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The Added-Value of the Ireland-Wales Cooperation Programme

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Wales Governance Centre

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Preface

About Us

The Wales Governance Centre is a research centre that forms part of Cardiff University's School of Law and Politics undertaking innovative research into all aspects of the law, politics, government and political economy of Wales, as well the wider UK and European contexts of territorial governance. A key objective of the Centre is to facilitate and encourage informed public debate of key developments in Welsh governance not only through its research, but also through events and postgraduate teaching.

About the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) project: 'Between two unions. The Constitutional Future of the Islands after Brexit'

The project examines the inter-relationship between the UK withdrawal from the European Union and constitutional change within the United Kingdom and Ireland. This constitutes a historically important event in its own right, and a real-time experiment in constitutional reinvention in a context with few rules and an unknown outcome. Professor Daniel Wincott at Cardiff University is one of the co-investigators of the project. Dr Giada Lagana is one of the project's research associate.

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Introduction

European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), also known as Interreg, is one of two goals of the EU Cohesion Policy and provides a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from across the EU member states. The overarching objective of ETC is to promote a harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the EU as a whole. It seeks to achieve this through close cooperation between partners across the EU to find shared solutions to common challenges.

In this framework, cross-border cooperation helps transform regions located on either side of internal or external land or maritime borders of the EU, such as the sea border between Ireland and Wales. Cross-border cooperation is thus aimed at tackling common challenges identified jointly in border regions, engineering cooperation and to exploit untapped growth potential.

Since its inception 25 years ago, ETC has progressed significantly from a Community Initiative worth some ECU (European Currency Unit) 1 billion¹ across a limited number of Member States, to a key instrument of the EU to promote and support cooperation across borders. A fifth round of programmes (commonly referred to as Interreg V), worth over €10bn over the 2014-2020 period, is now underway and covers the whole EU territory of 28 member states and is supported by specific EU regulations. Overall, there are 60 cross-border programmes along 38 internal EU borders. The cross-border programme operating in Wales since the year 2007 is the Ireland-Wales Cooperation Programme (hereafter 'the Programme' or 'the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme').

The Interreg Ireland-Wales programme is delivered by the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) - the Managing Authority - in partnership with the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA) and the Government of Ireland's Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The programme's vision is to provide a framework for organisations in the cross-border area to actively cooperate to address challenges and shared priorities on both sides of the Irish Sea, thereby contributing to the economic and sustainable development of Ireland and Wales. The focus on the Irish Sea includes projects that are bringing together scientific expertise to increase capacity and research into the effects of climate change. Universities and colleges are also linking with businesses to stimulate collaboration in sectors including

hospitality, marine and environmental sciences and life sciences, while the programme is also utilising shared culture, resources and heritage to boost tourism and visitor numbers to the cross-border region.

Despite the relatively small size of the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme,² the evolution of Ireland-Wales cross-border cooperation under its aegis has proved essential to the empowerment of policy networks³ in Ireland and Wales. This is one of the programme's most important achievements. Cross-border networks in Ireland and Wales have gained independence from the actions that have formed them, they have enforced and introduced boundaries to strengthen their position in new cross-border processes in areas of interests such as scientific research, culture and tourism. They have shaped the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme as an opportunity structure⁴ from a geographical and from a socio-political perspective.

The objective of this report is to investigate whether the cross-border nature of the programme is delivering any added value and if so, to identify the nature of this added value from a political perspective. As such, by drawing on a comprehensive qualitative document analysis, crossed with semi-structured qualitative interviews with representatives of the local, the national, the European, the transnational and the non-governmental level, this short report underscores the need for greater public awareness of the Interreg Ireland-Wales as an essential tool to development, cohesion and cooperation across the Irish Sea.

The report is structured as follows:

- **Section 1** provides a background to the Ireland-Wales Programme.
- **Section 2** presents what has not worked well through different rounds of Interreg Ireland-Wales.
- **Sections 3** presents the improvements and discusses the policy context, the needs, the rationale and the emerging effects of the Interreg Ireland-Wales 2014-2020 programme.
- **Section 4** presents the investigation's conclusions and offers recommendations for future delivery.

The evaluation methodology and a list of partners and organisations consulted (where possible) as part of the investigation are contained as Annexes.

Background

This report is taking place as the debate on the future of Structural Funds in the UK is on-going. The 2017 Conservative manifesto pledged to create a 'United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund' to replace European Structural Funds. This fund is intended to 'reduce inequality between communities across the four nations' and to deliver 'sustainable, inclusive growth'.⁵ The 2019 Conservative manifesto promised that '£500 million of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund [will be] used to give disadvantaged people the skills they need to make a success of life'.⁶ UK recipients will continue to receive EU funding over the lifetime of projects which are agreed within the current 2014-2020 funding cycle. Nonetheless, the UK government has only ensured future commitment for the PEACE programme in Northern Ireland, thus undermining the future of other initiatives such as Interreg.

Leaving the EU will naturally raise legitimate questions about the future of Wales on-going cross-border partnerships. Whatever the challenges, the Welsh Government has been clear that leaving the EU does not mean turning the back on its partners in Europe. Brexit strengthens the need for Wales to demonstrate its effectiveness and reliability as a partner, collaborating not just in the UK and the EU, but across the world to achieve common goals.⁷

Overview of the Interreg Ireland-Wales Programme

The overarching EU policy driver for the Interreg Ireland-Wales is the EU Cohesion Policy, which has its legal basis in Articles 174 to 178 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) and aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion by reducing disparities in the level of development between regions. Cohesion Policy provides the investment framework required to achieve the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the Community. EU Cohesion Policy is delivered through three funds of the European Structural and Investment Funds, which together - including national co-financing - amount to €644 billion. One of these funds is the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).⁸ The ERDF aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the EU, by correcting imbalances between its regions, particularly through thematic concentration. It focuses its investment on four priority areas.

The ETC programme – Interreg - was initially developed in this context, in 1990, as a community initiative. It has developed and evolved through five phases across 30 years. It includes three strands: Interreg A (cross-border), Interreg B (transnational) and Interreg C (interregional). In accordance with the design of the European Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 and Europe 2020 targets, the ETC programme 2014-2020 includes a budget of €10.1 billion, invested in over 100 cooperation programmes. With a basis of 11 investment priorities, the 80% of a cooperation programme's budget must concentrate on a maximum of four thematic objectives among the eleven available priorities. These guidelines provide an opportunity for regions to work together and address common challenges of a social, economic and/or environmental nature.

Ireland-Wales cross-border cooperation became eligible for Interreg funding in 1994. The main organisations involved in fostering linkages among those in Ireland and Wales who were interested in promoting cross-border cooperation were the Irish Sea Maritime Forum and the Central Sea Corridor. The involvement in a transnational framework could potentially link those working in similar sectors across the Irish Sea, thereby providing ideas and models of best practice in cross-border cooperation. The programme had to achieve a strategic fit where policies intersected with specific cross-border needs and challenges. Therefore, the geographical organisation of the cross-border region was central to the initial discussions.

Existing territorial delimitations influenced who could participate and thus produced effects of inclusion and exclusion, with distinct territorial claims related to distinct, ideologically motivated, national projects.

The defining physical feature of the area involved was the presence of the Irish Sea, with cross-border cooperation relying on the assumption that shared common features, challenges, and issues would be handled more successfully if managed on a cross-border basis. Hence, the geographical organisation of the region represented a compromise between the different interests and reflected the centrality of the Irish Sea. It comprised the central corridor of Dublin/Dun Laoghaire and Holyhead; the southern sea corridor of Rosslare/New Ross/Waterford; and Fishguard/Pembroke Dock and Milford Haven, with ports being of strategic importance and forming vital links across the sea border. Other areas involved are the Welsh counties of Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, Ynys Môn (Isle of Anglesey), Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire and the three NUTS III regions in Ireland: Dublin, the Mid-East and the South-East. The major urban centre was Dublin, with the Irish part of the region having a higher population density (126 vs. 70 persons per sq. km) and a considerably higher level of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita than their Welsh counterparts, Ireland as a whole, and the EU.⁹

The place-based approach¹⁰ of Interreg was used to legitimate the specific interests of the cross-border region. Authorities in Ireland and Wales presented these matters to the EU Commission as Ireland-Wales specific. They focused on enhancing sustainable growth through cooperation by maximising the potential of the natural and cultural assets of the maritime area by connecting it to a specific EU regional policy discourse. A discursive emphasis on economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development was an effective tool to anchor local strategies to the EU agenda. On the other hand, it constitutes also an outcome of a strategically selective discourse which informed local perceptions and discussions and responded to grassroots interests in an indirect but very pragmatic way.

The first Ireland-Wales programme established the foundations and each subsequent programme aimed to build upon the achievements whilst also addressing gaps. The priorities of past programmes included:

- **Ireland Wales Interreg II A:** Marine development; General Economic Development.
- **Ireland Wales Interreg III A:** Economic, Social, Technological Development; Sustainable Growth; Technical Assistance.
- **Ireland Wales Interreg IV A:** Knowledge, Innovation and Skills for Growth; Climate Change and Sustainable Regeneration; Technical Assistance.

Table 1

Commitment budget of Interreg programmes, 1990 to 2020

Interreg programme	Commitment budget (€ billion)
Interreg I (1990-1993)	€1.1bn
Interreg II (1994-1999)	€3.8bn
Interreg III (2000-2006)	€5.8bn
Interreg IV (2007-2013)	€8.7bn
Interreg V (2014-2020)	€10.1bn

Source: 'Ireland Wales Territorial Cooperation Programme: Mid-Term Evaluation Report', p. 4.

The current Interreg Ireland-Wales Territorial Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 (also known as Interreg V-A) is the fourth round of cross border cooperation for Ireland and Wales, under the fifth phase of ETC / Interreg programme. The objectives are divided into four Priority Axes:

- **Priority Axis 1** focuses on cross-border innovation and its specific objective is to increase the intensity of knowledge transfer collaborations involving research organisations and SMEs in line with the shared priorities of the smart specialisation strategies.
- **Priority Axis 2** focuses on the adaptation of the Irish Sea and coastal communities to climate change. Its Specific Objective is to increase capacity and knowledge of Climate Change adaptation for the Irish Sea and coastal communities.
- **Priority Axis 3** focuses on cultural and natural resources and heritage and its Specific Objective is to sustainably realise the potential of natural and cultural assets in increasing visitor numbers to coastal communities in the Programme area.

- **Priority Axis 4** provides the technical assistance, which aims to capitalise on best practice and learn lessons from evaluation of current procedures to ensure the efficient and effective management of the 2014-2020 Ireland Wales programme.

Overview of the Interreg Ireland-Wales issues

There are four main issues, which arise from interviews held with the programme participants. The main points are summarised below and relate mainly to Ireland Wales Interreg IV A:

- The centralised management of the programme;
- Few genuine cross-border projects;
- Capacity to deliver;
- The sustainability of the initiatives.

First, the most common feature of the management structure for the majority of the sub-programmes and measures under Interreg Ireland-Wales IV A was the centralised nature of the decision making. The vast majority of key strategic decisions were taken in the working groups, which usually comprised a small number of department officials and technical experts involved in the delivery of the project. There was generally not-enough involvement from wider societal interests, who perhaps would also be interested in and affected by the decisions taken. Even in those areas of policy making where one would expect a much greater involvement of community interests, the process of decision making was too closed.

Second, our interviews have highlighted the low level of genuine cross border projects. This problem is undoubtedly complex and common to all Interreg programmes in Europe. The most important blockage relative to Ireland and Wales was the initial lack of structures for a genuine joint management at the working group level. Projects tended to be appraised and agreed within the local councils and according to the policy priorities for that administration. Subsequently the two working groups from the two administrations would form a joint working group, at which information was exchanged regarding projects but involving relatively little overall joint planning and management¹¹.

One notable exception in this regard is constituted by the Celtic Advanced Life Science and Innovation Network (CALIN). This is a 4-year Ireland-Wales Interreg project which supports research and development programmes for small and medium-sized businesses in the life science sector. In our interviews it became clear that the success of this networks in facilitating genuine cross-border activity under the Interreg programme depended to a large degree on the type of relationship that existed between members of the network and, to some extent, on

the personal qualifications of officials involved. The opportunity to work together on joint projects, where both parties were dependent on the others' particular expertise and resources in key areas, was the key mechanism for developing greater understanding of each other's priorities and concerns.

Third, our interviewees signalled an issue of capacity. The potential to deliver genuine cross-border projects is dependent on the relevant organisations' capacity to deliver. At the local level, business interests needed greater access to information sources about potential opportunities. The local community level was in a similar position, but also required very practical support, such as an amount of co-funding, at least in the initial start-up phase of a project.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, organisations and networks at the local level experienced particular problems because Interreg initiated a growth surge of the sector, but with little visible means of sustainability. Some networks bluntly depended and still depend on EU money. Political and institutional uncertainty and a shortage of funds hampered efforts to consolidate social partnerships and posed a major challenge to their future role in cross-border development.

The Ireland Wales Programme 2014-2020: lessons from the past

Following new Commission guidelines, interactions and consultations among networks and sub-state authorities - and between networks and institutions - happened 'front' and 'back' stage in the elaboration of the new Interreg Ireland-Wales 2014-2020 programme. The distinction between 'front' and 'back' stage is important because, at frontstage, actors are visible to the audience and have to stay in role. Public officials are observable and accountable as office holders in elected bodies and are constrained by established bureaucratic rules, codes of conduct and public scrutiny. On the other hand, the backstage dimension of consultations describes the world of complex decision-making where public officials, actors and interest groups are hidden from public scrutiny and can engage in negotiations less constrained by formal rules. Backstage, actors can relax from their roles, step out of character and work within and across their networks to prepare and negotiate strategically in order to gain a more active frontstage, policymaking role. During the preparations of Interreg Ireland-Wales 2014-2020, backstage consultations and regular meetings played an important role in facilitating interregional lobbying and fostered the influence that different actors had within their policy network.

Backstage discussions were focused on the programme guidelines, the views of potential beneficiaries and the preferences of the responsible authorities. The working routine included actions such as discursively setting the agenda and framing local perceptions. Subsequently, frontstage, joint papers and declarations¹² were drafted and discussions focused on common Ireland and Wales issues to address in the programme. This was followed by the drafting of the partnership agreement, which expanded upon the areas that had been identified backstage as specific shared cross-border challenges.

The extent of backstage consultations behind the elaboration of the Interreg Ireland-Wales 2014-2020 programme is evidence of how, this time, policy networks at the local level were allowed to shape the concretisation of specific cross-border issues to be addressed. These represented a mixture of personal and professional preferences held by civil servants and politicians, electoral pressures and proposals from non-governmental organisations. For example, an overarching theme expressed in the Ireland-Wales Interreg strategy reflected the wish of policy networks to fully using the talents, skills, experiences and expertise within the

Irish Sea region, adding value to the economic and sustainable development priorities of Ireland and Wales'.¹³

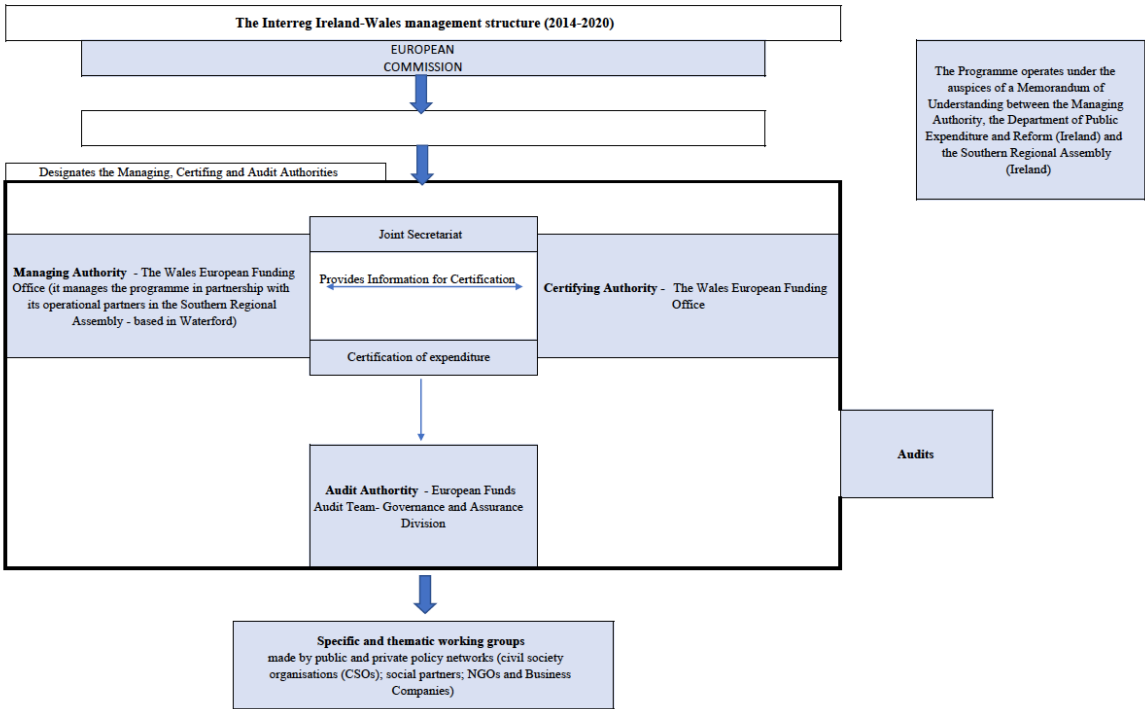
The final priorities were broad and encompassed almost all the issues brought forward by the different authorities involved. Improvements in terms of public consultations and decentralisation of the policy processes enhanced interdependence between the different Irish and Welsh actors involved, ensuring to some extent better chances in the successful delivery of the sub-initiatives. Consultations and decentralisations have also improved thanks to the fact that the programme has been brought in line with the WEFO IT system.¹⁴

The importance of the role played by policy networks in shaping the current round of Interreg Ireland-Wales is also reflective in programme management structures. These attempted to create a loose, fluid administrative organisation of the cross-border region, which would represent all levels of society and where networks could build interconnections and gain power. Moreover, the role of the Development Officers evolved. They got tasked to be regularly on the ground, particularly with regard to those policy measures that sought local communities to deliver projects. Hence, Development Officers started to play an important liaising role between the community level and the central bureaucratic level, giving voice to the needs and concerns of those involved on both sides. Our interviews have confirmed that, in the case of the voluntary and community sector, the officers were an important resource both in terms of information about possible co-funding sources as well as how to tackle different types of administrative hurdles. Given the broad experience of the officers, they were also central to the development of strategic planning for the different axes. Finally, Development Officers facilitated a common understanding of the other administrative structures and culture. Such an understanding was essential in the real joint management and strategic planning of the sub-initiatives.

Ireland-Wales governance arrangements represented territorial and socio-political elements to varying degrees and are evidence of how a relatively small group of policy networks was able to influence the shape of an EU opportunity structure that served their distinct interests. At the same time, none of them could enforce its vision unconditionally. National governments also influenced the Interreg outcomes. Elements of the governance architecture, discourses,

and interpretations constrained, shaped, and informed policy networks' participation in public policymaking efforts.

Table 2
The Interreg Ireland-Wales management structure (2014-2020)



Source: Own illustration.

Preliminary Findings

This report drew on different approaches that combined spatial and socio-political concepts related to cross-border cooperation between Ireland and Wales. It has underlined the geographical construction, the policy dimension, the delivery issues and how authorities in Ireland and Wales addressed them in the current Interreg Ireland-Wales programme. Overall, the analysis demonstrates how, both front and backstage, governmental and non-governmental actors in Ireland and Wales engaged positively and actively with the EU with the objective to create a new functional cross-border space, in which to exploit financial and political opportunities. The EU, on the other hand, has played an active role in managing and harvesting the positive aspects of Ireland-Wales cross-border policy networks. Policymakers and stakeholders in Ireland and Wales faced a variety of political and societal challenges over the years, but they were responsive to the requests of the local level. This is evidenced by how policy networks in Ireland and Wales shaped the concretisation of the last round of Interreg funds. The programme attempted to reduce unemployment; promote social inclusion; boost green economy and also improve transport links with policy networks trying to guide the process in their desired direction.

The elaboration of the Interreg Ireland-Wales 2014-2020 programme was just the ultimate strategic step towards the realisation of Ireland and Wales policy networks' interests in the EU framework. This process commenced much earlier. The strategies employed to qualify for the funds, for example, were originally chosen based on a subjective and filtered analysis of the material framework in which diverse political arenas interacted. Ireland-Wales cross-border cooperation issues were constructed by processes of problematisation introduced by lobbying organisations and were subsequently articulated to the Commission by public authorities. None was able to impose a specific version of the cross-border region unconditionally. Furthermore, the realisation of strategies depended on the strategies and strategic responses of others, which shows how the cross-border space did not serve as a simple strategic instrument. It, once created, offered opportunities and constraints that were not the same for all. The role of the EU Commission in animating and encouraging the cross-border networks to develop a strategic cross-border strategy cannot be underestimated.

These strategies and structures also show how the Ireland-Wales cross-border region has been historically constructed upon a specific dialectic of territory and policy networks. The latter are embedded in the space, and vice versa. Therefore, territory and networks should be seen as two mutual and intertwining dimensions of the region's life. As policy networks influenced the territorial and governance configurations – in accordance with national requirements - they challenged the formal organisation, hierarchy, and boundedness of the region. At the same time, the flexible adjustments of the region responded to fears of dominance. For example, some areas had a specific interest in working collaboratively in the framework of Interreg to preserve and enhance the marine and coastal environment in the face of the increasing impacts of climate change. Others rural areas were under electoral and political pressures for issues of economic growth and innovation and feared a dominance of the urban centres. The outcome was a cross-border region with a narrow territorial scope, representing a balanced compromise between strategies and structures.

National governments have remained and remain the ultimate gatekeepers of decision-making processes and of the frontstage negotiations with the EU Commission. While national governments can employ hierarchical means in their relationship to policy networks, the latter cannot impose order upon a framework that consisted of institutions beyond their territorial and legal control. Consultations, the support of public authorities, regular contacts with the Development Officers and representation in governance arrangements are all instruments employed to ensure representation and participation in the public policymaking process. In this way, policy networks that cannot directly steer and command cross-border processes, can nevertheless exploit some chances to seek new instruments to shape, steer, and frame cross-border cooperation and the Interreg governance mechanisms. Ireland-Wales Interreg V A allowed them to shape not the process as such, but the environment of the process from backstage. These activities affected the goal-attainment of different networks in Ireland and Wales and changed the context in which the programme Interreg operated.

Regional developers and planning institutions in Ireland and Wales seem very well aware that cross-border cooperation is an opportunity to solve some of the common existing problems based around the Irish Sea. Deciding to pursue specific interests connected to economic growth and shared cultural identity in the European framework was a strategic choice.

Therefore, protecting the future of the programme is fundamental to ensure that tangible successes survive to the challenge of time. Future cross-border strategies should be built upon the influential engagement mechanisms and policy networks institutionalised by the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme. They should apply the lessons learnt from the past, on the basis of a reflective contextualization of the issues already encountered. They should maximise the existing opportunities for cooperation and share the interconnected best practices to create positive, sustainable benefits for the people living in the Ireland-Wales cross-border region. To this aim, any future cross-border arrangement should include at the same time mechanisms for combining different funding streams, cross-border coordination and links to EU programmes and networks.

Policy recommendations

One of the most valuable aspects of the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme, has been its ability to bring partners together across the Irish Sea to work collaboratively and attract funding and opportunities. Through the Interreg Ireland-Wales programme, the EU empowered policy networks in Ireland and Wales to play a more active role in shaping the opportunities and constraints of cross-border cooperation. As demonstrated by this report, the outcome represented a mixture of strategic and spatial selectivity.

The Welsh and Irish governments recognise the value of these collaborations, which have enabled various public and private stakeholders to find real solutions to shared challenges related economically and culturally to the Irish Sea.¹⁵ Authorities in Wales and in the Republic of Ireland are clear that they want such cooperation to continue. In this regard, the Welsh Government's International Strategy refers to the importance of continuing to look outwardly to Europe and beyond, with a key goal to raise Wales' profile internationally. However, this commitment needs to be reflected in the structures set up, and in the funding allocated. European Funding currently supports much of this collaborative activity, and it will require a proactive choice by the UK Government to maintain and enhance this moving forward.

Based on the findings of this report, our recommendations are summarised as follows:

- **Networks.** One of the most important successes concerning the 2014-2020 Interreg Ireland-Wales programme is the role that the participating cross-border policy networks have played in shaping the essence of the programme. Their presence in the Steering Committees, the governance arrangements and their use of the place-based approach of Interreg in shaping the cross-border region indicates just how successful networks have been in developing a plausible strategy of cooperation and in persuading public authorities of their capacity to play an enhanced role over the different stages of the programming period. The success of policy networks in participating to public policymaking processes comes with challenges, but also opportunities attached. However, networks and their participation remain highly dependent on EU funds and on the EU support.

- **Managing networks rather than hierarchies.** Cross-border cooperation cannot be managed in through tight central control. Rather, any future management will have to work with and through other organisations. It will have to ensure that its operational responsibilities are performed to a high standard. It will also have to ensure that these are achieved. Considerable attention should be paid in the formative period to the design and management of systems for managing the multiple relationships through which cross-border networks will have to work. The management of networks requires careful attention to issues of coordination, participation and strategic coherence.
- **Partnerships.** The cross-border networks must be inclusive if they are to exercise an enhanced role in future. From the outset of the programme, various policy networks were made aware of the Commission's model of partnership, which involved elected politicians and social groups. The networks have to reflect on their organisational distribution or improving it by enhancing civil-society representation. Given that they have evolved within a local authority context, adapting to new partnership models is unlikely to be smooth. Both sides across the Irish Sea will have to work to make new partnership modes operate effectively for their local areas. Their likely new responsibilities will provide a powerful incentive to both sides to achieve a workable partnership.
- **Fostering change agents.** Both the SRA in the Republic of Ireland, and the WEFO in Wales had to face the challenge of building capacities for cross-border cooperation. How to build such capacities is in the first instance a cognitive and informational challenge. It requires identification and recognition of the opportunities for and obstacles to cross-border cooperation. It demands the development and dissemination of a store of knowledge. This is a very long-term process, inextricably bound up to a very important political-institutional dimension to capacity building. The practice of cooperation must become more diffused throughout the system and, to this aim, change agents - or development officers - in fostering cross-border cooperation are essential. Change agents are those who set out to animate, to persuade and to build

capacity for collective action. Future engagements in cross-border cooperation needs to have a number of such agents on its team to complement those who are responsible for management. The role of the change agents is to mediate between the government and the potential beneficiaries on the ground, to build the capacity of local actors to identify, develop and manage cross-border projects. In addition, change agents are an important source of collective learning as they can share their knowledge of what works and what amounts to best practice with other actors.

- **Capacity.** Expanding Wales to a more global perspective to secure and maximise the benefits of an enhanced status in the world, also implies building capacity. Capacity does not only involve stronger partnerships, increased trade and access to funding opportunities. Administrative and organisational capacity will also be essential. In this regard, policy networks will face the challenge of transforming themselves from loosely coupled networks into networks that are capable of delivering on their likely role. If their role expands, this implies that they will need additional resources to build up their organisational capacity, the staff who will assist in the preparation of good cross-border projects and the support of elected representatives.
- **Management versus Development.** Future structures and processes of cross-border cooperation must manage the initiatives through the entirety of the policy cycle. Nonetheless, they must combine this with an ability to animate, foster and promote cross-border cooperation on the example of the Interreg Ireland-Wales. Neither a developmental nor a managerial logic should be allowed to dominate. Careful attention must be paid to the different skills and organisational structure that can deliver both management and cross-border development.
- **Policy Learning.** More broadly, one of the interesting overall findings of the Interreg Ireland-Wales 2014-2020 analysis was the level of policy learning that was taking place in the European territorial cooperation arena. However, this policy-learning could only be effective and illustrative for the future if reflected upon and indeed actively applied by those who were engaged in the cross-border, policymaking processes from the very beginning.

Annex I

Methodology

Data for this report were collected through document studies (literature review) and interviews. The literature review gives an overview of the programme's overall structure, the procedures and the state of play. During the review, the focus was on aspects relevant to the interviews' questions. Those contents have served to build the structure and the foundations of this report, to which the input from the rest of the methods was added.

The document reviewed helped identify areas for analysis. The documents may be summarised as:

- Programme official documents: Cooperation Programme, Rules of Procedure of the MC, Annual Implementation Reports, Description of the Management and Control System,
- Background documents (including for written procedures),
- Programme reference documents: Programme Manual, Communication Strategy,
- Other documents: internal evaluations by the Joint Secretariat, monitoring data, information on the website.

The interviews were an additional angle for this report, helping to formulate the main focus in triangulation with the outcomes of the literature review. They also highlighted additional areas for attention. Interview purposes varied with the different target groups:

- One representative of the European Commission,
- Two people from the Managing Authority (MA),
- Two representatives from the Southern Regional Assembly,
- Two representatives from the Consulate General of Ireland in Cardiff,
- 15 sub-initiatives partners.

These interviews produced qualitative information from public and private networks involved in the programme implementation. They have all requested to remain anonymous.

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¹ Please visit http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/interreg25years/ for more information.

² To have an idea of the programme's size, it is sufficient to think that the 2014-2020 Ireland-Wales programme had a total budget of €98.998.059. The UK-Ireland Interreg programme, for the same round of funds, had a total budget of 282.761.998. For more information, please visit <https://irelandwales.eu/sites/default/files/2016-04/150325citizensummary.pdf> (last accessed 4/4/2020 at 10:11).

³ The concept of policy network is employed in this report to indicate the general characterisation of the links between the public and the private sector in the implementation of Interreg. Typical of the relations of actors (e.g. politicians, bureaucrats and interest representatives) within policy networks is an enduring linkage pattern based on interdependence. For example, administrators need political support, legitimacy, information, coalition partners in their competition with other sections of the bureaucracy, and assistance in the implementation of cross-border cooperation policies. Moreover, interest groups desire access to public policy formation and implementation. These different needs motivate and produce exchanges or transactions. When repeated often these exchanges may become institutionalised in network structures. Such network structures constrain the successive options open to the actors and in time may even influence the structure of the participating organisations. Hence, policy networks are a form of proto-organisation, or a 'loosely coupled' organisation. They are an intermediate form of formal organisation - and some could even develop into such formal organisations. However, networks differ from organisations by the degree of formalisation of relations and by the type of coordination. Networks do not necessarily have a power centre and coordination does not happen by hierarchic authority (or, in more enlightened form, by hierarchic consultation), but by horizontal bargaining.

⁴ The concept of EU 'political opportunity structure' involves a comparison between political opportunities at the domestic and EU levels. It comprises the structure and openness of the political systems involved, as this will allow an understanding of the ease of access for political actors to decision-making processes. Secondly, it is concerned with the receptivity of the political systems to the claims of political actors. This latter aspect includes a range of 'contingent' factors, such as public opinion trends, preferences of government officials, divisions among political elites, focusing events and other types of occurrences that can shift the political mood.

⁵ For more information please visit https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/european-structural-funds-after-brexit?gclid=EAIaIQobChMI2qrx0eew6QIVCLrtCh0iYQqVEAAYASAAEgL6_PD_BwE.

⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷ For more information please visit <https://gov.wales/framework-for-regional-investment-in-wales>.

⁸ For more information please visit <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-05/ireland-wales-territorial-cooperation-programme-2014-2020-mid-term-evaluation.pdf> (last accessed 17/07/2020)

⁹ For more information please visit Ireland–Wales Operational Programme (2014–2020). Available at: <https://irelandwales.eu/sites/default/files/2016-04/150325citizensummary.pdf> (last accessed 03/01/2020).

¹⁰ A place-based policy is a long-term strategy aimed at tackling persistent underutilisation of potential and reducing persistent social exclusion in specific places through external interventions and governance. It promotes the supply of integrated goods and services tailored to contexts, and it triggers institutional changes. In a place-based policy, public interventions rely on local knowledge and are verifiable and submitted to scrutiny, while linkages among places are taken into account.

¹¹ Interview with lead partner, 9 December 2019.

¹² See for example: 'Welsh Sustainable Development Scheme'; 'Wales: A Vibrant Economy'; 'Making Ireland's Development Sustainable – Review', 'Assessment and Future Action'.

¹³ Interview with lead partner, 21 November 2019.

¹⁴ All lead partners interviewed confirmed this trend unanimously.

¹⁵ For more information, please visit <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2020-02/annex-a.pdf>.