



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

Shared Island: Projects, Progress & Policy

Scoping Paper

No.153 February 2021

National Economic and Social Council

Constitution and Terms of Reference

1. The main tasks of the National Economic and Social Council shall be to analyse and report on strategic issues relating to the efficient development of the economy and the achievement of social justice.
2. The Council may consider such matters either on its own initiative or at the request of the Government.
3. Any reports which the Council may produce shall be submitted to the Government, and shall be laid before each House of the Oireachtas and published.
4. The membership of the Council shall comprise a Chairperson appointed by the Government in consultation with the interests represented on the Council, and
 - Three persons nominated by agricultural and farming organisations;
 - Three persons nominated by business and employers organisations;
 - Three persons nominated by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions;
 - Three persons nominated by community and voluntary organisations;
 - Three persons nominated by environment organisations;
 - Four other persons nominated by the Government, including the Secretaries General of the Department of Finance, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Housing, Planning and Heritage, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
 - Seven people possessing knowledge, experience and skills which the Taoiseach considers relevant to the functions of the Council
5. Any other Government Department shall have the right of audience at Council meetings if warranted by the Council's agenda, subject to the right of the Chairperson to regulate the numbers attending.
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7. The numbers, remuneration and conditions of service of staff are subject to the approval of the Taoiseach.
8. The Council shall regulate its own procedure.



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The Department of the Taoiseach has asked the National Economic and Social Council to produce a comprehensive report on the Shared Island in 2021, to inform the development of the Shared Island initiative as a whole-of-government priority. The NESC research will contribute to building a shared knowledge base and understanding about possible ways in which greater co-operation can emerge across a number of economic, social and environmental areas in Ireland, North and South, and also between these islands East and West.

The research will seek to engage with all communities and traditions on this island to build consensus around a shared future, with a focus on actionable areas of co-operation. The work will be underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement and absolute respect for the principle of consent. The research will *not* address the constitutional question, but will focus on sustainable economic, social and environmental development issues, in line with NESC's strategic remit.

This scoping paper sets out the proposed approach to NESC work on the Shared Island initiative. It proposes that NESC will produce a report in 2021, and that the work will have six parts:

- Part 1: Shared Island—Context, Background and Ambition
- Part 2: NESC's Approach to the Research—Cross-cutting, Co-operation, Learning and Problem-Solving
- Part 3: Existing Areas of Co-operation
- Part 4: Building Shared Knowledge—Exploring Possible Areas of Co-operation through State-of-Play Reviews
- Part 5: Shared Problem-Solving by Digging Deeper—Two Potential Projects
- Part 6: Understanding Shared Island: Insights and Lessons

To help to keep stakeholders, both North and South, informed and to support engagement and the ongoing work of the Shared Island Unit, Working or Consultation Papers will be published on the NESC website at www.nesc.ie. At present two Working Papers are being developed.¹

In addition, a Consultation Paper will be published, alongside this Scoping Paper, on climate and biodiversity. The paper, *Climate and Biodiversity Challenges and Opportunities*, presents an initial overview of the ‘shared knowledge’ in relation to climate and biodiversity. The paper is based on desk research and preliminary interviews with stakeholders. It provides some initial context and exploration of common climate and biodiversity challenges faced both North and South of this island. It proposes a number of areas for further consideration, from which one or two will be selected for State-of-Play Reviews (see Part 4 of this Scoping Paper)

¹ One on the economies on the island of Ireland, North and South, and the connections between them; and a second one on good jobs and quality work, which includes feedback from an initial round of stakeholder engagement.

Part 1:
Shared Island—Context,
Background and Ambition

The Shared Island is a mission in the current Irish Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, June 2020. The Taoiseach launched the initiative with an address on 22 October 2020 which set out the Government’s vision and priorities for a Shared Island and for working with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future, founded on the Good Friday Agreement.²

The Government’s approach to a shared island involves:

- working in partnership with the NI Executive and the British Government to address the major shared challenges faced on the island of Ireland.
- further developing the all-island economy, working to deepen North/South co-operation in areas such as health and education, and investing co-operatively for the benefit of the North-West and border regions.
- fostering constructive and inclusive dialogue, and supporting a programme of research to support the further development of a Shared Island agenda and the building of consensus on a shared future on the island, underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement.

The Taoiseach has set out that the Shared Island initiative is a whole-of-government priority, with important scope for contributions also from local government and from civil society, across the island, with a broad, positive and practical agenda.

A Shared Island Unit has been established in the Department of the Taoiseach to act as a driver and co-ordinator for implementing the Shared Island initiative.

Building a Shared Island

As outlined by the Taoiseach, the island of Ireland faces major challenges in the years ahead. These include:

- overcoming the threat of the Covid pandemic;
- working through the consequences of Brexit;
- building economic and societal recovery; and

² See https://merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Speeches/Online_address_by_An_Taoiseach_on_Shared_Island.html

- tackling the climate and biodiversity crisis.

The Government wants to work in partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive, through the North South Ministerial Council and with the British Government, to tackle these challenges together.

The Government has established a Shared Island Fund, with €500m in capital funding to be made available over the next five years to 2025, ring-fenced for Shared Island projects. Funding allocated from the Shared Island Fund will foster new investment and development opportunities on a North/South basis and support the delivery of key cross-border infrastructure initiatives and commitments on the Shared Island initiative, as set out in the Programme for Government.

The Shared Island Fund complements the Government's existing all-island commitments, including to the North/South Bodies, cross-border health services and the Reconciliation Fund, and the EU PEACE PLUS programme which is coming on-stream in 2021.

Dialogue

The Taoiseach launched the Shared Island Dialogue series to foster constructive and inclusive civic dialogue on all aspects of a shared future for the island. The series will cover areas such as the environment, health and the economy, as well as key civic concerns that are addressed in the Good Friday Agreement, including identity and equality. The dialogue series will seek to be as broad and inclusive as possible and engage with groups who have been traditionally under-represented in the peace process, including women, young people and new communities. On 26 November 2020, the first Shared Island Dialogue was held online to hear views from 'new generations and new voices on the Good Friday Agreement'. The series continues in 2021.

Research

The Shared Island Unit is progressing a comprehensive research programme across a range of sectors, in collaboration with the Economic and Social Research Institute and other partners. North/South and East/West collaboration is to be an important part of this work.

As stated earlier, the Department of the Taoiseach has also asked NESC to produce a comprehensive report on the Shared Island in 2021, to inform the development of the Shared Island initiative as a whole-of-government priority. The remainder of this Scoping Paper sets out NESC's approach to the research.

Part 2:
NESC's Approach to the Research—
Co-operation, Learning and Problem-
Solving

The NESC mission is to provide advice to the Taoiseach and the Government on strategic policy issues relating to sustainable economic, social and environment development in Ireland.

This research project is a Government initiative, but it is a departure in that the request made to NESC is not to provide advice about a specific area of national policy, such as housing or climate mitigation. It is instead a request to help build a shared knowledge base and understanding about possible ways in which greater co-operation can emerge.

NESC was asked to undertake this work because of its working methods, its approach to research and evidence, and its role as a deliberative body.

The types of work which NESC undertakes share a number of characteristics:

- i. There is recognition by Government or other stakeholders that the problems which NESC is asked to consider are challenging, strategic and medium-to-long term in nature.
- ii. The issues on which NESC works are those where there is evidence of real complexity and uncertainty.
- iii. NESC has a diverse and broad view as to what constitutes evidence and research. This includes a rigorous commitment to desk-based research reviews of literature and policy, international comparative data and case examples.
- iv. NESC works as what has been termed a 'boundary-spanning organisation' in that it is concerned with linking different perspectives, theoretical and practical.
- v. NESC is also committed to deep engagement with diverse experts, practitioners, policymakers, stakeholders, service providers, representative groups, user groups and/or citizens.
- vi. The NESC research process is a reflective one in which diverse expertise and evidence is examined, benchmarked against available theoretical or policy frameworks, discussed by the Council members, and reflected back to and discussed with those involved in specific areas, such as stakeholders, experts or citizens.
- vii. NESC relies on this approach as the means of identifying what might be possible and practical in specific contexts.

- viii. NESC has a long-standing interest in how to link bottom-up and top-down views and perspectives. This means, in practice, a focus on the ways in which organisations work and how they interact. This can be referred to as an institutional perspective, but the starting point is concerned with helping people and organisations to work and co-operate more effectively.

The Government has asked NESC to bring this approach and expertise to its work on the Shared Island initiative.

Reflecting this, NESC's work on a Shared island will involve a mix of:

- i. analysis and synthesis of the existing state of knowledge, prevailing policy approaches and the understandings of key stakeholders;
- ii. a focus on reframing problems based on an ongoing mix of analysis, problem-solving and deliberation; and
- iii. close consultation, both early and ongoing, with the policy system and other stakeholders, both North and South, with relevant knowledge and interests so as to develop a shared understanding and a capacity to resolve divisions with a view to reaching positive ways forward.

NESC will strive to take into account perspectives in Northern Ireland through engagement with all communities and traditions. It is acutely aware of the sensitivities to this initiative, and will seek to understand and articulate perspectives on an inclusive basis, including concerns. It will approach the work on the basis of good neighbourliness.

The overarching focus for NESC will be on identifying areas of co-operation and interdependence which work; i.e. areas where there is potential for co-operation for mutual benefit. As in all of its work, there will be a deep concern with the lived and practical experience, with understanding issues from different viewpoints, and in particular in seeking to find ways to improve links between bottom-up and top-down perspectives.

This part of the report will examine the theoretical and practical underpinnings for a constructive and pragmatic approach to co-operation and to building shared understanding. It will help to highlight and draw upon a number of key lessons which are critical to building a shared understanding across all communities and traditions on the island. These include:

- i. It is important to establish a shared sense of what is known by experts, organisations, stakeholders and citizens.
- ii. Differences are not necessarily resolved by technical solutions.
- iii. The limits of consensus need to be recognised.
- iv. A shared analysis can lead to a shared understanding of a problem.
- v. Joint analysis and dialogue can generate new conventions and ways of working.

- vi. Monitoring, reviewing and reflecting on what is emerging can help to identify lessons and ways to reframe challenges, and to find creative solutions.
- vii. Experiences of other regions and other countries can be used to help.
- viii. Working methods and outputs should be diverse.

Reflecting these lessons, an important dimension of the work will be how we approach it and the methodologies employed. These approaches are important in general for co-operative work, and especially for this project.

In particular, the work will:

- i. recognise the importance of consultation, listening, dialogue and engagement;
- ii. use bilateral meetings, focus groups and workshops, as appropriate;
- iii. engage with and work through existing networks, and other cooperative fora;
- iv. acknowledge the important role of civil society;
- v. use case studies, where appropriate, to illustrate successful examples of interdependence or to present possibilities for co-operation.

Emphasis will be placed on projects where there is an openness to the development of co-operation, and a focus on a problem-solving approach, to arrive at outcomes for shared benefits and insights into common problems.

Part 3: Existing Areas of Co-operation

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of Part 3 is to outline the existing shared knowledge on areas of co-operation or possible co-operation. It will seek to identify lessons and challenges that can inform and shape work on a shared island.

There are already many areas of North/South (and East/West) co-operation on the island of Ireland. As part of the Article 50 process for the UK's withdrawal from the EU, a mapping exercise of areas of north/south co-operation was undertaken in autumn 2017, and published by the European Commission in 2019. Some 149 areas of co-operation were identified, although this was a non-exhaustive exercise.

The remainder of this section provides an overview of some of the existing areas of co-operation, while acknowledging there are many others. Shared Island Unit work with the ESRI is also briefly described.

3.2 Existing Areas of Co-operation

Many bodies already operate or take forward co-operation on an all-island basis, such as: the North South Ministerial Council as a political institution of the Good Friday Agreement; the Centre for Cross Border Studies as a research body for all-island co-operation; and a range of civil society groups, including sporting organisations and professional bodies. There is also the array of connections and areas of co-operation on a cross-border basis across society e.g. through business, the trade unions, farming and environmental organisations, the community and voluntary sector, research institutions, as well as between government departments and state agencies, North and South.

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was established under the Good Friday Agreement (1998) to develop consultation, co-operation and action within the island of Ireland. It oversees six North-South bodies: Waterways Ireland, Safe Food, InterTrade Ireland, the Special EU Programmes Body, the Loughs Agency, and the Language Bodies: Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge.

The NSMC also undertakes work in six areas of co-operation: agriculture, education, environment, health, tourism and transport, with sectoral council formations meeting at ministerial level. Initiatives in these areas proceed through co-operation between the relevant government departments and their agencies, North and South.

- On *agriculture*, the NSMC considers common policies and approaches in areas such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), animal and plant health policy and research, and rural development.
- On *education*, the NSMC considers education for children with special needs, educational under-achievement, teacher qualifications, and school, youth and teacher exchanges.
- On *environment*, the NSMC considers research into environmental protection, pollution, water-quality management and waste management in a cross-border context.
- On *health*, the NSMC considers areas such as accident and emergency planning, co-operation on high-technology equipment, cancer research and health promotion. At its sectoral meeting in October 2020, two recent memoranda of understanding were noted in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic—on public health co-operation and on ‘proximity apps’. Discussions also took place on child protection and food safety.
- On *tourism*, the NSMC makes decisions on common policies and approaches in the area of tourism, with a particular focus on Tourism Ireland to promote the island of Ireland overseas as a tourist destination.
- On *transport*, the NSMC focuses on areas such as co-operation in strategic transport planning, including road and rail infrastructure and public transport services, and road and rail safety. A meeting in October 2020 considered the A5 Western Transport Corridor; high-speed rail connectivity, especially to the North-West, the Narrow Water Bridge project, renewed air services within the island, and cross-border greenways.

Plenary meetings of the NSMC took place in July and December, and the six sectoral council formations all met in October or November 2020 to consider their areas of work, plus responses to Covid-19, the implications of UK withdrawal from the EU, and updates on EU funding programmes. Each of the sectoral NSMC formations are undertaking a review of work programmes; these will be further discussed at council meetings in early 2021.

As noted, part of the Article 50 process for the UK’s withdrawal from the EU involved a mapping exercise, which identified a non-exhaustive list of 149 areas of co-operation (European Commission, 2019). These areas included the work of the six North-South bodies, plus the six areas of North-South co-operation under the NSMC, listed above. Other areas of co-operation—outside the formal structures of the NSMC but in line with the principles of North/South co-operation laid down in the Good Friday Agreement—that were noted were: energy; telecommunications and broadcasting; justice and security; higher and further education; arts, culture and sport; and inland fisheries. Further areas identified were: social security and social welfare; urban and rural development; enterprise development; housing, specifically Traveller accommodation; public services; local councils; implementation of joint Fresh Start Agreement commitments; and statistics.

In terms of non-governmental co-operation and engagement, the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) has a comprehensive all-island and cross-border research and dialogue remit, including its well-used Border People website, and provides the secretariat for Universities Ireland and the Standing Committee on Teacher Exchange, North and South (SCoTENS). Recent CCBS research reports and briefing papers have encompassed a wide range of topics, including:

- the implications of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU on North-South and East/West relations;
- the impact of Covid-19 on a number of cross border issues, including movement on the island of Ireland, tourism, social security entitlement for frontier workers, and business support schemes;
- a new common chapter for grassroots support for collaborative and sustainable North-South and East/West relations;
- toolkits for impact assessment, budgeting and evaluation of cross-border projects;
- cross-border supply chains in the agri-food sector;
- the case for a border economic development zone;
- cross-border hospital planning; and
- North/South public service provision.³

Other bodies such as the IBEC-CBI (NI) Joint Business Council promote all-island collaboration from a business perspective. They support this work through six pillars: business operations; all-island labour market; skills, education and innovation; physical infrastructure; climate change; and institutional engagement.

Trade unions have an all-island perspective, particularly through ICTU as the umbrella organisation to which trade unions in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland affiliate, and the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI), which undertakes research in Northern Ireland and Ireland. For example, a new cross-border Congress campaign, ‘A New Deal for Retail and Redistribution Workers’, seeks the establishment of a tripartite Retail Stakeholder Group (comprising unions, employers and relevant government departments) to agree and develop a new vision for the sector.

³ Michael D’Arcy’s (2012) report *Opportunities in North/South Public Service Provision* suggested 10 areas for co-operation: (i) employment and economic growth targeted at marginal communities; cross-border health service provision plan; (iii) all-island single energy market; (iv) North/South coordination on ‘treated water’; (v) all-island tourism infrastructure research project; (vi) cross-border economic development zone in the border region; (vii) resources of third-level institutions, North and South, to be combined; (viii) MOU on joint planning of certain 21st century infrastructural upgrades; (ix) to showcase the island’s single-market business achievements; and (x) a jointly commissioned operational ‘toolbox’ for civil servants.

As noted, there is also extensive co-operation between civil society and community organisations across the island of Ireland and Britain, reflecting North-South and East-West interests.⁴

As the research project progresses, additional initiatives will be added to this part of the report, as we become aware of them.

3.3 ESRI Research Projects for the Shared Island Unit

The Shared Island Unit is working with the ESRI on research on a number of economic and social dimensions. Initial work under the research programme is expected to include examination of issues for the all-island economy post-Brexit, and the health and education sectors from a Shared Island perspective.

Initial scoping work is envisaged to set out the state of play, including: mapping the overall sectoral structures on the island; identifying key issues, challenges and opportunities in the two jurisdictions in the years ahead; Brexit impacts; and notable conclusions from existing research. Research on specific issues will then follow on topics such as:

- the all-island services economy;
- productivity linkages in the all-island economy;
- shared challenges and opportunities for healthcare systems, North and South; and
- cross-learning and co-operation potential for education and training systems, North and South.

3.4 Other Relevant Research Initiatives

There are many other North-South research initiatives; for example, through universities and other research organisations.

Of note is the recent launch of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) and Notre Dame's Analysis and Research Ireland North and South (ARINS) initiative which aims to facilitate and disseminate research on the challenges and opportunities presented to the island in a post-Brexit context. The research and analysis will focus on three broad areas:

- political, constitutional and legal questions;

⁴ Of note here is CAWT (Cooperation and Working Together), a partnership between the Health and Social Care Services in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland, to improve the health and well-being of the border populations, by working across boundaries and jurisdictions, <https://cawt.hscni.net/>.

- economic, financial, social and environmental questions; and
- cultural and educational questions.

A wide range of papers are in production. Papers on economic, financial, social, environmental, cultural and educational issues will help to inform this NESC Shared Island research project where they are congruent with the parameters of the Shared Island initiative. For further information, see www.arinsprojects.com.

NESC will continue to monitor other relevant research taking place on a North/South and East/West basis.

Part 4:
Building Shared Knowledge—
State-of-Play Reviews

4.1 Introduction

The NESC approach to this work is focused on building shared knowledge and understanding over time about the scope for greater co-operation. As outlined in Part 3, there are many existing areas of co-operation, a number of which have a research dimension.

In 2021 NESC's work will focus on a select number of areas. This will ensure that the work is manageable within the resources available. The selected areas will be documented in overarching 'state of play' reviews. As noted, papers will be produced during the course of the project, and these will form part of the final report.

There are numerous possibilities within NESC's remit of sustainable economic, social and environmental areas that could be considered for the State-of-Play Reviews. The remainder of this section sets out a number of areas under the three NESC headings:

- economy;
- social policy; and
- environmental sustainability.

The areas selected for more detailed description and analysis in the State-of-Play Reviews will seek to build on NESC's areas of competence and expertise. The work on these areas will be informed by consultation and discussion with key interests across the island.

It should be noted that, at least in the initial phase of work, a number of areas are not included as it is believed that they are being considered or otherwise progressed by others, including by the Government and Executive through the North-South Ministerial Council, as part of the Shared Island initiative directly; in research being conducted by the ESRI or others; or where there is limited evidence of a shared concern or a common problem.

4.2 Economy

Introduction

The all-island economy has grown substantially in the two decades since 1998, and there are deep economic connections on the island, at infrastructural and business levels.

There is also a range of economic policy and regional development considerations for both jurisdictions on the island that do not fall within the areas of co-operation for the North South Ministerial Council. Thus, there seems to be considerable scope for further exploration of shared economic concerns for the island as a whole and on the potential to develop greater co-operation and co-ordination on these, at government and civil society levels, taking account of North/South and East/West dimensions, as relevant.

All-island economy

NESC work in this area will provide a context for taking the work forward in the other areas. This work will track the evolution of the economies North and South, their similarities and differences, in productivity, trade, wages and living standards, energy and regional disparities. It will also present material on the economic connections on the island. An initial paper prepared on the all-island economy will be published on the NESC website as a Working Paper.

Regional development

The promotion of regional development is a shared issue in both jurisdictions, with the potential to identify common concerns and potential areas of interdependence. A comprehensive study on the all-island economy was produced by the Irish and British Governments in 2006 (Irish Government & British Government, 2007). In terms of regional development, border areas have traditionally lagged behind other areas. This state-of-play review will examine the border region in terms of wages, employment and the nature of jobs in the area. In 2012, Bradley and Best set out the case for a Border Development Zone (Bradley & Best, 2012). The relevance of this idea will be examined, in the current post-Brexit context.

Good jobs/quality work

Work on the economy will also include an examination of good jobs/quality work. This will focus on challenges that will need to be addressed, by NESC and/or others, if a good jobs/quality work agenda is to be progressed across the island, including on:

- identifying and promoting good jobs and quality work, and the broader implications for policy and action, including sectoral differences;
- labour mobility and cross-border working;
- skills and apprenticeships; and

- social dialogue.

An initial paper has been prepared setting out the different approaches in good jobs in the various jurisdictions and documenting the key concerns raised in an initial round of stakeholder interviews. This paper will also set out an agenda for further work in this area, possibly focusing on a sectoral analysis, and will be published as a Working Paper at www.nesc.ie. Further work will then continue in this area, as documented in the Working Paper.

4.3 Social Policy

Introduction

Much co-operation and research is already taking place in the social policy sphere; for instance, in the areas of health and education. This section focuses on where NESC work in 2021 might add most value. In choosing these areas, the Council will give particular consideration to children and young people, as they represent the future of the shared island.

Addressing poverty

It is becoming clear that the pandemic and its aftermath is having a severe impact on many people, families and communities across the island, with an increase in poverty levels and inequality. Even before the pandemic, both jurisdictions were concerned about reducing poverty. In Northern Ireland the most recent statistics show that 19 per cent of people lived in relative income poverty (before housing costs), including 24 per cent of children.⁵ Comparable figures for Ireland show that 13 per cent of the population was living in relative income poverty in 2019, including 15 per cent of children.⁶

Both jurisdictions have anti-poverty strategies. The Irish Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020–2025 aims to reduce consistent poverty to 2 per cent or less (from 5.5 per cent in 2019) and make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU. A range of strategies and initiatives are set out to reduce poverty in Ireland and to make Ireland more socially inclusive (Government of Ireland, 2020). In Northern Ireland, under the ‘New Decade New Approach’ agreement, an Anti-Poverty and Child Poverty Strategy is to be developed by the Department of Communities, using a co-design, co-production approach.

The NESC work will consider both these policies to identify common concerns and approaches and to share learning. This could build on previous collaborative work on Mainstreaming Social Inclusion, undertaken as part of an EU-funded project, led by the Combat Poverty Agency (European Commission, 2006).

⁵ People are considered to be living in relative income poverty in NI if the income of their household is less than 60 per cent of the UK median household income. See <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/poverty>

⁶ See <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2019/>

The state-of-play review will also consider community approaches to addressing poverty, especially in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic, and what can be learnt from the range of initiatives to support communities experiencing poverty and deprivation. In addition to addressing basic needs, the work will seek to identify approaches that provide opportunities for children and young people to break out of the cycle of deprivation.

Mental health

There has been considerable all-island co-operation as well as research on many health issues at national and local levels, including in relation to primary and secondary health provision. However, less has been done on mental health, although a few studies have explored the context of, and challenges to, the reform of mental health services in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (Barry, *et al.*, 2002; Clarke, 2009). For example, in relation to mental health legislation, if you are from one jurisdiction but become mentally ill and are treated in the other jurisdiction you cannot be legally transferred from one hospital to another across the border; each Mental Health Act ‘expires’ upon crossing the border (Cullivan, 2020).

The work will engage in a dialogue about common problems and shared issues, and how anomalies could be resolved. It will examine the policy positions in both jurisdictions,⁷ and explore successful international policy and practice interventions. With the legacy of the Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’ and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions, issues of mental health continue to be highlighted.

Social enterprise

Ireland has recently launched a *National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland*, with the three key objectives of: (i) building awareness of social enterprise; (ii) growing and strengthening social enterprise; and (iii) achieving better policy alignment. A wide range of social enterprises in Ireland provide beneficial services in their local communities. While Northern Ireland does not yet have a formal policy, it is active in promoting social enterprise, and has an All Party Group on Social Enterprise.

The relationships between social enterprise representative bodies in Ireland and Northern Ireland could usefully be developed. This work will consider the potential of further all-island co-operation on social enterprise. This will involve an overview or audit of the range of activities and issues arising. A particular focus could be on initiatives to support children and young people from disadvantaged communities and/or environmental initiatives, to support the other State-of-Play Reviews being undertaken, and as part of the Digging Deeper initiative in Part 5 of NESC’s Shared Island work.

⁷ See, for example, Betts & Thompson, 2017 and Government of Ireland, 2020.

4.4 Environmental Sustainability

As noted above, there is co-operation through the North South Ministerial Council on environmental issues, but this is a rapidly developing area. Further action will be required in the years ahead to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis on the island.

NESC has been involved in an extensive programme of environmental, sustainable and climate research in recent years. This reflects international and national commitments to reduce our carbon levels and to protect our natural environment. These commitments are shared across the island, with both parts of the island setting out climate mitigation policies and actions.

The climate and biodiversity emergencies represent a set of common challenges. A Shared Island Consultation Paper has been prepared: *Climate and Biodiversity: Challenges and Opportunities*. It notes that there are many areas of existing and potential co-operation. It identifies five areas for further consideration, with a view to selecting one or two of these for State-of-Play Reviews, but acknowledges that others may be identified through the consultation process. This paper will be published as a Consultation Paper to provide the basis for further dialogue on the scope for greater co-operation; see www.nesc.ie.

The five areas are summarised below, with further details in the Consultation Paper.

Climate policy: shared focus on increasing ambition for 2030

Both jurisdictions on the island are committed to climate mitigation by 2030. Support for greater co-operation on climate change has been voiced by many. Therefore, for pragmatic and effectiveness reasons, dialogue, sharing of good practice and innovative policy measures would strengthen the capacity to reduce emissions on the island of Ireland.

Resilience in cities: sharing good practice

The significance of resilience for urban and rural areas in the transition to net-zero economies is becoming a focus of research and practice. Recent work by NESC on the resilience of cities includes a mini case study of Belfast City's resilience programme (Creamer *et al.*, forthcoming). This study on Belfast City's journey to developing a resilience strategy highlights the importance of collaboration, connectivity and funding. An area for further discussion would be the value of convening dialogue between cities across the island on building resilience. A particular focus could be on maximising the positioning of cities such as Belfast and Dublin internationally to avail of investment and leadership in leading the way on transitioning to a low-carbon society and economy.

Valuing nature: biodiversity accounting, policy and engagement

Cross-border co-operation and governance for biodiversity will be critical in the year ahead and beyond. Good collaboration, biodiversity engagement and sharing of knowledge has also been demonstrated through, for example, the cross-border collaborative projects being developed through the Interreg and LIFE projects. In

both jurisdictions, work on natural capital and fully valuing nature has been undertaken, and insights could be shared.

Understanding how to engage with and empower people to achieve shared biodiversity conservation goals is crucial. Crowley *et al.* (2020) stress the importance of ‘authentic and meaningful engagement across age groups, communities, sectors, institutions and public authorities, in order to achieve the ultimate shared goal of biodiversity conservation for this and future generations’ (Crowley *et al.*, 2020)

Renewable energy, dialogue and practice

The growth of renewable energy on the island of Ireland has been a positive development over the last decade. However, greater co-operation in developing it, and building societal engagement over its potential, represents a unique opportunity. Given the single all-island electricity market, and the emphasis both North and South on the rapid and ambitious scale-up of renewable energy to meet 2030 targets, there is considerable scope for further collaboration.

A key question is how best to convene dialogue on building co-operation on renewable energy across the island, given the already significant collaboration on the all-island energy market. NESC’s previous work on wind energy provides a valuable foundation (NESC, 2014). This could help to build further connections between developer-led and community energy projects, North and South, to share practice, understanding and opportunities to develop local value in renewable energy (particularly offshore wind and solar PV).

Local wealth-building, resilience and a just transition in rural farming communities

With high reliance on EU subsidies in farming, both North and South, the future of farming and its role in biodiversity restoration is a very live policy area. The bioeconomy is one area where collaboration is already happening and which could be a significant avenue for rural business. A related question is how to build resilience into value chains across the island of Ireland? This question has particular resonance for local economies and farming but has resonance too as applied to regional development (Bell, 2020). Further work and discussion could explore opportunities for engagement and sharing practices to increase economic and environmental sustainability for rural agricultural communities across the island.

A just transition for the sector needs to imagine an agricultural sector that can provide meaningful land-based work and safe, nutritious food through biodiverse, low-carbon farming (Mercier *et al.*, 2020). Just transition as a ‘social, economic and environmental necessity moves beyond borders and thus creates the potential to act as a conflict resolution and peacebuilding mechanism’ (*ibid.*). NESC’s work on just transition emphasises that it requires a focus on both a deliberative process and on equitable outcomes (NESC, 2020).

Part 5:
Shared Problem-Solving
by Digging Deeper

5.1 Introduction

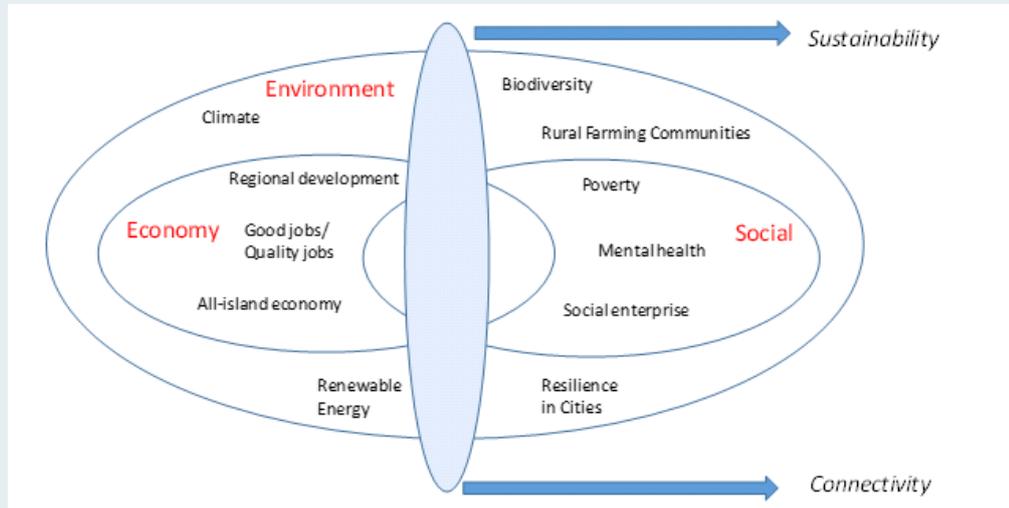
Part 5 of this project will focus on supporting a shared problem-solving approach. It will involve NESC digging deeper into specific areas. This work will build on the State-of-Play Reviews. The specific components of the work will be shaped by the reviews and the consultation and engagement process with wider stakeholders in both jurisdictions, and ongoing dialogue with the members of the Council and colleagues in the Shared Island Unit.

The deep-dive will help identify how progress might be made on specific and practical challenges. In doing this, it will help to contribute to how problems and challenges more generally might be resolved, supported and progressed by a Shared Island perspective.

The criteria for choosing deep-dive projects reflects NESC's interest in working on cross-cutting and challenging issues, the solutions for which require engagement with experts, stakeholders and those at the frontline. The deep-dive project will thus be an 'integrated' project combining elements of projects from the economic, social and environmental areas.

5.2 Proposed Integrated Areas for Digging Deeper

Figure 1 highlights the main areas of work that NESC will address in Part 4, in the State-of-Play Reviews, and identifies two integrated areas that will frame NESC's deep-dive projects.

Figure 1: Shared Island Areas of Co-operation—NESC Deep Dive Integrated Work

Sustainability

At an overarching level, NESC will focus on the question of sustainability and how this is understood and captured in the policy process in both jurisdictions. This work will probe how sustainability in the broadest sense can be supported. It will consider dimensions of sustainability, including:

- i. common sustainability frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- ii. well-being frameworks and indicators; and
- iii. how sustainability measures and actions might be embedded in aspects of policy.

Under the Agenda 2030 commitment to eradicate poverty, achieve sustainable development, and ensure that no-one is left behind, achieving the SDGs represents a shared focus and objective for development on the island of Ireland. The SDGs are relevant in that they provide a platform for considering public policy across multiple pillars—environmental, economic and social—underpinned by a partnership approach to policy implementation.

Wellbeing frameworks are also relevant here, bringing together a focus on performance outcomes, underpinned by environmental, economic and social indicators. The programmes for government in both jurisdictions are committed to developing and implementing wellbeing frameworks. This part of the Digging Deeper project provides an opportunity to identify commonalities and explore how sustainability measures and actions might be embedded in aspects of policy at both local and national levels.

Connectivity

The second issue into which NESC will seek to dig deeper is the question of connectivity. While connectivity includes trade, tourism, education, transport, broadband, etc, the focus here will be on families and livelihoods—that is, the connections of people and places. The reference here will be on ‘lived experience’: how people and places in the broadest sense are actually connected at local level. The role of local authorities, along with local and community development organisations, will be explored. The dimensions that will be considered include:

- i. SMEs opportunities and supports;
- ii. community plans;
- iii. social enterprise;
- iv. cross-border issues; and
- v. environmental opportunities and challenges.

To examine the issue of connectivity, the project will adopt a ‘place-based’ approach focused on a specific border region. It will consider regional development opportunities and challenges in the area based on a process of engaging with the firms, communities, stakeholders and organisations in a specific place. The aim would be to help identify the challenges, supports and workable ways forward.

The specific issues of interest for the Digging Deeper work on sustainability and connectivity will be developed as work on the State-of-Play Reviews progresses and in consultation with stakeholders. The work will reflect the issues examined by NESC in each of the three broad interrelated areas: economy, social policy and environmental sustainability.

Part 6:
Understanding Shared Island—
Insights and Lessons

This part of the NESC report when completed will focus on drawing out the insights and lessons from the various strands of work.

The objective will be to provide insights into how we understand and work with the concept of a shared island.

Given the nature of the work and the emphasis on engagement, Part 6 of the report will consider approaches to, and suggestions for, more structured, better-resourced all-island civil society/consultation frameworks.

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