

North/South Research Forum

The inaugural meeting of the North / South Research Forum, an initiative of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, one of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Cross-border Cooperation Observatory (INICCO) group of projects funded by the EU INTERREG IVA Programme, took place in Dundalk on Wednesday 9 December 2009, on the theme: ***What is the Future for Local Economic Development in the Context of the Global Economic Crisis?*** Keynote speakers were Ms Céline McHugh, Senior Policy Advisor, Forfás and Mr Michael Smyth, Head of School of Economics, University of Ulster.

Céline McHugh is a Senior Policy Advisor in the Enterprise Policy Department at Forfás - the Republic of Ireland's national policy and advisory Board for enterprise, trade, science, technology and innovation. Ms McHugh's presentation, *Regional Competitiveness Agendas – supporting enterprise development in the regional context*, provided an overview of a recently completed Forfás study which adopted a future-oriented perspective seeking to enhance the competitiveness of Irish regions for enterprise development. Using a broad framework of competitiveness factors, a review of each of the NUTS III regions was undertaken which highlighted key assets and opportunity areas for enterprise development. A key output of the project has been the generation of a suite of Regional Competitiveness Agendas (RCAs) which provide a platform for collaborative action within the regions. The RCAs have been used to inform Regional Economic Strategies as part of the on-going review of Regional Planning Guidelines by the Regional Authorities in the South (which are due for completion in March 2010). The presentation will focus on findings in relation to the Border region. It will also highlight some of the key cross-cutting issues and challenges for enterprise development identified across all the regions, and their policy implications.

Michael Smyth is Head of Economics at University of Ulster's School of Economics. He has been an academic economist for over thirty years and has published widely in academic and professional journals. Michael Smyth's paper, ***Local Economic Development In a Cross-Border Framework*** placed local economic development within the wider macroeconomic environments on this island, in these islands and internationally. The global financial and economic crisis have spawned huge top-down macroeconomic policy responses while the main casualties of the economic meltdown have been the self-employed and employees in vulnerable sectors such as construction, financial services, business services, distribution. The paper addressed the issue of policy and structural misalignments in the two economies as a barrier to cross border development and cooperation. The macro-contexts in the two economies at present are not conducive to greater cooperation but opportunities at a local level appear to be more relevant. The paper also outlined some areas for consideration such as cultural and heritage tourism, leverage of Project Kelvin, access to European Investment Bank finance on a cross-border basis, supply chain opportunities and the relevance of a Commons framework approach to cross border development.