Cymdogion Celtaidd   Comharsain Ceilteacha

Nabannan Ceilteach

Celtic Neighbours

Review and options for the future

(April 2018)

Contents

Purpose of this review

This review has two purposes: (i) to provide an overview and to take stock of the work and achievements of Celtic Neighbours to date and (ii) to consider what might happen next by providing options and recommendations for discussion among all stakeholders.

Background: This review was commissioned in 2017 to support the stakeholders in the Celtic Neighbours project in deciding if and how the project might operate in the years ahead. While the review has to take account of the work and achievements of Celtic Neighbours since its inception in 2005, the main priority and focus of the review is on looking forward and identifying options for how Celtic Neighbours might operate in future.

Methodology: The review was informed by (a) desk research and an examination of online and printed materials that were produced by Celtic Neighbours, (b) an online survey questionnaire that was circulated among a group of stakeholders in the Celtic Neighbours project and (c) structured interviews with stakeholders. The online survey was carried out during the summer of 2017 and the structured interviews took place during the spring of 2018. The survey questionnaire template can be found at Appendix 1. The template for the structured interviews can be found at Appendix 2. An overview of the survey results can be found at Appendix 3 and Appendix 4. A list of individuals and organisations contacted and consulted for the review can be found at Appendix 5. A list of publications consulted is at Appendix 6. The review process was supervised by a Steering Group comprising Meic Llewellyn and Mícheál Ó Fearraigh, and this supervisory work was carried out principally via email, conference calls and meetings.

Working language: The working language for the review process was English. A number of interviews and other communications were conducted through Irish.

Executive Summary

Through its work to date, the Celtic Neighbours (CN) project has demonstrated that there is a need for a project that connects artists and audiences in minoritised language communities. CN's work has been innovative, creative and at times ground-breaking in its approaches to supporting cultural collaborations between the native-language cultures of these islands, and to extend these language-based ventures to communities elsewhere in Europe.

CN's approach has been to work with artists, audiences and communities to create a sense of connectedness, common ground and exploration. This approach is effective and has been generally successful. CN's work is relevant to artists and their communities, and there are opportunities for CN to create a more central role for artists in devising or designing projects in future. One of the most effective aspects of CN is that it creates a safe and unconditional space where ideas and projects can develop, it operates as a loose network that causes 'creative cultural collisions' that may result in projects and happenings. Artists and other creative people react well to CN's approach to organising creative gatherings that stimulate ideas, projects and collaborations, and they appreciate the emphasis on bringing people together, rather than focusing on pre-determined or prescribed outcomes.

CN has built up a distinctive, perhaps unique, set of working relationships and contacts with artists, producers, funders, policy-makers, and many others involved directly or indirectly in supporting or promoting language and culture in Europe – this is a valuable asset and a strategic resource that needs to be maintained and developed. The CN project has been effective in its work to create cohesion and new shared spaces for promoting ideas and creativity, within and among minoritised language communities in Europe.

The need for CN, or something like it, is arguably stronger today because of political and ideological developments across Europe including Brexit, the rise of nationalism, and tensions around regional and cultural autonomy or identity. The CN project is valuable because it is unique and because it has created benefits for artists and communities in tangible, measurable ways and also in intangible ways – there is no easily identifiable project that could replace CN or replicate its work or maintain the niche that CN has carved out in the cultural landscape in Europe.

This review has found consistently strong or very strong consensus among stakeholders that there is a need for CN, that CN is valuable and necessary, and that it has expertise, adaptability and mobility that a larger organisation might find difficult to achieve. Stakeholders also identify potential risks arising from organisational & structural fragility, and there is an appetite among stakeholders for a concise statement of strategic purpose for the next 3-5 years. There is a sense of ambition to take this opportunity to position CN as an expert facilitator (or adviser or convenor or creator of opportunities) at this time when

there is a need in communities across Europe for the unifying, enlightening and empowering benefits of culture, creativity, language and arts.

Among the options for future development that were examined during this review, the preferred option is for CN to build on the strength of its networks and find ways of concentrating its work on being a catalyst for creative collisions within and across minoritised language communities in Europe. In practical terms, this option means CN would need to describe the scope and limits of its role and work, and to specify the actions that it plans to undertake in the next 3-5 years to maintain the momentum that the project has created since its inception. How exactly this happens will be a matter for CN and its stakeholders, but the prevailing ideas suggest that CN's role could be described using the following words: facilitator, adviser, expert, convenor, connector, explorer, instigator. The appropriate structural and organisational arrangements to support such a role could involve agreements, partnerships, MoU's or other arrangements among agencies whose strategic work will benefit from CN's work and services.

Celtic Neighbours and its work – how it looks in 2018

Celtic Neighbours is a project that focuses on stimulating cultural collaborations and promoting creativity in minoritised language communities in Europe. The project's original sphere of interest and activity was among the Celtic language communities. The scope and reach of the project's work has grown and since 2005 CN has been involved in or responsible for the generation or creation or facilitation of opportunities and projects that support and encourage cultural collaborations within and among communities in the Celtic world, and more widely in Europe. A common thread through CN's work has been to develop relationships and networks among minoritised language communities in Europe, where some 40 million citizens speak and use a minority language. The sense of purpose is very clear: "***Celtic Neighbours** is the development agency supporting cultural collaborations between minoritised-language communities and groups across the Celtic world and more widely in Europe.*" (http://www.celtic-neighbours.eu/y-fro.html)

To date, CN's work draws together different art forms and is always designed to maximise participation and develop sustainable interactions. CN works with a network of partners across Europe to create dynamic, interactive, community-led, arts initiatives, bringing together a wide range of artists, communities and cultural groups.

CN's role has evolved and morphed as it has built up its network of associates, partners and collaborators. While most of the people who contributed to this review had difficulty is saying what exactly CN is, there were common themes and ideas that describe CN and these include: instigator, facilitator, developer, networker, leader, broker, maker of opportunities and many other similar words.

Working in the field of contemporary and traditional culture in minoritised-language communities, in a role that operates both deeply within cultural communities, and somewhat on the fringes of the formal or official arts & culture infrastructure, CN has identified niches and needs that can generate benefits and opportunities for communities and individuals. For example the final report of the Tional project, entitled *But Does it Do Any Good?* contains this description of how CN sees its role and work:

"Celtic Neighbours acts as the fulcrum of an active network, and as a matter of course we maintain close ties with partner organisations in that network. We therefore receive regular feedback on the progress of initiatives from a high proportion of our colleagues. We have maintained a particular interest in projects growing out of Tional, asking for updates and discussing progress at least quarterly since July 2013. In addition, Celtic Neighbours has been a contributing partner in three of the eight programmes under consideration, and an active mentor to two others."

The report also gives a clear sense of how CN's work can be seen as a form of action research as well as cultural development:

"'*Tional' was a three-day gathering organised by Celtic Neighbours at Sabhal Mór Ostaig on the Isle of Skye in June 2013, essentially to help launch new cultural collaborations and strengthen existing ones. In this report we concentrate on the economic and social impacts of eight cross-national, community-centred cultural interactions that developed out of that gathering, examining in depth their impact now they have moved into their active production phase. This allows us to consider issues such as job creation, the generation of finance and the emergence of second and third generation activities. We look also at the impacts these eight collaborations have made on the confidence, ambition, expertise and other resources of those involved, whether as organisers, cultural practitioners or participants.*

All these projects are taking place through one or more of the smaller European languages, and all are collaborations between community and production groups dedicated to working in those languages. Our research suggests powerfully that multi-lingual initiatives not only contribute significantly to long-term economic well-being but have a positive impact on language use and cultural confidence in smaller-language communities. Celtic Neighbours www.celtic-neighbours.eu is the leading development agency supporting cultural collaborations across the Celtic world and more widely in Europe. If desired, access to our earlier report distributed a year ago, which concentrates more on the dynamics stimulating or militating against the success of embryo projects, can be found at http://www.ealain.ie/publications-reports/other-arts-reports-documents/ ."

The report on Tional also presents quantitative data to describe economic and other impacts:

- *9 successful interactions; 28 partner organisations from 8 minority nations involved*
- *Every project delivered in one of the smaller languages – often in two or more*
- *36 second and third generation collaborations already moving towards production stage*
- *Over 600,000 Euro generated in over less than three years*
- *162,00 Euro paid in wages; 37,000 Euro in artists' and professional fees*
- *11 full-time posts created; 44 part-time; 17 internships*
- *More than 700 volunteers and other participants; more than 15,000 audience members*
- *Audiences developing for innovative and multilingual productions*
- *Cultural activities effective in addressing social issues and community planning*

- *Participants report their skills, capacities, resources and confidence greatly enhanced*
- *Participants report accelerating positive impacts on language use and cultural confidence.*

This approach is consistent with CN's view (Beirm, p116) that part of its work is about "*how we can use the native languages and cultures to stimulate rural community regeneration, build economic structures without diluting the cultural integrity of the activities, and above all to analyse the philosophy of using culture as a means of promoting development in rural communities that can be transferrable to other areas (and other cultures?).*"

And a more recent example of this approach, which sets out to create knowledge and insight that that can then inform behaviour and practice, can be seen in one of the outputs of the Tosta project, namely the publication *Treoir Neamhfhoirfe – An imperfect guide to prioritise minority languages in international cultural projects (2017).* This publication fits perfectly with CN's statement of purpose "*We come from a range of organisations across Europe, drawn together by the desire to mount cultural projects that remove the sense of isolation that can affect speakers of small languages.*" (http://www.celtic-neighbours.eu/y-fro.html).

Interestingly in the context of this review which is looking at what might happen next and what CN's options might be, the publication of this high-quality guidebook underlines the question of what precisely CN's role is, or could, or should, be beyond its ability to act as a catalyst, mentor, broker, networker and driver of ideas, opportunities and projects. How will the learning and ideas of Tosta find their way into networks of practice, across Europe, in the performing arts, in visual arts, in language planning and in planning for diversity, inclusion and openness within the creative industries? Whose job is this? Does CN or should CN have a role in following through on projects like this? Or is its role to remain as a convenor of cultural collaborators, the designer of a creative and safe space where artists and organisers can come together to review progress, hear each other's stories, map out the challenges and dream up solutions and answers to try out?

CN has been involved in an impressive list of projects and publications since 2005 and the following are described in some detail on the website (http://www.celtic-neighbours.eu/projects--prosiectau.html):

- MoMA Machynlleth – Áras Éanna visual arts exchange (2017)
- Atlantikaldia Festival (2017)
- Wythnos Euskara Cymru (2017)
- Craobh Abhainn (2016-17)
- Tosta (2014-16)
- Cymylau Tystion (2014-15)

- Tair (2013)
- Tional (2013)
- Branwen (2012-13)
- Tír (2010-12)

Based on this body of work (online and print) it is clear that CN has identified and scoped out various niches and needs within the cultural, social, economic and political structures as they affect minoritised language communities within these islands and more broadly within Europe. CN has been able both to generate and respond to opportunities to support cultural collaborations between minoritised-language communities and groups across the Celtic world and more widely in Europe, and this is precisely what the enterprise sets out to achieve. This strategic and operational consistency is impressive, and it has been achieved with a very lean organisational structure and with minimal resources.

The path ahead and possible next steps

Based on the findings of the stakeholder survey and interviews, there appears to be a broad consensus on the following:

1. Through its work to date, the Celtic Neighbours project has demonstrated that there is a need for a project that connects artists and audiences in minoritised language communities

2. CN's approach, of working with artists, audiences and communities to create a sense of connectedness and exploration, is effective and has been generally successful

3. CN has built up a distinctive, perhaps unique, set of working relationships and contacts with funders, policy-makers, artists, producers, and many others involved directly or indirectly in supporting or promoting language and culture in Europe – this is a valuable asset and resource that needs to be maintained and developed

4. The need for CN, or something like it, is arguably stronger today because of political and ideological developments across Europe including Brexit, the rise of nationalism, and tensions around regional and cultural autonomy or identity

5. CN's work is relevant to artists and their communities, and there are opportunities for CN to create a more central role for artists in devising or designing projects in future

6. The CN project is valuable because it is unique and because it has created benefits for artists and communities in tangible, measurable ways and also in intangible ways – there is no easily identifiable project that could replace CN or replicate its work or maintain the niche that CN has carved out in the cultural landscape in Europe

7. The CN project has been effective in its work to create cohesion and new shared spaces for ideas and creativity, within and among minoritised language communities in Europe

8. The focus on the Celtic identity brings a sense of clarity to the project, it is a widely understood term

9. The use of the name Celtic Neighbours is effective although it creates a mixture of ambiguity and surprise as well – the project works with artists and communities that are technically outside the Celtic 'family' but on the other hand this reinforces the message that we are all neighbours; the name is also accurate in the sense that the driving forces usually come from the Celtic partners (Wales, Ireland)

10. One of the most effective aspects of CN is that it creates a safe and unconditional space where ideas and projects can develop, it operates as a loose network that causes 'creative cultural collisions' that may result in projects and happenings

11. CN's projects have often been small-scale and it is felt that these are particularly effective and impactful, but the project should always keep space for larger projects such as Tosta

12. One of the main constraints on CN is that it does not have the administrative or organisational capacity to function as a conventional organisation or project manager – paradoxically this may be CN's greatest strength, that it can be adaptable and agile, that it can operate across the silos of conventional funding and other structures, but without basic funding and other resources CN's ability to plan and operate is severely limited

13. CN relies on the work and availability of a very small group of committed and visionary people, and is highly reliant on one individual; this approach will be difficult to sustain especially if CN is to seek or compete for funding, or to take on new or large-scale projects

14. CN's strength has been its ability to make projects happen, but there is a need for CN now to have a more strategic focus, perhaps specify that its primary contribution is through organising an environment where artists, funders, organisations etc can meet in an open, inclusive, culturally & linguistically diverse setting with no predetermined outcomes other than that creative people are brought together

15. CN has developed an innovative way of working that could help funders and agencies achieve their objectives, and CN's role could be as an expert advisory service, or as a broker, that helps steer activity and policy development that is grounded in supporting artists and communities

Scenarios, options, recommendations for the future

Scenario 1	CN winds down
	This has not been identified as an option during the consultation process. On this basis it is not considered relevant to the current review. In addition, the consistent tone of the consultation and stakeholder interviews has been positive about CN and raised the question of *how* CN can continue to operate, not *if* it should continue to operate.
Scenario 2	CN tries to continue operating with the status quo
	- This is not considered a feasible option for a number of reasons (structure, resources, personnel) that were cited during the consultation. - CN lacks a robust organisational structure and, both because of and despite this, CN is seen as being simultaneously innovative and anomalous. - There is a strong view that the project is over-reliant on one individual and that it is difficult to see how the current structure supports this individual and any potential successors. - There are some concerns that the rich expertise that is concentrated in one or two individuals is at risk of being diluted or lost, if the current ways of working remain unchanged. - There is also a view, repeated by many, that the most useful things that CN achieves could continue to be achieved if (a) CN refocuses on a more limited set of goals and (b) is more explicitly an expert advisory body, a facilitator, a catalyst, a broker, a network, a hub, in fact anything but a conventional admin-heavy organisation.
Scenario 3	CN repositions itself 2018-2021
	- In this scenario, which is based on a broad consensus that emerged from the consultation, CN needs to reposition itself and renegotiate its unique expert advisory role with artists, funders, policy-makers, organisations and other stakeholders - This means positioning CN as an innovative project/network/alliance/collective that embodies, in practical ways through its work with artists, the concept of creative, cultural and linguistic mobility – the strong consensus among stakeholders is that CN has demonstrated that it brings a unique perspective and expert approach to this area.

	- One immediate priority in this scenario would be to set a clear simple strategic purpose for CN – for example, to be a catalyst for creative collisions within and across minoritised language communities in Europe. - In this scenario, CN needs to specify what it aims to do so that it builds on the solid foundation it has put in place over the years – it is already seen as relevant, necessary, valuable, so it needs to say what exactly it aims to do over the next 3-5 years to build on this and add value to the arts and creative communities that it serves. - To achieve this level of strategic focus, CN needs to set a small number of goals that will use CN's expertise to mentor activists/organisers who are interested in continuing the project, agree a succession plan, identify what funds are needed to maintain the CN network or 'non-organisation' or the 'liquid network' that the project has created (for a more detailed insight into liquid networks see Steven Johnson's presentation at http://www.ted.com/talks/view/lang/en//id/961) - In order to achieve the clear, simple focus that is implicit in this scenario, CN needs to set clear simple strategic goals that it can deliver – for example, that there will be a gathering/meeting every two years (a) to hear stories of what has happened in the last two years and (b) to make the space for new things and new ideas to be born. CN's role is to influence and shape the design and delivery of these events, and to work with the artists, producers, agencies and organisations who will make them happen on the ground. This means that CN will use its networks and contacts and leverage these to ensure that the agencies achieve the maximum possible impact from their investment and involvement in these events. Based on the consultation, this type of goal would appear to meet the needs of many stakeholders. The option of CN becoming an online information resource, rather than having a more organic catalytic role, seems not to be a priority among stakeholders. In this regard, CN's online presence and profile were identified as weaknesses because of lack of resources and possibly too broad a focus, and the scenario of the CN website being better designed, more user-friendly and more focused, seems to be more relevant and attractive to stakeholders.

Recommendation: pursue Option 3, identify operating model and how it could be funded.

APPENDIX 1

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE TEMPLATE

Celtic Neighbours Review SURVEY.

Stakeholder group survey

Purpose: to establish a baseline of evidence from stakeholders and participants on the following:

- to test the founding assumptions of the Celtic Neighbours project;
- to assess demand and need for the CN project;
- to identify scope and potential for further collaborations and projects;
- to identify things that the CN project could do differently/better in future
- to identify the main challenges and risks for the CN project

Survey will be an important source of insight and information, coupled with the structured interviews.

15

Celtic Neighbours was established in 2005 as a development agency supporting cultural collaborations across the Celtic world and more widely in Europe.

Q1. How effective has Celtic Neighbours been at supporting cultural collaborations?

SCALE 1-5 not effective-highly effective

Q2. How strong is the need for the Celtic Neighbours project?

SCALE 1-5 no need-strong need

Q3. How clearly is Celtic Neighbours recognised as a development agency for cultural collaborations?

SCALE 1-5 unrecognised-prominent

Q4. How likely are you to consider Celtic Neighbours as a potential partner or associate or resource when you are devising or planning a project?

SCALE 1-5 unlikely-highly likely

Q5. Do you feel that there is now a network of cultural organisations and partners as a result of Celtic Neighbours' work since 2005?

YES/NO

Please add more comments or information to support your response:

Celtic Neighbours aims to stimulate cultural collaborations between minoritised-language communities.

Q6. How effective is Celtic Neighbours at stimulating such cultural collaborations?

SCALE 1-5 not effective-highly effective

Q7. How important is it that Celtic Neighbours focuses on minoritised-language communities?

SCALE 1-5 unimportant-highly important

Celtic Neighbours aims to promote and celebrate minoritised languages.

Q8. How relevant is this aim in Europe today?

SCALE 1-5 irrelevant-essential

Q9. How effective has Celtic Neighbours been at achieving this aim?

SCALE 1-5 not effective-highly effective

Celtic Neighbours aims to use music and the arts to carry a message of diversity across Europe.

Q10. How effectively does Celtic Neighbours pursue this aim, through music and the arts?

SCALE 1-5 ineffectively-highly effectively

Q11. Should Celtic Neighbours continue to use music and the arts in this way?

YES/NO

Q12. Does Celtic Neighbours focus enough on policy and lobbying?

YES/NO

If you answered 'no' please suggest what specifically Celtic Neighbours needs to focus on ADD COMMENT BOX

```

```

Q13. Are there other ways that Celtic Neighbours can achieve its aims?

YES/NO

If you answered 'yes' please say what these are; what other kinds of things should Celtic Neighbours do? Are there things that Celtic Neighbours should stop doing? What should Celtic Neighbours do differently? ADD COMMENT BOX

```

```

Q14. *We are interested in identifying the opportunities and challenges that face the Celtic Neighbours project in the next 3-5 years – including cultural, environmental, technological, social, economic and political. Please identify the top three opportunities and challenges in these categories, and feel free to add others!*

	Top 3 opportunities	Top 3 challenges
Cultural		
Environmental		
Technological		
Social		
Economic		
Political		
Other		
Other		
Other		

Q15. *We are keen to identify risks that the Celtic Neighbours project might face in the next 3-5 years. If you can identify things that we need to consider as risks, please describe them here:*

APPENDIX 2

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

<u>INTERVIEW TEMPLATE</u>

Dear Colleague,

I'm writing to introduce myself, to say hello, and to thank you for agreeing to participate in the review of Comharsana Ceilteacha/Cymdogion Celtaidd/Nabannan Ceilteach/Celtic Neighbours. Our mutual colleague and friend Meic Llewellyn has kindly given me your contact details in connection with the review of the Celtic Neighbours project that I am working on.

I am currently undertaking a series of structured interviews with around 20 individuals and organisations who have been involved in various ways with Celtic Neighbours and this is the reason I am contacting you now.

The review of Celtic Neighbours includes a review of project documentation, and a consultation process that comprises an online survey questionnaire and a series of structured interviews with a sample group of stakeholders.

I would be grateful if you could spare 15-20 minutes in the coming two weeks to participate in a short telephone or Skype interviews with me, and I am pleased to attach an outline of the topics that I hope to discuss with you. All interviews will be treated as confidential and non-attributable unless we agree otherwise.

The main purpose of the interview is to get a sense from you and other stakeholders of:

- The need for Celtic Neighbours (or a similar enterprise or project)
- The best ways for Celtic Neighbours to be effective and relevant in the next 3-5 years
- What can Celtic Neighbours do next to anticipate and respond to the needs of (a) artists and (b) audiences in minoritised language communities in the next 3-5 years
- What opportunities should Celtic Neighbours focus on in the immediate future?
- Brexit

Please look on these as prompts or signposts, rather than as a prescription, for the conversation that we'll have.

With every good wish,

Dermot

APPENDIX 3

SURVEY RESPONSES (i)

APPENDIX 4

SURVEY RESPONSES (ii)

APPENDIX 5

Stakeholders who were consulted

Stakeholders who were consulted

Asier Basurto

Catherine Boothman

Geoffrey Brown

Nick Capaldi

Eibhlín de Paor

Zélie Flach

Naomi Heath

Gwyn Jones

Nuala Ní Fhlathúin

Kath Nic Leoid

Brian Ó hEadhra

Darach Ó Tuarisg

Luned Rhys Parri

Mirjam Vellinga

Appendix 6: Publications, websites consulted

http://www.celtic-neighbours.eu/

http://www.celtic-neighbours.eu/projects--prosiectau.html

https://www.scribd.com/document/321149086/final-tional-report-for-udaras

http://www.ealain.ie/wp-content/uploads/pdf/CreativeWest-TheCreativeSectorintheWesternRegion-WDC.pdf

https://www.ted.com/talks/steven_johnson_where_good_ideas_come_from

https://www.ietm.org/en/publications/fund-finder

http://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/Main_Site/Content/About_Us/three-year-plan-2017-2019.pdf

https://creative.ireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2017-12/Creative%20Ireland%20Programme.pdf

http://www.wai.org.uk/about-us/strategy-2013-2018

http://www.creativescotland.com/resources/our-publications/plans-and-strategy-documents/gaelic-language-plan

http://www.creativescotland.com/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/25500/Creative-Scotland-10-Year-Plan-2014-2024-v1-2.pdf

- Treoir neamhfhoirfe (2016) Tosta & Donostia/San Sebastian 2016
- Beirm-Bwrlwm-Fiuchadh Foinn-Ferment (undated)