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Cysylltiadau rhwng Cymru ac Iwerddon | Wales-Ireland relations

Ymateb gan: Ucheldiroedd Arfordirol: Treftadaeth a Thwristiaeth | Response from: Coastal
Uplands: Heritage and Tourism (CUPHAT)

COASTAL UPLANDS: HERITAGE AND TOURISM (CUPHAT)

- ***Introduction:***

CUPHAT is a collaborative Wales-Ireland INTERREG initiative led by Aberystwyth University, University College Dublin and Dyfed Archaeological Trust. It focuses on the four coastal upland areas of the Cambrian Mountains, Preseli Hills, Wicklow Mountains and Blackstairs Mountains. Through working with 12 communities in these uplands it aims to make use of the cultural and natural heritage assets of the four areas to promote sustainable or regenerative forms of tourism that can contribute positively to the well-being and resilience of people, communities and the environment.

- ***The need:***

The need for the project was established through gaining and understanding of the socio-economic profiles of these coastal upland areas, as well as examining tourism trends and considering the possible impacts of Brexit. Early consultation with community members was undertaken in order to inform and help shape the outcomes, objectives and practical interventions.

The four coastal upland areas targeted have historically been reliant on traditional industries such as agriculture and forestry. GDP for Ceredigion, for example, remains stubbornly low. The case for urgent improvements to this region's economy is well evidenced with poor GDP and GVA, a declining and ageing population, projected employment decline, market failure, low pay, and rural poverty. Most concerning is the region's projected economic decline during the period of 2018-2040 of 3.45% against a projected growth in the UK economy of 7.4%. This cycle of decline is particularly prevalent in the coastal uplands and needs to be addressed urgently. Brexit's impact upon agriculture and the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic both also contribute to the realisation that communities in the targeted areas will need to diversify to survive.

In the Irish context both the Wicklow and Blackstairs Mountains are at the outer periphery of the Dublin Commuter Belt in relatively isolated rural areas. Here the well-documented challenges of youth out-migration is reinforced by the proximity of Dublin and the lack of accessible employment opportunities in local communities. As *Realising our Rural*

Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development highlights, this trend to outmigration exacerbates rural depopulation leaving these areas at risk of service loss and increases the challenges associated with competing for capital investment.

Many economic indicators show that there is a considerable objective need to support economic development in Wales as a whole. In 2015, workplace Gross Value Added (GVA) for Wales was 71.0 per cent of the average for the total of all UK regions. Wales had the lowest level of GVA per head in the UK regions (Welsh Government 2017a: 15). Similarly, gross disposable household income (GDHI) in 2015 for Wales was £50.6 billion or £16,341 per head of population. This represented 85.5 per cent of the UK figure (Welsh Government 2017a: 15). Some of the Future Generations Indicators portray a situation in which Wales is seen to be lagging in economic terms behind other UK regions. The latest estimate of the employment rate for Wales from the Annual Population Survey (APS) of those aged 16-64 is 71.5 per cent for the year ending June 2017. The UK rate was 74.2 per cent for the year ending June 2017 (Welsh Government 2017a: 18).

The tourism sector is growing, particularly lately, as a consequence of visitors not wanting to holiday abroad and has the potential to be a strong economic driver for the programme area as demonstrated by recent performance. During 2014, some 10 million domestic tourism trips were taken in Wales which generated spending of £1.7 billion. These figures are at the peak or close to the peak seen for Wales in the past nine years with an average annual increase of 3.8% across the past five years (2010-2014). This growth is reflected across all the regions. Over the past five years, North Wales saw the largest overall increase of 14.9% in tourism trips, followed by South West Wales (12.1%), South East (11.9%). Mid Wales at 9% should strengthen and diversify its offer to maximise opportunities. By comparison domestic tourism in Ireland peaked in 2018 after a number of years of growth with 10.9 million trips and a spend of over €2 billion. 2019 saw slight declines driven by an increase in outbound tourists, while the impact of COVID led to a renewal of the domestic market in 2020 while restrictions were eased. Yet, visitor numbers vary widely across Ireland's regions with the most recent *Tourism Development and Innovation Strategy* introducing 'Ireland's Ancient East' as a new tourist proposition (that includes the Wicklow Mountains and the Blackstairs Mountains) to increase awareness of a region acknowledged as underperforming in attracting tourists in terms of numbers, spend and trip length.

Each of the four coastal upland areas included within the CUPHAT initiative possess some tourism infrastructure in addition but, at present, this is relatively under-developed, especially when compared with the mass tourism taking place along the coasts of both Ireland and Wales. In both Ireland and Wales, Brexit is likely to have an impact on tourism. However, unexpectedly, Brexit and the Covid 19 pandemic may encourage more people to holiday at home. This creates opportunities for more regions to benefit from new types of domestic tourists wanting to actively explore the less commercialised coastal upland areas.

CUPHAT has been designed to ensure that the investments are focused on capitalising on the recent growth in tourism and are responding to specific market opportunities. The proposed activities will develop a range of visitor product offers and experiences that build

on the areas of potential strengths for tourism in the Coastal Uplands and support both the Welsh Government's *Tourism Strategy, Partnership for Growth* and the Irish Government's *People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025*.

Focused investment is required to improve the overall tourism experience in these neglected regions if the tourism sector is to grow. While the quality of the tourism product in Wales and Ireland has never been higher, there are still important gaps that need to be filled. With both countries well served by a diverse range of visitor attractions, there is a need for more activities that allow visitors to escape the confines of the coast and provide cultured, all-weather attractions and destinations that are distinctive to the upland regions and reflect their distinct culture and personality. The emphasis, therefore, is not just on areas of easy accessibility but also on projects that potentially can change perceptions of the coastal uplands as rewarding visitor destinations.

Investment in these key sites will significantly enhance the current tourism offer and tackle barriers that face many tourism businesses, in particular the short seasonality of demand and weather dependency in many regions which can contribute to low productivity, low profitability and uncertain employment opportunities in the industry. In particular, CUPHAT will create more demand for tourist experience in the coastal uplands during the quieter shoulder and off-peak season.

Our discussions with stakeholders in the upland communities have also testified to the existence of considerable concern about their long-term futures, particularly post Brexit and Covid. The project will seek to promote a better and more engaged touristic experience – and increase tourist spend – within these communities as a way of helping to ensure their long-term economic survival and vitality. CUPHAT's activities will enable the coastal uplands to become more attractive places to live and work by working with key stakeholders and local communities and finding new ways to engage with, and increase, sustainable tourism.

- ***Changes sought and overall approach:***

The operation involves the four coastal upland communities of the Cambrian Mountains, Preseli Hills, Wicklow Mountains and Blackstairs Mountains participating in cross-border cooperation through linked activities and by joint marketing that makes use of common themes. Changes sought are to sustainably realise the potential of natural and cultural assets to bring new types of tourists into areas that are relatively underdeveloped. By raising awareness and fostering engagement with the stunning landscapes of the coastal uplands, the operation will increase capacity for sustainable community development and sustainable tourism. It will help to encourage tourists to visit new areas, away from the already busy coastline and to make linked visits between the various four sites. The operation will embrace new technologies and new modes of both generating interest in the uplands while also encouraging visitors to participate in active research through citizen science activities.

- ***Key outputs for CUPHAT:***

- 12 coastal upland communities participating in cross-border cooperation around cultural, natural and heritage tourism (3 in each coastal upland area);
 - A new tourism network created, which will promote cultural, natural and heritage tourism within and between the 12 communities and 4 coastal upland areas;
 - An increase of 5% in tourism numbers and spend in the 4 coastal uplands, with data information on social media usage (and potentially face-to-face surveys) being used to track, measure and drive uptake;
 - A sustainable tourism model piloted in the 4 coastal upland areas, which can be employed in other under-developed coastal uplands;
 - 4 FTEs in supported enterprises (one in each coastal upland area).
- ***Planned CUPHAT activities to help achieve identified outcomes and outputs:***
 1. **Creating a tourism network within and between each of the coastal uplands targeted.** This will enable the development of a more coordinated approach to promoting sustainable tourism so that a more varied and coherent offer can be provided for tourists (walking/cycling tours that connect different attractions, accommodation, cafés/restaurants etc). The tourism network will link and promote positive collective learning between the four coastal uplands and their adjacent coastal communities, so that common solutions to the challenges of growing and promoting sustainable tourism can be explored.
 2. **Developing a marketing strategy for the coastal uplands based on common themes (e.g. geology/geomorphology, natural heritage, agricultural practices, mining/industry, language, the picturesque).** Themes identified will be used to populate a website and other displays etc, which will help to market the coastal uplands (thus helping to generate interest in these locations even before international tourism resumes post-Covid). The website and displays will also include enhanced experiences to encourage future visits (3D recreations of sites, LiDAR to represent natural heritage);
 3. **Promoting tourist experiences, combining two or more coastal uplands.** The development of a marketing strategy and tourism network (as mentioned above) will underpin the promotion of new tourist experiences, based on visits to two or more coastal uplands (e.g. mining/industrial heritage holidays in the Cambrian Mountains and Wicklow Mountains);
 4. **Improving the tourist experience in 8 pre-existing cultural/natural heritage sites.** Many sites in coastal uplands are under-utilised/under-marketed. We will work with local stakeholders to create a more comprehensive tourist experience, including the

improvement of visitor centres/hubs, improved walks/signage, and the use of interactive apps to convey key aspects of cultural/natural heritage;

5. **Identifying 8 new cultural/natural heritage sites/experiences, through community engagement and citizen science, and working to embed these in the broader touristic experience within coastal uplands.** We will work with two groups of stakeholders. First, we will enlist individuals and groups living and working in coastal uplands (e.g. community groups, walkers/ramblers, school children). Their input, through public events and citizen science data collection exercises (e.g. community recording app trialled in CHERISH), will help to identify hitherto un- or under-recognised heritage sites. Second, we will enlist tourists to contribute to an evidence base to support cultural/natural heritage, e.g. helping to identify rare species of flora/fauna, or processes of landscape change;
6. **Creating 8 additional/enhanced microenterprises based on the heritage of the coastal uplands.** We will work with local stakeholders to encourage and develop new microenterprises to take advantage of the cultural and natural heritage of the coastal uplands;
7. **Identifying new kinds of tourists who would be attracted to coastal uplands.** We will work with local stakeholders to attract more bespoke groups of tourist interested in the heritage of coastal uplands. Potential under-exploited markets include: 1) walkers/cyclists; 2) ecotourists; 3) individuals prescribed with landscape therapy; 4) local history/archaeology societies; 5) tourists interested in spirituality. In general, we will seek to attract tourists who are looking for an 'escape' to less populated parts of Wales and Ireland, which has the potential to be appealing in a post-Covid world.

- ***Benefits of cross-border collaboration***

As a cross-border activity between Aberystwyth University, University College Dublin and Dyfed Archaeological Trust CUPHAT benefits from a strong partnership that also brings in the participation of stakeholders. A collaborative Wales-Ireland approach enables partners and participants to draw on and share a wealth of ideas, knowledges, connections, expertise and technology in order to forge new thinking, trial different ways of working and offer radical solutions that may have a wider applicability in policy and practical contexts.

CUPHAT has been jointly developed by partners who have a high degree of shared interest in coastal upland regions and who possess complementary knowledge and experience, as well as facilities, in the area of uplands, rurality and cultural heritage:

- Aberystwyth University provides expertise in cultural and natural heritage, the use of digital technologies to represent and promote heritage, citizen science, as well as detailed knowledge of the two Welsh coastal upland areas;

- University College Dublin provides expertise in cultural and natural heritage, community engagement, oral history collection, sustainable livelihoods, as well as detailed knowledge of the two Irish coastal upland areas;
- Dyfed Archaeological Trust provides expertise in the interpretation and promotion of heritage, the use of digital technologies to represent and promote heritage, citizen science, as well as detailed knowledge of the two Welsh coastal upland areas.

The three partners offer added value in a cross-border approach to an operation that could not be meaningfully achieved on only one or other side of the border. It is only through joint implementation that a coherent approach to the target regions and their future role can be developed.

The CUPHAT project has been developed so that it aligns fully with the series of Irish and Welsh Government policies and strategies in relation to tourism, economic development, rural development, natural resource management and, in the case of Wales, the Welsh language.

CUPHAT is a genuine cross-border operation in that it targets and addresses a shared upland culture across the Irish Sea, with all the challenges inherent in the often-difficult geography. Many of these areas are dependent on farming and now face concerns over the changing landscape of agricultural policy and the shifting markets for sheep and other produce. They are very settled communities with strong histories, place attachment and a great awareness of their relationship with the landscape. The lead partners all share an interest in telling this story in ways that will bring economic and social benefit to visitors and inhabitants alike. Through cross-border research and discussion, including with communities themselves, the partners have been able to identify common themes that can be used to encourage both individual and linked Wales-Ireland visits to these coastal upland areas, as part of a coordinated marketing strategy and enhanced interpretive provision.

Specifically, coastal uplands in Ireland and Wales (defined as upland areas located adjacent to the Irish sea coast) face a series of common challenges to their ongoing sustainability (linked to demography, economy, ecology, governmental support, location and the long-term impact of COVID-19). Our scoping study of potential coastal upland areas to work with as part of CUPHAT (within the INTERREG defined area) showed that the four coastal uplands areas of the Cambrian Mountains and Preseli Hills in Wales, and the Blackstairs Mountains and Wicklow Mountains in Ireland possessed an unrealised potential in relation to heritage tourism, thus making them highly appropriate sites to work with and to jointly explore the potential for increasing the capacity of coastal communities to utilise their natural and cultural heritage as a driver to economic, sustainable growth.

Each of the four areas possess a series of heritage sites and landscapes, which have the potential to attract international visitors. The tourism experience in these sites is, however, relatively limited and underwhelming and there is room to market these pre-existing sites more effectively.

Through our joint work we were able to confidently identify that each of the coastal uplands within CUPHAT possessed a number of new sites and landscapes that are important in relation to heritage, and which could benefit from additional marketing and promotion. Our

work with CUPHAT will have helped identify one new site/landscape in each of the four upland areas.

Additionally, a broader tourism infrastructure exists in each of the four upland areas (small-scale accommodation of different kinds, cafés/restaurants, souvenir shops etc) but, at present, there are few efforts to bring this infrastructure into a coherent tourism offer. We collectively recognised the scope to replicate and extend the comprehensive tourism offer developed by the Cambrian Mountains Initiative in relation to its Dark Skies designation into the other coastal upland areas that we wished to work with.

Each of these coastal uplands are, furthermore, located adjacent to coastal areas that receive large numbers of visitors annually (Ceredigion and Pembroke coast in Wales, Wexford and Wicklow coast in Ireland). Research into visitor practices shows that the majority of visitors do not venture inland into adjacent upland areas. Our work with CUPHAT aims to make the tourism offer in these coastal uplands more attractive to at least a proportion of those tourists visiting coastal areas at present.

At the same time, each of the four coastal upland areas share a series of common characteristics, which makes it appropriate to view them collectively as a coherent group of locations. These characteristics include:

- common geomorphology and geology with similar, characteristic upland habitats;
- common agricultural practices (e.g. small family farms, focusing largely on sheep rearing adapted to upland environments, and the presence of collective or communal land tenure systems);
- common history and heritage (these areas have shared similar human histories from the neolithic to the present, including neolithic and bronze age sites, early Christian heritage, Celtic cultural links, landholding practices, historic evidence of industry and mining, place-names in native languages, challenges of marginalisation and peripherality etc).

In addition, the cross-border nature of the intervention will allow us to learn from the shared experiences of different coastal uplands in Ireland and Wales. Some coastal uplands have already experimented successfully with certain aspects of their cultural and natural heritage, while others are lagging. Bringing coastal uplands together into a coherent INTERREG operation can enable us to learn from good practice and roll it out more broadly.

The collaborative approach across the Irish Sea further enables us to provide tourists with a similar set of experiences and expectations when seeking out the cultural and natural heritage of coastal uplands in the two countries. Working with a range of stakeholders we can not only develop a set of common themes for marketing the coastal uplands in Ireland and Wales but can also develop digital tools (such as an interactive website) in order to enhance the experience of physical and intangible heritage for potential or actual visitors, and also create a more inclusive offer for diverse types of audiences. The development of such tools can also help address ongoing issues relating to Covid-19 by creating a latent demand for tourism in the coastal uplands ready to be unleashed when international tourism resumes. The new

thinking stimulated by cross-border approaches facilitates the creation of innovative, thematic heritage experiences with a view to promoting multi-destination visits : for example, experiences connected to a picturesque heritage theme might combine visits to Avondale House in the Wicklow Mountains of Ireland with the Hafod estate in the Cambrian Mountains of Wales.

Through using the full expertise of all the partners to deliver a common set of practical interventions in each of the four coastal uplands the benefit to all these areas, as a result of increased tourist numbers and improved visitor experience, can be realised more effectively. These common activities (and common sources of added value for the heritage experience in the coastal uplands) will focus on: engaging with coastal upland communities to enhance and create heritage experiences through unlocking data and histories; connecting young people and tourists with cultural and natural heritage through citizen science activities; bringing landscape and artefacts to life through imaginative use of digital imagery (3D visualisation, LIDAR, drone images); helping communities to create new heritage-related goods and services as well as more diverse and sustainable tourism opportunities that appeal to a greater range of people and extend stays in the shoulder and off-peak season.

By enabling coastal upland communities to develop their tangible and intangible cultural heritage through use of new approaches and technologies, and to mobilise their shared cross-border assets as a driver to economic growth, CUPHAT aligns with the views expressed in *Getting cultural heritage to work for Europe*, the report of the Horizon 2020 Expert Group on Cultural Heritage. The report promotes the economic benefits of cultural heritage while also making a positive case for the role cultural heritage can play in shaping social cohesion and promoting environmental sustainability.

Not only does a cross-border approach allow partners and participants to draw more effectively on a wide range of academic research, new technologies and community-based approaches to inform their operations, it also facilitates wide dissemination of results, the creation of strong knowledge networks and the development of good-practice models that can be applied or adapted for use in other settings.

The CUPHAT initiative will research, collect and promote the cultural heritage of the regions in ways that can be shared across other similar areas, adapted for future use, and form the basis for resilient tourism networks which can ensure cross-border cooperation beyond the project's lifetime

- ***Synergies with other Wales-Ireland cross-border collaborations:***

CUPHAT is one of several other Ireland-Wales INTERREG initiatives that are underway or have recently been completed. Several of these are also concerned with finding ways of engaging with cultural and natural heritage, with local communities and with new technology in order to create more secure futures for rural landscapes and their inhabitants. In the case of the projects mentioned below there is a specific focus on well-coordinated, well-promoted sustainable tourism - and therefore a high degree of complementarity with

CUPHAT, which can be maximised to advance shared objectives and deliver benefits to rural communities :

Celtic Routes

Celtic Routes aims to establish an innovative, integrated cross border complementary tourism campaign on both sides of the Irish Sea. Extending throughout the coastal communities of Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion, as well as Waterford, Wexfor and Wicklow this promotional campaign aims to extend the season and create a unique, discreet and exciting offer for first time visitors. The development of innovative content to use across all digital and social platforms is a key feature of the project.

Rediscovering Ancient Connections

A project between Pembrokeshire County Council and Wexford County Council, *Rediscovering Ancient Connections* focuses on the areas of Ferns, Co Wexford (where Saint Aidan had a monastery) and Saint David's in Wales and is centred around the communities within each. It features a mentoring element between the two within a business and community context. Although different in its scope, deliverables and geography, this operation has potential for synergy with CUPHAT, especially with the shared focus on Pembrokeshire and Wexford/Carlow through which added value might be gained for both initiatives via promotion and marketing.

Ports Past and Present

Ports – Past and Present focuses on the distinctive heritage of port towns on either side of the Irish Sea and the Pembrokeshire element of the project clearly offers opportunity to explore synergies with CUPHAT.

LIVE

LIVE develops the concept of ecomuseums as a way of establishing and promoting a sustainable model for tourism in relatively remote areas of Ireland and Wales (Iveragh and Llŷn Peninsula), especially out of the peak tourist seasons. Again, there is potential for shared learning and collaboration with CUPHAT, which is being actively pursued.

- ***Closing remarks***

In summary, CUPHAT will create a more secure future for coastal uplands by encouraging increased tourism and greater diversification (including targeting new kinds of tourist and extending stays in the shoulder and off-peak season). The operation will explore, enhance and diversify the tourist offer in the target areas in Ireland and Wales, drawing on academic research, new technologies and community partnerships to provide new, regenerative tourism opportunities that stem from, and in turn benefit local communities and the natural environment. The operation will open up new areas as interesting places for tourists to visit – improving tourism opportunities, tourist experiences, and the livelihoods of coastal

communities. It will disseminate its results widely, develop models of good practice for developing and promoting interest in coastal uplands and create possibilities for future adaptation of its findings and practices.

CUPHAT aligns with policies and strategies, both in Wales and Ireland, that seek to realise the potential of natural and cultural assets through an improved, sustainable form of tourism. CUPHAT's engagement with this agenda, as well as with opportunities for blue, green and brown (peatland) growth will ensure that the four case study areas that are part of the project are made more attractive places to live, work and relocate to as well as to visit. There will be a positive impact on the well-being of those who live, work and visit the coastal upland regions involved in the operation which might otherwise be at great risk of social exclusion and marginalisation.

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