

# GREEN & BLUE FUTURES

EVALUATION, STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK,  
PRACTICAL AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

JULY 2015



**SOCIAL  
ENTERPRISE  
UK**



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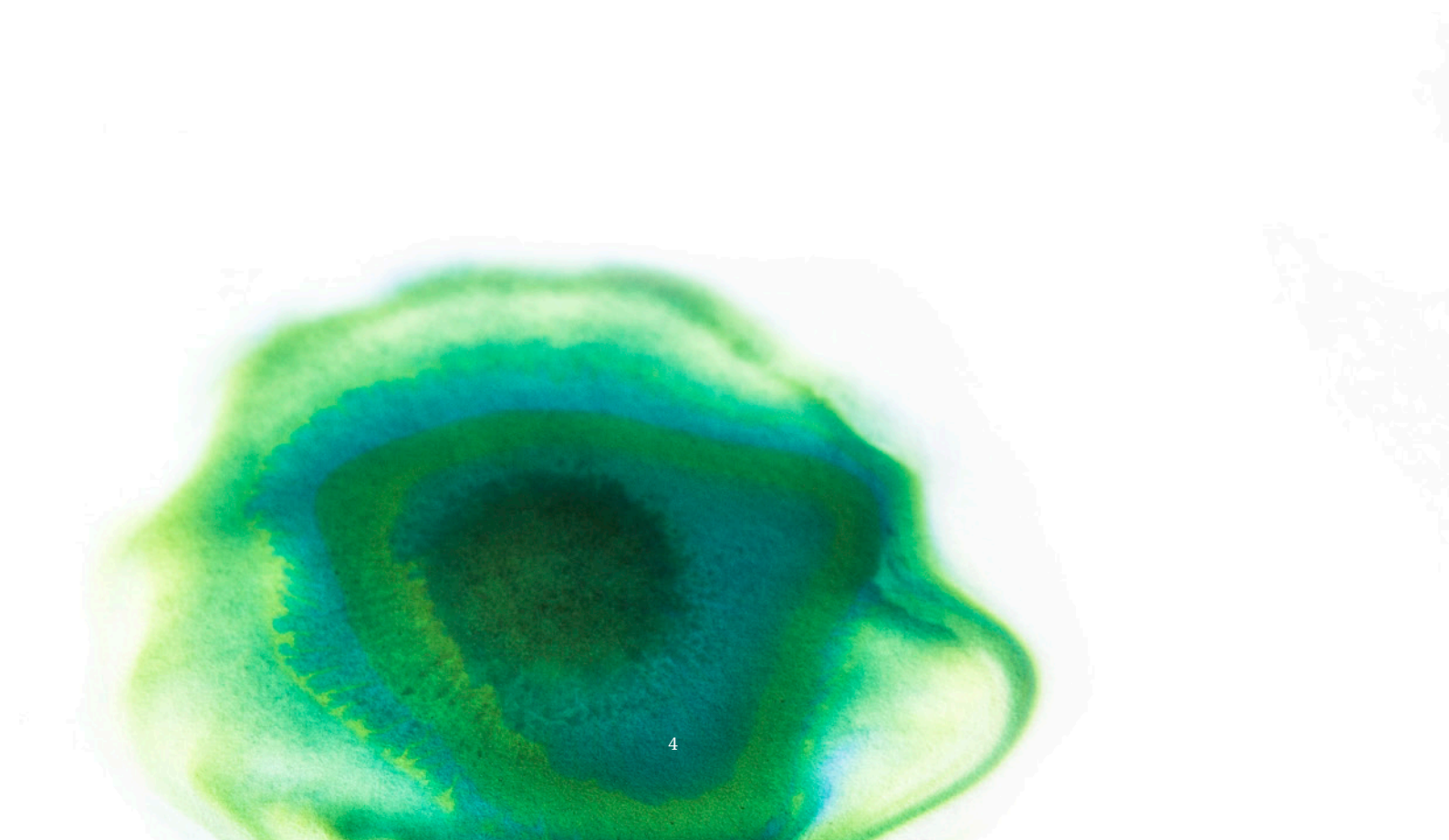
# INTRODUCTION

The Green and Blue Futures Project (G&BF hereafter) aimed at developing a transnational framework for growing the role of the social economy in the management and development of green & blue infrastructure within Northwest Europe (NWE hereafter), by developing and piloting appropriate models that maximise the wider benefits to society.

G&BF was composed of seven partners (representing Scotland, England, Ireland, France and Belgium) who took a variety of approaches to developing nature sites, parks, open space, community farms, woodlands and waterways. They explored ways to combine ‘social’ objectives, such as helping disadvantaged groups into employment, with environmentally focused activities such as regenerating a riverside or running a market garden. Possibilities were also explored for adopting social enterprise models, which combine a focus on social outcomes with the adoption of a business model that generates income, in order to diversify away from grant funding.

This report has two main aims:

- It gives an overview of the activities undertaken by the projects, the kinds of outcomes they achieved, the difficulties they encountered and the insight they gained (Section 1)
- It puts forward a strategic framework for building on this activity, highlighting implications for policy makers at local, national and European levels (Sections 2 and 3)







# SECTION 1:

## THE G&BF PROJECTS

### Introduction

This section of the report gives insight into the varied activities undertaken by the seven G&BF project partners and their experiences in trying to develop a social economy approach towards the green and blue infrastructure. The findings are informed by a series of interviews with project leads, and data collected through a shared outcomes matrix.

This work builds on a previous report produced by SEUK in October 2014, which drew on an earlier round of interviews to suggest a methodology for data collection. The 2014 report noted the following characteristics of the G&BF pilots:

- The field of activity varies hugely across pilots, ranging from a pilot developing strategy and running training as part of a social enterprise zone in Scotland, to a pilot conducting a feasibility study for growing spirulina algae on the banks of the river Sambre in France.
- The profile and structure of pilots also varies hugely. Some operate as an independent organisation, others are located in local authorities / public bodies.
- Of course, the pilots are also operating in different economic, political and social environments. Regulation and bureaucratic structures vary between countries and jurisdictions, shaping the opportunities and barriers faced by different pilots.

As a result, the data collection methodology was designed to allow for differences across the pilots. The outcomes matrix developed for the pilot captures top-level input (eg. the staff + resources involved in the pilot), output (eg. total numbers of beneficiaries worked with) and outcomes (eg. skills and confidence towards employment, reduced isolation) data for each of the three years of funding (2013, 2014 and 2015) and is flexible in terms of coverage of different outcome areas. In general, figures for the second year of the funding are used (ending December 2014), as the figures for 2015 are based on estimates.

The remainder of section 1:

- Reports on each project in turn, drawing on interviews and data submitted through the outcomes matrix
- Discusses overarching themes that emerged through interviews with project leads
- Aggregates the data, where possible, to give a sense of outcomes across the project as a whole



# THE PROJECTS

## Canal & River Trust (England)

The Canal & River Trust (CRT) project has been developing the Churnett Valley Living Landscape Partnership, which focuses on the area around a local canal. The project makes use of volunteers, and provides training opportunities for people in the management of vegetation and improving the condition of the towpath along the canal. City & Guilds qualifications are awarded to participants in subjects including health and safety and environmental management.

The pilot operates with 10 staff members and 48 volunteers, with a budget of £154,379 / €208,411. It has run various activities focused on the recovery and maintenance of the area surrounding the canal. For the second year, pilot data shows that 11 young people are in training, and seven are in education or employment.

In addition to social outcomes, the pilot reported numerous outcomes related to environmental knowledge and awareness:

- Working with ecologists from the Wildlife Trust helped to improve the knowledge of the young people involved about environmental issues
- Interest in local heritage was reignited when the pilot uncovered a hidden lock on the canal. The activities attracted television coverage and generated a new appreciation of heritage among volunteers and local people
- The activities of volunteers had led to habitat improvement through the building of bird and bat boxes, tree planting and hedge laying.
- They have also provided five tonnes of biomass fuel (logs) to local people and passing boaters over the first two years of the pilot
- Dredging material has been used to build up the towpath, saving on the transportation of new material and the disposal of old material

CRT encountered many of the issues faced by third sector organisations, and were slow to start up as a result: developing a ‘pipeline’ of young people to take part was challenging, and was affected by partner organisations suffering from cuts in funding and changes in government policy. A lack of experience in youth work and changes in management personnel also hindered the development of the pilot to some extent. Pilot leads also highlighted that the payment structure caused concerns, as they were asked to spend upfront and then claim back the money. This is challenging for small organisations who may not have the cashflow to cover costs, and also carries the risk that payment claims will be rejected.

One of the main benefits of the G&BF funding was that it allowed them to diverge from their core mission into engaging with disadvantaged young people. The pilot has helped them to think about the sustainability of canal maintenance, and how volunteers and local people might be involved, to the

extent that management could even be transferred away from the charity. There is potential for a social enterprise model to be used in this setting, as shown by other pilots in G&BF. Furthermore, CRT are considering developing an art trail project, similar to and inspired by that developed by Tipperary.

Project funding requires CRT reports on outputs and outcomes, which are fairly well defined. They are also working with Northampton University on the health benefits of UK waterways, and how they can be converted into financial values, and with Cardiff University on developing understanding of the economic value of UK waterways.

## ‘canal college’® at Scottish Waterways Trust (Scotland)

canal college® is a pioneering skills, work experience and employability programme. It provides memorable learning opportunities and hands-on work experience for young people between 16-25 years who are not in employment, education or training.

Most participants have faced significant additional barriers to, or have been disengaged from, work and education. These range from learning disabilities and mental health problems such as depression, through to chaotic home lives, acute shyness, speech problems and low self-esteem.

For many, canal college is therefore their first experience of achieving recognised awards like the Saltire Award for volunteering, the John Muir Award for environmental commitment, and Youth Achievement Awards for participation, responsibility and leadership. It may also be their first experience of team working, leadership opportunities, and peer support. As a result, one of the outcomes participants most frequently cited in the evaluation was improved confidence and social skills.

canal college® had similar aims to the CRT pilot in its use of canal maintenance as the focus of a range of activities. It is more established as a pilot, however, and has reached 162 beneficiaries. Three part-time members of staff worked to provide 14-week courses for 16-24 year old unemployed people.

The pilot aimed to help young people towards employment. To give an idea of the outcomes achieved by the pilot, figures show that between 2013 and 2015, 162 young people took part in the six 14-week canal college programmes in the Edinburgh and Falkirk areas (target 144). 116 of these achieved at least one positive destination as a result including:

- 21 found paid employment
- 21 began accredited training courses
- 20 went on to new volunteering opportunities
- 19 entered work placements
- 15 were accepted onto paid training
- 14 enrolled in Further Education

They considered the full cohort to have increased their self-confidence, self-awareness, time keeping, relationship-building and leadership skills.

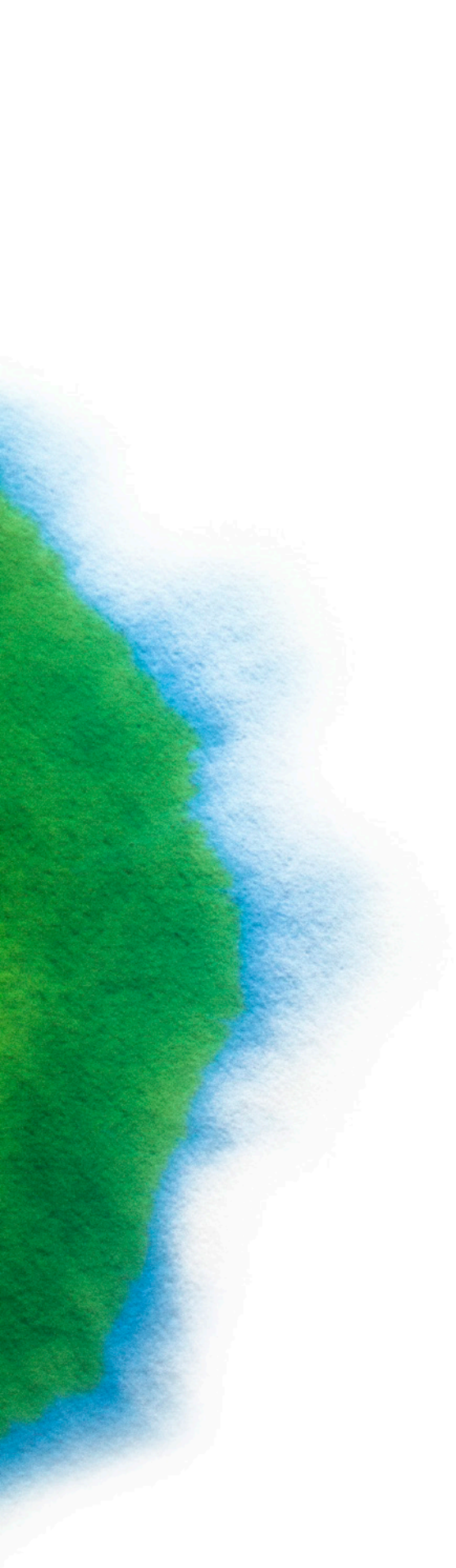
canal college is also a unique volunteering experience, giving people over 25 years of age the opportunity to mentor and help young people. By contributing their own skills and life learning, 24 mentors have helped young people to learn about the built, cultural and natural heritage of canals. But mentors have also developed skills and achieved outcomes of their own, particularly confidence and employability.

The pilot also reported that the full cohort improved their understanding and awareness of the importance of natural environment and heritage, and provided anecdotal evidence of improved access to and enjoyment of natural environment and heritage in the local area. For example, comments from local residents showed appreciation at the work being done, while around 200 people attended celebration events. They have also worked with partners at main access point on the Union Canal to create new woodland areas, hedgerows and wildflower meadows, and to increase biodiversity by building bat boxes.



Project partners gathered together for a G&BF meeting





canal college sought to support social enterprise-related activity by hiring canal boats from social enterprises on numerous occasions, and providing volunteering opportunities for volunteers from a social enterprise.

The logistics of delivery have also been challenging for canal college. Their rural setting creates difficulties that were not fully appreciated before they began, and it has taken time to build capacity. They have discovered that the structure they have been using is not the best option, and if they were to continue they would employ coordinators full time.

The funding has helped deliver the pilot and helped them to gain some perspective on the work they have been doing and to develop new partnerships. Archaeology Scotland, for example, will be a partner for their future work and to assist in the legacy of canal college through adoption of the Signature project in Falkirk.

The sustainability of canal college is in question as it depends on continued funding from various sources. They may require other funding streams, such as selling the service they provide to prisons or local authorities. These would be more feasible if they could draw down funding to do this directly, but payment by results models make this option risky. They fear that these models would not recognise the real value of what they do.

canal college is one of the most advanced of the G&BF pilots in monitoring / data collection. It has had an independent evaluation completed, and maintains an extensive log of project outcomes across eight outcomes areas. It is useful to note that the canal college brand has proved very successful and similar organisations across Europe could use this model to set up their own schemes.

**Groupement d’Intérêt Public Réussir en Sambre Avesnois (France)**

In contrast to the rest of the project, the Sambre group were late in delivering their main activity. To date, the main pilot activity has been to conduct a feasibility study investigating the business proposition for growing spirulina algae on the banks of the river Sambre. The intention is to see whether spirulina production can be linked with social enterprise work opportunities. They are keen to explore a different kind of economic development that works for the benefit of those that need help.

The feasibility study will be in three stages, the first of which is complete, thanks to G&BF funding. Stage one covers economic feasibility, which includes assessing how well spirulina can be expected to grow in the available conditions in Sambre, as well as the nature of the global market for the product. Another study has explored the options regarding energy consumption, which would be one of the main costs for spirulina production. The remaining studies will consider energy needs further and a communications strategy.

Overall, the pilot does not yet have measurable outcomes and is at a very different stage to the rest of the pilots on Green and Blue Futures. The main area of overlap is in the pilot’s plans to provide employment opportunities for

those more distant from the labour market. Gaining insight into how other pilots have tackled this has been helpful for project planning. The team has thus been much in contact with Province du Hainaut to exchange on good practices and social impact.

**Province du Hainaut (Belgium)**

The Hainaut activities consist of three pilots promotes social inclusion through biogardening activities and growing fruit and vegetables. They operate as a prime contractor, and subcontract to various delivery partners.

The pilots operate out of three public organisations, made up of 14 staff members in the second year with a size of over £1.24m / €1.68m. They report having 136 beneficiaries, and anticipate having 100 beneficiaries over the course of 2015.

With the pilot partners (subcontractors) the pilots deliver activities such as:

- Working with a province school to provide a certification on biogardening and horticulture that consists of a 40-hour theoretical course in horticulture and competencies validation by the school on the operators sites for adults excluded from the job market
- Developing an ‘orchard project’, where orchard maintenance is the centrepiece of a project that builds community cohesion and helps to build links between different groups
- Developing a new business line of plantlets
- Developing a partnership between operators to provide advice on culture planning and sharing of plantlets
- Assisting a partner in developing a more professional structure, and giving training on biogardening
- Developing a training on biogardening in deprived urban area

The Hainaut pilots emphasise that they pursue primarily social rather than financial goals. They promote social inclusion and want to use their pilot to encourage different groups to mix – both those that are disadvantaged and other, more affluent people from the local community.

The outcomes reported by the pilot can be summarised as follows:

- 4 beneficiaries have gone into employment
- 21 beneficiaries have increased soft skills / attitudes to work
- 37 have improved their hard skills / technical knowledge

They also reported that three trainers have been trained, over an accumulated 161 hours of training. Pilot leads noted the challenge of capturing their activities in quantitative data, as the subcontracting arrangement means data collection is implemented differently in different locations.

The Hainaut pilots have also supported the development of social enterprise in the local area. They have engaged in promotional activity increasing awareness of social enterprise, written press articles and gained television coverage. A website and blog created by the pilot has had so far 3242 visitors and 10000 pages views. They have also held six meetings with local actors wishing to develop business incubators for market gardener candidates.

For Hainaut, the G&BF funding has been instrumental in setting up pilots and trialling new models. The funding made it possible for them to build networks of partners in the region, with the three subcontractors and then beyond into a wider community. Seeing the examples set by the other G&BF partners has also been helpful for developing their ideas.

The pilot highlights that policymakers have a significant effect on the space they are operating in. EU regulation, for example, can have an effect on the businesses they work with, as increased volumes of production increase the amount of money paid to Europe. They also view policymakers as adopting an understanding of social enterprise that needs to be challenged: rather than it being a purely instrumental way to occupy people, it should be seen as a way to develop skills, improve employability and augment a green economy.



### Scottish Canals (Scotland)

The Scottish Canals pilot is centred squarely on social enterprise activity, as it forms part of the £45m Helix Social Enterprise Zone, transforming the area between Falkirk and Grangemouth in Scotland. Scottish Canals started off looking into social enterprise as a way of developing canals and green spaces, but since then have expanded their remit, and host a social enterprise officer who helps promote and develop social enterprise creation in the area.

Pilot data gives some insight into the scale of activity: two members of staff and 100 volunteers have been involved in running the pilot, with 99 beneficiaries. The size of the pilot in the second year was £53,000, forecast to rise to £79,000 by the third year of the project.

By the second year, the pilot reported that 14 people had moved into employment, with improved outcomes on self-confidence, pride and self-awareness. 20 new volunteering opportunities had also been created in social enterprises associated with the pilot, most of which were related to board membership.

The pilot also reports the creation of 11 social enterprises in the second year of funding. Pilot staff have engaged in extensive activity developing social enterprise in the local area, including attending 16 meetings with various departments of the local council, and the Scottish Parliament. Pilot staff attended four events related to business in the area, and they have developed robust signposting and referral processes where none existed previously.

The Scottish Canals pilot brought expertise on social enterprise to the G&BF project and were able to share this with other pilots.

### Tipperary County Council (Ireland)

The pilot in Tipperary had eight staff members and around 16 volunteers, and grew out of a previous INTERREG IVC project called 'Waterways Forward' that established links between the local authority and various community stakeholders which resulted in the production of a River Suir Community Action Plan. It aimed to reconnect the local community with the River Suir through a range of initiatives including:

- Running a 'mapping and access' initiative to understand how a 56km stretch of the river was already being used, and identifying potential options for providing improvements for the benefit of the communities. The project went on to develop access improvements at a number of strategic points along the river which will in turn along with the development of the towpath facilitate a canoe trail/blueway along the river. Approximately 80 people from the local communities were involved through the stages of the project as was the local Sports Partnership.
- A Community Art project involving 182 participants called Sounding Lines, which lead by 2 artists engaged with groups from the communities along the river of all ages to look at the river in a new way through the use of sound. This culminated in an interactive multimedia art trail set along 2.5 km of the riverbank and brought 150 people along the river on the Saturday of Heritage week 2014.
- A 'Youth Connect' project, which attracted 45 participants, teaching skills such as fly fishing, stonework and photography to encourage a more positive interaction with the river heritage and environment.
- A River Suir Tidy Towns Initiative which fed into the existing volunteering network of Tidy Towns Committees in towns and villages along the river. This project brought together the groups in 3 villages to share expertise and ideas and use the shared knowledge to do a river based/inspired initiative in their areas.
- A multimedia project with local third level institution and festival group engaged with a local art/environmental group to do a haiku project with local school children. 80 children participated and a number of volunteers took part in completing a mural on the theme of the river. The Riverrun project you tube video is available as a link on the Green & Blue futures website.
- International Conference, Developing the socio-economic potential for Waterways in October 2013 attracted over 130 delegates from Ireland and Europe.

Community empowerment was emphasised by the staff on this pilot. They were encouraged by the positive reaction they received from local people, who engaged with the programme and took part in developing ideas further, such as a café and canoe hire enterprise to complement the canoe trail/ Blueway. The project provided opportunities to work with young people and affect positive change in their attitude and relationship with the river, helping to move them from negative to positive associations. The Art project engaged with people from all generations from schools to day care centres to produce intergenerational community art pieces telling the peoples stories of their river. While the multimedia project focused initially on schools the mural brought together other groups within the community. Throughout its life the project engaged with a number of local festivals promoting the river which received very positive support from the local population while our midterm conference for the project brought people to Clonmel from across the country and from Europe.



The Tipperary pilot also highlighted the strong tradition of volunteering in the area through initiatives such as the Tidy Towns groups and the River Rescue. Indeed the mural for the multimedia project was completed by volunteers in response to a Facebook campaign when one of the groups was unable to take part.

Steps have been taken towards pilot sustainability. The project team, from within the local authority, through the support of G&BF funding have built strong relationships with the various local groups and it is expected that these relationships will last and develop well into the future. In fact this is considered to be the great success of the project from within the authority itself is the very positive relationship that has been developed with the community which will be a very strong legacy of this project. The opportunity to experience the work being undertaken in the other countries was of particular benefit to the team as the learning and transnational cooperation could be brought back and applied in Tipperary. The pilot was also successful in obtaining capital funding from other streams off the back of the mapping and access improvements activity. Once the requirements for the development of access improvements were known they targeted funding from the Irish Government and the County Council. In 2014 they secured €1.9m funding for the towpath Greenway, and €135,722 for access improvement points. A further €70,000 has been achieved in 2015.

The pilot has raised the issue about the use of social enterprise models along the River Suir especially in areas such as canoe hire, guided trails along the river and cafe/restaurant facilities. What we have found is that at the beginning of our pilots this was a concept that seemed remote in the context of the river, but as the pilots developed and the network along the river began to take shape the concept for enterprise began to emerge quite strongly. The infrastructure promoted and put in place by the project has shown the communities that the council is committed to the river and this has got groups thinking about the overall river plan and the potential benefit for their community as part of this plan. The council has within its structure supports for the development of social enterprise and the pilot partners are now at the stage where the seeds germinated by the Green & Blue Futures can be supported and developed as a legacy of the project.

## West Flanders (Belgium)

Three staff worked on the pilot in Flanders, which looks to provide employment and volunteering opportunities. This is one of the largest pilots, with 275 volunteers and 78 beneficiaries in the second year, and a size of more than £266,000 / €359,000.

Many of the activities in the Flanders pilot focused on water buffer maintenance. The lead organisation is a public body that is responsible for preventing flooding in the province. One of the main strategies for doing so is building water buffers (ponds). The construction provides opportunities for employment, particularly since it is not possible to use heavy machinery in very wet areas.

The pilot reports that in the second year of the project they helped 24 people into employment, and by the third year will be aiming to support 50 people into accredited qualifications.

Flanders is also looking to develop a pilot education programme for adults, employing a modular system that makes education more accessible for those with learning difficulties.

The organisation in Flanders is not itself a social enterprise – it is a public body – but it has used the G&BF funding to develop its approach to hiring local social enterprises to better recognise their scale and needs, and to offer greater long-term security via longer contracts. Before the G&BF work they did not have a clear position on how to do this, but they have now developed long term relationships and been able to invest in planning.

The team reports increased turnover of social enterprises associated with the pilot of more than £170,000, with an increase of almost 300 job and volunteering opportunities in these social enterprises (though they highlight that they do not have direct access to data regarding employment and volunteering in the social enterprises they hire). They also report that their sustainability has improved via the more effective use of volunteers in running the pilot – G&BF allowed them to put in place processes that they will continue to use after the funding has expired.

Alongside employment and social enterprise activities the pilot had a positive environmental impact. They are able to count the numbers of ponds investigated, the number of amphibians ‘assisted’, the number of trees maintained (though none of these figures were collected through the shared outcomes matrix). Environmental outcomes show that 160 people have increased knowledge of local biodiversity, while around 275 people in the wider community have improved awareness of and involvement in the local environmental area.

The West Flanders pilot also undertakes extensive marketing activity. Their magazine, for example, is sent to 35,000 households, and a regular e-zine goes out to all volunteers. They also have nine member organisations (community groups who pay for membership) who receive an impact report with details of numbers of volunteers and other outcomes.



# OVERALL THEMES

Looking at the pilots collectively, the following observations can be made about their experiences of the G&BF project.

## Combining different kinds of activities and goals

The pilots all aim to bring together aims and objectives that are often kept apart in the wider social economy:

- The aim to improve or utilise green space and waterways on the one hand,
- The aim to support disadvantaged groups at risk of social exclusion on the other.

Social enterprise is the vehicle being explored to realise these aims.

Collectively, the G&BF projects have begun to explore the fertile space where these aims overlap. The most common feature is a model where the maintenance of green and blue space needs labour, and these activities are used as an opportunity for providing training and qualifications for those who have difficulty accessing the labour market. A theme here is recognition that classroom-based learning does not suit everyone, and engaging with nature can be an appealing alternative.

Similarly, work in maintaining green and blue spaces helps to bring in local communities – both youth and the adult population – and to generate interest and a sense of ownership in local green and blue spaces. As shown by the Tipperary and Hainaut projects, an area such as a canal or an orchard can be a focal point that acts to improve community cohesion.

## Collaboration and learning across pilots

G&BF was proactive in ensuring project partners had the opportunity to meet, discuss their work and learn from each other. These exchanges were repeatedly reported in evaluation interviews as being very fruitful for the cross-fertilisation of ideas. Between May 2012 and July 2015, pilot partners have thus met very frequently for meetings, workshops and site visits, and have thus been able to learn from their counterparts and exchange good practices, between pilots and countries.

canal college in particular set an inspiring example for several of the other projects, especially Tipperary County Council and CRT. It was seen to provide an up-and-running, working example of how to combine training and qualifications for young people with managing waterways. Their way to develop a structured communication strategy was also highly inspirational. Moreover, the way in which UK-based projects have used modular, nationally recognised City & Guilds qualifications has highlighted the benefits of this approach to projects in other countries. Similarly, the more professionalised culture of volunteering in the UK was helpful as a source of ideas for other projects wanting to use volunteers more effectively. In December 2014, the Province of Hainaut and the Province of West Flanders took the initiative to meet at Stepy-Bracquegnies to share experience between Farm Delsamme and Farm De Lochting regarding socio-professional development of trainees.

## Innovative practices

G&BF partners have sought to develop innovative practices throughout the pilots, whether it be by making most of the environment to develop a spirulina production or to adopt biogardening activities as a way to foster social inclusion. The collaboration and learning across projects has also been an important element in helping the project partners to come up with original and bold ideas, and approaches to social enterprise across NWE on the continent have also provided inspiration to others. The work of West Flanders Province with social enterprise supermarkets for example, has been of interest to CRT and other projects.



“THE ATMOSPHERE WAS VERY FRIENDLY. WE HAVE LEARNED TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER, THIS IS THE MAGIC OF EUROPEAN COOPERATION!”

Stéphane Ramu, Pilot lead for Province du Hainaut

## Funding, sustainability and social enterprise

A key intention of the G&BF project was to explore how social enterprise models can be used in the development of green and blue infrastructure.

The organisations hosting the G&BF projects were not themselves social enterprises, as they were generally either charities or operating out of the local authority.

The organisations set up as charities tended to focus more on getting the project up and running, and prioritised this to some extent over investigating social enterprise models in detail. While they have begun to investigate social enterprise options, most of these organisations remain reliant on grant funding of one sort or another and their experiences illustrate that there is a long road to being self-sustaining on income from trade or contracts. This is consistent with traditional voluntary sector organisations exploring more enterprising or business-focused work to achieve sustainability.

Pilots run out of public sector organisations have focused more on how to integrate existing social enterprises into their procurement activities. This was new territory for many of them and project funding allowed the time and resources to establish new systems and processes.

In a context where public expenditure decreases, looking at social enterprise models or innovative ways to involve corporate stakeholders through CSR is indeed crucial, as it can help public organisations spinning out of parts of the public sector, or charities becoming more business-orientated, and therefore be more resilient and in turn economically sustainable.

G&BF funding has also allowed for the development of a virtual Social Enterprise Zone.<sup>1</sup> This online portal gives insight into the work that has taken place, acting as a record and resource that can be used by others wanting to set up similar projects.



<sup>1</sup> Found on the G&BF website: <http://greenandbluefutures.eu/pilot-themes>



Barriers to development

For those projects that struggled to get started, it is for reasons very familiar to those operating in the wider third sector. The projects are usually trying to achieve a lot on small resources, and building partnerships with organisations who are similarly stretched. Innovation means starting things from scratch without a clear blueprint, which brings with it unforeseen challenges, as illustrated (for example) by the attempt to set up training in very rural and isolated settings. Whilst this project provided some initial funds and a network of like-minded projects and people to draw on, there are myriad challenges to starting up or expanding projects – many of which were faced (and indeed overcome) by the organisations in the Green and Blue Futures programme.

Bureaucratic and regulatory barriers also exist. This is variable across different settings and might be related to procurement rules, agricultural policy or funding arrangements. The way in which social enterprise is understood by policymakers and integrated into regulation also affects how easy it is for social enterprises to set up. Research has identified that both understanding of social enterprise and also procurement and commissioning are particular challenges for those operating in public sector environments<sup>2</sup>.

Challenges of data collection/measurement

As the next section on aggregating data shows, it has been possible to collect data in a standard format across the G&BF project through the outcomes matrix, although the other pieces of data shall not be overlooked in order to have a good understanding of the impact generated.

While projects took a variety of approaches to using the outcomes matrix, with some taking a more structured approach to data collection and some variations in interpretation, the information provided through interviews has often helped sorting out the discrepancies observed. For example, there is little correlation between the number of staff on the projects, the number of volunteers, the number of beneficiaries or the scale of activity as described in the interviews – some projects will have apparently large staff teams but few beneficiaries and small size, and vice versa. This highlights that ‘number of staff’ (for example) may include multiple part time staff compared to a few full time, and that the border between beneficiaries and volunteers is not clear and changes across projects.

It was felt that the matrix was helpful for prompting thinking about how to measure outcomes. If it was to be used in future, it would need further tailoring and refining to make it truly usable and helpful for projects.

AGGREGATING DATA

The outcomes matrix contained a range of possible indicators. Projects partners were invited to fill in data for those indicators that were most applicable to their work. The outcome areas identified were grouped under ‘employment’, ‘environment’ and ‘social enterprise’.

It was hoped that some aggregation of data would be possible, to provide an overview of outcomes across the whole project. Of course, aggregation can only be meaningful when projects submit the same kinds of figures for a given outcome. The wide variety and diversity of the projects makes this challenging.

This table give an overview of which projects provided which kinds of data:

	Inputs & outputs	Employment	Environment	Social Enterprise	Qual checklist
Canal & River Trust (CRT)	Numbers	Numbers	Text	Minimal	No data
canal college (SWT)	Numbers	Numbers	Number & text	Text	No data
Hainaut	Numbers	Numbers	No data	Numbers (altered)	No data
Scottish Canals	Numbers	Numbers	No data	Numbers and text	No data
Succeed in Sambre	Data provision was held up as a result of the delays delivering the feasibility study				
Tipperary	Numbers	No data	Numbers	Minimal	No data
West Flanders	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Numbers	Text

Some aggregation of figures was possible in two areas: project inputs/outputs, and employment outcomes, and this does start to give some indication of the scale of impact of the programme as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> See barriers to start-up and growth, The People’s Business: State of Social Enterprise (SEUK; 2013)



Inputs and outputs

Table 1 below shows the aggregated figures for inputs and outputs across six of the seven pilots.

Inputs/ outputs	Actual number at 31/12/13	Actual number at 31/12/14	Estimated number at 31/12/15
Total number of staff	30	34	26
Total number of volunteers	273	455	557
Total number of beneficiaries	338	642	826
Estimate of additional financial resource leveraged (indicate £ or €)	£97,013 €130,968	£1,642,560 €2,217,456	£395,020 €533,277

Table 1: aggregated project inputs and outputs

Analysing these figures tells us about the scale and growth of projects.

The number of project staff has been rather steady over the course of the project, while the numbers of volunteers has grown and is expected to grow further over the course of the project. All but one of the six projects who submitted data have volunteers, ranging from 2 to 275 volunteers as of December 2014. Three projects expect the number of volunteers to go up for the last year of the project, one expects a decrease (from 2 to 1 volunteers) and one expects the number to remain the same.

Of course, there may be variation in what project leads consider to be a ‘volunteer’, as it can include both people who spend significant (unpaid) time working on the project, and those who are involved just on a one-off occasion. Some volunteers become part-time staff or vice versa as well.

Beneficiary numbers also have increased into the second year, and are expected to increase into the third year. Beneficiary numbers ranged from 16 to 300 beneficiaries for a single project. Five projects submitted beneficiary data, and four of them expected the number to increase into the third year.

Four projects submitted turnover data. Total turnover in year 2 was over £1.7m / €2.3m. This makes the average turnover

- £282,000 / €380,000 in year 1
- £429,000 / €579,000 in year 2
- £526,000 / €710,000 in year 3

Five projects indicated that they were able to use the European funding to leverage additional funding from elsewhere. The figure for year two is much higher than in the other years because one project (Tipperary) was able to secure almost €2m in funding from other sources. Again, the variety amongst the projects in their scale makes any broad analysis challenging, but generally there is a picture of leverage and growth being achieved across those reporting their turnover. The trend is also encouraging, as there is an increase year-on-year, indicating a growing momentum on some of the larger projects.

■



## ‘Employment’ outcomes

A full table of employment outcomes is available in the appendix.

Hard employment outcomes

The data shows that across the five projects who submitted employment data, the numbers for those in training, education or employment were:

- 50 in year 1
- 125 in year 2
- 98 is the estimated number for 2015

Job-relevant qualifications were achieved by the following numbers:

- 30 in year 1
- 84 in year 2
- 81 in year 3

These figures show that projects have had been successful in helping people into work and/or training, though these figures do not necessarily include the figures achieved by sub-partners, so they are likely to understate the employment outcomes overall.

It was also suggested that projects collected softer outcomes, especially regarding professional skills. A significant number of beneficiaries has thus mentioned improved confidence, better time-keeping skills or better knowledge about the sector, which are paramount in building sustainable opportunities for young people.

This data shows that

- 150 beneficiaries experienced soft outcomes such as increased confidence and pride, improved self-awareness, increased leadership skills / responsibility.
- 200 beneficiaries increased their practical skills and knowledge, gained sector-specific skills, or increased their knowledge on policies and procedures

For soft outcomes data to be meaningfully aggregated, more work would need to be done across projects on taking a more standardised approach to capturing the data (e.g. through using the same tools for data collection). Whether the benefits of doing so would justify the time and effort it would require is a topic for further discussion between the partners. Certainly the hopes of some projects to be able to benchmark progress using outcomes data are not yet realisable.

## ‘Environment’ and ‘social enterprise’ outcomes

Outcomes related to the environment and to social enterprise were quite specific to different projects and so are descriptive as well as numerical. While the aggregation is made difficult by the lack of standard categories, these qualitative outcomes were an important part of the project.


Many pilots have been very active in supporting the development of social economy locally, whether it was by engaging in promotional activity about social enterprises with articles and TV coverage (Province du Hainaut), hiring canal boats from social enterprises (canal college), or engaging in extensive activity developing social enterprise in the local area (Scottish Canals).

Significant outcomes related to the environment have also been achieved, from helping to improve the knowledge of the young people involved about environmental issues (Canal & River Trust) to encouraging a more positive interaction with the river heritage and environment with a ‘Youth Connect’ project (Tipperary) or allowing for increased knowledge of local biodiversity and improved involvement in the local environmental area (West Flanders).

“AS MY TIME WITH CANAL COLLEGE PASSES BY, I HAVE NOTICED (...) A MORE ROUNDED UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL HISTORY, HERITAGE, CULTURE AND NATURE. THERE HAS BEEN, FOR ME A NOTICEABLE PERSONAL PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT, WHICH I HAVE TO SAY WAS QUITE UNLOOKED FOR AND LARGELY UNEXPECTED. ALL IN ALL THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN HUGELY REWARDING, IT’S BEEN REALLY GOOD TO SEE OUR STUDENTS MOVING ON, AND I FEEL PRIVILEGED TO HAVE BEEN A PART OF IT.”

Testimonial of a long-term mentor of canal college and a Scottish Canals employee





## SECTION 2: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the report attempts to do three things:

- 1) to draw wider lessons and learning from the practical work of G&BF
- 2) to place those lessons in the wider European policy context with regard to social enterprise and green & blue infrastructure
- 3) to provide recommendations and a framework for further work in policy and practice

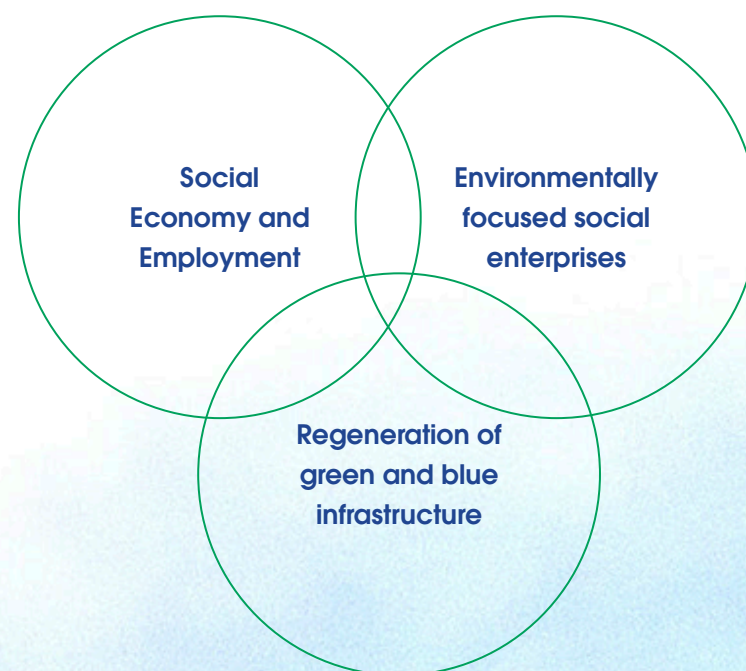
In relation to the latter, this section also looks at the concept of social enterprise zones – work to date, and the potential in the green and blue context.





# LESSONS AND LEARNING

G&BF has been a real centre of innovation and a test-bed for new ideas and projects to be started or expanded into new areas. Whilst there has been a significant amount of work on social economy and green employment, or environmentally-focused social enterprises, or regeneration of green & blue infrastructure, there have been few that have focused on combining these various strands to see what emerges from the overlap.



The evidence and insight from the qualitative and quantitative work have allowed to identify several areas of interest that have emerged from this overlap:

1) There is the potential for sustainable business models and social enterprises within green and blue infrastructure – whilst this has tended to focus to-date on areas like energy production (eg. community-owned wind turbines or hydro), the business models explored in this work demonstrate much greater opportunities.

>> For example, tourism, leisure and food production can be seen as having real potential, as with the canal hire and trail projects in Tipperary, the biogardening project in Hainaut and the spirulina farming in Sambre.

2) The combination of working outdoors, a strong link to the local community and tailored support clearly has real potential in terms of employment and pathways to work. Some of the pilots have demonstrated that such approaches can work with the right client groups and the right motivation such as learning and certification of new skills.

>> For example, the canal college and Canal & River Trust work shows how waterways can be both a location and a route to learning, skills, confidence, volunteering and employment

3) Definitional or sector boundaries can still be a hurdle: being viewed as an ‘environmental’ project can involve being characterised, just as thinking of an organisation as a ‘charity’ can do. It’s clear that a focus on the impact and the anticipated and intended outcomes can move beyond public-social enterprise-charity-environment silos to create something more than the sum of its parts.

>> For example, the Scottish Canals project clearly has its origins in canals work, has developed into a broader social enterprise focus, and also has training and employability at its heart – each reinforces the other to achieve more.

4) Genuine networks are key – for the individual beneficiaries as much as the delivery organisations. A key part of achieving employment outcomes for beneficiaries has been reducing isolation, raising awareness of opportunities, providing personal support and building stronger relationships. Interviews made clear that this was also true to different extents for those involved in running the projects.

>> For example, the West Flanders project has strong public sector and social sector links, and a broader reach through networks to the wider community: this helps bolster the enterprise and the outcomes for the individuals involved.

5) Local context is everything – for all the ability to share usefully across national and international borders, the projects succeed or thrive depending on their local circumstances: what funding is available; the relationships with the local public sector; the regulatory environment; the levels of bureaucracy and so on.

>> For example, Tipperary has been very successful in building on local relationships, and accessing additional resources from the public and social sectors to build on and expand its work.



# THE EUROPEAN POLICY CONTEXT

## Social Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Europe

The primary cross-cutting initiative with regard to social economy, social enterprise and social entrepreneurship is the Social Business Initiative (SBI)<sup>3</sup>, which was launched in 2011. The idea behind it was to recognise and support the growth of social enterprise and social business, and that this vibrant and dynamic area of business helps achieve European objectives: of both economic and social transformation. The SBI has involved various strands of work:

- improved access to public and private finance: through making structural funds available to social enterprises and seeking to attract greater amounts of private investment (eg. the European Social Entrepreneurship Fund)
- giving more visibility to social enterprises: various platforms and groups have been supported to assist with this, alongside investigation of labels and marks that can support visibility
- making the legal and regulatory framework more suitable: a central part of this has been the EU procurement reforms, which explicitly include environmental and social criteria, and give more flexibility to create opportunities for social enterprise
- The SBI is also supported by an advisory group on social enterprise - the GECES - on which there are representatives from each country.

In addition to this central EU initiative, there are several networks which pre-existed and help inform the general relationship of social enterprise and European policymaking. These include:

- the Euclid Network - which has a social enterprise network with national bodies participating (<http://www.euclidnetwork.eu/membership/euclid-social-enterprise-network.html>)
- CE FEC - Social Firms Europe - which represents a particular sub-set of social enterprise, focused on employment and social mobility (providing work opportunities and integration for those disadvantaged from the labour market) - <http://socialfirmseurope.org/>
- Co-operatives Europe - a representative body and network for co-operatives and mutual organisations across Europe, many of whom are social enterprises - <https://coopseurope.coop/>

There are also a range of bodies and networks which are established or starting up across Europe - Social Enterprise NL, Mouves (France), Smart Kolektiv (Serbia), Social Entrepreneurs Ireland and so on. Each is involved in supporting start-ups, supporting networking, and creating a more favourable environment for social enterprises where they are. They are at different stages of their own development, but most are starting to mirror some of the work that has been done in the UK: building an evidence base through research, trying to inform and influence the policy and regulatory environment, and providing direct support to help social enterprises directly. The virtual Social Enterprise Zone (SEZ) created in the frame of the G&BF project shall also be a useful resource for organisations looking to set up or work with social enterprises.

All are also broadly trying to influence the European business programmes and agendas to include and more fully reflect the economic, social and environmental impact of social enterprises and what they can contribute to Europe's general development. There are also a wide range of transnational research projects (such as SEFORIS) which are looking at various issues surrounding social enterprise in a pan-European context. All of these provide different channels to communicate the lessons, learning and recommendations from this project.

## Where is the environment in all this?

What is interesting from a policy perspective is that the 'green' or environmental agenda, at least in a European context, has occurred almost entirely in parallel to the social enterprise policy work. Despite the 'triple bottom line' aspirations of many social enterprises – consisting of combining social equity, economic, and environmental factors –, environmental policy and programmes have largely been viewed as separate - in terms of sustainability or a set of industry sectors that can be supported. This is also perhaps due to the fact that work on the environment in the EU is arguably much more embedded and established, with initiatives going right back to the mid-to-late 90s.

Whilst there are a plethora of initiatives looking at environment in similar ways and areas<sup>4</sup> to social enterprise (such as access to finance, visibility and promotion, procurement and regulation), the environmental and social enterprise agendas rarely seem to cross over, cross-reference or mutually support. In some ways, this reflects the development within countries too - the broader environmental agenda is more established, more widely recognised, and more advanced across sectors than social enterprise. But rarely do they reinforce, interlink or mutually support; for example, there is much work being done in relation to the Social Value Act in the UK at present, but little connection is being made with the pioneers of embedding sustainability in procurement.

In terms of waterways specifically, they are generally considered as transport or as about conservation rather than as potential sources of social mobility, drivers of employment, or potential hubs of new business<sup>5</sup>. This similarly feels like a missed opportunity, as indicated in the learning from the G&BF project – if we view waterways only through the lens of travel or conservation, then we are not maximising its potential.

There is, therefore, real importance in sharing the learning and findings from the Green and Blue Futures project, which connects and brings together these various strands. Whilst it is always difficult to 'join up' different departments of large governmental organisations, there is a strong case to be made from the evaluation which can inform EU policymaking and practice alike.

<sup>3</sup> see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0682:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>4</sup> See: access to finance [http://ec.europa.eu/growth/access-to-finance/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/access-to-finance/index_en.htm) , visibility and promotion [http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/sustainability/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/sustainability/index_en.htm) procurement and regulation [http://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/public-procurement/other-aspects/index\\_en.htm#green](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/public-procurement/other-aspects/index_en.htm#green)

<sup>5</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/inland/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/inland/index_en.htm) - waterways as transport; <http://www.ecrr.org/>



# FRAMEWORK & PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

## Social Enterprise Zones

The G&BF project has created a ‘virtual social enterprise zone’ which is effectively an online space where resources, case studies and good practice can be shared. This is one approach to connecting those involved in the project but also reaching out to others to help share some of the learning and good practice so far.

There is much more potential in the social enterprise zone concept, though, and it is something that has been returned to a few times, primarily in the UK. It builds on the more established (and actioned) concept of ‘enterprise zones’ which are still being used as a delivery mechanism by the Department for Communities and Local Government today. They tend to involve tax breaks, rate reliefs, incentives for businesses, and investment (direct and in infrastructure) to encourage and foster greater levels of enterprise: freed, effectively, from a range of statutory regulations. Unsurprisingly, social enterprise advocates have championed for something similar to do the same for social enterprise and its additional associated benefits.

One of the first examples was run by Community Links<sup>6</sup> in Newham, East London, which established a social enterprise zone in 1998 as a way of testing new policies and projects to encourage regeneration in a deprived area. It had a strong policy and public services focus, and concentrated primarily on how to translate national policy into local contexts, and to use more of the public sector budget to support regeneration and tackle poverty and disadvantage.

Somewhat forgotten is that Social Enterprise Zones were actually included in a Conservative green paper on the voluntary sector ahead of the 2010 election. This referred to a proposal to “*create Social Enterprise Zones that will offer tax relief on qualifying investments*”. Unfortunately, this did not translate into policy in the coalition government in the UK.

Social Enterprise UK has itself for the last two years been running its ‘Social Enterprise Places’ programme<sup>7</sup> which seeks to identify and support ‘hot spots’ of social enterprise activity. This has a broader remit than the Community Links approach, seeking to build awareness and momentum with key stakeholders – including politicians, policymakers, local businesses, universities and individuals, who are all key parts of a successful and thriving social enterprise ecosystem. Currently, there is no formal statutory involvement (eg. tax reliefs, incentives) but the places are growing in number and range of activity. This focus on the other elements of the ecosystem beyond the statutory levers has demonstrated that there are other key factors to developing a thriving social enterprise environment.

In other areas, a particular location in the throes of regeneration and significant investment can seek to build social enterprise into its heart. This is the case with the Helix Social Enterprise Zone (referred to above) which is a cross-sector partnership to support social enterprises locally to start-up. Another example is the social economy zone monceau-FONTAINES<sup>8</sup> in Belgium, which results from a successful public-private partnership.

What does all this mean for those working in green-blue-social enterprise work? There are two clear approaches that those involved could take:

- 1) Continue and expand the online / virtual social enterprise zone that is already established – adding simple forums, LinkedIn groups and/or the ability to upload could help widen the community and the network of support and knowledge to be drawn upon in a simple, low cost and connected way. For those using social media, a hashtag (eg. #bgsocent) could help connect and thread together relevant tweets.
- 2) Seek to create a formal green and blue social enterprise zone around a waterway or coastal or woodland area – this could be done by applying to an existing national or European programme as indicated above, or through working with partners locally (eg. local authorities, businesses, and other social sector organisations) to do so on the ground. This would build on the informal activity, but provide additional recognition, profile, momentum and, potentially, investment and other support.

Activity in such a zone could include:

- mobilising local businesses to support current work
- getting key stakeholders together (local commissioners, funders, & politicians)
- market-building and marketing activity (reaching potential customers and clients)
- raising profile through (local) media coverage and events
- encouraging and supporting start-up social enterprises
- building relationships and networks between local organisations
- declaring a bounded area as a zone to focus attention and resource

Again, much of this is about time and capacity, rather than funds in the first instance – most of the partners in the G&BF programme could consider this as a next step to their work.

## Practical recommendations

Based on the work of the G&BF programme, we have a number of key practical recommendations for the pilots’ stakeholders. This shall also help external individuals or organisations to structure their ideas and projects.

- 1) Prospective Social Enterprises should explore the two social enterprise zone possibilities and seek to draw on collective capacity to take these forward – Drawing on lessons learned through G&BF will clearly be of ongoing value. Other projects with a similar overlap/focus could be identified and contacted as a first step.
- 2) Prospective Social Enterprises should connect to their relevant national social enterprise network: to both share and disseminate their practice and learning, and also to access support and opportunities.
- 3) To build a stronger collective evidence base and sustain the enterprises developed through the project, G&BF partners should consider further harmonisation of data collection models and approaches.
- 4) G&BF partners could seek a further European source of funding to develop this work further – this could be more focused and directly build on existing provision.
- 5) G&BF partners and similar organisations should seek to access more mainstream social enterprise support – be that support programmes run by private sector organisations, local authority or government-funded support, or even investment-readiness and social investment-focused support.
- 6) Prospective Social Enterprises in this sector should acknowledge the importance of outdoor learning opposed to

<sup>6</sup> See “The experience of the Community Links Social Enterprise Zone <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/734.pdf> for more information

<sup>7</sup> See more details on the website: <http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/social-enterprise-places>

<sup>8</sup> See more details on the website: <http://www.monceau-fontaines.be/>





classroom-based learning, and build on this to set up social inclusion schemes.

7) Prospective Social Enterprises shall explore ways to generate further interest and sense of ownership through work with local communities. This could involve community asset transfer, community land initiatives or more direct engagement with the local community.

8) Prospective Social Enterprise should aim at adopting innovative practice in order to be resilient, whether it is regarding the business model or the activities themselves. As this project has demonstrated, societal and sector contexts change constantly – remaining adaptable, flexible and with diversified business models is key to seeing organisations through this change.

9) G&BF partners and similar organisations should further encourage transnational mobility in order to benefit from other countries’ experience. This could be done through action learning visits and face-to-face exchanges, and also through online webinars and video-

## THE EXAMPLE OF THE CANAL COLLEGE® BRAND

canal college® project has been very successful in providing memorable learning opportunities and hands-on work experience for young people between 16-25 years who are not in employment, education or training.

The project was awarded runner-up in the Falkirk District Annual Volunteer Award for Youth Engaging Organisation of the Year, and has also been nominated for a Living Waterways Award 2015 and a Scottish Heritage Angels Award 2015, both prestigious awards.

Their example provides valuable insights into the importance of acknowledging the potential of outdoor learning for young people:

*“The course [my son] attended was very educational and tailored to suit his needs unlike many other supported learning courses which are classroom based and not of practical benefit to many young people with additional support needs. He learned lots of practical skills as well as social skills within a very supportive environment. [His] confidence and self-esteem grew through his participation in this group and he thoroughly enjoyed the structure and felt very valued by the group leaders and his peers. [We] both feel that canal college courses are invaluable and that this is where investment should be for the future of our young people with additional support needs teaching practical skills that are transferable.”*

- Testimonial of a parent of a participant of canal college

It also points out how such projects can act as a real stepping stone towards employment for many young people, by improving the participants’ soft skills:

*“My son suffers from a lack of confidence, but I have seen his confidence and self-assurance grow hugely over the time he has been at canal college. In my view, canal college has been a massive success, especially for young people who struggle to access work. The effect the college has had on the students is huge, and the things it has given my son are immeasurable”*

- Testimonial of a parent of a participant of canal college

*“Because of my Asperger’s I find dealing with new people and places stressful and being unemployed for so long was making it more difficult for me. Since starting at canal college, I have been trying new things, discovered more about John Muir and the canal waterways. Canal College has helped because it reminded me of the skills I had and given me confidence in them and in myself. I have received the valuable experience that has helped me gain a job as a trainee ranger which I am really looking forward to.”*

- Testimonial of a young participant who found a job after his time at canal college

“MY SON SUFFERS FROM A LACK OF CONFIDENCE, BUT I HAVE SEEN HIS CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ASSURANCE GROW HUGELY OVER THE TIME HE HAS BEEN AT CANAL COLLEGE. IN MY VIEW, CANAL COLLEGE HAS BEEN A MASSIVE SUCCESS, ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE TO ACCESS WORK...”

Testimonial of a parent of a participant of canal college



## TIPPERARY COUNTY COUNCIL - HOW GBF FOSTERED TRANSNATIONAL MOBILITY NOT ONLY WITHIN THE PROJECT BUT ALSO WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS

In relation to the transnational element of the project, Tipperary County Council along with Canal & River Trust were involved in the Leinen Los-Jobsmotor Cast off project on the Finnow Canal in Germany in 2014/2015, which was looking at ways of developing the canal and included a number of international partners.

Tipperary County Council were asked to participate on the basis of their work and involvement with Green & Blue Futures. They presented the project and hosted a study visit from Germany on the access points and canoe trail.

This example demonstrates how G&BF fostered transnational mobility not only within partners of different countries through meetings and workshops to exchange on good practice, but also with external partners interested to learn more about the project.



**“...CANAL COLLEGE HAS HELPED BECAUSE IT REMINDED ME OF THE SKILLS I HAD AND GIVEN ME CONFIDENCE IN THEM AND IN MYSELF. I HAVE RECEIVED THE VALUABLE EXPERIENCE THAT HAS HELPED ME GAIN A JOB AS A TRAINEE RANGER WHICH I AM REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO.”**

Testimonial of a young participant who found a job after his time at canal college



## GIP RÉUSSIR EN SAMBRE

The example of GIP Réussir en Sambre, looking into ways to produce and sell spirulina algae on the banks of River Sambre, shows how innovative ideas can be linked with canals and waterways. This freshwater alga is a high quality dietary supplement, one of the most nutritious, complete and efficient foods on Earth, and the most concentrated whole food source of protein.

Its production and consumption being still too empirical, this project aims at using the river Sambre to produce it, and the economic and commercial studies attest without any doubt to the significant economic potential that producing and selling spirulina represents. From the low possibilities of mechanisation, this activity could create around 50 direct jobs, whose descriptions perfectly fit reintegration and professional qualifications.





# SECTION 3:

## POLICY

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the work of the G&BF programme, we have a number of key policy recommendations aimed at informing European Strategy & Policy, national bodies, and government.

### Introduction

The Green & Blue Futures Partners believe that;

- European policymakers should seek to bring together parallel streams of work looking at environmental / sustainability and social enterprise more clearly – there is learning to be shared both ways, and potential duplication to be avoided. Bringing networks together or creating a joint programme of work would be a start.
- Those responsible for social value or social enterprise support as policymakers or influencers should reinforce the importance and significance of the environment in all their work – as a key and fundamental part of being a triple bottom line organisation. This could be enshrined in practice, in guidance and in programmes.
- Local policymakers with devolved powers should seek to create a green and blue social enterprise zone, with associated benefits and reliefs, to unleash the potential of its environmental assets as a force for employment and social mobility.
- European and national social enterprise bodies should potentially establish environmentally-focused or ‘green and blue’ networks from amongst their memberships to foster and join up more of this activity.
- Policymakers and influencers should investigate community ownership options for environmental assets – partners should work with the likes of Shared Assets to take such work forward.



### Recommendation 1 – On EU funding programmes

A key barrier for Social Enterprises to not only establish themselves, but also to survive, is the distinct lack of start-up finance available for fledgling Social Enterprises.

The G&BF partners therefore suggest that future funding programmes should be given specific measures which will support Social Enterprises, and also have specific references to how Social Enterprise models would have a positive impact on the management of ‘Green and Blue’ spaces and subsequently the socio/economic development of such land and water space.

There have been previous commendable efforts to assist Social Enterprises through initiatives such as the Social Business Initiative (SBI), and if a second phase of this was launched with more Finance that would be a very positive step forward.

The current ESF programme is another key funding stream that offer excellent opportunities for Social Enterprises. ESF will support organisations around the EU to put in place projects aimed at training people and helping them get work. Initiatives supporting entrepreneurs with start-up funding and companies who need to cope with restructuring or a lack of qualified workers will also be funded.

The GBF partnership firmly believe that funding should be linked to:

- encouraging better environmental behaviour amongst recreational users of waterways, water buffers, agricultural, and recreational land
- Support for the use of new technology in managing land and waterway infrastructure to improve efficiency and reduce costs

The G&BF partners also recommend that:

- European policymakers bring together parallel streams of work looking at environmental / sustainability and social enterprise more clearly. There is learning to be shared both ways, and potential duplication to be avoided. Bringing networks together or creating a joint programme of work would be a start.
- EU territorial policies have specific reference to measures which highlight the importance of Social Enterprises and the Social Economy for socio/economic development.
- More funding is made available for small business start-ups using social enterprise models such as those highlighted as good practice in the Green & Blue Futures project.



### Recommendation 2 – On a European Network of Social Enterprises

The Social Enterprise concept is still in its relative infancy. Many of the project partners experienced different levels of support their respective countries and this was sometimes a barrier to progress.

It was agreed that a National Social Enterprise contact point for each member state should be established if it wasn't already. Similarly, these national organisations should be engaging with umbrella organisations such as Social Economy Europe who are the representative organisation for the EU. We believe that Social Economy Europe can be a key body in raising the profile and potential behind Social Enterprises throughout the EU

By Through Social Enterprises affiliating themselves with representatives of the Social Economy sector they are more likely to be included in stakeholder consultations relating to the design of regional funding initiatives at EU level.

It is also suggested that there should be one specific owner of the Social Enterprise concept at a European level. Presently, there seems to be a certain amount of confusion as to which body in Europe acts as the ‘sponsor’ of Social Enterprises.

It would be a real benefit if one specific DG was the leading light. Through research in pulling together this Framework we found references to DG Internal Markets and Services, and the European Economic and Social Committee amongst others. If there was one body in particular tasked with the lead (and adequately resourced of course) it will be much simpler to raise the profile of the potential of Social Enterprises with a common message

### Recommendation 3 – On initiatives for Research & Design

The G&BF partners suggest that continued financial and advisory support is provided for innovative approaches that encourage research and development across sectors and disciplines

This should be a “quadruple helix” approach and should include specific support for market valorisation of new innovative practices.

The partnership is aware that the European Economic and Social Committee are currently undertaking a project to specifically look at the role of Social Enterprises in the EU.

It would be welcome news if the EESC were given further resources to investigate their initial findings further, and continue to promote the benefits of Social Enterprises further.

### Recommendation 4 – On EU2020 Flagship for Resource Efficiency

The flagship initiative for a resource-efficient Europe under the Europe 2020 strategy supports the shift towards a resource-efficient, low-carbon economy to achieve sustainable growth.

The initiative for a resource-efficient Europe provides a long-term framework for actions in many policy areas, supporting policy agendas for climate change, energy, transport, industry, raw materials, agriculture, fisheries, biodiversity and regional development. This is to increase certainty for investment and innovation and to ensure that all relevant policies factor in resource efficiency in a balanced manner.



The G&BF partners recognise that social enterprises and a thriving social economy can deliver a considerable contribution to achieve the goals of this Flagship. This is why they promote:

- Support and funding to encourage better environmental behaviour amongst recreational users of green and blue infrastructure.
- The development of more energy-efficient and less polluting / ecologically-damaging vessels for recreational users of green and blue infrastructure.
- Greater recognition of & and support for, the ecological value of inland waterways and the green infrastructure as a driver of economic growth
- Greater recognition of & and support for, the environmental resource of inland waterways and the green infrastructure as a driver of economic growth and for promoting people's health and well-being through access to the outdoors and learning

We therefore believe that those responsible for social value or social enterprise support as policymakers or influencers should reinforce the importance and significance of this Flagship Initiative in in all their work – as a key and fundamental part of being a triple bottom line organisation (combining social, environmental and financial goals). This could be enshrined in practice, in guidance and in programmes.

Policymakers and influencers could also investigate community ownership options for environmental assets – partners should work with the likes of Shared Assets to take such work forward.

### Recommendation 5 – On EU2020 Flagship – An agenda for new skills & jobs

The G&BF partners welcome the flagship initiative, An agenda for education and new skills & jobs. They call upon the European institutions to recognize the contribution that Social Enterprises and the Social Economy can make to implement this agenda through integrated approaches for the management of Inland Waterways, green spaces and adjacent Regions.

Partners would welcome measures that encourage the public and private sector to recognize the value / synergies that can be delivered on this initiative through use of social economy structures and ‘not for profit’ social enterprises. This contribution should be facilitated through support for funding schemes that facilitate the bringing together of the different ‘actors’ involved in. In particular;

- Support for exchanges & placements through the Lifelong Learning programmes.
- Support for schemes that pro-actively promote or facilitate ‘reticent’ communities to participate in activities that deliver a healthier lifestyle, civic pride, reduction in anti-social behaviour, and routes to employment.
- Support for waterway and other environmental or community engagement - based social enterprises to deliver employment & training programmes, particularly those targeted at disadvantaged groups - the long-term unemployed, young people and ex-offenders.
- Support for volunteering schemes, particularly those that bring the generations together.
- Support for volunteering schemes, particularly those that bring people from different ethnic groups together.

In that perspective, it is important to:

- Recognize the needs of the private sector work together with Social Enterprises in R&D, education and consultation.
- Recognize that the private sector needs to work together with Social Enterprises in order to jointly deliver employment, training, cost savings and social skills development offered by Social Enterprises.

Local policymakers with devolved powers should also seek to create a green and blue social enterprise zone, with associated benefits and reliefs, to unleash the potential of its environmental assets as a force for employment and social

mobility. G&BF partners believe that the idea of a social enterprise zone would fit well under the Green Infrastructure Initiative<sup>9</sup>.

European and national social enterprise bodies should potentially establish environmentally-focused or ‘green and blue’ networks from amongst their memberships to foster and join up more of this activity.

### Recommendation 6 – Operating Guidelines for working with public and private sector

With reference to the above recommendation, we would like to see further co-operation between Social Enterprises, the public sector and the private sector. We believe that Social Enterprises would greatly benefit from being able to access Government contracts with a specific focus on the management of Green & Blue Infrastructure.

There are presently few examples where we can show true cross sectoral working, but the project partners have demonstrated through this scheme that there is potential. With reference to the Flagship Initiative of the Innovation Union, we see a lot of synergy between this and the work that the Green and Blue Futures project delivers.

The Innovation Union outlines how innovative approaches, in our case the management of Green and Blue Infrastructure, can significantly improve;

- Products
- Marketing
- Processes
- Organisation

There is much evidence from the project that can help improve processes and stimulate growth. For example, new public – private partnerships have been working very well.

### Recommendation 7 – Measuring outcomes rather than costs

We believe that too many contracts are awarded based on costs, with little consideration towards other positive social and environmental outcomes that can be generated.

We need to explore ways in making policies that will result in financial returns being gained for works but that have additionally, for example, significant training or personal development opportunities attached to them.

<sup>9</sup> See more on: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/>



# APPENDIX: OUTCOMES

The following table gives the full list of outcomes contained in the ‘employment’ section of the outcomes matrix. Aggregated data is displayed, but caution should be taken in interpreting these results as not all partners submitted data in a format that was able to be aggregated. This is included here in the interests of transparency and completeness, despite the variety and patchiness of the data.

Whilst the data is far from perfect, these again provide a more rounded indication of the change or transformation for individuals supported by the projects: a picture emerges which is familiar from other employment work– increases in personal networks, confidence, knowledge and self-esteem lead to tangible training, education and employment outcomes.



Outcome area - employment	Outcome detail/ measure	Actual no. at 31/12/13	Actual no. at 31/12/14	Estimated no. at 31/12/15
Individual is in suitable employment, education or training ('positive destinations')	- is in training (part or full-time)	3	18	20
	- is in education (part or full-time)	2	18	15
	- is in employment	43.5	88.5	63
	- increased confidence + pride	65	160	
	- increased self-awareness	57	174	60
	- improved attendance			
	/ time-keeping	57	174	60
	- improved relationship-building skills	57	174	60
	- increased leadership skills / responsibility	57	151	30
	- reduced isolation	57	139	10
Improved soft skills / attitude through + towards employment, education or training	- any other	0	22	40
	- attained job-relevant qualification or accreditation	30	84	81
	- increased practical experience / knowledge	110	222	80
	- gained sector-specific skills	102	210	60
	- gained CV or job-search skills + knowledge	100	176	53
Improved hard skills or technical knowledge through + towards employment, education or training	- gained knowledge on policies + procedures (eg. health + safety)	65	199	80
	- increased knowledge of location's job opportunities	73	186	60
	- increased knowledge (+ access) of sector job opportunities	73	188	60
Greater awareness of work opportunities / career possibilities in the field				