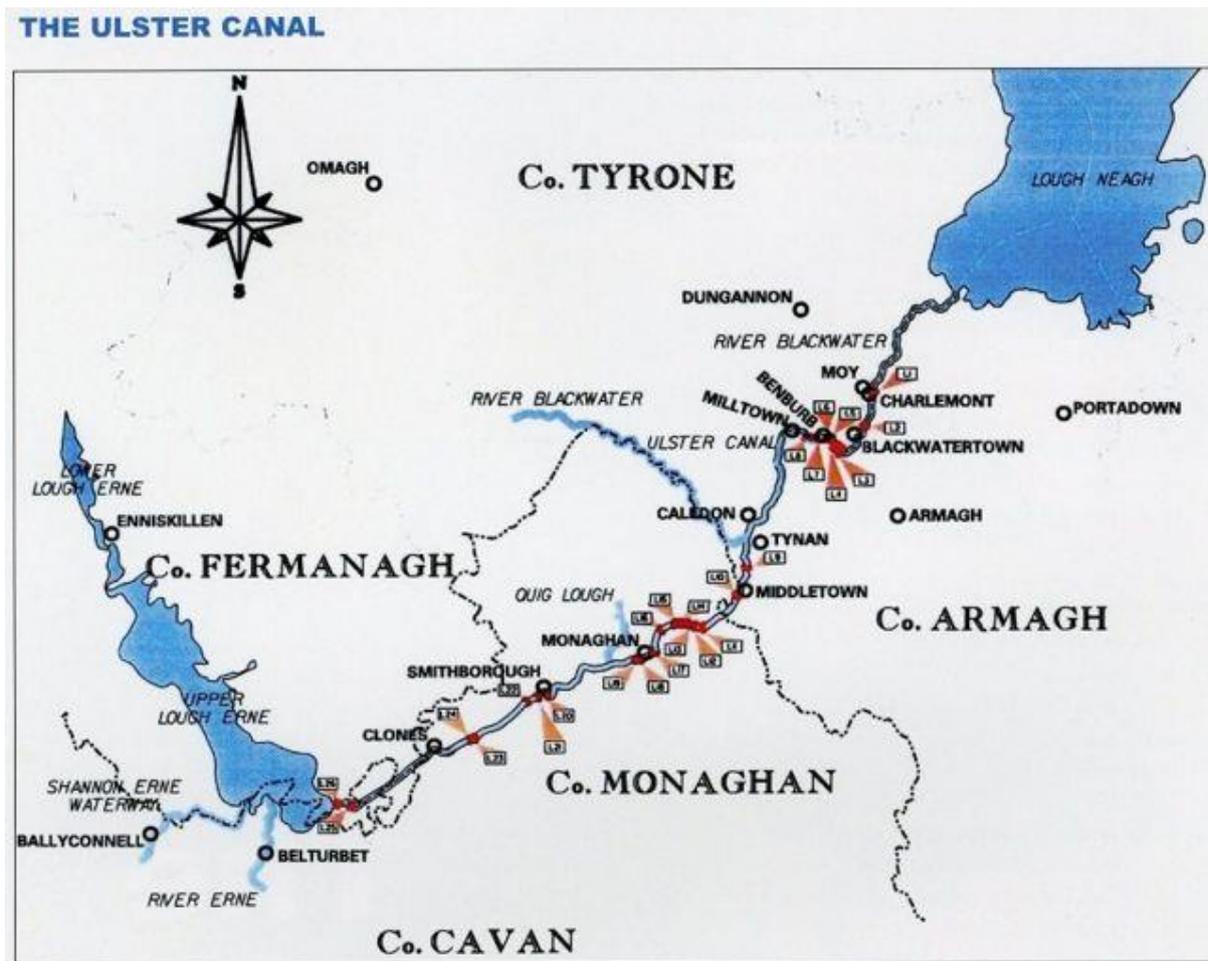


The Ulster Canal Regeneration Project

Reimagining the Central Border Region's Tourism Infrastructure



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Introduction

Despite the Irish government’s pledge to allocate €12 million in funding towards the completion of Phase II of the Ulster Canal restoration project last April (*Department of the Taoiseach, 2021*), there has been no definitive move on either the Irish government or Northern Ireland Executive’s side to take the restoration works up to Lough Neagh, which would have followed the original canal’s historic route. The current restoration works south of the border are overseen by Waterways Ireland under the stewardship of North-South Ministerial Council.

As recognized by Minister Heather Humphries, TD, the cross-border, community-building aspect of the Ulster Canal restoration project could make it a “permanent symbol of peace and reconciliation” on the island (*Department of the Taoiseach, 2021*), but it arguably requires a broader vision to realize its full potential. As will be argued throughout the paper, it is a project that could greatly revitalise the Central Border Region. The interest in restoration works and opportunities for the northwards extension of the Ulster Canal has been highlighted by Councils along the route and the project ambition is featured within the Irish Central Border Area Network’s (ICBAN) regional strategies: [The Regional Strategic Framework \(ICBAN, 2013\)](#), and the [Framework of Regional Priorities \(ICBAN, 2021: 73-74\)](#), with particular emphasis on greening the region, through its strong links with:

TABLE 1. THE PRIORITIES OF ICBAN

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	including the expanding of the regional tourist offering through strategic linkages and repackaging of tourist infrastructure from both north-to-south and east-to-west on the island of Ireland, focusing particularly on the development of domestic eco-tourism.
INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY	including the promotion of active travel such as walking and cycling through the rollout of greenway and blueway infrastructure.
HUMAN CAPITAL	capitalising on the ecotourism opportunity that can help regenerate communities along the proposed

	Canal route; to develop educational and skills training opportunities, particularly surrounding environmental conservation and historical and/or cultural heritage; attracting various industries and providing greater incentive for young and educated people to remain in the CBR, combatting the regional depopulation trend.
LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES	helping enhance citizens' quality of life by improving the variety of recreational activities for the towns and villages along the proposed Canal route.
NATURAL CAPITAL	recognizing that the project will promote opportunities in the green economy, support the development of regional and cross-border landscape conservation initiatives, and increase the region's biodiversity in collaboration with communities, landowners, agencies, and local government.

Research Aims and Objectives

My research project focused on addressing the four key elements designed to help ICBAN and its member Councils to review and promote the original entire vision for the Ulster Canal from Lough Erne to Lough Neagh, listed below:

1. Examining the existing remit of a key stakeholder with responsibility for developing the Canal, Waterways Ireland, which is the North-South Implementation Body for Inland Waterways set up by both governments on the island. This analysis examines how the existing remit might be expanded upon, and the significance of this.
2. Development of a business case for the economic regeneration of the border region, focusing upon:
 - a. Benefits to the primary impacted Council areas of Mid Ulster, ABC, and Monaghan, and the secondary impacted areas of Cavan, and Fermanagh, and Omagh;
 - b. Opportunities to promote greater positive cross-border mobilities in light of Brexit;

- c. The increasing public interest in environmental conservation;
 - d. The economic boost to the growing ecotourism sector (as recognized by Project Ireland 2040's *National Development Plan*).
3. Articulating the political dimension and context, which might help advance the vision.
 4. Considering the potential funding and financing opportunities for the northward expansion of the Canal.

I have devoted a chapter to each point, with a final section focused on SWOT Analysis and Key Recommendations.

TABLE 2. CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

PHASE	STATUS	DESCRIPTION
I	Complete	Phase I of the Ulster Canal restoration project has created 2.5km of new navigation along the River Finn between the Upper Lough Erne and Castle Saunderson, costing around €3 million.
II	Ongoing	Phase II of the project will add another 1km of new navigation to the route between Clones and Clonfad, with a projected cost of €12.2 million. Planning permission has been extended until May 2023, with site works expected to commence in August 2022, and additional infrastructure being completed by December 2023.
III	Planned	Phase III of the project is expected to be broken down into four stages to make it more financially manageable, with all planning permissions already in place in Fermanagh and Monaghan. This final phase will link Phase I and Phase II together via 10km of new navigable waterway between Clonfad and Castle Saunderson, projected to cost approximately €108 million. It will ultimately link Clones to the River Shannon via Lough Erne and the Shannon-Erne Waterway system and is thus expected to attract boating visitors from destinations as far as Limerick (<i>Department of the Taoiseach</i> , 2021).

Methodologies

As part of my internship, I have conducted archival research, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and ethnographic cognitive mapping, in order to: (1) identify best-practice examples from policy developments and similar existing projects, and; (2) formulate

a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis to support my subsequent recommendations in reimagining the project to help achieve its unrealized potential. The methods used will be expanded upon along each step.

Part 1: Waterways Ireland's Remit over the Ulster Canal

There have been two occasions, 2007 and 2015, when Waterways Ireland (WI) were given the remit by the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) to focus on the Ulster Canal, on behalf of the two governments. For the fuller examination of the development of Waterways Ireland's Ulster Canal remit, please refer to Appendix.

The first extension passed during the NSMC 5th plenary meeting in July 2007, giving WI responsibility over the canal restoration between Clones and Upper Lough Erne, could be related to the St. Andrews Agreement in October 2006, which considered "the potential for further North/South economic cooperation including proposals for joint investment initiatives" under the NSMC (*Gov.uk*, 2006: 14), and which also fit within the Irish government's National Development Plan. A 2008 feasibility study was then conducted by Tourism Development International and Ferguson & McIlveen, which favourably predicted vast regional development with full canal restoration. The second extension was approved on the 24th of February, 2015, stretching from the upper Lough Erne to the International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson in County Cavan (*Kildarestreet*, 2019) These changes can be linked to the November 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, and were also part of Ireland's 10-year plan for National Development (*Government of Ireland*, 2018: 30).

Potential for Extension

Early in 2021, a Department of Infrastructure spokesperson assured that; "The potential of any further extension...may be considered at future meetings including identification of costs and funding sources" (*Northern Sound*, 2021). Furthermore, "a spokesperson for Ministers O'Brien and Noonan said the two Sponsor Departments and Waterways Ireland are continuing to work on plans to realise the full potential of the Ulster Canal amenity" (*ibid*).

It has been stated by Minister Nichola Mallon on the 30th of November 2021; “Waterways Ireland has NSMC approval to explore the potential restoration of the stretch of the Ulster canal from Clones to Lough Neagh”, (*TheyWorkForYou*, 2021). ICBAN met with the Minister on 21st March, 2022, when she clarified that the current NSMC decision for restoration work relates to the existing stretch only. The Minister expressed support to investigate how a business case for the Canal’s expansion could be progressed, should funding become available. It thus appears that the governments could become more willing to allocate funding towards the canal’s completion if they were to receive an updated feasibility study for the northwards expansion of the project.

Hereby, I am inclined to suggest that the northwards project could be better pitched by stressing, for example, a need to promote greater cross-border mobilities in light of Brexit as well as the public interest in environmental conservation, and the economic opportunity that the growing ecotourism sector could bring (as recognized by Project Ireland 2040’s National Development Plan). This could encompass anything from cross-border boating and bicycle racing to history, nature and heritage tours, especially if the canal restoration one day reaches Belfast.

Part 2: Regional Economic Opportunities

Investment Returns

The socio-economic and health/environmental benefits of canal restorations are well documented; for example, a 2011 Inland Waterways Advisory Council’s report estimated that the baseline benefits of navigable inland waterways ranged from £109,000 to £730,000 per kilometre, while suggesting the figure to be even higher for canals (Hazenbergh and Bajwa-Patel, 2014: 13). The British Marine Federation Tourism report (2013: 3; as cited in *ibid*: 41) also highlighted that “canal boating, with its associated overnight trips, generates one of the highest levels of expenditure of all water-sports/recreation activities”. Another report suggests that for every £1 invested in the canal towpath network, there is a return of £7 of health benefits (*Canal & River Trust*, 2014: 11).

A 2021 empirical study valuing the environmental benefits of canals and canal restoration using house prices estimates that “canals generate land value uplift of £0.8–£0.9 billion in England” (Gibbons, Peng and Tang, 2021: 858). They further write;

Analysis of the effects of canal proximity for the whole of the England and Wales network indicates that households are willing to pay a 5% premium to live within 100m of a canal on average over the 2002–2017 period (*ibid*: 872).

Some canal restoration projects use these premium land markups in order to generate funding for their restoration works. For example, the Derby Canal in England benefits from the developer Wheeldon Brothers building more than one hundred houses on a large plot adjacent to the canal (Derby Canal, 2019). Accordingly, this helps the developer “reduce the required cost of building a balancing tank to deal with rainwater flooding; using the canal land as part of the ‘leisure’ provision and sell properties close to the canal for a premium, thereby generating more profit and providing a ‘free’ section of canal” (*ibid*). Meanwhile, its

Canal Cottages building “can be financed by development loans, as the asset being developed retains a commercial value and provides both tangible security and possible income generation to service the loan” (ibid).

Moreover, a 17-year longitudinal study on the health and mortality impacts of canal regeneration in North Glasgow found that “regeneration of urban blue and green assets can have a strong positive impact on health and health inequalities in urban settings” (Tieges et al, 2020: 10). They thus suggested that future urban development “should consider the impact on health of blue spaces in synergy with their use for economic development and climate adaptation” (ibid: 10), calling urban waterways “underutilised assets with potential impacts on climate adaptation as well as public health, social cohesion, and recreation” (ibid: 2).

The above studies show that canal restoration projects are continuously evidenced to be highly profitable not only in terms of economic potential, but also its links with social, environmental and health benefits. They thus arguably presage that the full Ulster Canal restoration has a great potential in becoming a lucrative flagship project for the entirety of the island of Ireland, which could attract both domestic and foreign investment. As promoted by Brian Cassells (2022); it is a project that “threatens nobody, but benefits everybody”, and it arguably requires a creative, unified force as will be demonstrated below.

The Interviews

After gathering information on existing best-practice examples, I have contacted and conducted twelve semi-structured interviews specifically tailored to the different key stakeholders in line with the paper’s key themes. The following interview participants have been identified as either highly informed, actively involved or personally impacted by the potential full restoration of the Ulster Canal, including:

TABLE 3. INTERVIEWEE LIST

TARKA KING	<i>Author and advocate for the Ulster Canal in association with Castle Leslie</i>
SAMANTHA “SAMMY” LESLIE	<i>Hotelier at Castle Leslie</i>
PAUL CLIFFORD	<i>Director of Services at Monaghan County Council</i>
PAT TREANOR	<i>Councillor at Monaghan County Council</i>
PARTICIPANT A	<i>Representative of a business development agency</i>
PARTICIPANT B	<i>Tour guide</i>
KATY HAYWARD	<i>Professor at Queen’s University Belfast</i>
JOE NELSON	<i>Director of The Waterways Community</i>
CHRIS MCCARNEY	<i>Biodiversity Information Coordinator</i>
CATHAL MCCALL	<i>Professor at Queen’s University Belfast</i>
BRIAN CASSELLS	<i>Former President of Inland Waterways Association of Ireland</i>
ANNE CORLEY	<i>Cassandra Hand Centre in Clones</i>

Mapping the Potential of a Repackaged Tourism Infrastructure

In order to help visualize the potential tourist ‘package’ that could be promoted through the full realization of the Ulster Canal, I have endeavoured to map out the most significant points of interest from Clones to Lough Neagh, and even touching upon Belfast (in connection to the existing small boat rentals). The access link to the full map can be found [here](#) as well as the list of references.

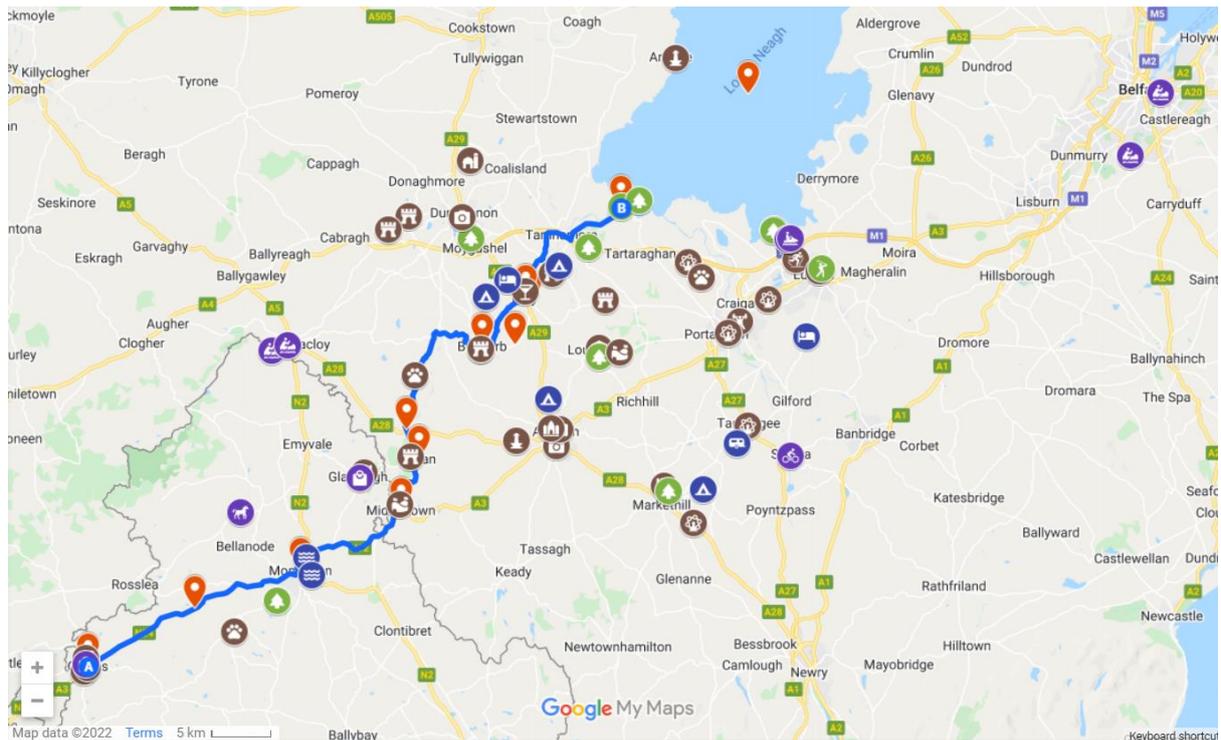


Figure.1 Ulster Canal Points of Interest

The distance between the furthest points from east to west is around a 40km radius, while the canal route between points A and B is approximately 80km in length. Considering that many feasibility studies of canal projects of this size tend to cover population samples of over 250,000 people, it would be arguably more beneficial to cover this entire catchment area in the future feasibility study, since the region here has a relatively low and widely scattered rural population, yet a rich offering of activities and points of interests. The 40km radius around the Ulster Canal's section passing through Benbulbin, for example, roughly encompasses a population in excess of 370,000 people (*FreeMapTools*, 2022). The proposed radius of interest is based on a consideration of lifestyle changes in travel, leisure, tourism and heritage interest over the past 10-15 years, and recognises the wealth of opportunities in the region. The 40km assessment is a starting point for consideration and should be examined further in developing any new business case for the northward expansion of the Ulster Canal.

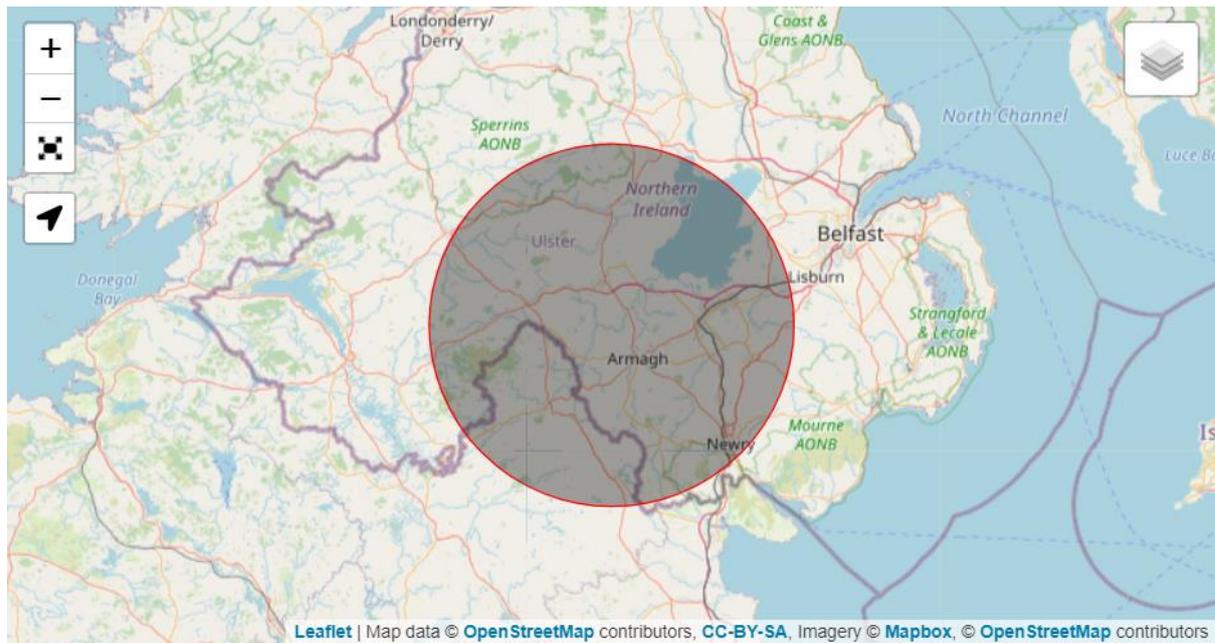


Figure.2 40km radius around Benburb (FreeMapTools, 2022)

For a better illustration of tourism here, see Appendices 2 & 3 for the case studies on Clones and Castle Leslie – these are summarised below. These two cases provide important learning points for potential opportunities that could be applied to the wider region, through realising the overall vision of the Ulster Canal.

2.a Regional Benefits: Clones

Socioeconomic Strengths & Opportunities

The Ulster Canal restoration that is currently underway in Clones is expected to generate new economic opportunities spurring the town's revival. This will lead to the creation of short-term jobs in planning, engineering, and construction works, among other sectors, as well as long-term employment through new tourism and small business opportunities. In turn, the manufacturing industry is expected to be attracted to the region by placing the town on the national map as a prime destination for investment (Treanor, 2022). This will prompt the town community to revitalise itself and encourage people here to remain, including students and young professionals who move away in pursuit of higher education (ibid). Therefore, the catchment area that is directly and indirectly benefitting from the canal works is much larger than Clones; reaching other communities such as Enniskillen, Dungannon, Omagh, Armagh and Cavan, as people often commute across the border for work (ibid). The overall area of beneficiaries may thus be as wide as 40km radius.

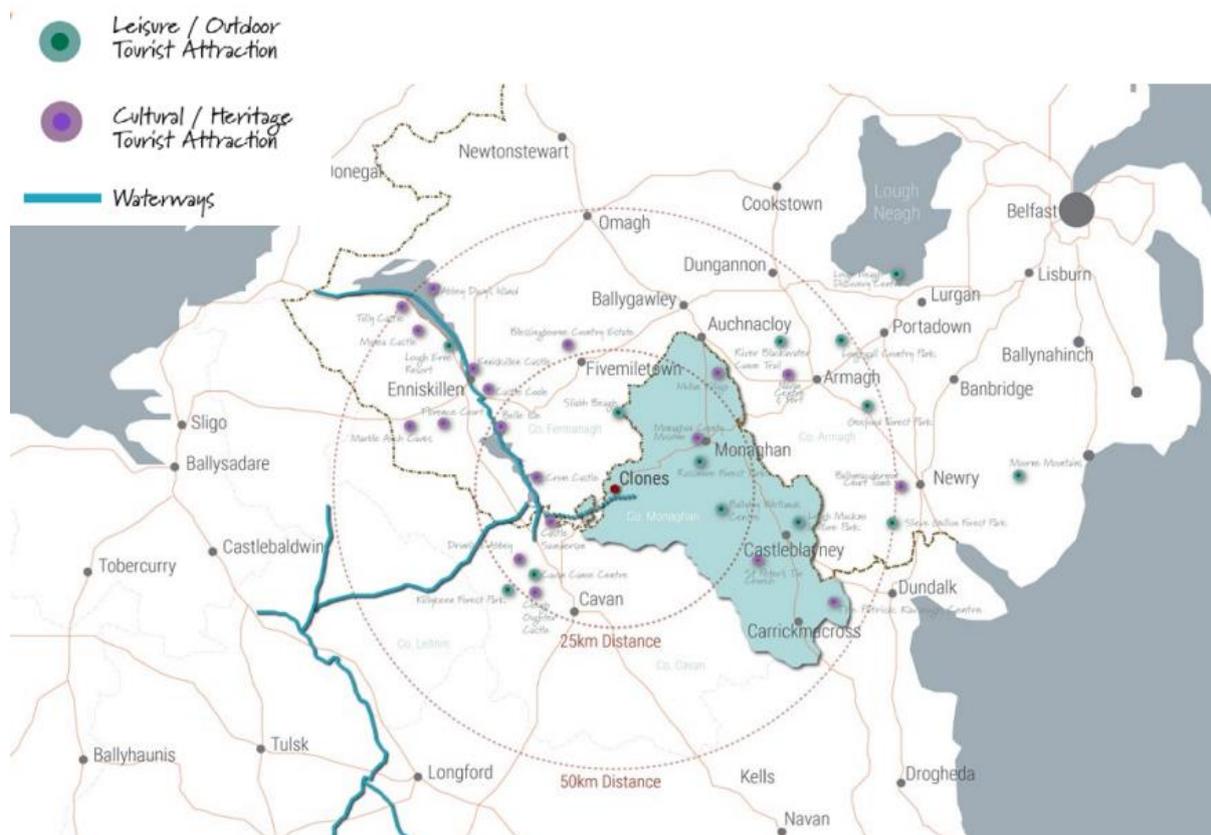


Figure.3 Spatial Analysis of Attractions in the 50km Radius from Clones (Paul Hogarth Company, 2021:8)

Ultimately, it is recognized that the enhancement of a regional tourism offering will benefit from links with destination brands including, Ireland's Ancient East, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, and Embrace a Giant Spirit. Further tourist links can be developed with destinations such as Slieve Beagh, Castle Leslie estate in Glaslough, Castle Bailey, and Lough Muckno, promoting the opportunity of a tourism master plan and packaging all the nature walks, potential camping, wildlife experiences including birdwatching and fishing, and historical trails together.

Important points for consideration and improvement, which may need to be addressed in order to reap the full benefits of the suggested tourist package, include:

1. The infrequent and badly connected transport links from Clones to nearby town hubs, including Enniskillen, Dublin and Belfast, which may discourage potential tourists travelling

without cars from visiting. A similar predicament might be found in other smaller towns along the route.

2. The need for overnight tourist facilities, which include camping/glamping sites, as well as basic accommodation for short-stay visitors and budget travellers.

3. An open channel of communication between the local government and voluntary and business sectors, could help to secure alternative funding opportunities, for example, through fundraising or approaching American investment opportunities, drawing upon the strong networks which canal enthusiasts have built and developed.

These ideas should hopefully provide key learning points for other towns along the extended canal route northwards, including the Council areas of Mid-Ulster and Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon, as well as the secondary impacted areas of Cavan and Fermanagh/Omagh. For the full Case Study, please see Appendix 2.

2.a Regional Benefits: Castle Leslie

Socio-economic Strengths & Opportunities

As expanded in Appendix 3, Castle Leslie sits in a strategic position between two canal-harbours. Before the onset of Covid, annual visitor numbers were around 100,000, and current plans are to attract between 150,000 and 200,000 tourists. The Leslie Family's castle estate is both historically and culturally important for the Central Border Region, and it enjoyed renewed popularity after hosting the wedding of Sir Paul McCartney and Heather Mills back in 2002. The restoration of the castle estate has in itself created nine small businesses from its customer clusters. Moreover, as told by Sammy Leslie (2022), the castle had to continue paying higher business tax rates due to its location even after the historical canal and railway had closed, suggesting that any proximity to water is deemed commercially attractive.

There are several potential tourist packages that could be created through the restoration of the Ulster Canal. For one, the Castle Leslie Estate would be very interested in supporting a transport loop between the reopened canal route with a historic railway, alongside horseback riding trails and bicycle paths. This would not only maximize visitor time spent in the region, but also help generate economic opportunities for local businesses.

The castle estate is also partnered with several other estates in the region on both sides of the border, creating a shared network of tourism infrastructure. For example, the estate has filed an application for EU LIFE programme funding in collaboration with three other estates, namely the Tynan Abbey, Caledon Estates and Enniscoe House, to work together in rewilding ancient woodlands across 300 acres of land. Entitled 'Biodiversity and Rewilding', the project, if successful, would be a flagship for rewilding in Ireland, with it aims to "create

the conditions for ecosystems evoking those of the ancient Kingdom of Oriel to re-emerge, recover and flourish in a changing environment” (*Castle Leslie, 2022*).

The Estate promotes tourism collaboration across the border, rather than competition, with the internet era now driving people’s free will in choosing their holiday destinations. Cross-border tourism partnerships are seen to be to everybody’s mutual benefit. The most important ideas to be taken away from this case study are as follows:

Cultural & Historical

1. As articulated by Sammy Leslie (2022), the Central Border Region ought to be considered as a massive hub of social history, architecture, artisan skills, and traditions, making it an “incredible microcosm of heritage, different from anywhere else in the country”, and highlighting everything from its troubled border history to the conservation of famine walls. In turn, the Ulster Canal restoration, could be seen in this regard as a project that links everything together, from the historic railway walking route to heritage trails.
2. The Ulster Canal crosses the land of *Airgíalla*, the Kingdom of Oriel, with its rich folk traditions, and provides untapped educational and tourism opportunities for the Central Border Region. The kingdom spanned the counties of Armagh, Monaghan, Louth, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Londonderry, with its main hubs being Armagh and Clogher.
3. Several traditional Irish woollen mills in Caledon, Tyrone; Lisbellaw, Fermanagh; Foxford in Dungannon; and Mills & Waterfalls in Benburb, created a highly profitable network along the Ulster Canal as they used water from the canal harbours.

Environmental

4. The nearby area is significant geologically thanks to it sitting atop the Carlingford Lough, a glacial fjord, which could be further exploited by the tourism packaging. The area is also classed as an Important Bird Area.
5. Perhaps most importantly, the area of the Central Border Region can also be geologically classed as a 'true border' as the northern part of the island once belonged to the tectonic plate that is now mainly represented in North America, whereas the south of Ireland lay beyond an ocean and belonged to the African tectonic plate, around 450 million years ago. As the two plates shifted against each other, a mountain-building phase developed, known as the Caledonian, and the two parts of Ireland finally merged about 440-400 million years ago, the impact of which is still evident in Ireland today. Again, the Ulster Canal crosses this 'true border', a story which could be developed alongside the ecotourism industry.

2.b Overall Regional Benefits

As aforementioned, the above case studies help demonstrate the potential tourist offerings and opportunities in realising the full vision of the Ulster Canal as a flagship cross-border regional project, but the list is by no means exhaustive. Clones has an important role to play as a key point on the route and it is of course the focus of Irish Government investment in the Canal, whilst Castle Leslie is one of a number of important estates and tourism providers adjacent to the waterway.

As pointed out by Brian Cassells (2022), the Ulster Canal is the ‘missing link’ to a land of opportunities all across the island of Ireland, with potential to connect navigable waterways all the way from Limerick to Belfast and beyond. The project is also adjacent to the untapped gateway boating haven of Ulster’s “inland sea”, which is Lough Neagh. There are reportedly 1,600 private boats and 400 public boats located on the Shannon-Erne Waterway (ibid), and these can be attracted northwards by developing the unclaimed prize that is the link to Lough Neagh. It has been suggested that the development of Lough Neagh may be difficult due to the concerns over private ownership of its bed-and-soil by the Earl of Shaftesbury, however, interviewees believe that the Earl could be agreeable to opening the Lough to development, as a lucrative and mutual business opportunity.

Cassells (2022) also pointed to the fact that the Lagan Canal in Lisburn had initially little development in infrastructure, until people started adapting their canal-facing backyards, installing their own jetties and bringing small boats back to the Lagan. Another example of unrealised potential is that adapting a single M1 bridge could open up 12 miles of waterways for boats, canoes, walks, etc.

Blackwatertown in County Armagh is a potential gateway to a plethora of wildlife, birdwatching and fishing activities with herons and kingfishers being abound by the

Blackwater River. The town also houses the Blackwater Disabled Barge Project, which organises free educational trips along a scenic river route on a specialized boat with wheelchair accessibility.

Another underdeveloped tourist offering can be found at Benburb, home to Benburb Castle and its Old Mill Buildings. This is an area that is also rich in history, being the site of the 1646 Battle of Benburb and the 1607 Flight of the Earls, which changed the course of Irish history. Although its part of the Ulster Canal route may seem difficult to reinstate due to its seven locks, Cassells (2022) proposes an investment into a rotating boat lift, inspired by The Falkirk Wheel in Edinburgh, (this was also part of plans to regenerate central Scotland's canals and to reconnect Glasgow with Edinburgh, with around 400,000 people visiting the wheel annually). As the only other boat lift in the UK is found at the Anderton Boat Lift in England, Northern Ireland could greatly benefit from having the third only boat lift in the UK, with potential uses helping to repay the construction costs involved.

Lastly, it is important to note that Northern Ireland's tourist industry may be too reliant on promoting certain attractions such as the Giant Causeway, when other attractions can point to higher visitor numbers. For instance, the Lagan towpath, which provides a cultural, social and biodiversity link between Belfast and Lisburn, saw 1.3 million user numbers in 2020, making the Lagan Valley Regional Park easily the most visited outdoor attraction in Northern Ireland (*Lagan Valley*, 2020: 7). Thus, as emphasized by Cassells (2022), the Ulster Canal joins two communities and two countries, and in the case of Northern Ireland, it also demonstrates that there is more to its regional heritage than the Giant Causeway. To reiterate, the Ulster Canal is a project that threatens nobody, but benefits everybody.

Part 3: Political Dimensions

As purported by Prof. Cathal McCall (2022), the NSMC could have been a great forum for the development of North-South relations but historically, there have been difficulties for the NSMC to progress initiatives when there have been political disagreements, causing some interruptions to their work progression. The Ulster Canal is however still seen as a less politically contentious issue than other projects, so both governments need to continue to find ways to help ensure its progress is not stalled by political disagreements impacting on North-South working.

A similar view has been echoed by Prof. Katy Hayward (2022), who noted that the NSMC is particularly vulnerable to political dynamics that can also disrupt its meetings. Other stalled projects such as the Narrow Water Bridge, from Co Down to Co Louth, may also highlight the vulnerability of North-South cross-border projects, which require not just a political will and financial capacity for their completion, but also the patience to overcome various localized difficulties on both sides of the border, as experienced during the Irish government's financial crash in 2008-2010.

The silver lining here, however, is that the Ulster Canal restoration project does not carry the same 'political baggage' as other all-island initiatives, and as strongly put by Mr Brian Cassells (2022), it is in fact a project that "hurts no-one, but benefits everyone". Indeed, McCall also recognized that certain cross-border projects have a good chance of success so long as they secure funding, especially from the EU, and are handled at the local Council level, for example, road and bridge constructions projects, community-building peace programmes, or projects building social capital. As the full Ulster Canal restoration will carry the spirit of community-building social enterprise, with an emphasis on greening the region,

the existing risks from political opposition may be low. The greatest challenge, as put forward by most interviews, lies in securing the funding for its continuation.

The Challenges of Brexit

The work of the North-South Implementation bodies, including Waterways Ireland, is partially covered under the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland - meaning that it includes only some of the EU legal acts cited as directly or indirectly facilitating cooperation. One of the “areas *not* covered by the Protocol and for which *none* of the EU legal acts cited as facilitating cooperation in the Mapping Exercise are [found] in the scope of the Protocol” include the management and regulation of water resources (Whitten, 2022: 4). This includes areas such as water pollution and water catchment work, water quality and water regulation.

Other relevant impacted areas not covered by the Protocol may impact the implementation, health & safety monitoring, and business operational strategies in connection with tourism infrastructure in the CBR (Whitten, 2022: 6). These include international authorisations for bus and coach services, ferries, river basin management plans, flood risk management, habitat and wild birds directive, and mobile roaming—all of which may impact the implementation, health & safety monitoring, and business operational strategies in connection with the tourism infrastructure of the CBR (ibid: 6). For example, it may affect policies regarding boating requirements, licences and/or travel authorization, which would then make cross-border tourism more challenging, particularly when navigating a waterway across a non-tangible border.

Prior to Brexit, policies regarding water management were largely underpinned by a series of EU laws, including the Water Framework Directive, the Floods Directive, Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, and the Drinking Water Directive. Nevertheless, the two North-South Implementation Bodies - Waterways Ireland and Loughs Agency - “continue to

operate notwithstanding the changed legal and policy context in respect of water regulation following UK withdrawal from the EU” (Whitten, 2022: 11). Therefore, in practice, it may be concluded that the changes to “North-South cooperation in matters relating to water quality and management of resources will likely continue on relying on the continued application of EU-derived laws” (ibid: 12), even in the future post-Brexit political landscape.

Alas, Brexit may lead to another difficulty for the CBR in terms of accessing alternative funding to EU sources. Prof. Hayward (2022) warned of the increasing doubt around the autonomy of Northern Ireland when it comes to investments in cross-border projects because the decisions that will be made for the use of the Shared Prosperity Fund, for example, will be primarily in London.

The bottom line is that common EU membership allowed for the depoliticization of cross-border initiatives as it effectively streamlined various supervisory and governing processes enacted by the two governments, in addition to giving access to various funding resources. However, the process has been made more difficult now that the UK has entered a different regulatory regime. Still, these difficulties will be felt all across the board, not just exclusively by the future prospect of the Ulster Canal restoration project.

Some Potential Benefits of Brexit

Both Sammy Leslie and Tarka King (both in 2022) have offered an interesting alternative perspective on Brexit creating an unexpected opportunity for the CBR by, in fact, highlighting the existence of the border to foreign tourists. As the canal crosses the border four times, Brexit creates a novel issue which could be exploited by the tourism industry, in that the idea of crossing the border could be commercialised, since the invisible border could be described as rather anticlimactic. Or, to paraphrase, Americans might want to see the border marked clearly between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland if they are to

visit Caledon in County Tyrone say. In other words, the renewed politicisation of the border may lead it to become a tourist destination in itself. A similar exercise has already been realised in Clones, which reintroduced the Irish pound, or 'punt', into its local currency, finding strength in highlighting the differences and making its community stand out from the rest of the island.

Therefore, it may be considered that the time is right for a project like the Ulster Canal, as it would not only be a positive show of cross-border community relations that will allow for people to learn to live together through and despite Brexit, but also become a landmark project to be used as a shining example of inter-governmental cooperation in moving forward on Brexit.

Part 4: Funding Opportunities

This is an example list of possible funding opportunities, but it is not intended to be comprehensive. Alternative means of funding can also involve community fundraising, support from larger businesses (e.g., Co-Op has donated money to canal restoration before) and wealthy private donors. As suggested by Tarka King, the Irish diaspora in the United States can also be a viable source for seeking investment.

TABLE 4. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

FUNDING BODY	PEACEPLUS PROGRAMME
DETAILS	A new EU funding programme “designed to support peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, building upon the work of the previous PEACE and INTERREG Programmes” (SEUPB, 2020). Apart from highlighting peace-building efforts, it also considers the importance of projects that will contribute positively to the economies and building prosperity in the post-Brexit environment.
CRITERIA	Must fit the outlined themes for project ideas, as exemplified below.
AVAILABLE FUNDS	€265-47m depending on the theme broken down into smaller investment areas (see SUPB, 2020: 27), There are a range of investment areas which might help support initiatives associated with the canal, around tourism, heritage, environmental conservation, rural regeneration etc. However, it is unlikely that the programme will support any capital investment in the blueway.
APPLICATION OPENING / CLOSING FUNDING BODY	TBA. Stakeholders may now register their interest in specific themes and investment areas by emailing peaceplus@seupb.eu . More information here .
	SHARED ISLAND FUND
DETAILS	The Government announced the Shared Island Fund in Budget 2021, “with €500m in capital funding available between 2021-25, ring-fenced for investment in collaborative North/South projects” (<i>Government of Ireland, 2021</i>). In the revised National Development Plan, published in October 2021, the Government made a commitment to extend the Shared Island Fund out to 2030, with a budget of €1bn. The Government is making allocations from the Shared Island Fund to enable delivery of the commitments and objectives for a Shared Island, which are set out in the Programme for Government.
CRITERIA	Funding is allocated to Government Departments on the basis of approved collaborative North/South projects that implement Programme for Government commitments and objectives on Shared Island. Policy-led Departments then make the assessment on projects and consider if a capital allocation from the Shared Island Fund should be sought. Their criteria include a) having a clear North/South basis,

	which contributes strategically to the commitments and objectives on a shared island in the programme for Government; b) partnership with the Executive / UK Government / Local Authority / European Union or other; and c) viable sectoral business case for a proposal.
AVAILABLE FUNDS	N/A; up to government departments' discretion.
APPLICATION OPENING / CLOSING	TBA; more information here .
FUNDING BODY	LEVELLING UP FUND
DETAILS	Investment in infrastructure that improves everyday life. Projects should be aligned to and support Net Zero goals and work with the natural environment.
CRITERIA	Judged by 'characteristics of the place', 'deliverability', 'strategic fit with local and fund priorities' and 'value for money'. More details here .
AVAILABLE FUNDS	Project bids of up to £50 million seem acceptable. There are multiple rounds of funding. A flat £125,000 of capacity funding will be allocated to all eligible local authorities. This capacity funding will be provided with the primary intention of supporting the relevant local authorities to develop their bids for later rounds of the Fund.
APPLICATION OPENING / CLOSING	First round closed in June 2021. Second round has not opened yet.
FUNDING BODY	COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP FUND
DETAILS	£150 million total fund for the UK communities to take ownership of assets and amenities at risk of closure. It will run for 4 years.
CRITERIA	Supports communities to buy or take over local community assets and amenities at risk of being lost and run them as community-owned businesses. Not for local councils or private individuals. To be eligible for funding, applicants will have to demonstrate they are accountable to the local place and/or community they represent, how they will operate for the benefit of the wider community in tangible ways, and how they will use the asset to deliver community impact.
AVAILABLE FUNDS	Up to £250,000 match-funded capital will be available for most asset types and up to £50,000 (and no more than 20% of the total capital costs applied for through the Fund) is available for project development costs and post-acquisition support.
APPLICATION OPENING / CLOSING	The third round is now opening in May 2022 - more info here . The fund will run until 2024/25 and there will be at least 8 bidding rounds in total.
FUNDING BODY	SHARED PROSPERITY PROGRAMME
DETAILS	It provides £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025. In Northern Ireland, the UK Government is considering options for development of a Northern Ireland investment plan to reflect the particular needs of its economy and society.
CRITERIA	Northern Ireland/UK-based.

AVAILABLE FUNDS	N/A
APPLICATION OPENING / CLOSING	TBA. The ‘pre-launch guidance’ was published on 2 February 2022 so it has not launched yet, nor has there been any date announced. More details here .
FUNDING BODY	NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND
DETAILS	Since 1994, HLF has awarded over £192m to more than 380 waterways projects, including £25m that helped save the Kennet and Avon Canal, to a modest £5,000 towards the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Society, making them a viable source of funding.
CRITERIA	Funding a huge variety of projects as detailed here . A comprehensive list of recent funding decisions for projects in Northern Ireland is also available for study here .
AVAILABLE FUNDS	Between £250,000 and £5 million is available.
APPLICATION OPENING / CLOSING	N/A - see the guide here .
FUNDING BODY	ULSTER GARDEN VILLAGES
DETAILS	The Society primarily allocates funds to projects within Northern Ireland that will have a positive impact in the areas of health, disadvantaged sections of our society, young people, culture and heritage, and environment. Past funded projects included the National Trust and the Gobbins Coastal and Cliff Path.
CRITERIA	Northern Ireland-only; culture/heritage & environment.
AVAILABLE FUNDS	Case by case. During 2018 they made donations of £1,460,013 to charitable causes compared to £1,016,277 (2017) .
APPLICATION OPENING / CLOSING	Latest funding round closed on 26th April 2022; must check the ‘News’ section of their website to monitor when the next round opens.
FUNDING BODY	THE ASSOCIATION FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY
DETAILS	Previously funded projects included the unique graving dock lock on the Stover Canal and Bowbridge Lock at Stroud, the Saul Junction swing bridge, the Wappenshall canal warehouses and canal boats such as the lighter Susan - it can also be used towards restoring any of the key heritage buildings along the canal route. The grant must represent at least 20% of the total project costs.
CRITERIA	UK-based; capital funding only.
AVAILABLE FUNDS	£20,000 max.
APPLICATION OPENING / CLOSING	The closing date for all application is 31 st of March in each year. More details here .
FUNDING BODY	THE WOLFSTON FOUNDATION
DETAILS	The grant supports organisations managing sites of outstanding historic, architectural and cultural significance and that have a clear

	emphasis on public access and engagement. For landscapes, parks and gardens, a case should be made that the site has a national significance.
CRITERIA	UK-only; conservation and restoration work to sites of outstanding historic, architectural and cultural significance. Applicants must be a registered or exempt charity (or equivalent) or local authority. Project must be listed as Grade A, B+ or a Scheduled Monument (Northern Ireland).
AVAILABLE FUNDS	£15,000 - £100,000
APPLICATION OPENING / CLOSING	Decisions made in June and December annually. For the next funding round: Open to Stage 1 applications: 14 May Stage 1 application deadline: 1 July Stage 2 application deadline: 1 September Funding decision: December. More details here .
FUNDING BODY	HERITAGE IMPACT FUND
DETAILS	A loan that can be used towards archaeological restoration; for example, of one of the key historical sites along the canal such as the lock keeper cottages. The HIF can offer incentivised terms to provide greater assistance to those organisations and projects that will deliver enhanced local economic and community impact. They also provide assistance in helping organisations assess the impact of their project during the application process, and beyond. It is a joint initiative with contributions from the Department for Communities Northern Ireland, among others.
CRITERIA	UK-only; must inquiry with the AHF's Investment Team here .
AVAILABLE FUNDS	They offer loans from £25,000 to £500,000 for up to five years with tailored terms with flexible and competitive interest rates for impactful projects. The headline interest rate for secured loans is 6% above Bank of England base rate.
APPLICATION OPENING / CLOSING	N/A

Part 5: SWOT Analysis and Key Recommendations

A SWOT analysis is hereby presented on the key strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats for the project. The key recommendations take these points into account and draw on the aforementioned learning points, the feedback from the interviews, and the secondary research information that has been gathered.

TABLE 5. SWOT ANALYSIS FOR THE FULL CANAL RESTORATION

<p>STRENGTHS</p>	<p>Socio-economic: The Ulster Canal is a great example of a project which opens the connection not just on the water, but one that follows the water, with greenways walking and cycling routes supporting the blueway. As pointed out by Joe Nelson of the Waterways Community, the reopening of the waterway increases boating tourism with the rest of Ireland and draw its greatest socio-economic benefits from links with other recreational activities and sustainable transport; turning the Canal into a ‘destination’ rather than just an ‘attraction’.</p> <p>Cultural/Historical Heritage: There is a vast offering of cultural and historical heritage site within the 40km radius of the Ulster Canal, making tourist packages widely accessible.</p> <p>Environmental Conservation: Walking, cycling and boating will help ensure that the growth of weeds can be controlled, keeping maintenance costs down in the long-term.</p> <p>Political: Despite being considered a cross-border project, the Ulster Canal does not appear to carry the “political baggage” (McCall, 2022) to render it a political risk, meaning that there could be very little political opposition towards its fulfilment.</p>
<p>WEAKNESSES</p>	<p>Socioeconomic: Infrequent or badly connected public transport in the more rural parts of the CBR could discourage tourists without cars. Moreover, there is a need for parallel investments in tourist facilities such as budget accommodation for short-stay visitors, bicycle rental shops, and paddleboard / kayak / canoe / and rowing boat rentals, especially on the northern side of the border.</p> <p>Cultural/Historical Heritage: Many historical points of interest will require restoration before they can become viable supporting tourist attractions for canal users.</p> <p>Environmental Conservation: Some of the more neglected parts of the original canal route are cut off or disturbed by (sometimes illegal) structures built over it, which may become a problem for the engineers. For example, one of the bridges on the canal route that has been more recently put in place is too low for many commercial boats to pass.</p> <p>Political: Sectoral Relationships - Enhanced working relationships and communications between local government and the voluntary sector can help strengthen efforts to raise funding from more</p>

	sources, to project a positive unified approach, and enhance advocacy and lobbying initiatives.
OPPORTUNITIES	<p>Socioeconomic The promotion of slow tourism opportunities will increase cross-border mobilities and help thwart negatives associated with Brexit. Economically, it will also highlight the towns along the canal route as being potential areas of investment, even in areas outside of tourism, such as by attracting the manufacturing and education sectors to the region.</p> <p>Cultural/Historical Heritage: The CBR offers an unexploited microcosm of cultural heritage, including the Kingdom of Oriel, and places the Ulster Canal at the centre of renewed efforts to promote this.</p> <p>Environmental Conservation: The wider region has various protected wildlife areas and the project itself has a low-carbon footprint, thus making it more marketable towards various funding/investment bodies and government development plans. As the route of the canal lends itself to the geological story of how Ireland was formed through the coming together of two tectonic plates, joining the northern part of Ireland with the southern part, this could provide opportunities for educational tourism.</p> <p>Political: There is a unique opportunity to promote the border, with its tangible invisibility to foreign tourists and visitors, curious to learn about the history and its prominence in the unfolding story of Brexit.</p>
THREATS	<p>Socio-economic: If the full canal restoration does not take place, then sections of the canal to the south of the border won't enjoy the full benefits that are possible. Moreover, increasing costs for construction and labour can present challenges around funding and promoting sustainability.</p> <p>Cultural/Historical Heritage: Neglect and dereliction could affect some culturally or historically significant sites if no conservation efforts take place, which would affect the tourist offering.</p> <p>Environmental Conservation: There are not many environmental concerns that do not already come with simple solutions, as the canal restoration is largely expected to improve the regional biodiversity by, for example, cleaning out the littered areas of canal. There will be consequences for fauna, flora and wildlife in the short-term due to canal works. Any lack of health and safety measures, e.g., on Lough Neagh, could occasionally lead to fatal boating accidents.</p> <p>Political: Brexit may also lead to differing environmental standards and practices being introduced in NI and Ireland. The management and regulation of water resources is not covered by the NI Protocol, which could cause problems in the future if the UK and EU standards drastically change from each other. Political disagreements and impasses in the working of the NSMC, could impacts on policy and funding for such a joint cross-jurisdictional project.</p>

Key Recommendations

In light of my SWOT analysis, and the generally overwhelming enthusiasm towards the prospect of full Ulster Canal restoration from the interviewees, I would like to present the key stakeholders with the following 8 key recommendations:

TABLE 6. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

PHASED APPROACH TO FUNDING	Given the rise in costs associated with materials, labour and energy, it may be prudent to consider a phased approach to funding. This was recommended in the early 2000s as part of the business case being promoted then. We see this approach being taken towards the delivery of Phases 1-3 currently and with other inland waterways projects on the island. This phased approach can also be taken to delivering sections alternating between the northern and southern ends, in turn fostering a collaborative effort by both governments to coordinating delivery.
PROMOTING A WIDER REGIONAL IMPACT	Since the previous business cases completed in 2008, there have been societal changes and particularly with regard to travel and connectivity. The world has become a smaller place quickly with advances in infrastructure, vehicle quality, and public transport, thereby improving comfort and reducing travel times. The Covid pandemic has encouraged people to be more culturally curious about facilities, amenities, attractions, places of interest and things to do that are more local. People are now more inclined to travel longer distances more easily and regularly in search of leisure and well-being opportunities. It therefore can be argued that the corridor or radius of interest which was set at 12km during the 2007 study could now be extended to at least 40km. This provides a larger immediate catchment population (c. 370,000) that can service and be serviced by the canal's development, in turn aiding the project's sustainability and appeal as an investment opportunity.
OPEN UP THE CONNECTIVITY	If the canal restoration is anticipated to take years to complete, it may be practical to start raising funding for associated initiatives - through smaller grant applications and fundraising - towards restoring the historical sites along the canal route, promoting water-based activities on the smaller sections of the route, and working to join the communities together. An important example to date is in the investment into associated greenways. This may in turn enhance the project's positive appeal to governments to contribute funding towards completing outstanding sections. Please note that this is not a new or

	<p>radical approach by any means; the Lagan Canal and the Grand Canal both took this route, with local volunteers even beginning to dredge up the riverbed themselves before the government took over the restoration works.</p>
<p>SET UP A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO LOBBY THE GOVERNMENTS AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERESTS</p>	<p>Consolidate partnerships and build external networks by forging alliances between the local government, voluntary and business sectors. This will help build concerted efforts and momentum in garnering enthusiasm towards the project. A Trust may also be a good structure to help secure and use funding that comes from a variety of sources.</p>
<p>CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF FUNDING</p>	<p>Many key stakeholders in the voluntary sector have wide networks of potential funding contacts and private investors, to help secure funding for the project and associated elements and initiatives. For instance, as a flagship cross-border project, the Ulster Canal has potential to attract the Irish diaspora in the United States to help contribute towards the restoration.</p>
<p>PARTNER WITH A LOCAL UNIVERSITY FOR THE SOCIOECONOMIC FEASIBILITY STUDY</p>	<p>Following the example of the Canal & River Trust partnering with the University of Northampton to review the impact of waterway restoration, it may be more beneficial to conduct a feasibility study in partnership with a local university, such as by recruiting PhD research students with backgrounds in relevant fields, such as economics or geography, to access a more varied range of resources. It may also be more cost efficient.</p>
<p>SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AND/OR VOLUNTARY OPPORTUNITIES ALONG THE CANAL ROUTE TO DEMONSTRATE ITS SOCIAL BENEFITS</p>	<p>In order to put greater political pressure on regional government to push forward with the northwards canal extension, it may be beneficial to demonstrate social involvement and engagement with the canal by implementing some educational and/or volunteering programmes in strategic points. For example, it may be a good idea to partner with small local charities working with vulnerable adults or children to conduct outdoor activities such as learning about water safety or recognising wildlife; organising a hand-crafted boat race; selling food, crafts, or conducting other social enterprise projects; picking up litter to help clean up the local environment, etc. This may further help strengthen the local communities in the region.</p>
<p>APPLY FOR A BLUEWAY ACCREDITATION</p>	<p>At present, the Lagan Navigation Trust is the only organisation in Northern Ireland to have been awarded a Blueway accreditation from the Blueways Ireland Steering Group. This carries the benefits of denoting a) brand recognition; b) quality standard; c) support, promotion and funding, and which may become the key part of extending the Waterways Ireland's remit towards the Ulster Canal by evidencing its regional significance. Having such a standard can help prompt for better regulations, management and development of Lough</p>

Neagh. More information on the benefits and application process can be found [here](#).

Final Remarks

The Central Border Region offers a wealth of opportunities to help bolster the case for Ulster Canal extension. The best-practice examples and case studies, interviews, and analysis of findings have informed the above recommendations and are designed to help support the ambition of realising the original wider vision.

Appendix 1:

Waterways Ireland's Existing Remit over the Ulster Canal and the Potential for its Future Extension.

Hereby, the paper offers a careful examination of the Waterways Ireland's existing remit and the potential for its future northward expansion by analysing the decision-making processes that contextualized the previous two mandates for the North-South Body.

What is the existing remit of Waterways Ireland?

Waterways Ireland (WI) is currently responsible for the following waterways: Barrow Navigation, Erne System, Grand Canal, Lower Bann Navigation, Royal Canal, Shannon-Erne Waterway and Shannon Navigation, amounting to approximately 1,000km of navigable waterways (*Waterways Ireland*, 2021). Its programme delivery is approved by the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in Ireland.

WI remit extension over the Ulster Canal in 2007

The WI's remit was officially extended by the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) during its 5th plenary meeting in July 2007 to "include responsibility for the restoration of the Ulster Canal between Clones and Upper Lough Erne" (*Waterways Ireland*, 2020a: 7).

Although the exact reason for the extension was not specified, it could be deduced that this is related to the St Andrews Agreement in October 2006, which considered "the potential for further North/South economic cooperation including proposals for joint investment initiatives" under the NSMC (*Gov.uk*, 2006: 14).

Subsequently, the Irish government "announced plans for significant investment...in strategic North/South projects" as part of its National Development Plan, launched on 23rd of January

2007 (*British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly*, 2009: 8). This was achieved “in the light of the Irish Government’s offer to cover the full capital costs of the project” (*NSMC*, 2007: 2).

In response, NI Assembly’s Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness pronounced on 18th of September, 2007, that the Executive have also agreed to help “progress that restoration and share the ensuing costs of the restored and reopened section, when it is complete” (*NI Assembly*, 2007a). However, he also stressed that “that decision does not confer any commitment on the Irish Government or the Executive to fund further restoration of the Ulster Canal” (*ibid*).

On 24th of April 2008, Julie McClean of PwC presented a feasibility study conducted by Tourism Development International and Ferguson & McIlveen to the NI Assembly, which concluded that the regeneration would provide significant economic benefit for the six-mile corridor either side of the canal. The study covered the area with a population of 100,000, including Armagh City, Dungannon, Monaghan and Clones, which may help explain why the Waterways Ireland’s remit extension enveloped these particular areas. The study estimated the cost of full canal restoration at around £126 million in January 2006, to which NI Assembly Deputy Chairperson David McNarry responded that; “An investor would not accept an estimated cost figure of £125 million that had been worked out two years ago.” (*NI Assembly*, 2008).

Hereby, it is important to note that WI’s recurrent or maintenance funding is “provided by grants from money voted by the Northern Ireland Assembly and the House of the Oireachtas”, of which 15% is provided by the Assembly in Northern Ireland, and 85% by the Irish Government, reflecting the current distribution of waterways in each jurisdiction” (*Waterways Ireland*, 2020b: 7). For the northward expansion of the Ulster Canal, the Irish government may thus expect Northern Ireland to cover the full capital costs, since the

Republic provided funding of €12.2 million through the Shared Island Fund and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund for Phase 2 of the project (Clonfad to Clones) (*NSMC*, 2021: 2).

Indeed, back on the 6th of November, 2007, Minister Nigel Poots pointed out that the Republic had agreed to “open the new 12km stretch of the Ulster Canal from Enniskillen to Clones, 60% of which is in Northern Ireland and 100% of which is being paid for by the Republic” (*NI Assembly*, 2007b). He thus expressed the hope that after also agreeing for the Republic to bring the canal from Clones to Caledon, the Northern Ireland administration would “take it from Caledon right down to Lough Neagh, and open it up onwards from Lough Neagh to Belfast, Coleraine and Newry, and reinstate the canal infrastructure” (*ibid*).

The 2015 remit extension

On the 24th of February, 2015, the Irish Government approved to restore a 2.5km canal stretch from the upper Lough Erne to the International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson in County Cavan (*Kildarestreet*, 2019). The NSMC then focused on progressing Phase 1 and the development of a Greenway during its 10th of June 2015 meeting (*Waterways Ireland*, 2020a: 7). These changes come under the November 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, which “contained a number of commitments to provide support and funding for North-South infrastructure projects”, as also part of its 10-year plan for National Development (*Government of Ireland*, 2018: 30). The Irish government, together with the Northern Ireland Executive, also agreed to review and identify “options for the future development of the Narrow Water Bridge and Ulster Canal projects” (*ibid*).

In the Ulster Canal Greenway’s *DRAFT Strategy*, published in April 2017, it was noted that the final section of the route from Benburb to Lough Neagh will “require a strategic level assessment, as the canal itself terminates at Charlemont” and therefore, “there is no towpath

or bank to follow from there onward” (*Waterways Ireland*, 2017: 29). They thus envisioned to “continue on to provide the greenway with a logical end destination, such as the Discovery Centre at Lough Neagh”, which it noted as “the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles...and the third biggest in Europe” (*ibid*). This area was also described as a “haven for wildlife and home to a wealth of flora and fauna” (*ibid*).

Noteworthy, the project saw a growing push for funding in anticipation of Brexit’s effects on the Border Region, as voiced by Minister Darragh O’Brien TD while welcoming the announcement of new government-approved €6 million in funding from the Shared Island Fund for the continued restoration of the Ulster Canal and the Greenway on 18th of December, 2020. Later, they bestowed a further €1 million for Phase 3 of the project to allow for engineering works to get underway, bringing the total government investment to over €13 million as of 28th April 2021 (*Department of the Taoiseach*, 2021a).

How could the existing remit be further extended?

Earlier last year, a Department of Infrastructure spokesperson assured that; “The potential of any further extension...may be considered at future meetings including identification of costs and funding sources” (*Northern Sound*, 2021). Furthermore, “a spokesperson for Ministers O’Brien and Noonan said the two Sponsor Departments and Waterways Ireland are continuing to work on plans to realise the full potential of the Ulster Canal amenity”, adding that “while there is no intention to request NSMC approval for any further restoration at this point in time, the Ministers will examine next possible steps when it is appropriate to do so” (*ibid*).

In response to queries on future canal expansion towards Lough Neagh by the Committee for Infrastructure on the 14th of April 2021, John McDonagh of Waterways Ireland stressed that any extension has to be authorized by the NSMC (*NI Assembly*, 2021). However, as stated by

Minister Nichola Mallon on the 30th of November 2021; “Waterways Ireland has NSMC approval to explore the potential restoration of the stretch of the Ulster canal from Clones to Lough Neagh”, (*TheyWorkForYou*, 2021). ICBAN met with the Minister on 21st March when she clarified that the current NSMC decision for restoration work relates to the existing stretch only. The Minister expressed support to investigate how a business case for the Canal’s expansion could be progressed, should funding become available.

It thus appears that the governments could become more willing to allocate funding towards the canal’s completion if they were to receive an updated feasibility study for the northside of the project. Hereby, I am inclined to suggest that the northside project could be better pitched by stressing, for example, a need to promote greater cross-border mobilities in light of Brexit as well as the public interest in environmental conservation, and the economic opportunity that the growing ecotourism sector could bring (as recognized by Project Ireland 2040’s *National Development Plan*). This could encompass anything from cross-border boating and bicycle racing to history, nature and heritage tours, especially if the canal restoration one day reaches Belfast.

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Appendix 2:

Regional Benefits to Canal Restoration - Case Study A: Clones

Socio-economic Strengths & Opportunities

As identified by Cllr. Pat Treanor (2022), the Ulster Canal restoration in Clones is expected to create employment via not only the short-term labour opportunities brought on by the planning, engineering, and constructions works on the canal itself, or even the subsequent long-term tourism and small business opportunities, but also by attracting the manufacturing industry to the region by placing the town on the national map as a prime destination for investment. This will allow the town's community to revitalise itself and encourage people to remain, including young people who tend to leave Clones for higher education and never return, creating an ageing population, which has been steadily falling for the last 40 years according to local censuses (ibid).

During the Partition of Ireland, the management of the Great Northern Railway fell apart, and with the closure of the Ulster Canal it cut off 2/3 of Monaghan's trading routes (Treanor, 2022). Roads were also physically blocked during the conflicting times, effectively isolating northern and southern communities from each other (ibid). The Troubles then further prevented the local region from being able to rebuild its established connections. The project is therefore crucial for not only the economic regeneration of the town but also for bringing back cross-border trade and rebuilding the lost community links, as the towns in the CBR once performed an important regional role as key getaways to the north and south respectively.

It is commonly agreed that the area will not reap full benefits from the project until its completion in full. Cllr. Treanor (2022) draws parallels with the restoration of the Shannon-Erne Waterway 25 years ago. This was similarly considered a symbol of reconciliation, and

all investment was recouped after 4-5 years of operation through the increase of local activities, demonstrating how investments in canal works can be highly profitable for governments. On this, Mr. Tarka King (2022) also mentioned that the government is losing more money by not doing anything and letting the canal deteriorate.

Upon completion, the boating community will be able to travel on to Belfast, and perhaps even Scotland and other canals in Europe. There is also some hope that the canal's completion will lead to greater interest and value appreciation in the real estate market. There would also be a positive impact in the preservation of local historic buildings and estates from dereliction. As pointed out by a tour guide, "dereliction and demolition are part of living on the border; even in a town as historic as Clones" (Participant B, 2022).

Ultimately, it is recognized that the enhancement of a regional tourism offering will benefit from links with destination brands including, Ireland's Ancient East, Hidden Heartlands, and Embrace a Giant Spirit. Further tourist links can then be established with destinations such as Slieve Beagh, Castle Leslie estate in Glaslough, Castle Bailey, and Lough Muckno, etc, creating in effect a tourism master plan and packaging all the nature walks, potential camping, wildlife experiences (including birdwatching and fishing), and historical trails together.

Cultural and Historical Heritage

- Tourist sites with evidence of life in Clones going as far back as 1500 years ago with monastic churches, graveyards, towers, and Norman-period defence fortification, making it a history haven. The town also provides education and classes on its historic production of the Clones Lace, which saved the local population from starvation during the Great Hunger (*Paul Hogarth Company, 2021*).

- All along the river Erne, there are numerous heritage attractions from Crom Castle to Tully Castle. If the Canal successfully connects Clones to the Erne again, it would encourage travel between these heritage sites (see Figure 1 below).
- Black Pig's Dyke, the most prominent of a series of discontinuous linear earthworks in southwest Ulster and northeast Connacht, Ireland, can be found in Co Monaghan (Treanor, 2022).
- Song about shipwreck of the Ulster Canal is preserved here, along with various literary and poetic works, and even ghost stories, once again exposing the untapped tourist potential for passing on these stories to visitors (Treanor, 2022).
- A popular local folklore tells the story of an English army laying waste to the ground in the local area during the 1600s, before losing their soldiers in underground tunnels of Drumboat, Co Monaghan, while trying to retrieve a missing piper. Now, every calm Saturday night, one can hear pipers playing from below, in the tunnels (Treanor, 2022).
- Educational opportunities teaching the town's history and passing on its stories could be created and developed on top of the current eco-archaeology tours, repackaging the history of the canal infrastructure in Clones towards youth groups, school field trips, sport clubs, etc. For example, QR codes could be added to the tourist sites telling the stories of the canal lock keepers, who used to leave a bag of coal at the lock house to exchange with local farmers for eggs and other food along the way, and how canal trade encouraged whole families to live on barges. As the canal was narrower than other canals, special 'Ulster lighters' (a type of barge) were built specifically for the journeys down its waterway (Corley, 2022).

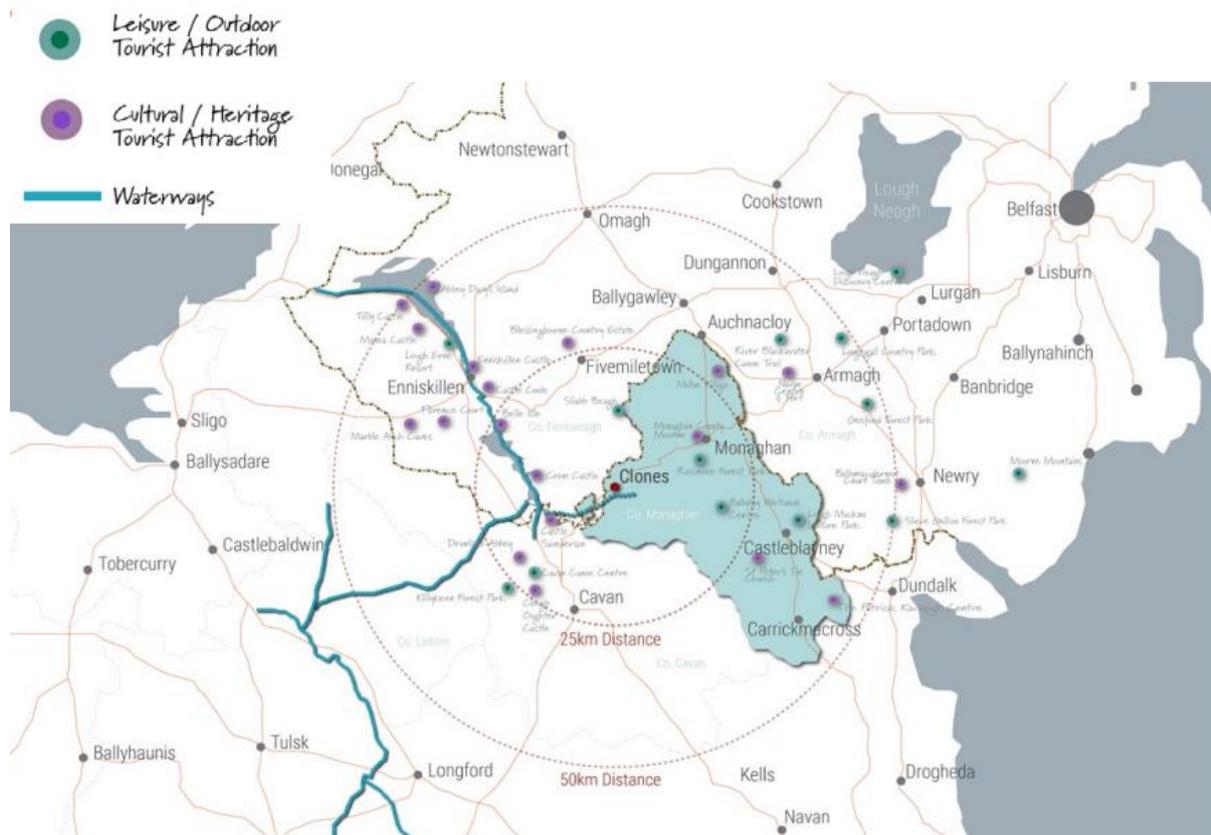


Figure 1 Spatial Analysis of Attractions in the 50km Radius from Clones

Environmental Conservation

- It is considered that the Ulster Canal restoration would leave a low carbon footprint, as the construction works simply improve the infrastructure that is already there in place, such as dredging up the old canal route, while the development plans already endeavour to protect and increase the local biodiversity (Treanor, 2022).
- The ecotourism development of greenways can show off the biodiversity that already exists in the region but also broaden the attraction of well-being economic development, namely the oft-unaccounted economic benefits of having a fit and healthy population, which can greatly reduce the government spending needed in the health sector. A big part of the Phase II works focuses on the provision of a water sports centre and facilities to promote physical activities (Treanor, 2022 & Clifford, 2022).

- There is a local government recognition that there needs to be a sustainable tourism development, to manage unforeseen challenges such as those found at the Cuilcagh Boardwalk Trail, where parking has become a localised problem.
- The main road from Clones to Monaghan is not good for cycling due to lorries and other heavy traffic, so the provision of a greenway will create a good alternative transport route, in addition to supporting rural tourism (Corley, 2022).
- Preparations made for the greenway include rewatering of the beds and clearing out litter in the canal's path across Co Monaghan.

Points for Consideration

- **Social** - Clones Canal Stores and Museum: there are low visitor numbers from Northern Ireland - even the American tourists double the NI tourists (Participant B, 2022). Infrequent transport links to nearby town hubs, including Enniskillen, Dublin and Belfast, may contribute to a sense of isolation, and particularly for the youth. The town still receives a surge of domestic tourism around its popular film festival and St Patrick's Eve parade, as well as free seasonal tours around the town's historic heritage.
- **Logistical** - There is currently no provision of overnight tourist facilities, including any camping or glamping sites, or more basic, cheaper accommodation for short-stay visitors who would be unwilling to spend money in the one nice hotel in Clones (Corley, 2022).
- **Financial** - Due to the high costs associated with the Phase III works, there is a worry that additional works could take another 25 years. Consequently, the border region's communities have become demoralized now and won't believe in any socio-economic opportunities until they see it happen. Small businesses such as B&Bs that had been opened won't return until there is an economic payback, so right now there

is limited infrastructure, leaving the town quite unprepared for a greater intake of tourists.

- **Connectivity** - There needs to be a closer working relationship between local government and the voluntary and business sectors, to maintain the original vision of the Ulster Canal as the 'missing link' between the two jurisdictions on the island. It is argued that there could be greater traction and that more could be achieved if greater efforts were made to collaborate.
- **Strategic Outsourcing of Funding** - Greater efforts should be invested into seeking American investment towards the Ulster Canal project, where there is a real appetite to see evidence of peace and reconciliation incentives.

Appendix 3:

Regional Benefits to Canal Restoration - Case Study B: Castle Leslie

Socio-economic Strengths & Opportunities

Castle Leslie sits in a strategic position between two canal harbours. Before the onset of Covid, annual visitor numbers were around 100,000 visitors, and current plans are to attract between 150,000 and 200,000 tourists (Sammy Leslie, 2022). The Leslie Family can trace its ancestry back to Atilla the Hun, making the estate both historically and culturally important for the CBR (*CastleLeslie*, 2022). The estate is also especially known for hosting the wedding of Sir Paul McCartney and Heather Mills back in 2002. The restoration of the castle estate has in itself created nine small businesses from customer clusters, including an ice cream shop, pizzeria, pubs, 1840s pottery workshop, hairdressers, and an electric bike company in Ballymore. Moreover, as told by Sammy Leslie (2022), the castle had to continue paying higher business tax rates due to its location even after the canal or railway had closed, suggesting that any proximity to water is deemed commercially attractive.

There are several potential tourist packages that could be created through the restoration of the Ulster Canal. For one, the Castle Leslie Estate would be very interested in supporting a transport loop between the reopened canal route with a historic railway (even if only a small part of the historic railway could be opened for tourism with a model steam-engine train, for example) alongside horseback riding trails and bicycle paths (Leslie, 2022). Such a plan would enable the estate to increase overnight guests, who come to explore the nearby historic sites, before looping back on a historic train ride and ending their trip on horseback. This would not only maximize visitor time spent in visiting the region, but also help generate economic opportunities for local businesses.

The castle estate is also partnered with several other estates in the region on both sides of the border, in helping create a shared network of tourism infrastructure. For example, the estate has filed an application for EU LIFE programme funding in collaboration with three other estates, namely the Tynan Abbey, Caledon Estates and Enniscoe House, to work together in rewilding ancient woodlands across 300 acres of land (*CastleLeslie*, 2022). This would also include driving research into the behaviour of land and soil quality under different agricultural management methods, in support of greater sustainable tourism methods. Entitled ‘Biodiversity and Rewilding’, the project if successful would be a flagship for rewilding in Ireland, as it aims to “create the conditions for ecosystems evoking those of the ancient Kingdom of Oriel to re-emerge, recover and flourish in a changing environment” (ibid).

The Estate promotes tourism collaboration across the border, rather than competition, with the internet era now driving people’s free will in choosing their holiday destinations. Cross-border tourism partnerships are seen to be to everybody’s mutual benefit (Leslie, 2022).

Finally, as a unique example of creativity and what could be experienced on the Ulster Canal, Sammy Leslie (2022) offers some archival footage of her own mother water-skiing on the Grand Canal in the 1960s, while being pulled by a horse, instead of a motorboat.



Figure 1 Desmond Leslie and his wife on the Grand Canal, Lorcan Film Unit

Cultural and Historical Heritage

- As articulated by Sammy Leslie (2022), the CBR ought to be considered as a massive hub of social history, architecture, artisan skills, and traditions, making it an “incredible microcosm of heritage, different from anywhere else in the country”, and highlighting everything from its troubled border history to the conservation of famine walls. In turn, the Ulster Canal restoration, could be seen in this regard as a project that links everything together, from the historic railway walking route to heritage trails.
- The Ulster Canal crosses the land of *Airgíalla*, the Kingdom of Oriel, with its rich folk traditions, and provides untapped educational and tourism opportunities (ibid).
- The area has a rich history of transportation and trade in grain, butter, wool, and stone quarries, etc, which were slowly shipped down the canal at very low costs. Timber transported down the Ulster Canal can be linked back to Prince Edward Island in Canada (ibid).

- A Journey into Lost Time: Another interesting consequence of the ever-present border in the region was its use of double time, back when Ireland had its own time zone, known as Dublin Mean Time, which was 25 minutes and 21 seconds behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) (BBC, 2019). Even before that, time differed from location to location, for example, the time in Omagh was different from the time in Belfast during the 19th century (ibid). This greatly impacted railways and telecommunications, as well as transportation along the Ulster Canal. The social history of this adds another unique point about the region that could be more widely promoted.
- Several traditional Irish woollen mills in Caledon, Tyrone; Lisbellaw, Fermanagh; Foxford in Dungannon; and Mills & Waterfalls in Benburb, created a highly profitable network along the Ulster Canal as they used water from the canal harbours (Leslie, 2022).
- Ancient Celtic land calendar traditions influenced farming calendars to work with nature, another example of linkages between educational programs and ecotourism initiatives (ibid).

Environmental Conservation

- As mentioned above, four castle estates in the CBR are currently collaborating to lead innovative research into rewilding efforts, which would greatly improve the local biodiversity and wildlife.
- The nearby area is significant geologically thanks to it sitting atop the Carlingford Lough, a glacial fjord, which could be further exploited by the tourism packaging. The area is also classed as an Important Bird Area SPA (NIOPA, n.d.).
- The area in the CBR can also be geologically classed as a ‘true border’ as the northern part of the island once belonged to the tectonic plate that is now mainly represented in

North America, whereas the south of Ireland lay beyond an ocean and belonged to the African tectonic plate, around 450 million years ago (Leslie, 2022 & *AskAboutIreland*, n.d.). As the two plates shifted against each other, a mountain-building phase developed, known as the Caledonian, and the two parts of Ireland finally merged about 440-400 million years ago, the impact of which is still evident in Ireland today (*AskAboutIreland*, n.d.). Again, the Ulster Canal crosses this 'true border', a story which could be developed alongside the ecotourism industry.

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