

## The project «ROAD» was funded with the support of the European Union under the Programme "Europe for Citizens"

Applicable to the Strand 2 – Measure 2.3 "Civil Society Projects"

**Maintaining rural UK links with Europe** 14 events, one online-survey and one webinar with a total of 384 participants have been carried out within this theme.

### Purpose of Project

To bring together ERP partners in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland in order to demonstrate commitment to European relations and to enable a voice in Europe. The partners were to consider the situation of rural development post-Brexit and future working relations with other EU Countries. It was intended that a fringe event at the Scottish Rural Parliament in November 2018 would bring together ERP partners to discuss possible policies and solutions which would be shared during workshops across the UK and discussed with partner ERP Countries.

### Rural Opinion Advocacy and Development (ROAD) 2018/19

#### Maintaining UK Rural Links with Europe

This Report sets out the work that was carried out and achievements of the UK ROAD Project.

### Results of our ROAD Project

1. The UK ERP partners have joined with Republic of Ireland and set up the UK & Ireland Rural Network. This Network will allow each of our Countries to better understand how we can share information between our organisations and ultimately with our European partners.
2. The project has confirmed that all sectors agree on the importance and necessity of maintaining links between the UK and Europe post Brexit.
3. We reached over 385 rural people during our project.
4. Contributions were made by ERP Partner Countries: Latvia, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Republic of Ireland, and Netherlands. Kosovo and Iceland expressed interest but were unable to join the Zoom meeting.
5. We have ideas and suggestions for how links can be maintained which we will take to the ERP Gathering and use to discuss and create an implementation plan.

England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales

### Event 31 – Main event - Maintaining UK links Workshop at the Scottish Rural Parliament

**Participation:** The event involved 25 citizens, including 22 participants from UK, 1 participant from Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands each.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Stranraer, Dumfries & Galloway, **Scotland 15.11.2018.**

**Short description:** The event was arranged in cooperation with the ROAD-project and the European Rural Parliament. Questions were answered to the following questions Why is it important to maintain links with Europe? What kind of links do we need to maintain? How can we do that? Who needs to do it? All the events and the survey below answered to the the same set of

questions and reported back at the main event. Answers were quite close to each other so main elements are reported here. Longer reports are available on the events.

**Survey 3 - subevent** - Scottish Rural Action's survey was adjusted with input from all partners and, using Survey Monkey, created for use by all participating countries. **It received 171 responses** from across England, Wales, Ireland and Northern Ireland. It was used to find out how people felt about Brexit and its perceived impacts, their understanding of the funding their communities had received from the EU and opinions on the future of funding.

## 2 subevents were organised by England

**Event 32 – subevent** Brexit discussions

**Location** The event took place in Kent/Stalisfield Village hall England on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019

**Participation:** The event involved 8 citizens from England UK

**Short description**

Links between the UK and Europe are essential as some of the constraints on our rural economies are similar / the same, due to local geographies, climate, long-standing trade routes and technology-transfer mechanisms etc. We thus have much to share that is useful across borders and seas. A question remains as to how “early stage” knowledge transfer between rural areas might happen - especially if associated with activity that is not profit-generating – should the UK not participate in future EU programmes.

**Subevent webinar 10 (ACRE)**

**Participation:** 8 people from 7 countries UK, Latvia, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Republic of Ireland, and Netherlands participated in a zoom webinar to debate on what after Brexit.

**Location / Date** Zoom 24.4.2019.

**Short description** International co-operation is key to everything but as Europeans and members of the European Rural Parliament (ERP) we need to adapt and seek new ways of working together post the availability of EU funding. The second key element is flexibility. We must share our knowledge and skills and not be protective as knowledge is power and should be shared in the interests of everyone. “Co-operation can happen without funding but that would be local UK County/region/area based action”. The important role for all of us in the ERP is sharing more widely across and outside the UK” Concerns about the disconnection of young people were raised at the workshops held in Stalisfield Village Hall, Kent and how this should be addressed. The discussion concluded that there would be challenges in working together on EU funded projects, but that networking needs to be self-run. We need to grow and develop existing mechanisms for future knowledge transfer and co-operation.

## 5 subevents were organised by Wales

**Event 33 – subevent - LEADER project events**

**Participation:** The event involved 25 citizens, including 24 participants from UK and 1 from the Netherlands.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Pembrokeshire, Wales 10.12.2018

**Event 34 – subevent - Regional LAG event**

**Participation:** The event involved 22 citizens from UK

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Pembrokeshire, Wales 24.1.2019

**Event 35 – subevent - Pembrokeshire Enterprise Network**

**Participation:** The event involved 34 citizens from UK

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Pembrokeshire, Wales 29.1.2019

**Event 36 – subevent - Community forum network**

**Participation:** The event involved 18 citizens from UK.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Pembrokeshire, Wales 13.2.2019

**Event 37 – subevent - West Wales Third Sector Conference**

**Participation:** The event involved 6 citizens from UK.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in West Wales, Wales 13.2.2019

**3 subevents were organised by Northern Ireland**

**Event 38 – subevent - Cullyhanna ROAD workshop**

**Participation:** The event involved 16 citizens from UK.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Cullyhanna, Northern Ireland 6.2.2019

**Event 39 – subevent - Ballymoney ROAD workshop**

**Participation:** The event involved 14 citizens from UK.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Balleymoney, Northern Ireland 14.2.2019

**Event 40 - subevent Cookstown ROAD workshop**

**Participation:** The event involved 22 citizens from UK.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Cookstown, Northern Ireland 12-13.3.2019

**4 Subevents were organised by Ireland**

**Event 41 – subevent - Maintaining links Ireland**

**Participation:** The event involved 3 citizens from Ireland.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Leitrim Ireland 7.2.2019

**Event 42 – subevent - Maintaining links Ireland**

**Participation:** The event involved 16 citizens from Ireland.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Limerick Ireland 13.2.2019

**Event 43 subevent - Maintaining links Ireland**

**Participation:** The event involved 3 citizens from Ireland.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place Monaghan in Ireland 21.2.2019

**Event 44 – Maintaining links Ireland**

**Participation:** The event involved 8 citizens from Ireland.

**Location / Dates:** The event took place in Ireland 23.2.2019

**Below short descriptions and answers from the subevents 34 to 44**

**Wales/Planed**

Why is it important to maintain links with Europe?	What kind of links do we need to maintain?	How can we do that?	Who needs to do it?
Because we are part of Europe!	Communication	Keep talking	Politicians
	Education		All of Us

It is imperative for trade, for good relationships for sustainability we need to reduce travel and cost for all trade 'buy locally'. This needs to be highest on any agenda.	Links across all sectors as well as relationships people paid with their lives when Europe was not united, we should not turn our back on our neighbours. We cannot compete alone with China / USA / Russia	We must talk about staying united and working together and playing together. EU is a structure we must work to replace with others. Enjoy our culture and celebrate others.	Everyone – government national and regional business networks and organisations supporting business. Education – positive messages about links with Europe.
Tourism, imports and exports. Welcoming the young	Travel and communication Better travel – trains, times and improved carriages as they have in Europe.	Keep advertising and welcoming travel and education	PLANED / LAGs – listening to our needs, worries – more importantly our future generations
It's important to maintain links with as many people as we can. To help to be helped, knowledge / skill sharing. Links with the EU will result in opportunity.	That is really difficult to answer. Links at all levels government, industry and education	Meet with and develop relationships individually and as organisations / groups.	Everyone
Historical, geographic	Rural development	As part of a government initiative	Welsh government
Collaboration is vital Sharing knowledge / skills / experience Avoiding island nation mentality	Skills Resources Trade People movement	Networks Political influence	Trade bodies / organisations Networks Politicians universities
To continue learning from one another and to share ideas	With community and business organisations	Networking and hosting organisations	Organisations AMs, MPs
We are part of Europe! Cultural, historical, demographically, economically. Most UK citizens ancestors came from the mainland of Europe.	Every kind – transport, energy, education, cultural, exchange visits more interreg type opportunities.	Regular international exchanges and information sharing. Hear from non UK residents to help everyone appreciate we are all humans, sharing this space.	Journalists, broadcasters, influences of public awareness
Joined up thinking – policy, law etc Improved business opportunities Improved travel opportunities Supporting our neighbours	Business links Travel links Financial links Links in law and policy	Remain in the EU Play an active role in national planning Meet regularly and maintain an open and honest dialogue. Consult at local level and feedback to international.	Local – regional – national – international. All levels

Networking, skill set. Exchanging views Free flow of transport links	Networking, skill set. Exchanging views Free flow of transport links	Dialogue and communication – and get on with it!	MPs
Networks and sharing ideas	Buses and cultural links	Existing mechanisms	Whoever is doing it already
Networking	Channels through which resources can flow	Regional expertise	Same people as now
Business / social / cultural links Financial – knowledge transfer	Exchange	Not leaving the EU	Filter down to local communities
To work together on projects to achieve mutual goals	Action Learning	Maintain the LAG type approach through UK funding	

## Ireland

Essential that we retain links to Europe post Brexit. EU has brought investment in communities and in infrastructure. It has given communities and citizens a more global outlook and we are more outward looking as a region. We don't want to go back to a more inward looking region we have better quality of life now. Lots of us have family connections and some their childcare and health service providers on the other side of the Border. We want to ensure our children and grandchildren can continue to learn across Europe but particularly across the Border. We need to retain free movement of labour across the border. Research – lots of valuable research being done across a whole range of areas – especially in relation to mental health and well-being – we need to learn from that – our universities also benefitting from EU research funding and that creates new knowledge and in some cases new products/services/jobs.

Serious concerns expressed over what will replace single farm payment and importance of subsidy to support small farmers. Import and export charges on food and produce could have devastating effects – need to ensure any agreement supports jobs in the food industry on both sides of the Border and those jobs need to be protected.

General concern expressed about potential consequences on businesses of a no deal Brexit and a hard Border – businesses already under pressure and banks and other retail businesses closing in villages and smaller towns.

Will collaboration between NGOs become more difficult post Brexit? – North South co-operation between government departments may become more difficult to do – departments tend to operate in silos.

One concern is that we won't be able to grow the crop our buyers want without Dutch seed potato which has been developed to grow at this latitude and for relatively cold/wet soils.

Dairy farming is a cross border trade with milk moving both ways over the border from farms to processors and then back to shops/supermarkets for purchase by consumers.

Lamb production in NI will be wiped out if no deal due to the high tariffs imposed on exports into the EU.

EU environmental designations have been important in protecting the environment. We need to retain some link to these designations post Brexit to cover environmental sites/assets in rural areas that straddle the Border.

Need to retain links or at least a watching brief on what's happening with EU institutions; the European Parliament, the Commission and the Committees to be aware of evolving EU Rural development and farming/food/environmental policies. Especially important for NI who will share the only land border between the UK and the EU post Brexit. We need to try and align any future UK rural development policy with EU Rural development policy or at least ensure there are co-operation strands in both to enable rural networks to continue to work together after Brexit.

### **How to maintain links?**

European Rural Parliament (ERP) is probably more important after Brexit for NGOs to maintain links with peers in Europe. Positive that ERP is broader than EU membership and includes European countries in the Balkans – we will have the same status vis-a-vis the EU post Brexit. ERP needs to consider how it can use its influence more with the EU institutions to shape policy for benefit of rural Europe.

Some participants argued that a case for Special Status for NI post Brexit be made to the EU and Westminster

Suggested that we consider lobbying EU to allow NGOs and academic institutions to participate in some EU programmes. Example given of the EU Northern Peripheries Programme which includes non-EU member states.

NGOs here need to identify and evidence the difficulties/challenges for rural citizens post Brexit and lobby for programmes/funding to address these challenges in a positive way.

### **Northern Ireland.**

#### **Economic Reasons**

For Agriculture and other businesses, especially SME's and Micro businesses, it is important that links are maintained. The UK and Northern Ireland is the biggest market for Irish exports of agricultural produce but also for other Irish businesses. Also, in border counties, farmers land can cross the border and how this will be dealt with after Brexit was raised. The UK is used as a land bridge to the rest of the EU as it reduces the time of getting goods...

#### **Social Reasons**

There is a long history between UK and Ireland and good relationships have developed and grown over many years. The Good Friday Agreement was mentioned in all workshops and the benefits this has brought to communities on both sides of the border but also with the wider UK. PEACE funding altogether and Interreg projects in educational relations have been helpful...

People living on the border can access health care, dental care etc on both sides of the border. Third level students have accessed education in the UK and Northern Ireland for many years and the freedom of students to study and through the Erasmus programme has been beneficial for both students and educational institutes....

#### **Political Reasons**

It is paramount that The Good Friday Agreement be protected and remain in place and take precedent over whatever Brexit deal/withdrawal agreement is done. Relationships have strengthened since the Good Friday Agreement and these must continue.

#### **Culture and Heritage Reasons**

The PEACE funding programme enabled a lot of cross border cultural projects develop since its inception. Bringing communities together through such projects has allowed communities to become more integrated. Also new communities and citizens that have moved to areas become involved in such projects.

#### **What kind of links need to be maintained?**

The networks that have been built over the years especially since the Good Friday Agreement must be maintained. This is at business, social and political level. It was common among the workshops that open borders are needed to ensure that links are kept.

#### **How can these links be maintained?**

The following are the main ideas that were discussed as how links can be maintained:

- Change nothing was identified as one way of maintaining links - continue as things are in terms of the community groups and exchanges that have developed regardless of Brexit outcome.
- Encouraging communities and networks, whether social, economic, cultural or political to maintain the links, networks and relationships that have already been formed over the past

number of years is needed. Brexit should not dissolve the work already done in forming and growing these links and relationships.

- The Backstop Agreement was mentioned in one workshop as a way of maintaining links between Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and having this honoured would ensure that links can be maintained.
- Northern Ireland must continue to benefit from EU initiatives as the south – PEACE projects can continue to build communities.
- Communities must be encouraged to continue to carry on integrating with one another both sides of the border. This could be done through regular cross border meetings/conferences/dialogues among community groups and regular cross border activity. It was raised among the people in one workshop of the fear of the ‘us and them’ coming back after Brexit and this needs to be avoided.
- Town twinning that already exists between towns in the UK and Northern Ireland and EU towns must be maintained and encouraging this into the future.
- Maintaining school exchanges between UK and EU second level education can also be a way of maintaining links and continuing the programme beyond Brexit.
- The Erasmus programme for third level students, allowing them to study in a college/university for part of their course, is another means of maintaining the links between the UK and EU. The Erasmus Plus fund for projects addressing adult learners and continuing to be able to access this by organisations from the UK and Northern Ireland was also identified as a way of maintaining links but also developing new links.
- The churches can play a role in maintaining links and building on the work already done, especially in border counties.
- It was noted in one of the workshops that maybe following Brexit new solutions instead of maintaining what is there will have to be explored – recognising that not all links and relations will be able to be maintained.

### **Who needs to maintain these links?**

The three workshops gave the same feedback on this question that links must be maintained at all levels