer and networking, and capitalising on the research and cross-border businesses supports available from organisations such as InterTradelreland;
- Agriculture, Food & Fish Processing: strengthening the local food economy by encouraging greater public and private sector purchasing from local and regional food producers and suppliers;
- Tourism & Recreation: working collectively to harness the opportunities presented by the natural, built, cultural and physical environment of the Border Development Corridor;
- Low Carbon, Energy Saving & Renewables: advancing the region as a champion of the green economy, sustainable development and renewables agenda; and
- Diaspora: embracing the goodwill of the Diaspora, capitalising on successful initiatives and engaging with the proposed National Diaspora Centre.

The charter is now in the ownership of local government across the Irish Border Region; and it is hoped that the priority themes noted will inform future regional - and local - policies and practice as they relate to the sustainable development of communities and places throughout the region.

3.9 This includes the forthcoming Local and Economic Development Plans (LECPs) by councils in Ireland and the Community Plans by the councils in Northern Ireland. The LECPs are charged with building on council's existing economic and community development work and enhancing local involvement and inputs while being consistent with the policies and objectives of the local (county) development plan. In terms of town and village revitalisation, the LECPs place an emphasis on a strong 'place-related' approach to economic growth and supporting community development. Servicing the needs of various groupings within society are also noted as being important in terms of the range of activities/pursuits provided for children, elderly, parents, women, men, youth/teenagers, etc.

3.10 For both jurisdictions, the LEADER aspect of the new Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 also has economic growth and development of small towns and villages in rural areas as a core objective. In Northern Ireland, LEADER is focusing on business investment and job creation, social infrastructure improvements, village renewal including the development of integrated village plans, and rural broadband schemes. Similarly, in Ireland, the emphasis is on facilitating diversification of the economic base of rural areas through enterprise/job creation, promotion of local development, enhanced accessibility and quality of ICT, and town renewal. Programmes of activity under LEADER must be congruent with the aforementioned LECPs and Community Plans.

- 3.11 The growing emphasis being placed on economic development as part of these various strategies and frameworks requires greater partnership working not only across all levels of government but also between government, business and third sector. As well as requiring a new way of working, they demand a fresh focus on what should be the economic base of our rural communities. For the Irish Border Region, this entails a shift away from an over-reliance on traditional economic sectors in favour of growing a knowledge-based/knowledge-intensive and high value-added sector (ICBAN, 2013). This includes in manufacturing and agri-business. However, as noted by O'Donoghue et al (2013), autonomy making and financial/funding constraints continue to make it difficult for local governments to support the development of their local economies. While it is accepted that viable economic development is dependent on a suite of integrated and comprehensive strategies and tools - rather than piecemeal or sectoral approach - it remains unclear where initiatives that are often unexpectedly announced mid-stream of local projects/strategies being developed 'fit' within this need for a whole-of-town (i.e. place-based) approach. Such 'announcements' include the regional 'Action Plans for Jobs', the national 'rural renewal funding programme' and the more locally focused REDZ<sup>2</sup> initiatives.
- 3.12 The aforementioned 'Action Plans for Jobs' for example - for which there will be a *Border Action Plans for Jobs* before the end of 2015 - is based on the principle that the best way to support job creation in towns and villages is to build on the particular strengths and assets of an area and support agencies and organisations locally, regionally and nationally (as appropriate) to harness these advantages to support enterprise growth and drive new job creation strategies and projects (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2015). As a model, it embraces the previously noted concept of local comparative advantage, and should be complimentary to the general objectives contained within the LECs. The *Border Action Plan for Jobs*, when published, will cover the counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth - a diverse region within its own right - and it is not yet clear to what extent, if any, it will have a cross-border dimension. In the development of these regional plans, a series of consultative events have been held at which local authorities, regional bodies, higher education institutions, other public bodies, the private sector and communities have been encouraged to come forward with innovative ideas to boost job creation within their areas.

From analysis of the Action Plans published to date, it is likely that the Border Plan will identify indicative areas of economic growth as tourism, agri-food, renewables/clean technology; with other important sectoral clusters including engineering and life sciences. It will encourage the mapping of business and technology parks, and the specialisms and research innovation hubs within universities and institutes of technology within the region. From the review of existing guidelines and frameworks for the region, there is little doubt that agri-innovation, renewables, tourism and creative industries (including digital media, coding and gaming) will play a core role in the revitalisation of our towns and villages. Also of importance will be the 'silver economy', acknowledging that the population of the Border

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<sup>2</sup> REDZ stands for 'Rural Economic Development Zones'; a concept promoted in the report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA).

Region is ageing<sup>3</sup>; this has implications for the type of services required over the medium-term and their location. Also, the relative wealth of older consumer groups and, as such their spending power, should not be ignored as we strategically plan the regeneration of towns.

- 3.13 Despite this plethora of initiatives, and in light of public spending cuts, a changing funding environment and an ongoing process of local government reform, the need for local stakeholders to get involved and be active in the regeneration of small towns has never been greater. With a holistic approach to revitalisation which involves all stakeholders within a community being needed to achieve rural revitalisation, the new Community Planning process and Local Economic and Community Plans for Northern Ireland and Ireland respectively are important additions to the community engagement toolkit employed by local government. Local people care about local issues; and often local issues are replicated throughout the region - thus making them regional issues. Engagement with community is essential in both policy development and its subsequent translation to practice.

### **Irish Border Needs Analysis**

- 3.14 With border regions covering 40% of the European Union's territory and being home to 30% of Europe's population (Beck, 2008) it is unsurprisingly that the landscape of the EU is shaped and strongly influenced by borders and their associated challenges and opportunities. While some countries are better than others at overcoming the issues raised by a border and harnessing the opportunities provided by various funding programmes to enable and assist border regions to overcome peripherality, EU, Irish, and British policy continues to point towards the need for greater research into local economic development and complementary functional areas, with the emphasis being on sustaining rural communities by harnessing their potentiality (Creamer et al, 2008). In the context of border areas one of the most effective ways of promoting sustainable regional and local development is to work on a cross-border basis.
- 3.15 It is widely recognised that there is much added-value to be gained from cross-border cooperation and, as such, border areas have become laboratories of change and integration (Beck, 2008; O'Dowd, 2002). According to the Association of European Border Regions<sup>4</sup> (AEBR), such added-value can include political integration (partnership building), institutional cooperation with an emphasis on the harmonisation and improvement of policies, socio-economic development including the mobilisation of endogenous potential, and socio-cultural promotion involving the sharing of knowledge and experiences (AEBR, 2003).
- 3.16 Each border area, however, faces unique challenges which not only affect the people living and working in these areas but also have implications for local, regional and national policy and agencies. Such challenges include poorly developed infrastructure, low levels of

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<sup>3</sup> This is due to a combination of factors including young flight and increase in life expectancy.

<sup>4</sup> The Association of European Border Regions, established in 1971 to act for the benefit of all European border and cross-border regions, promotes cooperation, exchange of knowledge, and lobbying on common issues.

urbanisation and an over-reliance on agriculture for employment due to a lack of other economic investment in the area (Bacsi & Kovacs, 2006; quoted in Creamer et al, 2008). Nonetheless, evidence suggests that border areas are now considered by certain sectors as a *positive* rather than a *depressing* factor due to the business opportunities that can emerge (Perkmann, 2007; IDELE, 2005). As previously noted, territories along the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland are predominantly rural. Thus, cross-border collaboration dovetails with the rural development agenda and the on-going diversification of the rural economy.

3.17 The following tables outline a needs analysis for Irish border towns and villages, and is based on comments from stakeholders at interview and supported by other sources of evidence, including the *Border Regional Planning Guidelines* (which are no less relevant despite the wind-down of the Regional Authority in mid-2014). The purpose of this analysis is to identify potential areas of action to enable sustainable development of the Central Border Region, with towns and villages as the driver for this. The needs analysis is based on identifying the gap that exists between the current position (what is) and the idealised future situation (what should be) (Witkin et al, 1995). This provides a focus for directing future actions. Given the significant work already completed by ICBAN, this needs analysis takes the *Regional Strategic Framework* (RSF) and Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) findings as the guide for ambition (what should be) in the Central Border Region. The needs analysis is based on five themes: Employment opportunities/Business development; Connectivity; Education, skills & training; Local assets and comparative advantage; and Community.

<b>Employment Opportunities / Business Development</b>	
<b><i>Current situation (what is)</i></b>	<b><i>Future developments (what should be)</i></b>
Business development opportunities limited by physical (infrastructure) barriers that impact on accessibility to and within the region	<b>An accessible region where geographical location is considered an opportunity, not a barrier, for development</b>
Electricity grid perceived as a barrier to business growth, particularly the demands of high energy users and also resilience required by technology-based enterprises	<b>Resilient electricity grid that is a vehicle for development across all areas where demand exists, and which exploits renewable technology to minimise exposure to imported energy</b>
Globalisation, imported goods, and low-cost options offered by multi-national supermarkets negatively impacting on ability of local producers and retailers to compete, leading to business closures and associated changes to the 'Main Street' of rural towns and villages	<b>Central Border Region considered an exemplar with thriving towns and villages where local businesses are valued for the contribution made to social and economic growth and wellbeing of areas</b>
Perception amongst established businesses and potential entrepreneurs that finance required to grow businesses is restricted by the lending criteria and models of financial institutions	<b>Central Border Region recognised as an exemplar for business development where entrepreneurial activity is encouraged through supportive statutory/regulatory agency environment where the conditions for growth are understood and created</b>
Perception amongst small-medium sized businesses that support from central and local government is differentiated, disjointed and focused on larger enterprises	<b>Central Border Region as an exemplar for local business support based on cohesive and coherent effort from all stakeholders with clear structures of support for different scale enterprises</b>

Concern amongst stakeholders that the general environment necessary for development is being negatively impacted by the removal or transfer of services that directly and in-directly impact on the confidence and viability of local businesses	<b>Central Border Region as a place of business confidence where development and growth are supported by innovative public and private sector service delivery models, and a recognition that the previous status quo is no longer sustainable</b>
General perception of long-term dynamic of decay that is prevalent in towns and villages across the Central Border Region, and is a consequence of changing retail habits, commuting patterns and decline of local manufacturing industries	<b>Businesses attracted to the Irish Central Border Region where towns and villages are considered to be vibrant and attractive, not desolate and declining</b>
<p><i>RSF Objective:</i> A smart and internationally competitive region – Development of intellectual, educational and innovation support and enterprise assets</p>	

<b>Connectivity</b>	
<b><i>Current situation (what is)</i></b>	<b><i>Future developments (what should be)</i></b>
Road infrastructure restricts development opportunities because of the resultant poor connectivity with ports / airports and main conurbations on island	<b>Road network that is recognised as an enabler for, not a hindrance to, development</b>
Internet connectivity is at a standard below that of urban areas, negatively impacting on the region’s ability to access national and international markets	<b>Internet connectivity as an attractor for investment and entrepreneurship</b>
Mobile phone black spots hindering social and economic development in areas where poor connectivity exists	<b>Seamless, high quality mobile phone network throughout the region</b>
Isolation and lack of accessibility to employment, health and other public services experienced across the spectrum of age groups	<b>Region acknowledged as both internally and externally connected</b>
Regional disconnect between Donegal/Sligo in the West and Monaghan/Armagh in the East, limiting connections to markets along the eastern seaboard	<b>Region acknowledged as both internally and externally connected</b>
Public transport services to locations outside the CBR have restricted late-night and weekend frequency; are susceptible to congestion effects; and do not offer high-speed connectivity with major urban areas	<b>Credible public transport alternatives that reduce reliability on private vehicles and promotes a sustainable approach to social and economic development in the Central Border Region</b>
<p><i>RSF Objective:</i> An accessible and connected region – Development of physical assets</p>	

<b>Education, Skills &amp; Training</b>	
<b><i>Current situation (what is)</i></b>	<b><i>Future developments (what should be)</i></b>
Substantial work already undertaken by secondary schools, further education (NI) and institutes of	<b>Learning and innovative region with opportunities for educational attainment across different qualification</b>

technology (Ire) but challenges remain in terms of addressing gaps in skills development, and matching qualifications with employment opportunities	<b>levels within the region, where skills match opportunities</b>
Movement of young people away from the Central Border Region for third-level education, and who do not return because of perceptions around employment prospects	<b>Attractive, desirable region for young, educated people to establish themselves, utilising (unique) regional assets for business development opportunities</b>
<p><i>RSF Objective:</i> A smart and internationally competitive region – Development of intellectual, educational and innovation support and enterprise assets</p>	

<b>Local Assets &amp; Comparative Advantage</b>	
<b>Current situation (what is)</b>	<b>Future developments (what should be)</b>
Considerable progress already made in terms of utilising natural assets in the region, such as the global geo-park; identification of potential growth around eco-tourism; and sensitive use of natural assets as a driver for development and enhanced quality of life	<b>Sustainable utilisation of natural assets as a means for developing tourism and recreation in the region; enhancing the environment through wildlife protection; and promoting quality of life</b>
	<b>Central Border Region recognised as innovative, providing leadership to other regions on the island of Ireland and internationally in terms of attitudes to and protection of the environment and natural assets.</b>
General decline in the condition of properties in towns / villages across the Central Border Region, particularly dereliction arising from increasing vacancy and struggling retail sector, impacting on residents and businesses perception of the health and status of the 'Main Street'	<b>Towns and villages in the Central Border Region that are attractive places to live, work and visit, using their built and natural environments as assets for development</b>
<p><i>RSF Objective:</i> A sustainable region – Development and protection of natural assets</p>	

<b>Community</b>	
<b>Current situation (what is)</b>	<b>Future developments (what should be)</b>
Out-migration of young people in pursuit of further / higher education and employment opportunities in larger urban centres across the island of Ireland and internationally	<b>Central Border Region a place that retains young people through access to economic and social opportunity</b>
De-population of rural areas in the Central Border Region, and the consequent negative effects on society and the economy in these areas, creating a downward spiral of degeneration	<b>Population of the Central Border Region structured around a balanced demography</b>
Public sector budgets increasingly constrained, impacting on service delivery and, consequently, quality of life of	<b>Ageing population that is supported, not neglected, by public, private and community sectors and which</b>

older people in the Central Border Region	<b>is celebrated as an integral part of a successful, attractive, vibrant Central Border Region society</b>
Out-migration of young people in pursuit of further / higher education and employment opportunities in larger urban centres across the island of Ireland and internationally	<b>Accessible higher education courses that are desirable and relevant, leading to enhanced economic options and improved equality of opportunity for young people in the Central Border Region</b>
<i>RSF Objective:</i> A people centred and inclusive region – Development of people, skills and organisational assets	

3.18 Reflecting on the issues highlighted by these tables - and the five socio-economic challenges facing the Central Border Region as highlighted in the Interim Briefing Paper as part of this study (see Section 1.5) - it is also worthwhile noting the challenges highlighted by ECOVAST through its ASSET Programme<sup>5</sup>:

- Globalisation - with a particular emphasis on food production and processing;
- Centralisation - and indeed specialisation - with an emphasis on administrative functions;
- Out-migration;
- Pressures of new development - particularly out-of-town developments;
- Impact of development on landscapes;
- Economic recession;
- Loss of jobs - a challenge preceding the global financial crisis of 2007/08;
- Loss of retail;
- Tourism decline - and associated loss of employment and facilities;
- Housing challenges;
- Declining public purse; and
- Long-term sustainability of projects.

3.19 Many of the challenges facing small towns and villages are perpetual, - irrespective of location. The challenge for the Central Border Region is understanding the dynamics at play in this small corner of Europe. This includes the additional impediments of peripherality and disconnectedness. In recognising this, however, it is also important to note that there are other rural areas that have similarly struggled with challenges comparable to those identified above. Section 4 will explore the learning points that can be taken from these examples both in terms of success and failure.

<sup>5</sup> In 2005 ECOVAST, together with the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), set up a project to focus on small towns called Action to Strengthen Small European Towns or ASSET. As part of this project, two opinion surveys were carried out between 2006-2009 to seek the opinions of rural networks across Europe and record their views on small towns, the problems they were facing and how were they coping with the economic recession.

#### 4: SCOPING LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

- 4.1 The purpose of this section is to review case studies on the theme of rural town and development and regeneration so as to identify (a) potential projects that could be replicated in the Irish Central Border Region, as well as (b) general lessons from practice. These are used to inform the potential areas for action then outlined in Section 5.

To ensure applicability of the case studies to the Central Border Region this process has been guided by: the key messages emerging from literature (Section 2); an understanding of rural development on the island of Ireland (Section 3); and the Border Needs Analysis (Section 3) which was based on interview responses (See Appendix 1 for listing of interviewees). The case studies are arranged by the core themes emerging from the research: Employment opportunities/Business development; Connectivity; Education, skills and training; Local assets and rural advantage; Community.

##### **Employment Opportunities / Business development**

- 4.2 Ireland's Border Region economy is dominated by traditional sectors such as construction, agriculture and forestry (incl. the agri-food sector) and small-medium sized manufacturing businesses. All have struggled for decades due to rising costs, diminishing margins and the impact of the global economy. There is, though, also strong evidence of entrepreneurial activity and a willingness to engage in innovation. Clearly there is a desire from many business people in the region to keep going, but a common theme is the call for assistance to make this happen. Whilst self-motivation is important, evidence from elsewhere demonstrates the importance of a partnership approach to business development. This includes business networks and help in identifying opportunities. The examples included here highlight the need to innovate in the face of economic adversity, as well as commitment from participants in organised initiatives.

##### *4.2.1 Farmville, North Carolina (USA)*

In 1996, Farmville was similar to many other small towns in rural America facing a number of different threats coming from various sources. The economic strategy being followed at that time was, for example, seeking industrial development only. In response, the Farmville Development Partnership (FDP) was developed as an umbrella group incorporating different economic bodies in the town with a vision for diversification.

A core purpose of the Partnership was to have one point of contact for economic development projects to ensure efficiency and that each case was managed and not neglected (for example, by one organisation thinking that a different organisation was dealing with the opportunity presented when, in reality, nobody was dealing with the case). The FDP both supports existing businesses and markets and incentivises new business to locate in Farmville. It engages in place-marketing, uses the presence of a University within a 15km radius to market itself to start-ups in certain sectors, offers

rental subsidies, retail incentives and embraces the strong social capital demonstrated by the community.

#### *4.2.2 Mount Morris, New York (USA)*

With a population of just under 3,000 people, decline in this small town began back in the 1970s with the loss of manufacturing jobs, the construction of a by-pass and the development of out-of-town retail facilities.

To redress its decline the community formed a development group which catalogued buildings and offered them to developers at subsidised rental values. Areas of defined need were also targeted with tax incentives to stimulate economic growth. The development group actively targeted their 'marketing' of the facilities on offer to diaspora and alumni of neighbouring universities and colleges.

#### *4.2.3 Upper Calder Valley Renaissance Programme, Yorkshire, England*

The UCV Renaissance programme was directed by Yorkshire Forward (a regional development body) and the programme was to involve collaboration across the valley and between the towns to assist in the regeneration process with Calderdale Council. The UCV Renaissance programme was set up in 2002. Regeneration projects in the area included the removal of blight and public realm improvements, some obsolete buildings were removed and a canal that runs through all the towns was turned into a linear park. Tourism and transport were identified by groups within the UCV as the most relevant issues and these gained individuals motivated to help develop these issues across the valley. The programme involved the development of a shared strategy (process of co-design) and the delivery of some 'quick-wins'; which in turn built momentum and confidence around the collaborative process.

Within UCV there was a rivalry between the towns. There were some people in UCV who saw the benefits of the towns collaborating, whilst others were less committed, participating in collaboration only to achieve external funding; other stakeholders were entirely opposed to the process. There were issues surrounding collaboration with the local authority, Calderdale Council, as relationships between the council and other stakeholders were poor.

The UCV programme did achieve greater relationships, and therefore collaboration, between the council and other stakeholders which was a benefit of the programme.

### **Connectivity**

- 4.3 Whilst infrastructural deficits remain in the Border Region arising from historical under-investment there is much that stakeholders can do to maximise the scarce resources available to them. This typically involves being open to adopting an alternative view of how services are delivered or infrastructure is utilised. The first case study in this section is a demonstration of what is possible through cross-border cooperation on public transport networks, which are a vital enabling mechanism for the other elements of regeneration and

development of small towns and villages. The second case study looks at how technology is being used as the basis for enhancing visitor experience. The underlying message is that the telecoms network needs to be of sufficient quality to support these types of ventures, which ICBAN has been working towards.

#### *4.3.1 Accessibility in the Waldviertel Region, Austria*

The Waldviertel Region in Austria is an example of how effective public transport schemes and cross-border public transport schemes can be developed to help those living in a rural region. To keep the region accessible, and thereby assist its economic function, public transport has been made more efficient, cross-border public transport developed and a cross-border mobility centre has been created.

Public transport inside the Waldviertel region is now coordinated. The bus services link up with the rail services to try and achieve higher occupancy rates and help the population reach larger settlements for their individual purposes. Cross-border public transport has been developed with a railway line serving residents in the Waldviertel Region with services to the Czech Republic. In 2011 a cross-border bus network was established, however this only operates from Friday to Sunday to primarily serve tourists, however this plays an important role in assisting the economic development in the area.

The cross-border mobility centre was established in the Waldviertel region in 2011 to assist with the development of more sustainable transport options for the region and to make the region accessible by a variety of transport options. The mobility centre is a service facility providing information on available public transport and advertising services available. The centre however also recognises the importance of ensuring public transport meets the needs of the residents so takes feedback from residents on timetables and meets with service providers to ensure that services meet demand.

#### *4.3.2 Smart E-Tourism, Russia and Finland*

The Republic of Karelia, Russia and the Oulu Region, Finland are working together on the development of an e-tourism framework. Through the framework, the partners - universities and tourism agencies - are examining how, through technology, digital services with a tourism theme can be interconnected so that visitors to this cross-border region have a 'continuous experience'. Consideration is being given to how information can be personalised to the preferences and tastes of the tourist - in terms of the type of activities, foods, accommodation, etc. Specific attention is being given to the role of social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr), smart spaces and 3D internet in the promotion of tourism activities.

As well as developing and enhancing a regional tourism business, this programme will also raise awareness of existing tourism infrastructure - and provide local government with the statistics/information it needs to make informed decisions on future investments in the marketing and promotion of tourism.

## Education, Skills and Training

- 4.4 In tandem with business development is the need to ensure employees and business owners have the skills necessary to pursue the opportunities that do exist. This can take the form of structured courses as well as short, executive training programmes. The further education colleges in Northern Ireland and the institutes of technology in the Republic of Ireland have a strong reputation for local engagement in their respective jurisdictions. Collaboration between the two is also an emerging trend. The case study example highlights a model for creating the critical mass necessary for the delivery of education, skills and training with an emphasis on addressing the gaps that exist to meet the needs of a peripheral region.

### *4.4.1 University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland*

The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) describes itself as “partnership of 13 independent colleges and research institutions is accountable for all formal education beyond school in our region and provides access to study at further and higher education level as well as research opportunities. Each partner serves local, regional, national and international needs, as well as making a distinctive contribution to the university partnership” (UHI, 2015). The University is recognised as “providing opportunities and support for students, which they might not otherwise have had, to pursue their studies within the Highlands and Islands” (QAA, 2012).

UHI is an example of how critical mass can be created through partnership to develop an education delivery model that builds on the strengths of the region, whilst also acknowledging the skills and training deficit, to offer courses relevant to local, regional and national enterprise through close relationships with the business sector and other stakeholders. This demonstrates the necessity for a strategic, collaborative approach to identifying gaps and realising opportunities.

## Local assets and rural advantage

- 4.5 A recurring theme from interviews was the recognition that towns and villages in the Irish Border Region have natural and built environment assets that can equal, and indeed surpass, rural areas elsewhere in Ireland and the UK. The common message is that using these local assets in smart ways that make the unique factors an attractor is central to overcome the infrastructural barriers that exist. The case studies included here focus on the potential for agri-food and tourism-based development, assets that are clearly evident in the Border Region and where it is considered there is scope for growth. The caveat is that initiatives must be coordinated and the pragmatic benefits demonstrated to all involved as there will inevitably be additional effort involved, which can sap the energies of stakeholders if not managed carefully.

### *4.5.1 Cittaslow, Matakana, New Zealand*

Experience of participating in the ‘Cittaslow’ movement, a global movement, demonstrating the need for involvement, integration and collaboration amongst stakeholders

Cittaslow creates a brand for their towns, this benefitted developers and planners seeking to market developments; however locals felt that this was only reconfirming the assets the town already had and that by using this brand to boost tourism, the unique qualities of the town could be lost. The use of Cittaslow was also seen as imposing regulations unnecessarily; Cittaslow was viewed as being too rigid and restrictive.

The adoption of Cittaslow in Matakana is an example of how without community involvement or support a mechanism to that has the potential to boost economic development and regeneration is likely to fail.

#### *4.5.2 Volterratur (tourism consortium), Volterra, Italy*

The town suffered from population decline as those of working age left to find work which created an ageing population. To create jobs Volterra tried to develop the health sector in the town, but it was the tourism sector which has been most beneficial for the development of Volterra through Volterratur.

Volterra attracts tourists to the town not only by the historic buildings and architecture on offer but also due to the cultural identity the town has created for itself and by the local food and wine products on offer. The town provides cultural events to attract tourists to the town. Examples of these events include opera singing in the medieval square and hosting events in its Roman amphitheatre. The use of local farm produce and wine to attract tourists also helps create a demand for local products helping the agricultural sector. Volterratur created a brand to help the town develop an identity.

Prior to the founding of Volterratur, the town had been unsuccessful in developing a town brand. From 1994 town brands have been proposed and opposed due to opposition from locals and most tourism strategies were too fragmented to gain maximum exposure.

#### *4.5.3 Food Nation, North East England*

With a growing emphasis on agri-food development in the Irish Border Region - and the cohort of artisan producers and eateries on which there is potential to build a successful industry - the social enterprise that is Food Nation promotes an interesting model that is adaptable to the ICBAN region (see Appendix 2 to see how this has been explored for the Irish Border Region as part of an ICLRD Executive Training Programme in 2014).

Food Nation, based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, provides innovative food and nutrition services to schools, businesses and communities across the North-East of England. It supports the development of innovative community activities that address health inequalities related to food, nutrition and diet; it provides primary school children with the opportunity to run their own school-based enterprise selling food; it

organises a range of cookery courses and workshops dealing with the use of fresh, local produce in cooking; and it works with schools to teach the 'plough to plate' story of locally produced food - a concept that includes farm visits, food growing and the development of enterprise skills.

## **Community**

- 4.6 Similar to local assets and rural advantage, community is a rich resource that exists in towns and villages across the Border Region. Evidence from case studies demonstrates how this can be harnessed to overcome potential threats to community existence, as well as promote an approach to the environment and lifestyle choices that can become a model for replication elsewhere. Both are examples not only of survival but how community-based initiatives can provide a platform to grow and consequently become an attractor for people into these areas, combatting the prevailing dynamic of out-migration from rural towns and villages.

### *4.6.1 Community Hub, Essex, England*

This initiative created a community hub in response to the risk of closure of core services. In 2007, Post Office Ltd. announced that over 30 post office closures would take place in Essex. The Council reacted by establishing a fund to keep local post offices open and work with them to identify opportunities to become self-sufficient. This led to the re-establishment of three post offices under threat of closure. By 2009, three post-offices had been re-established at Buckhurst Hill, Henham and Little Hallingbury. In addition to the previous services provided these locations now also offer public information and financial services and have become a community hub and meeting point for older people.

Many of the benefits are intangible and difficult to measure. At the same time, this has become an invaluable initiative in terms of creating a space for community to come together. In particular, the initiative has removed the need to travel elsewhere for such services; keeping and adding to existing services has created a sense of vibrancy.

### *4.6.2 The Findhorn Ecovillage, Findhorn Bay, Moray (Scotland)*

Within this ecovillage, sustainable values are expressed in the built environment with ecological houses, innovative use of building materials such as local stone and straw bales, beauty in the architecture and gardens, and applied technology in the Living Machine sewage treatment facility and electricity-generating wind turbines. Sustainable values are also expressed in the community's social, economic and educational initiatives. Over the last 50 years the Findhorn Ecovillage has diversified into more than 60 different community businesses and initiatives, providing a model of a vibrant, living local economy.

The village has been a low carbon pioneering ecovillage since 1985, and received UN Habitat Best Practice Designation in 1998. The four community-owned wind turbines have a total capacity of 750kW, thus supplying more than 100% of the community's

electricity needs. The village is home to the UK's oldest and largest Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) system. An end result of this approach to sustainable development is that the ecovillage's ecological footprint is half the national (UK) average.

4.7 The case studies explored above provide insights into key success factors for rural town development, and examples for possible replication in the Central Border Region. Amongst these case studies the following are identified as recurring essential ingredients (in no specific order):

- **Bottom-up, self-help approach:** building on local resources and alternative funding streams, recognising that access to central government finance may not be relied upon;
- **Energised stakeholders:** to engender long-term commitment to initiative(s), built on early 'wins' and who feel valued;
- **Strategic, long-term vision:** structured around realistic and achievable goals;
- **Participatory processes:** that involve stakeholders through meaningful partnership across the public, private and community sectors;
- **Leadership:** that is recognised and respected by stakeholders;
- **Innovation:** processes, stakeholders and systems that are swift to respond to changing circumstances, needs and evidence; and
- **Maximise and utilise asset base:** focusing on diversification and development that creates both competitive and comparative advantage built on uniqueness of the region.

It is also important to note that not all case studies achieved the projected outcomes; typically this was due to a lack of genuine partnership and collaboration amongst the stakeholders brought about by competing interests or lack of motivation by participants.

These factors are incorporated into the proposals for action in the Central Border Region explored in Section 5.

## 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 As noted by Creamer et al in 2008, the Irish Border Region has a long history of experiencing considerable structural challenges which, in the past seven years, have become more pronounced in some communities as a result of the global economic crisis. These include demographic weaknesses (in particular an ageing population), low population densities, a weak urban network, limited connectivity, poor quality public services, high unemployment / under-employment and low educational attainment. Together, these factors continue to have implications for the type of employment available locally and the attractiveness of the region to potential investors. Addressing these deficits remains dependent on recognising and tapping into the identified assets, opportunities and potential at the local, county and regional levels; and this can best be achieved through greater collaboration and joint programmes of action on a North/South basis.
- 5.2 The border needs analysis and comparative of international experiences reiterate the main socio-economic challenges, as identified in the interim briefing paper to this study, facing rural towns and villages namely:
- Employment opportunities and associated challenges around business development in border areas;
  - Connectivity - both physical and ICT;
  - Access to services which are being rationalised and/or relocated;
  - Community deficits such increasing vacancy and dereliction of town and village centres, heightened disinvestment and growing lack of opportunities; and
  - Declining and ageing population.

The redress of these challenges where possible requires a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-scalar approach to rural revitalisation; and most importantly, requires a focus not on these challenges per se but on the asset base and comparative advantage of rural communities.

### Conclusions

- 5.3 Building on previous work by the ICLRD into rural regeneration, the viewpoints of stakeholders from across the region (including central government), and reflecting on the border needs analysis and case studies as highlighted, it becomes clear that action is required in the following areas:

#### *5.3.1 Employment Opportunities / Business Development*

- Engendering a commitment across the general public, government and private sectors to 'support local' by demonstrating the value to the region from local businesses, raising awareness through events, social engagement;
- Improving access to finance for established businesses through commitment from banks and other financial institutions, and identification by economic

development agencies of mechanisms to reduce the debt burden of entrepreneurs at the start-up stage;

- Local authorities North and South adopting a cooperative and coordinated approach, using mechanisms such as a Business Development Manager (Monaghan County Council) to coordinate and push ideas with businesses, and support local business groups and associations to become more active;
- Building on the 'green' credentials of the region, develop the eco-corridor concept across the region in collaboration with statutory agencies, private and community groups; this would be a cross-cutting 'brand' spanning businesses in tourism, clean technologies, renewable energies, etc.
- Reducing, in real and perceived terms, the peripherality of the region through physical infrastructure improvements (see Connectivity section below) and changes to mind-set;
- Through marketing and awareness raising, highlight the opportunities presented by local assets and comparative advantage across the public, private and community sectors; this includes in the areas of tourism, clean technologies, renewable energies, agri-innovation, engineering, etc; and
- Continued investment in the electricity grid in North and South and via the interconnector, upgrading feed-in options for local renewable-based generators.

### *5.3.2 Connectivity*

- Continued advocating for strategic road improvements across the region, with particular reference to upgrading the A5/N2 and A4/N16 corridors;
- Promoting an 'East-West' transport corridor concept supported by road infrastructure upgrades as highlighted above;
- Enhancing rural transport options through improved public service timetabling, and collaborative approaches among the many service providers to provision;
- Improving rail links to the region, including increased frequency and reduced journey times on the Sligo-Dublin line, and scoping of options for extensions to existing rail line in County Armagh towards Tyrone;
- Progressing a targeted programme of improvements to broadband connectivity to a minimum of 30Mbps across both jurisdictions; a recommended bandwidth also noted by CEDRA (2013: 52); and
- Upgrading mobile phone networks through infrastructure improvements (roll out of 4G technology) and removal of roaming charges.

### *5.3.3 Access to Services*

- Developing an understanding of the role that public sector (schools, libraries) and private (day-to-day banking, post office) services have in supporting the economies of border towns and villages, with a collaborative and innovative approach to maintaining these services;
- Encouraging the establishment of local economic partnerships involving all stakeholders to consider the role of shared services in plugging the gap left by the rationalisation of services across both jurisdictions;

- Organising a series of meetings/working groups to consider how local opportunities can be maximised to support mutual business;
- Developing a supports/information programme around succession planning in businesses; and
- Developing a collaborative, networked approach to education provision through the Institutes of Technology and Colleges that maximise skills development to match business opportunities in the Central Border Region.

#### *5.3.4 Community Deficits*

- In support of equality of opportunity, investigate the provision of outreach centres/distance learning opportunities by groupings of Universities and/or Colleges, with courses matching needs of local industries and supporting innovation;
- Action a programme of publicising opportunities for highly educated graduates 'at home' in a coordinated approach with stakeholders (reference also the 'Business Development' section above); and
- To encourage and attract inward investment, develop a range of interventions to improve the public realm/streetscape/general aesthetics of place (which, it is acknowledged is dependent on availability of finance);

#### *5.3.5 Declining and Ageing Population*

- In undertaking a comprehensive, strategic, multi-agency and multi-stakeholder approach to stemming young flight - detail the high-skill, high value-added opportunities 'at home' (see section on Community Deficits above);
- In tackling depopulation, develop a comprehensive, strategic, multi-agency and multi-scalar research programme aimed at understanding and redressing the factors that lead to depopulation - taking into consideration social, economic and service provision factors;
- Facilitating an ageing population (the 'silver economy') through a multi-agency, multi-sectoral approach that is wide-ranging and addresses, for example: service provision; mobility; access to suitable housing; and health care support; and
- Examining ways that the 'silver economy' can become a net contributor to the overall economy of the region - through mentoring programmes for example.

5.4 While there is no doubting the negative impact that the current recession and austerity has had on rural areas across the island of Ireland, it is increasingly evident that the growth of the rural economy is entwined with the vibrancy of its communities. It is also clear that there is no 'one-size-fits- all' approach to rural revitalisation; rather, they must be a tailoring of policies and actions to specific geographies. For the Central Border Region, which is diverse in its composition, this may require a sub-regional set of policies and actions over the short to medium term.

## Recommendations

- 5.5 Local dynamism is key to making areas attractive to investment as well as to retaining and growing local populations. Such dynamism should not be confined to one sector - business, local government or community - but rather should be demonstrated through a mix of all stakeholders working collaboratively. The following recommendations require that collaborative approach is adopted if real and sustained rural revitalisation of our border towns and villages is to be achieved.

### *5.5.1 Employment Opportunities / Business Development*

ICBAN has been proactive in the space of business development in recent years through a series of INTERREG IVA funded programmes such as HATCH, Innovative Enterprise Programme and Traded Services to name but a few. These largely have focused on supports to business from networking opportunities to provision of business advisory services. While there is a continued and ongoing need for such supports - reflecting the constantly changing nature of the business environment - there is also potential for ICBAN to take a more practical role in supporting business development; for example:

- Establishing a Central Border CEO Forum involving Chief Executives from local government, private businesses (of all scales) and community groups to provide strategic direction for both public policy development and investment decisions;
- Conducting an audit of all types of business premises in the region (in-use and vacant), using the URBACT 'Wood Footprint' project model developed by Monaghan County Council, to establish a property database that can be used to attract investment and support start-ups;
- While recognising the range of finance options currently available to businesses, investigate different models of finance (e.g. credit unions, crowdsourcing, establishment of local banks) for both start-ups and established businesses;
- Working to ICBAN and the local authorities, source funding for two to three Business Development Managers for the Central Border Region with a specific role to progress social innovation enterprises;
- In support of inward investment, undertake a study into the capacity issues facing the electricity grid servicing the region; and with the relevant agencies and bodies such as SEAI, consider the various scenarios and options available - including feed-in options for local renewable-based generators;
- Building on the success of the region-wide tourism brochure for the G8 Summit (2013), undertaking a region-wide marketing/branding initiative of the comparative advantages that can support business development and which builds on the unique characteristics and asset base of local areas.

### *5.5.2 Connectivity*

Recognising the work of ICBAN to date in advocating for high-speed, quality telecommunications and a renewed commitment to the upgrade of the A5/N2

corridor - and acknowledging that this work will continue - other action points to be considered by ICBAN in improving connectivity, and thus generating a scenario where the region is a viable option for business investment, include:

- Adopting a leadership role to consider opportunities for local broadband improvement schemes in 'not spots' through the Rural Development Programme;
- Raising awareness of the forthcoming removal of roaming charges and associated benefits;
- With service providers, undertaking a programme of work to enhance rural transport schemes through improved public service timetabling, and collaborative approaches to provision (e.g. examining how slight changes to timetables - 5 to 15mins - can create opportunities for cross-linkages between different routes); and
- Investigating the potential for improved rail links to the region, including scoping of options for extensions to existing rail line in County Armagh towards Tyrone.

#### *5.5.3 Access to Services*

Access to inter-generational services is core to the vitality of rural communities; yet it is an area under ongoing threat through rationalisation and relocation. There is a role for ICBAN, in association with local councils, to explore new models of service delivery for the Central Border Region; for example through

- Mapping the location of, and accessibility to, services across the region; and where 'blackspots' are revealed, establishing a working group with local government and the relevant agencies to investigate opportunities for a cross-border shared services agenda to be employed;
- Working with local government (initially), developing a 'support local' campaign, through events and social engagement, which demonstrates to the public the role of local businesses in securing vibrant rural communities;
- Working with local enterprise offices across both jurisdictions, organising a regional road-show highlighting potential funding and business development opportunities; this, for example, could take place in collaboration with InterTradeIreland who already host a number of such events focusing on their schemes/products; and
- Exploring further issues around - and solutions to - business succession planning and roll-out.

#### *5.5.4 Community Deficits*

While the condition of the town or village centre can be viewed as a representation of that community's general economic health, so to speak, the aesthetics of place is not the only indicator of decline. Community deficits are also closely tied to the lack of diversity in facilities (health, policing, financial, service stations and garages) present within a community to serve the needs of its varied population (toddlers and children, teenagers, elderly), to the spending power (or lack thereof) of the local population and the presence of businesses locally in which to spend money but also to lack of equality of opportunity - linked to mobility, access to further education opportunities, childcare, etc. With rural revitalisation being dependent on rural vibrancy, there is scope for ICBAN to:

- Collaborate with local authorities to identify the local asset base and comparative advantage in each council area; accepting that there will be overlap given natural assets do not adhere to borders (this is where the concept of functional areas comes into play);
- Work with local government - planners and economic officers in particular - to undertake a rural vibrancy survey to determine the deficits, opportunities and type of actions required across the region; there are toolkits in place to assist rural communities in this, for example [www.ruralvibes.eu](http://www.ruralvibes.eu);
- With the local enterprise offices in the region, undertake a publicity campaign to highlight the range of businesses located in the region - including high-skill, high added-value - that graduates may be unaware of; and
- Through LEADER (and the forthcoming Irish government-funded rural renewal programme), and working with local communities and local government, develop a 'whole-of-place' strategic village renewal programme that goes beyond public realm improvements to also focus on the latent assets and strengths of specific towns and villages.

#### *5.5.5 Declining and Ageing Population*

With the ageing profile of the Border Region population, and the ongoing challenges posed by depopulation - largely through 'young flight' for education, employment or indeed, world travels - there is a growing case to be made for ICBAN to begin to undertake work in this area, with potential initial 'steps' including:

- Establishing a database of successful business people from the region (including retirees) who could act as mentors for business start-ups and those interested in expanding;
- Undertaking a research programme to further investigate the needs of the 'silver economy' and the implications of this for how we plan and design our communities, and future-proof services; and
- Recognising that the Irish border counties involved in ICBAN are part of the Age Friendly Ireland Cities and Counties Programme (which in turn is affiliated to the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC) and there is growing Northern Ireland engagement in the Age Friendly cities Network U.K., investigating opportunities for expanding this cross-border - and developing a joint programme of activities to support age-friendly services, age-friendly planning, age-friendly mobility, etc.

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## **Appendix 1: Interviewees<sup>6</sup>**

### **Councils**

- Donegal County Council - Planning Department
- Sligo County Council - Community & Enterprise
- Leitrim County Council - Economic Development Unit
- Cavan County Council - Economic Development Unit
- Monaghan County Council - Economic Development & Planning
- Mid-Ulster District Council - Planning Department
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council - Funding and Investment
- Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council - Regeneration Unit

### **Central Government**

- Department of Environment, Community & Local Government
- Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation
- Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine
- Department of Environment
- Department for Regional Development

### **Community / Business Representatives**

- Donegal - Community Forum Representative
- Fermanagh - Development Association Representative
- Leitrim - Community Council representative
- Monaghan - Business Representative

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<sup>6</sup> Not all central government departments, community or business organisations approached to be part of this study accepted the invitation.

## Appendix 2: Developing the Agri-Food Sector

**Table: Challenges and ideas for developing a regional food strategy in the Border Region.**

	Challenges	Ideas
Developing a regional food strategy	How do we achieve <b>common thinking</b> across such a diverse area as the Border Region?	Follow a wider people-inclusive strategy and identify people within each district council with an interest in the topic. In Newcastle, the food charter was the document used to gain buy-in from diverse partners in the vision of a regional food strategy. This is a living document that can evolve as new partners join the process and help to shape it.
	What is the <b>role of local government</b> in developing and supporting a regional food strategy?	Local government is seen as an enabler of the process. Food Newcastle is driven by the social economy and the private economy; producers need to be involved. For that to happen, there must be benefits for the private sector, e.g., in terms of marketing and sales and one local example of this is the sponsorship of the Taste of Monaghan by Silver Hill Farm, a major duck producer based in Co. Monaghan.
	What is the potential to <b>piggyback food</b> on to <b>other economic developments</b> ?	For example, the Westport Greenway in Mayo began with a cycling/walking route that now has a food trail along it, and food-themed spin-offs are developing along the new Wild Atlantic Way driving route from Donegal to Cork. Something similar could be done with the Ulster Canal Initiative to create an economic spin-off based around food. A regional food strategy could also build on other attractions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the world's first cross-border geopark in Fermanagh and Cavan (see <a href="http://www.marblearchcavesgeopark.com/">http://www.marblearchcavesgeopark.com/</a>) or</li> <li>b) Fermanagh's natural attraction of lakes and caves.</li> </ul> Fishing in Cavan is a major attraction for anglers and could be translated into a food experience by local eateries offering to cook the anglers' catch and create a memorable food experience of fish from the region.
Food branding, marketing and communication	How do you capture the <b>green image</b> of the region in order to market the region and its food?	Do this with a quality regional food brand; a food charter for the region will help to formulate that brand. The green feel in the Border Region (rushes, heather) calls for securing EU Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status for local speciality foods such as boxty (see <a href="http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/food-and-drink/boxty-makers-hoping-to-achieve-the-same-status-as-champagne-and-parma-ham-1.1669806">http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/food-and-drink/boxty-makers-hoping-to-achieve-the-same-status-as-champagne-and-parma-ham-1.1669806</a> )
	How do you promote the <b>localness</b> of food?	Key stakeholders are hotels, restaurants and other eateries who can emphasize the local/domestic food offerings on the menu. As an example of this in practice, Silver Hill Farm educates customers about the local provenance of their produce (see <a href="http://silverhillfarm.ie/">http://silverhillfarm.ie/</a> ). Their duck products are distributed via Pallas Foods, an island-wide distributor. All of Pallas Food's 80 reps have been to the Silver Hill factory to learn about the products so

		that they can share its food story with the food service sector. This message can in turn be communicated to the consumer by naming the producer on the menu and identifying their location.
	The next step is how to <b>communicate</b> the regional <b>food story</b> .	The key role of food champions should not be overlooked e.g. Neven Maguire of MacNean House in Blacklion (see <a href="http://www.nevenmaguire.com/">http://www.nevenmaguire.com/</a> ), catering colleges, as well as popular food destinations such as The Old Post Office in Lisbane, Down (see <a href="http://www.oldpostofficelisbane.co.uk/contact.html">http://www.oldpostofficelisbane.co.uk/contact.html</a> ) and experiences from regional food festivals and events like Taste of Cavan (see <a href="http://www.thiscavan.ie/fun/article/taste-of-cavan">http://www.thiscavan.ie/fun/article/taste-of-cavan</a> ). Such food events were recognised for their value in both helping people identify local foods (“I never knew that...”) and getting them talking about local food. Well-known commentators in general can help to promote local food while investment in leadership and management in the food industry was also identified as an important factor along with the need for an umbrella group to achieve this. For example, Peter Quinn (formerly GAA) and Michael Hanlon, both of Lakeland Dairies Co-op (see <a href="http://www.lakeland.ie/">http://www.lakeland.ie/</a> ) promote and celebrate the dairy industry. Everyone is potentially a food champion, e.g., the dissemination of ‘Taste of Cavan’ promotional packs at the Association of County and City Councils conference.
Supporting food producers and farmers’ markets	How do <b>food producers</b> address the <b>administrative demands</b> on both sides of the border?	It is important for food producers to develop relationships with all the relevant local councils. For example, Silver Hill Farm conducts breeding, hatching, rearing and processing activities in both the north and the south necessitating compliance with regulations in both jurisdictions.
	What is the role of <b>farmers’ markets</b> and how can they be sustained?	Local examples were noted whereby over time the local business community recognised the benefits of a farmers’ market to a town, e.g. in countering the drain of customers due to outlying supermarkets. Local councils have a supportive role to play in providing funding and services, e.g., the need for subsidisation and/or reasonable pricing to support stall holders with little turnover; and helping stall holders to meet health and safety requirements. Stallholders have a key role to play in the governance of the markets.

### Appendix 3: Potential EU Funding Opportunities for the Revitalisation of Border Towns and Villages

Funding Programmes: 2014-2020

Programme	Beneficiaries	Priorities of Relevance	Relevance and Call Status
Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme 2014-2020	Public and private stakeholders from EU Member States of Finland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom and Sweden; and Non EU Member States of Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway	<p>Four Priority Axes with specific objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using Innovation to Maintain And Develop Robust And Competitive Communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Degree of collaborations between SMEs and R&amp;D</li> <li>- Awareness and attitudes among health professionals towards the use of eHealth technologies</li> </ul> </li> <li>Promoting Entrepreneurship to Realise the Potential of the Programme Area's Competitive Advantage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conditions for start-ups in remote, sparsely populated areas</li> <li>- Awareness of business opportunities beyond local markets among SMEs</li> </ul> </li> <li>Fostering Energy-Secure Communities through Promotion of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awareness of energy efficiency opportunities and renewable solutions in housing sector and public infrastructures in remote and sparsely populated areas</li> </ul> </li> <li>Protecting, Promoting and Developing Cultural and Natural Heritage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preparedness of responsible authorities in remote and sparsely populated areas for environmental management in relation to climate change and impacts of new investments in exploitation of natural resources</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p>In context of themes emerging in the interim and subsequent position paper on revitalising border towns and villages - growth and investment in SMEs, age-friendly planning, business development (incl. access to finance, family succession, connectivity, etc.), harnessing renewable potentials ('green corridor') and role of eco-tourism in overall development of region - all priority axes under this programme are of interest.</p> <p>Preparatory projects - continuous open call for all 4 priority axes.</p> <p>Third call currently open focusing on Priorities 3 &amp; 4 until 30th November 2015.</p>
Atlantic Area Programme	Stakeholders from all of	Four Priority Axes and specific objectives:	In context of themes emerging in the interim and

2014-2020	Ireland, Northern Ireland and parts of England, Scotland, Wales, France, Spain and Portugal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stimulating innovation and competitiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhancing innovation capacity through cooperation to foster competitiveness</li> <li>- Strengthening the transfer of innovation results to facilitate the emergence of new products, services and processes</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Fostering resource efficiency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fostering renewable energies and energy efficiency</li> <li>- Fostering green growth, eco-innovation and environmental efficiency</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Strengthening the territory's resilience to risks of natural, climate and human origin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening risks management systems</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Enhancing biodiversity and the natural and cultural assets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems' services</li> <li>- Enhancing natural and cultural assets to stimulate economic development</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p>subsequent position paper on revitalising border towns and villages - as outlined above - and other strategic priorities such as climate change and community resilience which are (should be) of interest to all places, all priority axes under this programme are of interest.</p> <p>Waiting final approval by the EU Commission</p>
North West Europe 2014-2020	Regions, cities, universities and public-private partnerships across the whole country of the UK, Ireland, Luxembourg, Belgium and Switzerland; Parts of Germany, France, and Netherlands.	<p>Three themes - Five objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Innovation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To enhance innovation performance of enterprises throughout North-West Europe regions</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Low Carbon <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To facilitate the implementation of low-carbon, energy and climate protection strategies in order to reduce GHG-emissions in North-West Europe</li> <li>- To facilitate the uptake of low carbon technologies, products, processes and services in sectors with</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p>Mission for 2014-2020 is to produce measurable positive change in the North-West of Europe on three themes: Innovation, Low carbon and Resource and materials efficiency.</p> <p>Call due to open in late November 2015; a two-stage application process</p>

		<p>high energy saving potential in order to reduce GHG-emissions in North-West Europe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To facilitate the implementation of transnational low-carbon solutions in transport systems in order to reduce GHG-emissions in North-West Europe.</li> </ul> <p>3. Resource and Materials Efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To optimise (re)use of material and natural resources in NWE.</li> </ul>	
URBACT 2020	Open primarily to local authorities across the 28 member states as well as Norway and Switzerland; scope also for regional authorities, public body equivalents and universities	<p>URBACT III programme is organised around four main objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Capacity for Policy Delivery: To improve the capacity of cities to manage sustainable urban policies and practices in an integrated and participative way.</li> <li>2. Policy Design: To improve the design of sustainable urban policies and practices in cities.</li> <li>3. Policy Implementation: To improve the implementation of integrated and sustainable urban strategies and actions in cities.</li> <li>4. Building and Sharing Knowledge: To ensure that practitioners and decision makers at all levels have access to knowledge and share know-how on all aspects of sustainable urban development in order to improve urban development policies.</li> </ol>	<p>European Territorial Cooperation programme aiming to foster sustainable integrated urban development in cities across Europe and contribute to achievement of EU2020</p> <p>Action Planning Networks moving into Phase 2 Application</p> <p>Implementation Networks call expected March 2016</p>
ERASMUS +	Private Sector; Public Sector; Non-Profit Organisations; Academic institutions and research centres	<p>KEY ACTION 1 (KA1) – LEARNING MOBILITY OF INDIVIDUALS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mobility of learners and staff</li> <li>2. Joint Masters Degrees</li> </ol> <p>KEY ACTION 2 (KA2) – COOPERATION FOR INNOVATION</p>	<p>The new Erasmus+ programme aims to support actions in the fields of Education, Training, Youth and Sport for the period 2014-2020. It replaces seven programmes bringing together:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig and Jean Monnet)</li> </ul>

		<p>AND THE EXCHANGE OF GOOD PRACTICES:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ICT</li> <li>2. Environmental Technologies</li> <li>3. Defining skills and training needs in economic sectors</li> <li>4. Building capacity of youth councils, youth platforms And local, regional and national authorities</li> </ol> <p>KEY ACTION 3 (KA3) – SUPPORT FOR POLICY REFORM</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. National meetings and conferences and transnational seminars on active participation of young people</li> <li>2. European Youth Week</li> </ol> <p>SPORT Sub-Programme:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Value of sport and physical activity in relation to personal, social and professional development</li> <li>2. Awareness raising activities</li> <li>3. Monitoring and benchmarking of indicators</li> <li>4. Sharing good practices</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Youth in Action programme</li> <li>- Five international cooperation programmes (Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink, the programme for cooperation with industrialised countries)</li> <li>- The new sport action.</li> </ul> <p>Information on 2016 calls can be accessed at <a href="https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/news/2016-erasmus-plus-call-for-proposals-programme-guide-and-annual-work-programme-have-been-published_en">https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/news/2016-erasmus-plus-call-for-proposals-programme-guide-and-annual-work-programme-have-been-published_en</a></p>
Cosme	Local and Regional Authorities, Corporations, Federations Unions, Administrations States, Agencies Chambers and SMEs from across the European Union, Candidate countries, European Economic Area, Mediterranean countries, Balkans	<p>Activities to be supported include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access to finance for SMEs through dedicated financial instruments</li> <li>2. Entrepreneurship</li> <li>3. Improving framework conditions for the competitiveness of enterprises and policy development.</li> <li>4. Internationalisation of SMEs.</li> </ol>	Programme for the competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises; continues the actions of the 2007-2013 Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme (EIP) under the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP).

Creative Europe	Local and Regional Authorities, Corporations, Universities, Development NGOs, Non-Profit Organisations, Federations Unions, Administrations States, Agencies Chambers and SMEs from across the European Union, New Independent States, European Economic Area, Mediterranean countries, Balkans, Switzerland	<p>Activities to be supported include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cross-border cooperation projects between cultural and creative organisations within the EU and beyond.</li> <li>2. Networks helping the sector to operate transnationally and to strengthen their competitiveness.</li> <li>3. Translation and promotion of literary works across EU markets.</li> <li>4. Development of fiction, animations, creative documentaries and video games for European cinema, television markets and other platforms.</li> <li>5. Film festivals that promote European films.</li> <li>6. The European Capitals of Culture and the European Heritage Label.</li> </ol>	Creative Europe will replace the MEDIA, MEDIA Mundus and Culture programmes of the previous programming period 2007-2013. Creative Europe helps the cultural and creative sectors to seize the opportunities of the 'digital age' and globalisation and it enables the sectors to reach their potential so that they can contribute to the Europe 2020 goals for sustainable growth, jobs and social cohesion. Programme for European cultural and linguistic diversity - specifically targeting the needs of the cultural and creative sectors aiming to operate beyond national borders. Programme complements other EU programmes such as structural fund support for investment in the cultural and creative sectors, heritage restoration, cultural infrastructure and services, digitisation funds for cultural heritage and the enlargement and external relations instruments.
Europe for Citizens	Public bodies or non-profit organisations from the 28 member states and the following countries who have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commission: Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia	<p>Activities supported b this programme include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Citizens' meetings, town-twinning.</li> <li>2. Creation and operations of transnational partnerships and networks.</li> <li>3. Support for organisations of a general European interest.</li> <li>4. Community building and debates on citizenship issues based on the use of ICT and/or social media.</li> <li>5. Initiatives to raise awareness on the EU</li> </ol>	<p>To contribute to citizens' understanding of the EU, its history and diversity &amp; to foster European citizenship and improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level. Pogramme also interested in raising awareness of remembrance, common history and values</p> <p>No calls currently open</p>
Employment and Social	Open to EU Member States;	Activities supported by PROGRESS include:	EaSI's priority activities in 2014-20 will help

<p>Innovation Programme</p>	<p>EEA countries, in accordance with the EEA Agreement, and EFTA Member States; and EU candidate countries and potential candidate countries...with specific organisations as follows:</p> <p>PROGRESS - National, regional and local authorities; employment services; social partners;; non-governmental organisations; higher education institutions/ research institutes; experts in evaluation/impact assessment; national statistical offices; and the media.</p> <p>EURES - National, regional and local authorities; employment services; social partner organisations; and other interested parties</p> <p>MicroFinance &amp; Social Entrepreneurship - public and private bodies established at national, regional or local level and providing microfinance for persons and micro-enterprises and/or financing for social enterprises in the above-mentioned countries.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employment, especially to fight youth unemployment</li> <li>2. Social protection, social inclusion and the reduction and prevention of poverty</li> <li>3. Working conditions.</li> </ol> <p>Activities supported by EURES include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The development of targeted mobility schemes to fill job vacancies where labour market shortcomings have been identified, and/or to help workers with a propensity to be mobile, where a clear economic need has been identified;</li> <li>2. The development of EURES cross-border partnerships, in particular the provision of information, counselling, placement and recruitment services for cross-border workers;</li> <li>3. Mutual learning among EURES actors and training of EURES advisers</li> <li>4. Raise awareness of benefits of geographical / occupational mobility</li> </ol> <p>Activities supported under MicroFinance and Social Entrepreneurship include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase access to, and the availability of, microfinance for vulnerable groups who want to set up or develop their business and micro-enterprises;</li> <li>2. Build up the institutional capacity of microcredit providers;</li> <li>3. Support the development of social enterprises, in particular by facilitating access to finance.</li> </ol>	<p>Member States to modernise their labour markets and social security systems and increase their rates of employment, in particular among young people. The instrument feeds into the EU's ten-year growth strategy by supporting the implementation of the employment and social objectives of Europe 2020.</p> <p>The EaSI Programme is umbrella name for EURES, PROGRESS and MicroFinance and Social Entrepreneurship Programmes.</p> <p>At the heart of the EaSI Programme is the concept of social innovation</p> <p>Current call open focusing on social policy innovations supporting reforms in social services - closing mid-November 2015.</p>
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Urban Innovation Fund			
Horizon 2020	Private Sector, Public Sector Bodies, Non-Profit Organisations, Academic institutions and research centres	Of particular relevance to ICBAN is the priority of 'Societal Challenges' which covers such issues as: Funding will focus on the following challenges: (a) Health, demographic change and well-being; (b) Food security, sustainable agriculture and forestry, marine, maritime and inland water research and the bio-economy; (c) Secure, clean and efficient energy; (d) Smart, green and integrated transport; (e) Climate action, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials; (f) Europe in a changing world - Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies. (g) Secure societies - Protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens.	The general objective of Horizon 2020 (H2020) is to contribute to building a society and an economy based on knowledge and innovation across the Union by leveraging additional research, development and innovation funding, and to support the delivery of EU2020. This general objective shall be pursued through three mutually reinforcing priorities: (a) Excellent science. (b) Industrial leadership. (c) Societal challenges.  Current calls open under Societal Challenges for projects with focus on energy consumption and urban mobility - closing January 2016.

## Appendix 4: Potential Linkages with Other Programmes / Organisations

- **ESPON 2020**

ESPON was established in 2002 with the aim of promoting a territorial and spatial dimension in European policy-making. The programme covers all 28 member states plus the 4 partner states of Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Iceland. ESPON 2020 sees its core objective as institutional capacity building and the achievement of efficient public administrations through the use and promotion of the evidence produced, generated and subsequently disseminated through the mechanism of supported projects. ESPON 2020 will strive to strengthen the evidence-base so as to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy and the achievement of key thematic objectives through the analysis of development trends. Objective 2 - knowledge transfer and analytical user support - is focused on knowledge transfer and will be stakeholder-driven. It largely will work as follows:

- Grouping of stakeholders - including local authorities, cross-border networks such as ICBAN, central government departments, etc. - will come up with a project idea; and will submit this to ESPON as an expression of interest...there will be set windows where such expressions/calls can be submitted.
- Expressions of interest should be developed by a grouping of stakeholders from at least three member states.
- If approved, ESPON will work with the stakeholders to develop the project idea further and then put it out to tender; with the successful applicant - usually a grouping of research institutes/universities - then working closely with the stakeholders throughout the lifetime of the project to deliver on its objectives.
- These projects tend to have budgets in the region of €400,000 - €650,000 and last for a min. of two years. It is expected that approx. 25 such projects will be delivered over the course of this programme.

- **European Network for Rural Development**

The ENRD is a hub that connects rural development stakeholders throughout the European Union (EU). Within each member state there is a national support unit to support the activities of the ENRD; in Ireland, this unit is based in Tipperary Institute while for Northern Ireland, the support unit is Rural Development Council. The national events are responsible for:

- hosting events, meetings, workshops, conferences and seminars;
- facilitating information exchange through various mediums such as website, publications, newsletter, guides, fact sheets;
- providing support for good practice /relevant experience exchange;
- encouraging cluster networking;
- organising thematic initiatives and discussion forums; and
- coordinating cooperation activities.

Each national network is characterised by open on-going membership.

- **ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability**

The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) is a well-established network of cities and local governments dedicated to sustainable development. Its agenda is diverse ranging from sustainable communities to smart cities to healthy, happy and inclusive communities. To facilitate the roll-out of its various agendas the ICLEI network operates a series of networks - ranging from eco-cities to renewable energy networks to eco-mobility networks. Surprisingly, only one current member of ICLEI is from the island of Ireland; namely Dublin City Council.

- **RURAL VIBES**

Rural Vibes has been developed by a European partnership, passionate to assist rural communities and business to work together and make rural areas vibrant. It is an initiative of the Rural Alliances Project, which is co-funded by Interreg IVB North West Europe Programme and involves County Kerry and Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

Rural Vibes provides rural communities with great tools to assess the individual perceptions of members or community groups in rural areas. Collectively these can form an overall picture of how your community views itself. See <http://www.ruralvibes.eu/> for further information.

- **ECOVAST**

The European Council for the Village and Small Town (ECOVAST) was set up in 1984 to further the well-being of rural communities, and the safeguarding of the rural heritage, throughout Europe. Its formal aims are:

- To foster the economic, social and cultural vitality and the administrative identity of rural communities throughout Europe; and
- To safeguard, and to promote the sensitive and imaginative renewal of, the built and natural environments of such communities.

ECOVAST's membership has grown rapidly, to over 500 members in 20 countries in East and West Europe. The membership is widely drawn, to include individuals, academic bodies, government and non-government organisations, from local to international level. ECOVAST can thus act as bridge between decision-makers and those who are active at local level, between experts and practitioners. It operates mainly as a network, to assist mutual support among its membership in pursuit of their activity in rural areas. While there is a national network covering the U.K. (see <http://ecovast.webs.com/>), there is no such network for Ireland.