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Opportunism over strategy: a history of regional policy and spatial planning in Ireland

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ABSTRACT
Since the 1950s regional policy and spatial planning in Ireland has been largely reactive and opportunistic in nature rather than strategically or ideologically driven. As a result, inconsistent approaches to regional and spatial issues have arisen, driven mainly by short-term goals or issues of the day rather than adherence to a clear, long-term strategic objective. Thus, Government interest in regional and spatial issues has ebbed and flowed in reaction to the events and economic climate of the day; during the 1950s interest surged in reaction to rural decay, emigration and economic failure, waned with entry in to the European Economic Community in 1973 and the prolonged recession of the 1980s and re-emerged in response to growing congestion problems arising from the 'Celtic Tiger' at the turn of the century and led to the publication of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) in 2002. This history is outlined and brought up to date, to incorporate recent developments, such as the publication of the government strategy document 'Putting People First'. It is hoped that this may provide context to facilitate forthcoming deliberations around the recently announced 'replacement' NSS for Ireland.

1. Introduction

Since the 1950s regional policy in Ireland has been largely reactive and opportunistic in nature rather than strategically or ideologically driven. As a result, inconsistent approaches to regional and spatial issues have arisen, driven mainly by short-term goals or issues of the day rather than adherence to a clear, long-term strategic objective.

Taking the late 1950s and the transition to an industrialized, open economy as a start point, the history of regional policy in Ireland is outlined. Four distinct periods in that history are identified: The first period outlines the surge in interest in regional policy in reaction to rural decay, emigration and economic failure in the 1950s and the publication of the Buchanan Report in the 1960s. The second period outlines the Europeanization' of regional policy in Ireland and the consequent loss of interest in sub-national regional and spatial issues with entry in to the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1970s and the continued lack of interest throughout the prolonged recession of the 1980s. The third period begins in the early 1990s and explains the re-emergence of regional and spatial issues on the national policy agenda in response to growing congestion problems arising from the 'Celtic Tiger' culminating with the publication of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) at the turn of the century. The final period deals with the current, confusing period where a 're-nationalized' or nationally funded regional and spatial policy resulting from economic prosperity has run headlong into the fallout from the 'Great Recession' (Roche 2013, 211). With the re-emergence of large-scale emigration, legacy problems of congestion and poor planning coupled with conflicting messages from government regarding the importance of regional and spatial planning Ireland is now in a more complex and uncertain phase. Throughout the paper, comparisons are drawn with developments in the UK where similar ebbs and flows in regional policy are also evident, but for quite different reasons.

The main body of the paper is followed by a short section where the impact of academic literature on Irish regional policy, the concept of space, the importance of data and the urban–rural divide are discussed. The paper then concludes by arguing that despite the publication of

a NSS and two National Development Plans, all placing balanced regional development as a key strategic target, there is little evidence to-date to suggest that this objective is being achieved or that a consistent or strategic approach to achieving this goal is being taken The two most important policy proposals dealing with regional policy and spatial planning, the Buchanan Report and the NSS were both effectively rejected by Government of the day. The most recent strategic plan, 'Putting People First' cannot be implemented having missed the legislative window for EU approval. As a result, it can legitimately be argued that regional policy in Ireland is still struggling for recognition and direction. This struggle reflects the uncertainty in the minds of policymakers as to whether balanced regional development undermines or supports national economic growth, that is, uncertainty regarding the costs or trade-offs necessary to achieve balanced regional development.

2. National versus regional

By the end of the 1950s, the 'lost decade', there was a general acceptance that Irelands' policy of isolationism and self-sufficiency had failed. Ireland's overall growth performance was one of the worst in Europe. The post-war boom was over and Irish industry, having exhausted the limited potential of the domestic market, stagnated. Meanwhile, a persistent decline in the population and continually rising emigration exacerbated problems and contributed to a high dependency rate. The resultant decline in per capita gross domestic product (GDP) and the grave balance of payments situation prompted a change in orientation (O'Hagan 1978; Kennedy, Giblin, and McHugh 1988; O'Donnell 1998).

Net outward migration from 'dreary Eden1' during the 1950s was 398,000 – the highest rate since 'An Gorta Beag'2 of the 1880s. Net outward migration peaked in 1957 at 60,000 or roughly 2% of the population (Central Statistics Office 2012b, 2013e). This haemorrhage was greatest in the least urbanized counties, in particular, Leitrim, Monaghan, Mayo, Longford and Donegal where above-average declines in agricultural employment coupled with below-average growth in manufacturing employment (Buchanan 1968). Between 1950 and 1960, this resulted in a net decline in population of some 137,000 persons or approximately 5% of the population, presaging a continuing contraction of the domestic economy (Whitaker 1983).

Policy-makers of the day had therefore to formulate a national economic policy that struck a balance between regional development and maximizing the national productivity and welfare of the state. On the one hand, an economic and industrial policy had to be devised that delivered a convergence of living standards and productivity between Ireland and other countries in Europe. On the other hand, a remedy to rural decay and emigration was also desperately needed.3 A fundamental question remained, however: could rural and regional balance be achieved without making concessions to national performance?

Whitaker's4 1958 'Economic Development' (Department of Finance 1958a) or 'Grey Book' and the subsequent1958 White Paper, 'Programme for Economic Expansion' (Department of Finance 1958b),5 heralded a dramatic change in thinking. This change no doubt reflected Lemass'6 support for the burgeoning European integration movement. 'Economic Development' proposed an integrated programme of national development, advocated free trade and if necessary borrowing. This new strategy proposed a reduction in tariffs, opening up of goods and capital markets and development of a more corporatist and Keynesian approach to economic management. This change in policy brought about, not only 'a purposeful coordination of development effort and, most importantly, a transformation of disillusionment and despondency into hope and confidence' (Whitaker 1983, 90).

Whitaker and the Capital Investment Advisory Committee (Department of Finance 1958c) were not in favour of trying to balance regional and national performance, arguing that Ireland should be treated as a single economic entity and that economic policy should be targeted at improving general economic and social conditions. They noted 'Special

subsidisation of remote areas by more extensive grants for industrial development is wasteful and retards progress in areas better situated' (Department of Finance 1958a, 19). In other words, dispersal of factors of production and public goods at a sub-national level would undermine the overall national strategy. This view should not be entirely surprising. Average income levels needed to be raised, industrial production improved, trade liberalized and products internationalized. The State also needed to disentangle itself from dependency on the UK, in terms of both trade and standards, specifications and measurements, before regional distribution could be addressed (Nolan et al., 2000).

Not everyone agreed with Whitaker and in acknowledgement of the growing urban–rural divide some argued that decentralization of industry should be considered. In response to Economic Development, Ó Nuallain countered 'the economic disadvantages of placing new industries outside of the Dublin area may not be so great as is generally thought' (1959, 119). Ó Nuallain did, however, warn against distributing industry across 'every little town in Connacht' and argued in favour of a more selective approach, specifically growth centres: far better, I think, to select five or six centres, of which Sligo and Galway would be two such centres, as potential industrial nuclei, which would constitute strategic growing points from which an impulse towards economic growth would spread to the surrounding districts. (1959, 120).

Bishop Lucey of Cork,7 fearing the dangers of emigration, urbanization and industrialization also argued that government departments should be decentralized ' … Dublin is overgrown, that it is overgrown as the result of State action and that the basic remedy is to take away some of the State Departments from Dublin and locate them in the provinces' (Keogh 1994, 217). The location of industry was crucial to the debate. Industrial policy was seen as the main policy instrument available to accelerate regional expansion and reduce income and social disparities (Buchanan 1968; O'Farrell 1975). Furthermore, Industrial dispersal was also seen as the antidote to rural decay (Telesis 1982) as it was the only tool available to create jobs in rural Ireland and compensate for declining agricultural prospects.

In 1956, in an attempt to encourage greater export focus, the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) had begun offering tax relief on export profits but, given the precarious state of indigenous industry, there was little take up. Having failed to stimulate local industry, the IDA of necessity, shifted their attention towards attracting foreign-owned, export-oriented enterprises. Thus, began an industrial policy synonymous with the provision of assistance to foreign-owned manufacturing enterprises and the promotion of Ireland as a low tax, export base. So, the policy of attracting foreign investment to Ireland began initially as a regional one and only later developed into a national industrial policy (McAleese 1997).

The primary aim of Irish industrial policy, through attracting foreign manufacturing firms to Ireland, was the creation of employment (Telesis 1982). Secondary to this was an attempt to cultivate a modern, indigenous manufacturing industry through the transfer of technology and management skills and the creation of a sub-supply market in Ireland through linkages with indigenous industry. In the absence of an explicit policy for the development of the distributive trade or services sectors, industrial policy indirectly carried responsibility here too. Thus, industrial policy became a panacea, not just for manufacturing but also for services and, by default, regional policy.

3. The Buchanan report

Given the wide range of national issues facing policy-makers in the late 1950s, it is not particularly surprising that little priority beyond attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) was given to regional concerns. The difficult balancing act of achieving a convergence of living standards and productivity with other European countries and finding a remedy to rural decay

and emigration remained. All the while, uncertainty as to whether regional policy contributed to or detracted from national performance persisted.

As economic conditions improved throughout the 1960s, advocates of regional policy continued to argue that far from being counter-productive, regionally differentiated policies would actually contribute to national growth by making fiscal policy more effective (O'Farrell 1970). But even within this camp, there was no agreement between what O'Neill (1973) described as the 'Dispersionists' and the 'Centralists', as to what type of regional policy was best suited to Ireland, that is, between 'even dispersal' or 'growth centre' models.8

The debate culminated in the United Nations commissioning a study on behalf of the Irish Government in 1968; 'Regional Studies in Ireland' or what became known as the Buchanan Report (1968). It was hoped that the report might provide a framework within which the conflicts between centralist and dispersionsist development policies could be resolved and bring some coordination to the scattered attempts to promote regional economic growth. The report came down in favour of regional and spatial planning, arguing that regional development was actually central to solving key national problems rather than adding to them. With international trade seen as the key to Ireland's prosperity and with a political and economic climate focusing on how to capitalize on opportunities presented by the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement and the possibilities of accession to the EEC, Buchanan, like many at the time, was of the view that industrial policy was the best policy instrument available to support regional development and create employment in rural Ireland.The report also advocated a 'Centralist' policy, favouring a concentration of industrial employment in a limited number of national and regional growth centres with access to labour force, markets and ancillary services and social amenities, transport and communications infrastructure.

Buchanan proposed a move away from the existing dispersed approach being adopted by the IDA and recommended instead targeted growth centres (not unlike the nuclei proposed by Ó Nuallain in 1959) where 75% of all new industrial employment for the next 20 years would be concentrated. He argued that sufficiently large centres or poles were needed in order to attain a critical mass sufficient to compete with Dublin. Thus, Dublin, Cork and Limerick–Shannon were identified as national growth centres, while Waterford, Galway, Dundalk–Drogheda, Sligo and Athlone were proposed as regional centres. The Donegal planning region did not get a regional centre as Letterkenny was deemed too small, whereas Dundalk and Drogheda were both sufficiently large to warrant being centres, resulting in the North-East planning region having two growth poles.

The plan proved controversial, particularly the exclusive targeting of urban centres as growth poles. Such an urban-led approach was politically unpalatable in a country with a largely rural electorate and was shelved for reasons of expediency (Laffan 1996; O'Leary 2002). Annette (1970, 312) argues that even if the plan had been accepted, there was no legal or administrative framework to implement it, saying there was 'no wineskin to hold the new wine'.

The plan was shelved and as Walsh (2013) notes, this failure would cast a long shadow over future attempts to promote spatial planning in Ireland. In 1972, the 'new' IDA launched their five-year (1973–1977) Regional Industrial Plans. These plans were the first full articulation of government regional industrial policy (Gleeson et al. 2006). They were also an explicit rejection of the concentration or growth centre model advocated by Buchanan in favour of a dispersed regional policy (Bradley and Morgenroth 1999). But Buchanan had at least succeeded in arousing interest and research around spatial planning in Ireland.

In the first period identified, despite considerable interest in of regional and spatial issues there was no consensus on how best to proceed nor was there any systematic implementation of a clear policy other than a broad 'Dispersionist' industrial policy. Thus, the default regional policy that emerged was largely delegated to a 'top-down' industrial policy. In

this respect, regional policy in Ireland and the UK was similar, as regional policy in the UK consisted mainly of capital and tax incentives to support industry (Balls 2000). In both the UK and Ireland, the policy focus was on creating employment, but in the UK this was driven by an explicit neo-keynesian approach designed to create employment in the regions. In this, it was largely successful although Hildreth (2008) notes that the fundamental regional imbalances remained unchanged.

4. The 'Europeanization' and disappearance of sub-national regional policy

Entry into the EEC in 1973 was to have profound implications for economic and regional policy in Ireland. In preparation for entry into the EEC, the final protective barriers behind which Irish industry could shelter were being removed. In the context of an emerging European regional policy and the European funding framework, Ireland was designated as a single Objective 19 region in accordance with the wishes of the Irish Government. This strategy resulted in a re-orientation of regional policy; from sub-national to supra-national. More specifically, it resulted in a nationally designed regional strategy geared towards maximizing the benefits (as a single region in Europe) from Structural, Cohesion and, in particular, Agricultural funds (Kinlen 2003). In fact, much of the debate on whether or not to join the EEC centred on the benefits and implications of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for Ireland (Barrington and Cooney 1984; McAleese 2000). This approach led to a democratic deficit, engendering a sense of helplessness among local and regional government, making them increasingly dependent on the national administration (Keogh 1994). This dependence was exacerbated with the abolition of domestic rates in 1977, cutting off funding to local authorities, which was replaced by the centrally funded 'Rate Support Grant'.

Since the 1960s, with a few exceptions, such as tourism policy (where natural resources were already spatially dispersed), regional and spatial distribution issues had largely been delegated to the IDA by integrating regional and industrial policy objectives, that is, IDA grant schemes were the principal mechanism for correcting regional imbalances (O'Hagan 1978; Gleeson et al. 2006). This strategy continued throughout the 1970s, albeit supplemented by funding made available through the CAP. The CAP supported farm incomes by guaranteeing prices for the main agricultural commodities and thus acted as a mechanism for income redistribution. For Ireland, with agricultural activity well dispersed around the country, the CAP was viewed by default as supporting balanced regional development. But Prof. Joseph Lee, with characteristic directness, is clear that 'The only concrete regional planning during the 1970s was done by the IDA' (1989, 560).

The first of two oil crises in the 1970s impacted at the end of 1973. Oil prices increased by a factor of 10 and other energy prices and general inflation soon followed in their wake. As roughly 70% of Ireland's energy was imported, this created balance of payments problems and from 1974 to 1976, contributed to a slowdown in economic growth. Or as Justin Keating, Minister for Industry and Commerce at the time described it; the impact of the first oil crisis on the Irish economy was like 'falling off a cliff' (Keogh 1994, 325). A growing population and, in particular, a rapidly growing labour force, put increasing pressure and strain on public finances and reduced per capita income still further. This first oil crisis was met by continued fiscal expansion and the strong recovery experienced after the 1974–1976 recession was driven largely by public spending and borrowing. Despite a recovery in demand, both at home and abroad, Ireland's fiscal policy remained expansionary, becoming pro-cyclical (O'Hagan 1995).

The second oil crisis, in 1979, heralded a global economic downturn. Irish economic policy distilled to one of survival by whatever means possible. The period 1980–1987 was one of prolonged recession and by end of the decade Ireland's economic, social and political strategy was in ruins. The economy was running a sizeable current budget deficit and with real interest rates now positive, and 40% of national debt being foreign owned, 35% of all tax

revenues were diverted to servicing that debt. A vicious cycle began as borrowings were increasingly just servicing the crippling debt that had been incurred during the 1970s. Despite significant employment growth, unemployment continued to rise. Furthermore as much of this employment growth had been in the public sector and was no longer sustainable, fiscal policy turned deflationary. By 1987, the Debt/Gross National Product ratio would approach 130% and with it real fears of national insolvency (O'Donnell 1998). Thus, the late 1980s were characterized by high unemployment, public finance imbalances, falling living standards and wholesale emigration of Ireland's young and educated (commonly known at the time as the 'brain drain'). Net outward migration in the 1980s was 207,000, peaking in 1988 at 44,000 (Central Statistics Office 2012b, 2013e). To add to the woes, Chernobyl and fears of Libyan terrorism put a major dent in tourism receipts from the USA.

During the mid-1980s, the CAP also underwent a serious crisis; one of legitimacy. This stemmed from the realization that farm modernization and the 'productivist' model was generating significant over production and creating 'butter mountains' and 'wine lakes'. The EEC budget was exhausted and arguably the CAP was contributing to social and regional imbalance while at the same time absorbing 70% of the community budget (O'Connor 1986). This was completely disproportionate to agriculture's relative economic importance (Crowley 2003). Reforms led to a fall in prices and the introduction of milk quotas where, from a regional perspective, it called into question the long-standing assumption that the CAP was an implicit regional policy.

As unemployment increased and the economic crisis deepened throughout the 1980s, the importance of spatial issues declined (Gleeson et al. 2006). By this time, industry had surpassed agriculture in relative importance and performance of this sector became the barometer for Ireland's economic strength (O Hagan 1978). This was especially apparent for employment and was reflected in industrial policy, which throughout the recession of the 1980s prioritized job creation over the location of new firms (Boyle, McCarthy, and Walsh 1999; FitzGerald 1999). The abolition in 1987 of the Regional Development Organizations (established in 1969) due to budgetary constraints was further evidence that regional policy had again taken a back seat to national priorities (McAleer 2007). Thus, the neglect of sub-national regional issues in Ireland during the 1980s arose from a top-down focus on solving national issues while adhering to the European Regional programme. In contrast, during the same period, a similar lack of active regional policy in the UK was driven by ideology; specifically by the devotion to neo-classical growth theory economics and the belief in self-correcting markets being advocated by the Thatcher Government (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, and Tomaney 2006; Hildreth 2008).

In 1987, further impetus for the 'Europeanization' of regional policy came with the ratification of the Single European Act and the prospect of a single market. Thus, the second identified 'Period', is characterized by a reduction in interest in regional policy issues in both the UK and Ireland. In Ireland, this happened for a combination of reasons: the shift from sub-national to supra-national emphasis in order to secure EU funding; and the onset of severe recession in the 1980s. In the UK, the shift was driven by an explicit change in economic policy, from neo-Keynesian to classical growth.

5. The 'Celtic Tiger' and the re-emergence of sub-national regional policy

Up to and including the period of the Celtic Tiger, economic policy had essentially been geared towards convergence with western European living standards. Although successful at a national level, it resulted in a divergence at a regional level. This divergence arose primarily from unsustainable development in the Dublin, mid-east and south-west regions and put regional issues and spatial planning back on the agenda (Bradley and Morgenroth 1999; McAleese 2000).

Although the publication of the National Development Plan 1994–1999 (Department of Finance, 1993) or NDP in November 1993 coincided with the 'unofficial birth date' of the Celtic Tiger (McAleese 2000), it did not highlight regional development as a pressing issue. Nevertheless concerns over regional imbalance, which had been largely neglected since the early 1970s but more particularly since the recession of the 1980s began to resurface. During this period, the Irish economy underwent a major transformation with unprecedented economic growth, reversing the trends of the 1980s. This phenomenal growth led to a convergence of Irish living standards, in terms of per capita GDP, towards the EU average (Tansey 2006). While all regions benefited, there was evidence of a growing divergence or imbalance between the Greater Dublin Area (GDA)10 and others. Consequently, the re-emergence of interest in sub-national regional and spatial issues was in response to unbalanced regional growth, increasing congestion problems and infra-structural pressures developing in the larger urban areas but, most particularly, in and around the 'dispersed city' (Department of Environment and Local Government 2002, 22) of the GDA. Unlike previous occasions, this refocus on regional policy emerged therefore due to problems associated with rapid economic success rather than problems associated with economic failure.

The regional divergence and unsustainable development in the GDA and the south-west resulted in balanced regional development becoming an explicit and key objective of the National Development Plan 2000–2006 (Department of Finance, 1999) and placed regional and spatial issues back on the policy agenda. Of course, concerns regarding the unsustainable growth of the GDA had been flagged as far back as 1970s (O'Farrell 1970) yet no clear policy or strategy had been developed in response. It is unlikely therefore that the explicit goal of balanced regional development in the second (2000–2006) NDP and the subsequent NSS arose solely from the merits, or necessity, of spatial planning or regional development.

There was, of course, another significant impetus for the resurgence in interest on spatial and subnational regional issues and the re-shaping of regional policy. In 1999, having exceeded the Objective 1 threshold, the European Commission accepted arguments advanced by the Irish Government and removed Objective 1 status from the country as a whole and Ireland was split into two separate NUTS 2 regions for funding purposes. Arguably, it is this change, more than any other that prompted the 2000–2006 NDP to highlight balanced regional development as one of four core objectives and led to the establishment of the Border, Midland and Western (BMW)11 and Southern & Eastern (SE) regional assemblies to manage Regional Operational Programmes (see Figure 1). This new designation allowed the newly created BMW region to retain full Objective 1 status for the period 2000–2006 while the SE region was designated as an Objective 1 'Phasing Out' region meaning that the SE regions still qualified for EU support but on a sliding and declining scale.

Thus, regionalization in Ireland was a pragmatic response to optimize EU funding rather than any real commitment to the creation of meaningful regional structures or to democratic regionalization (Kinlen 2003; Gleeson et al. 2006; Hayward 2006). O'Hara and Commins (2003, 12) support this view, stating that the SE and BMW Regional Assemblies were established at the insistence of the EU, in order to devolve the management of the European operational programmes. Hence, the perfect alignment of the regional development plans outlined in the NDP 2000–2006 with the NUTS II regions as defined for European funding purposes.

6. The National Spatial Strategy

In 1999, in preparation for the NDP 2000–2006, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) argued that a National Spatial Development Strategy should be formulated. This strategy should, among other things, examine how best to achieve balanced regional development highlighted as an objective in the NDP 2000–2006 (FitzGerald et al. 1999).

Around the same time, the National Economic and Social Council made a similar recommendation, highlighting the need for a NSS (1999) to achieve sustainable balance across the regions.

The NSS published in 2002 was the 'first formal articulation of spatial policy' in more than two decades (Gleeson et al. 2006, 118) and was described by Morgenroth and Fitzgerald et al. (2006) as the most important regional policy document since Buchanan. The purpose of the strategy was to provide a broad strategic, 20-year national development framework with the specific aim of correcting the spatial imbalance that had been amplified during the economic boom of the 1990s. In effect, the NSS would provide a framework that would guide government departments and agencies when implementing policies or making investments with a spatial dimension.

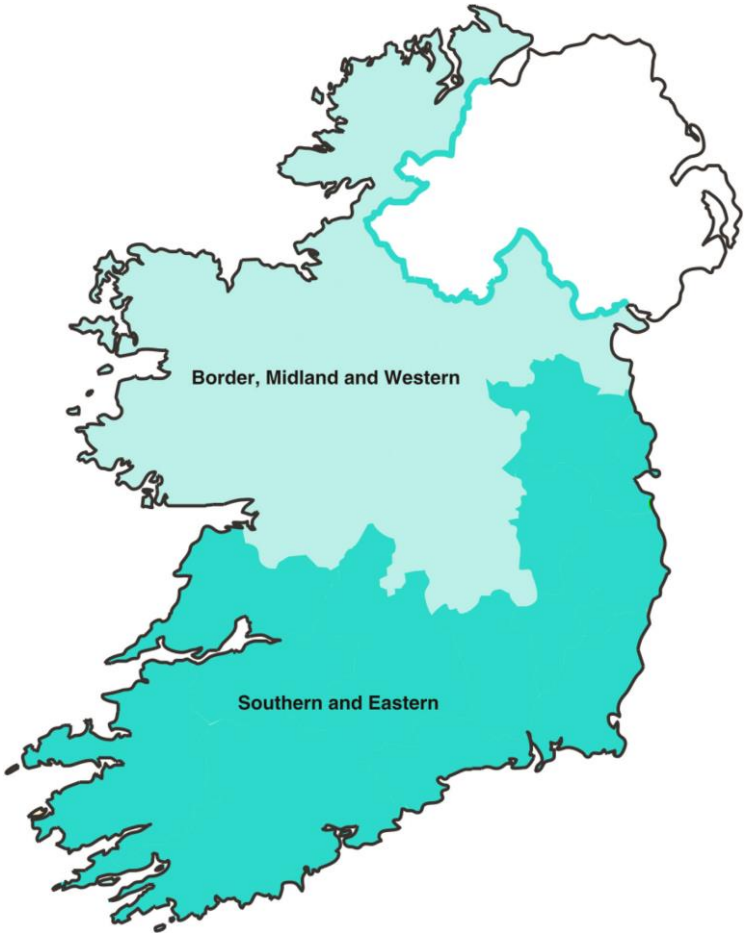


Figure 1. NUTS 2 regions of Ireland.

The NSS, formulated in response to the unsustainable growth of the GDA, advocated a more balanced pattern of spatial development. The report noted that despite various industrial policies, foreign enterprises display a clear preference for proximity to larger urban centres, most particularly Dublin. So much so that Morgenroth (2013, 49) stated that it rendered the dispersed policy 'either ineffective or futile'. International research also suggested this was the natural tendency (Clinch, Convery, and Walsh 2002; Doring, Knappitsch, and Aigner 2010). To underline this point, the report noted that in 1999 the GDA accounted for 48% of national gross value added (GVA). By 2010, the share had increased to 50% (Central Statistics Office 2013b). This concentration of economic activity had created congestion and an unwelcome 'socio-economic geography' (Department of Environment and Local Government 2002, 14) since it was around such urban areas that the greatest population growth had occurred. This

was of critical importance for the development and provision of services, since an adequate population concentration was necessary to generate 'points of consumer demand' (96). Consequently, in a return to a 'centralist' approach similar to that advocated by Buchanan in 1968, one of the key aims of the strategy was to develop strategically located, national gateways. These gateways would become engines of regional and national growth, spurring development throughout their wider spheres of influence and generating sufficient critical mass to counterbalance the GDA.

Reflecting the new political situation following the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the NSS took an 'all-island' view and was explicitly cognizant of the Regional Development Strategy of Northern Ireland (RDSNI) – 'Shaping the Future' (Department for Regional Development in Northern Ireland 2001). The NSS identified the existing cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford as national gateways. In addition, a number of centres in the weaker 'Objective 1' BMW region were designated as national-level gateways: Athlone/Tullamore/Mullingar; Dundalk; Letterkenny/Derry; and Sligo. This polycentric approach of linking towns was similar to that proposed by Buchanan in 1968 when Dundalk and Drogheda were paired. However, now the polycentric city system and the associated rural partnerships prompted by the NSS drew its inspiration from Europe,12 particularly the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP; O'Hara and Commins 2003). The Athlone/Tullamore/Mullingar conglomerate or polycentre was picked for the Midlands since none of these three towns could individually develop sufficient critical mass due to significant numbers of long-distance commuters to the GDA. Dundalk was selected because of its strategic position on the Dublin–Belfast corridor. The Letterkenny/Derry pairing emerged due to the fact that Derry was identified by the RDSNI as a 'regional city' in the north-west.

In addition to the 'all-island' dimension, the NSS also differed from Buchanan in another important respect. The NSS proposed a hierarchical framework, identifying nine strategically located, medium- sized hubs that would act as economic bridges between the gateways and their wider rural areas and would support and be supported by the gateways. The following towns would act as 'capitals' for their surrounding hinterlands; Cavan, Ennis, Kilkenny, Mallow, Monaghan, Tuam, Wexford, Ballina/Castlebar and Tralee/Killarney (see Figure 2). Gateways and hubs were to be linked via radial and linking corridors along with international access points.

Crucially, the NSS moved beyond industry, recognizing that policy formulation must be multidimensional and co-ordinated. Thus, 'tailored' policies would be required (Department of Environment and Local Government 2002, 18) that integrated sectoral themes, such as education, industrial, transport, energy, telecommunications, health, social, cultural, environmental, rural and housing policy.

The concept of balanced regional development had also evolved. The 2000–2006 NDP had defined balanced regional development to mean the achievement of regional equity or a reduction in disparities between the regions. This approach, again, in line with EU regional policy of the time, sought a balanced distribution of economic activities and population over the national territories. 13 The definition used in the NSS had changed to focus on regional competitiveness or efficiency – 'balanced regional development means developing the full potential of each area to contribute to the optimal performance of the State as a whole – economically, socially and environmentally' (Department of Environment and Local Government 2002, 11). In what Maillet (1998) describes as fourth-generation regional policy, this change reflected the evolution in European regional policy which was developing in response to the growing internationalization and globalization of markets. Thus, European regional policy was shifting away from redistribution of resources towards attempting to stimulate regional potential.

Again, some interesting comparisons can be made with the UK where a similar shift was evident. The Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration Policy (HM Treasury 2007, 13) stated '… it is essential that every nation, region, locality and neighbourhood of the UK performs to its full economic potential'. Unlike Ireland, however, 'New Regional Policy' retained the ambition to reduce inequalities between the regions, as the title of Public Service Delivery Agreement (PSA) number 7 clearly shows: 'Economic performance of all English regions and reduce the gap in the economic growth rates between regions' (HM Government 2007) and so effectively merged the ambitions of the Irish 2000–2006 NDP and the NSS, that is, balanced regional development and improved regional competitiveness. Also, unlike Ireland, the design in the UK was also driven by a bottom-up approach. Following the establishment of National Assembly of Wales and devolution of Scottish parliament in 1988, 'Your Region, Your Choice' (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions 2002) UK policy envisaged directly elected regional assemblies with devolved responsibility for regional spatial strategies.

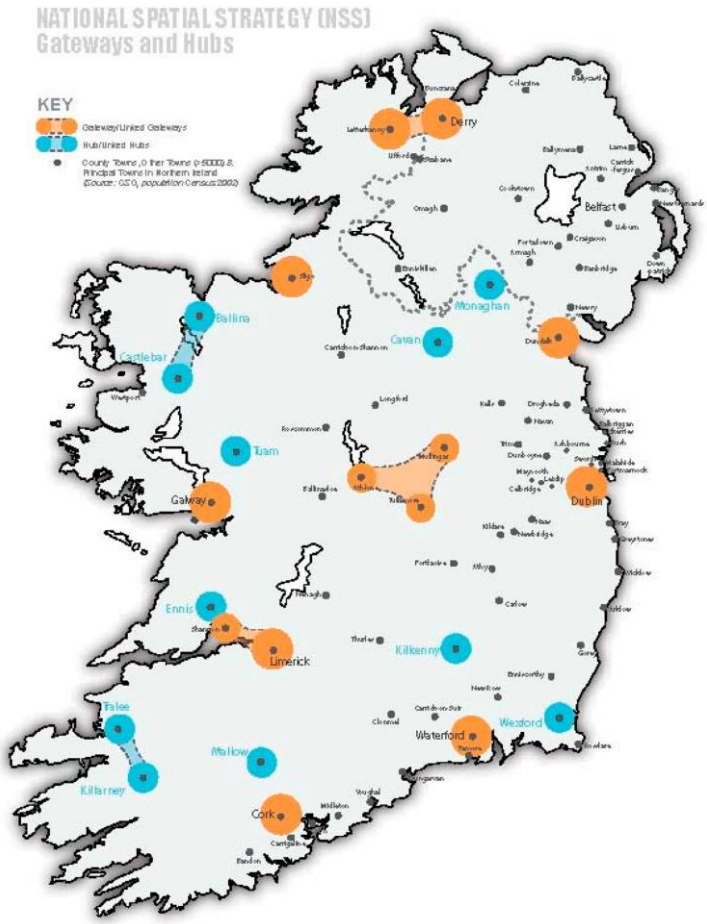


Figure 2. NSS gateways and hubs.
Source: Dept. of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2007), 'National Spatial Strategy Hubs – Development issues and Challenges'. Source: http://www.irishspatialstrategy.ie/Publications/File,184,en.pdf.

While some argued that regional equity was not sustainable, as a target it at least had the advantage of being measurable. In contrast, 'potential' does not lend itself easily to measurement, particularly when it is not clearly defined. Nevertheless, the NSS placed explicit emphasis on monitoring programmes, highlighting the need to develop 'appropriate

performance indicators' (Department of Environment and Local Government 2002, 122). Measurement is not made any easier by the fact that the boundaries of the gateways and hubs were never clearly defined in the NSS or the subsequent NDPs. Arguably the switch from functional to polycentric areas did not add clarity but rather added to the fuzziness of boundaries, as now hinterlands were part of the mix. Nor was it made clear how the all-island or cross-border aspects of the strategy were to be measured. In contrast, the UK 'Your Region, Your Choice' policy defined precise indicators from the outset. To monitor the Government's progress in delivery, four indicators were adopted: Indicator 1: Regional GVA per head growth rates; Indicator 2: Regional GDP per head levels indexed to the EU15 average; Indicator 3: Regional productivity as measured by GVA per hour worked indices and Indicator 4: Regional employment rates.

Although widely welcomed, the NSS did attract some criticism; specifically regarding the number and choice of gateways and hubs, the lack of supporting economic analysis and implementation initiatives and the design of the polycentric model (McCafferty 2002; Morgenroth 2003, 2013; Bannon 2004; Walsh et al. 2006). In any event, within 13 months of publication of the NSS, the then Minister of Finance, Charlie McCreevy, during the 2003 Budget speech announced a decentralization policy that reverted to the 'Dispersionist' model and was the 'antithesis of the joined-up strategic planning advocated by the NSS' (Walsh 2013, 34). So once again the government of the day had effectively rejected the 'Centralist' model and strategic spatial planning. O'Toole argues that the NSS was not 'simply ignored but actively destroyed' sending a 'clear signal that the whole idea of organising space in a rational way was being abandoned' (2009, 173). Despite this, a third NDP (2007–2013) was published in 2007, which once again highlighted balanced regional development as a key target. The 2007 plan defined balanced regional development as 'supporting the economic and social development of all regions in their efforts to achieve their full potential' (Department of Finance 2007, 57) which was consistent with the definition used in the NSS. Continuing to reflect European influence, the 'significant restriction of the availability of regional aid for the period of the plan' was noted in the 2007–2013 plan (Department of Finance 2007, 64) while clarifying that the BMW region would continue to qualify for regional aid throughout 2007–2013 as an 'economic development region', whereas the SE would only qualify on the basis of unemployment criteria.

Like the NSS before it, the 2007–2013 NDP stressed the importance of developing appropriate indicators to inform the allocation of central Government NDP investment over the period of the plan, but also envisaged the construction of a 'regional economic model' (Department of Finance 2007, 76) to be developed under the aegis of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government Spatial Planning Monitoring and Research Programme. The programme would also 'support the establishment of the monitoring framework and outcome indicators…against which progress towards the objective of more balanced regional development can be measured' (Department of Finance 2007, 76–77). But like the NSS before it, the 2007–2013 NDP did not clarify or define many key concepts, making it unclear how the necessary metrics were to be developed.

In time, the need to benchmark the relative performance of gateways and hubs led to the development of Gateway Development Indices. The objective of these indices was to monitor the progress of the gateways in achieving their objectives under the NSS and the impact of the NDP and Regional Operational Programmes. These prototype indices were intended as composite quality of life indices, made up of eight distinct domains.14 An initial set of pilot indices were compiled for 2008 with the intention of updating them in 2010 and 2012 (Fitzpatrick Associates 2009). These indices were subsequently replaced in 2013 with a new set of indicators developed by Future Analytics and Behaviour & Attitudes and jointly commissioned by the Southern & Eastern and Border, Midland andWestern Regional

Assembles (2013). These new indices were also based on eight domains15 and were broadly similar but not directly comparable with the original Fitzpatrick domains and indices, owing to a combination of new data becoming available and other data no longer being available. The new indices were also different as they used CSO POWSCAR16 micro-data to define the gateways and hubs as functional areas (a concept not used in the NSS itself17) by including the wider commuting belt or catchment area surrounding the urban core. Using this approach, the midlands Athlone/Tullamore/Mullingar polycentre appears as a single entity (see Figure 3).

Thus, the third identified period was characterized by renewed interest in regional policy owing to evident congestion and regional imbalances. But despite this interest and the publication of a NSS little changed on the ground. The UK also witnessed a resurgence in interest in regional policy, marking a real shift in policy. What became known as 'new regional policy' was also very different to anything in Ireland as it is a real attempt to introduce 'bottom-up' management.

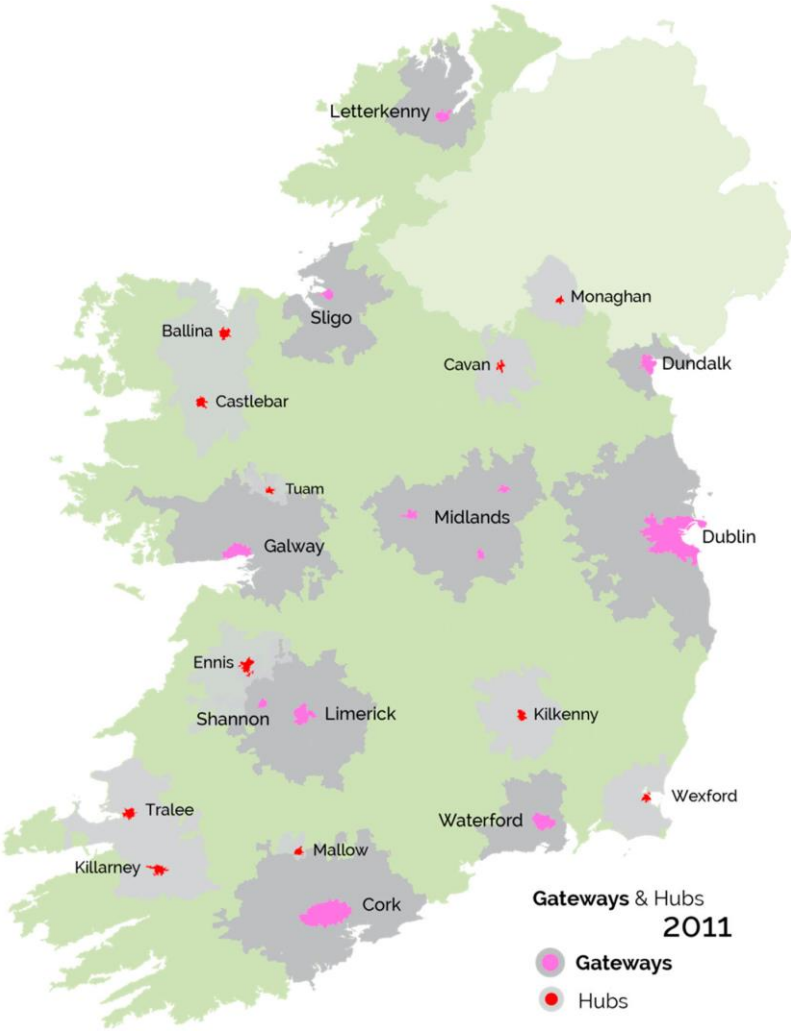


Figure 3. Defining and measuring gateways and hubs.
Source: Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly and Border, Midland & Western Regional Assembly (2013).

7. The 'Re-nationalization' of regional policy

Since the early 1970s, regional policy in Ireland has been influenced heavily and funded by the European Union (EU). In what could be described as pragmatic regionalism, much of Ireland's regional policy has been conceived nationally but delivered regionally. This approach became explicit when the eight Regional Authorities were established as NUTS 3 regions under the Local Government Act, 1991 and became operational in January 1994. The relationship became even more explicit in 1999, when it emerged that Ireland (as a single region) would no longer qualify for Objective 1 funding. Consequently, the Irish Government proposed, and the European Commission agreed, to divide the country into two NUTS 2 regions for structural funds purposes. The BMW region retained full Objective 1 status while the SE region was designated as a transitional region. This decision was driven by concerns for financial advantage rather than by a commitment to democratic regionalization (Hayward 2006).

On 31 December 2006, the BMW region ceased as an Objective 1 status region. Between 2007 and 2013, the region was granted Objective 2 'Phasing-in' status under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment Objective, allowing the region to receive support from both European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund. The SE region was designated an Objective 2 status region.

With the loss of European funding, apart from some short-term Objective 2 funding in the BMW region, regional policy was now essentially funded by the national exchequer and has effectively therefore been re-nationalized' (O'Hara and Commins 2006, 1). The consequent implications for regional policy in Ireland are still unclear. If Government behaviour in previous recessions is any guide, then spatial planning and regional policy will most likely not be priorities during recovery from the 'Great Recession'. The question is will a lack of EU funding exacerbate that lack of priority?

In 2012, on the 10th anniversary and half-way point of the NSS, there was much discussion and debate regarding the successes or failures of the strategy and what the future might hold for regional policy and spatial planning. The 'Great Recession' was now in its fifth year. Unemployment had increased from 4.8% in Q2 2007 to 15% in Q2 2012 (CSO 2013a) and annual GDP rates (at constant prices) had fallen from 5.3% to −1.1% during the same period (CSO 2012a). The General Government Debt/GDP ratio increased from 25% in 2007 to 119% in 2012. The Government deficit as a percentage of GDP shifted from a position of balance (0.1%) in 2007 to one of significant imbalance in 2010 (30%) before falling back to 8% in 2012 (Department of Finance 2008; CSO 2013c). The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, acknowledging the half-way mark and the decline in economic fortune since 2002, published a report 'Implementing the National Spatial Strategy: 2010 Update and Outlook' (2010) which sought to reaffirm the governments' commitment to the strategy they had effectively rejected back in 2003. However, almost exactly two years later, with a new government in place, a new strategy 'Putting People First' (Department of Environment, Community and Local Government 2012) was launched and proposed to significantly reconfigure regional Government in Ireland.

Not least the new strategy proposed to reorganize the regional boundaries, replacing the existing eight regional authorities and two regional assemblies with three new regions (Connacht-Ulster, Southern and Eastern-Midland) and regional assemblies (see Figure 4). The new Eastern & Midland region would essentially extend the GDA to include counties Laois, Offaly, Louth, Longford and Westmeath. Unfortunately, the logic or rationale for the new boundaries was not clearly articulated in the document leaving plenty of space for conjecture. One possible motive posited by VanEgraat (2012) is that the object was simply to reduce public sector staff numbers and costs rather than stimulate effective regional development. An alternative motive anticipated by MacFeely in 2011 was that the artificial nature of NUTS regions combined with the history of expediency adopted with regard to funding regional

policy in Ireland made the NUTS regions in Ireland particularly vulnerable to reconfiguration or manipulation in order to maximize EU funding.

Whatever the reasons, the three proposed regions do at least conform to the size thresholds defined in Article 3(2) of Regulation No. 1059/200318 that specifies NUTS 2 populations should fall within minimum and maximum population bands of 800,000 and 3 million persons. The status of these proposed regions remains unclear however. It was hoped by many that the launch of 'Putting People First' would provide a new momentum or stimulus for the NSS. However, the situation is potentially more confused than ever. NUTS regions cannot be changed unilaterally but must be agreed in advance with the European Commission in line with EU regulation 1059/2003. The opportunity to change NUTS regions for the years 2015–2017 was announced by Eurostat in 2012 but no proposals were submitted by the Irish Government to the European Commission before the (1 February 2013) deadline. Amendments to 1059/2003 were agreed by the European Commission in May 2013; Ireland was not among the member states requesting amendments, even though the Southern & Eastern (NUTS 2) region and the Dublin (NUTS 3) region were well in excess of the population thresholds; by 10% and 56%,19 respectively.

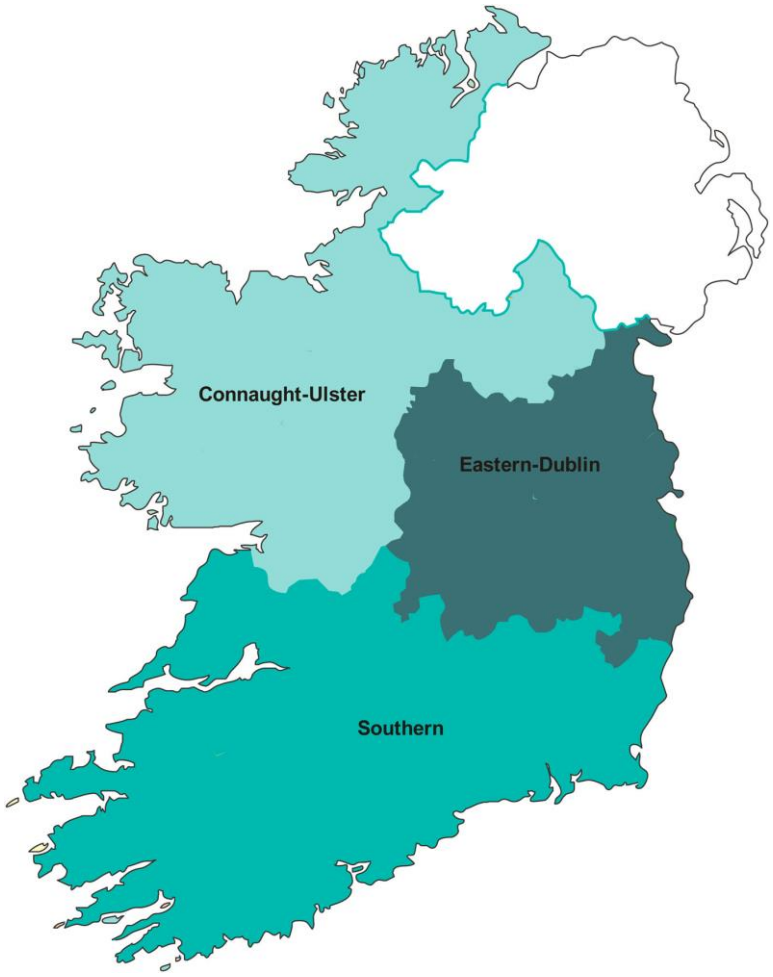


Figure 4. Proposed new regional Boundaries.
Source: Dept. of Environment, Community & Local Government (2012).

Hence, the status of the regions proposed in 'Putting People First' is unclear. If the government are proposing to decouple the national and EU administrative regions, it will create

a chaotic situation. To add to the confusion, the Irish Times reported on 12 February 2013 under the headline ‘Government Scraps Spatial Strategy’ that the Minister for Environment, Mr Phil Hogan, informed the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation that the NSS had failed. With regard to the gateways and hubs, the minister stated that ‘nothing has happened’ in the 10 years since they were designated and that new ‘replacement strategy’ would be circulated within a year. Later the same year, in May 2013, launching the new Gateways & Hubs Development Index, Jan O’Sullivan, Minister for Housing & Planning, announced that the government intended to launch a new NSS in 2016, once the current round of Regional Programme Guidelines were completed. This strategy would not be an update of the existing strategy but an entirely new one.

Thus, the fourth and current period is characterized by confusion. The return to nationally funded regional policy offers many opportunities but the uncertain status of the proposed regions in ‘Putting People First’ and the mixed messages regarding the timing and extent of a new Spatial Strategy have not provided clarity regarding the direction spatial and regional planning are likely to take next.

8. Discussion

The history of regional policy and spatial planning is important in not only helping us understand why things are the way they are today, but could if considered, perhaps help policy-makers to avoid making some of the same mistakes again. To quote Edmund Burke ‘Those who don’t know history are doomed to repeat it’.20 Many aspects of the history of regional policy in Ireland could be discussed. In this section, four issues are briefly discussed: (1) how academic literature and theory may or may not have influenced Irish regional and spatial policy in general; (2) the concept of space and regions in particular; (3) the recurring theme of insufficient sub-national data and (4) the urban–rural divide.

8.1. Influences

One of the many challenges in trying to make sense of regional planning in Ireland is trying to understand to what extent theory influenced policy thinking and development. Reviewing Irish policy documents, one can find traces of regional economic and development theory, but often without explicit reference, leaving the reader unsure as to which theories precisely have informed thinking and to what extent they actually swayed policy in practice. Even when literature is cited, the absence of modelling and empirical testing for an Irish context again leaves one unsure to what extent theory has really been adopted or applied. Historically, a lack of data, particularly sub-national data, no doubt contributed to this lack of empiricism21 and hence Walsh’s complaint regarding the ‘serious deficits in the range and quality of accessible spatial data’ (2013, 25). But since the turn of the century there have been dramatic improvements in the availability and quality of data in Ireland.22 How and whether those data are used, to borrow an expression from Geary (1966), depends on ones ‘statistical conscience’ – there are never enough data so empirical analyses always require an element of creativity.

The lack of specific definitions in Irish policy documents creates other ambiguities. For example, the new concept of balanced regional development introduced by the NSS did not define in any useful way what was meant by ‘developing the full potential of each area’23 with the implication that progress towards it could not be measured. Morgenroth (2013) notes, that if it had been, then economic approaches to measuring efficiency could perhaps be used. Equally, the concept of ‘critical mass’ which underpins centre-based approaches needs to be defined for Irish circumstances so that a minimum threshold below which economies-of-scale do not arise can be determined, and so that optimal targets for the relative size of the centres and their respective hinterlands can be set.

Without question, the European Community and Union has had a major influence on Irish regional policy thinking and implementation. In fact, since joining the EEC in 1973, it has arguably been the dominant influence. For example, one could argue that Irish policy-makers (ever pragmatic) have allowed Europe to do much of the intellectual thinking and have simply implemented the European view in a financially efficient manner. Adoption of the polycentric approach and redefining what was meant by balanced regional development in the NSS are clear examples of this. But, of course, Ireland has influenced Europe too. In fact, regional policy in Europe has been inextricably intertwined with Ireland from the start. The real catalyst for developing European regional policy in the 1970s was the first community enlargement and the entry of Ireland, the UK and Denmark into the Community and preparation for Economic and Monetary Union. Specifically, the Thomson Report (Commission for the European Communities 1973) recommended establishment of the European Regional Development Fund (which was established in 1975) to correct the structural and regional imbalances that existed owing to over dependence on agriculture, poor or declining industrial activity and structural under-employment. Thomson recognized that the rural periphery, in particular Ireland, was facing significant development challenges and would retard European ambitions if not addressed.

Irish regional policy has been driven primarily by economic and financial considerations rather than by other social, political or democratic concerns. In much the same way that it was assumed that industrial policy would implicitly create a market for services, the implicit hope has been that economic growth will bring social development. Perhaps not an unreasonable argument, but as Annette (1970, 132) notes, it meant that those pushing a social agenda often 'found themselves separated by barriers of language, ideology and policy from the zealots of rapid economic growth' as the primary focus was explicitly economic. This was not unique to Ireland, in Europe too, despite highlighting the importance of political, cultural, administrative and social factors, the emphasis was originally on developing regional industrial and economic activity. As Mazower notes '"social Europe" always took second place to the higher goal of fiscal convergence and monetary union' (2012, 410). But the Single European Act in 1986 brought with it new ideas, shifting and widening the emphasis from regional development to improving competition, transport networks and the environment and transforming regional policy into an economic and social cohesion policy for the community. But while European thinking changed the focus in Ireland remained for a long time resolutely economic and financial. The NSS was the first plan to really broaden the scope and aim 'to achieve a better balance of social, economic, physical development' (Department of Environment and Local Government 2002, 10). But despite the lofty ambitions, actions on the ground suggest that the primary motive has remained financial and economic.

8.2. Concept of region

In many respects, the design of the regions in Ireland has taken the path of least resistance. A striking feature of Irish planning has been the close correspondence between planning regions and the counties of Ireland (the historical, cultural and political regions). There have been few attempts to fundamentally rethink the concept of region or their shape. A typical example of this was the planning regions proposed in 1964 by An Foras Forbatha which were simply ad-hoc groupings of existing counties. Subsequently, other higher order regions have been introduced (such as the European NUTS regions) but again these have not fundamentally altered the day-to-day functioning or conceptualization of space in Ireland. Administratively convenient, and politically expedient, they have not offered particularly useful frameworks for regional social and economic planning. And unfortunately history has shown that neither economies nor the environment typically conform neatly to political or administrative boundaries. As noted earlier, some attempts have been made re-conceptualize

space, notably the Buchanan Report and the NSS but neither of these plans were successful in this respect.

The Buchanan Report was the first important proposal for a national strategy on regional development in Ireland. The urban-oriented approach advocated envisaged large cities with industry as the growth poles and drivers of regional development. Walsh citing Moseley (1974) states this approach was very much influenced by the 'prevailing international theoretical and empirical research on regional development' (2013, 15). For example, the growth pole model (Perroux 1950, 1955) argued that economic growth was stimulated by the most developed industrial sectors and enterprises which acted as growth poles for the whole economy. These growth poles would strengthen surrounding metropolitan areas, stimulate economic growth and create stronger linkages between other poles. Although not intended as a geographic concept, this concept was often used to explain spatial polarization of regional development where highly developed regions became 'growth poles'. The dynamic centre–periphery models of Myrdal (1957), Hirschman (1958) and Friedmann (1966) also envisaged core regions as economic centres with the greatest potential for change. They would be located in large influential, innovative, metropolitan centres with the most competitive enterprises from which economic stimuli would diffuse into the surrounding hinterlands. But the report was also influenced by practical examples from overseas, in particular the rapid expansion of industrial centres such as Birmingham, Dusseldorf and Milan (Northcott 1970) where growth centre policies were being implemented. It is curious however that problems being experienced at the time with the implementation of 'growth centre' policies in several European countries were seemingly not observed (or at least not referred to). The relationship between economically remote and developing areas and the growth centres appeared to be the Achilles heel of this approach – something of immediate importance to Ireland. So much so, that it led to Buchanan being shelved, as the perceived focus on urban centres made this approach politically unpalatable.

The failure to adopt Buchanan had a lasting impact. It was not until the early 1990s, some 25 years later, that the concept of 'region' from a planning perspective was revisited with the introduction of NUTS regions. Although these regions had existed informally for statistical purposes for some years,24 these 'European regions' were only formally established in 1994 under the terms of the 1991 Local Government Act. But like the planning regions proposed by An Foras Forbatha back in 1964, the eight NUTS 3 regions were simply amalgams of existing counties, so the challenge to existing thinking was minimal. A somewhat more dramatic change in Irish regions emerged in 1999 with the introduction of the NUTS 2 regions and their political administrations – at least from a formal political perspective. But there is no evidence to suggest that the borders of these new regions were influenced by economic or regional development theory, but rather were driven by the threat of losing European structural funds. So while the NUTS regions were without question a significant development, they still respected and leaned-on existing county borders and did not really represent a change in conceptual thinking (at least in Ireland). But given the lessons of Buchanan, which had demonstrated the danger of ignoring domestic politics and culture, one could argue with some justification that this was simply a very pragmatic approach. It no doubt had some administrative advantages too.

The next challenge to prevailing thinking did not take quite so long. In 2001, the Irish Government published a consultation document 'Indications for the way ahead' (Department of the Environment and Local Government 2001) which introduced, among other ideas, the concept of 'functional areas'. Inspired by thinking from the ESDP (European Commission 1999), each of the 12 functional areas would contain an urban centre and share 'common characteristics and issues' (15).25 But this idea was quickly rejected. In particular, the fact that boundaries of the functional areas and the existing counties were not coterminous was seen as problematic, especially for local political reasons (Walsh 2013).26

Thus, the NSS was the first formal policy document to really reconceptualize space in Ireland for more than 30 years. The strategy introduced a more complex hierarchical system of inter-linking gateways and hubs mixed with conglomerates or polycentres placing emphasis on interlinkages between centres and hinterlands. This approach was multi-dimensional and multifunctional in concept and extended beyond the agglomeration of economies approach normally articulated by regional economists (O'Leary 2007) to address, among other things, quality of life and environmental issues. The strategy was clearly influenced by thinking and developments in Europe, in particular the ESDP,27 but also indirectly the growing volume of academic literature, which since Buchanan had largely abandoned Growth Pole theory owing to growing dissatisfaction with the lack of coherence between theory and empirical reality. New influences, such as Porter's (1990) theory of industry clusters, which examined why enterprises concentrate their activities in industrial and geographic clusters assisted by closer supply links, proximity to government and educational institutes, act as a catalyst for innovation and form networks of cooperation to improve competitive advantage from a global market perspective were incorporated. Krugman's (1991) 'core-periphery' or new economic geography model which argued that regional clusters of economic activity emerge due to a combination of centrifugal and centripetal forces was also evidently an influence. Other concepts too, such as Solow (1956) and Grossman and Helpman (1994) ideas regarding economic growth and Audretsch's (1998) work on agglomeration, were indirectly imported into policy documents via domestic research reports (Forfás 1996; Department of the Environment and Local Government 1997; Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development 1999; Economic and Social Research Institute 1999; National Economic and Social Council 1999). Despite this, Morgenroth argues that while NSS borrowed concepts 'there is a glaring lack of reference on both the NSS and the accompanying research reports to key results of the economics literature and their importance in the Irish context' (2013, 47).

The strategy was also influenced by country examples; in particular, developments in Denmark appear to have been inspirational.28 But the dominant influence was European – the reconceptualization of space and the introduction of 'polycentric development' in Ireland aligned perfectly with the ESDP. In fact, it was seen as the poster child for national implementation of a European framework and as such attracted a lot of attention around Europe (Walsh 2013). The key to understanding the importance of city networks, city clusters and linked hinterlands for Ireland is to remember that investment, structural funding (particularly Objective 1 funding) and Trans-European Network loans, would be oriented towards polycentric development.

The most recent policy document 'Putting People First' did not introduce any new concept of space but rather continued the ideas outlined in the NSS. Instead, it focused on reorganizing and reshaping the NUTS II regions (but again conforming to existing county borders) and streamlining the associated regional assemblies and councils.

8.3. Data and statistics

One does not need to read too far into the history of regional policy in Ireland before one comes across complaints regarding gaps in sub-national data availability and problems with data quality. By and large these complaints were justified, although as noted already, the situation today is very much improved. But very few commentators or analysts have discussed why this problem persisted for so long. Few seem to have remarked on (or perhaps understood) the link between data infrastructure and the downstream benefits for statistics, in particular, the making available of affordable, good quality regional and local statistics. Yet this is a crucial issue, not just for preparatory analyses, testing theory in an Irish context but also for compiling performance metrics against which policy implementation can be benchmarked.

The conceptual changes underpinning the definition of balanced regional development suggest that the future policies and performance metrics must become more, rather than less, sophisticated. Consequently, the need for a coherent and coordinated national and regional data infrastructure to support regional economic and social analyses and regional modelling is now greater than ever (National Statistics Board 2003; Southern & Eastern and Border, Midland & Western Regional Assemblies 2013; MacFeely and Dunne 2014). The absence of a unique business identifier and the uneven use of the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) as the unique person identifier across the public service and supporting public registers has been highlighted as a serious obstacle to progress (National Statistics Board 2012; Ruane 2013). The introduction of the new smart location 'Eircode' in 2015 has the potential to address the long-standing absence of a spatial identifier, providing it does not suffer from the same fate as the PPSN, where only partial use across the public service limit its value. The non-alignment of administrative data and policies to the official regions is another challenge. The National Economic and Social Council drew attention to this in 1999 saying the different regional boundaries used by various state agencies need to be harmonized. Nolan and Maitre raised the issue again in 2008. This has not happened29 and works against the efficient compilation of national and regional statistics, making their production unnecessarily, or in some cases, prohibitively expensive.

8.4. Urban–rural divide

The urban–rural divide that undermined the Buchanan Report in the 1960s still exists. Today over 60% of the Irish population live in urban settlements (Central Statistics Office 2012c) yet rural Ireland remains the stronghold of the Irish cultural, sporting and language identity idealized in literary and political discourse. Loss of culture or language is typically associated with the growing role of cities and urbanization (Nordin and Llena 2012). At a county level, the variation in the urban– rural ratio is large, but counties such as Leitrim, Country Galway, Roscommon, Donegal, Mayo, Monaghan, Cavan, Longford, County Limerick, Kerry, County Waterford, Kilkenny, Sligo, Wexford, Clare and North Tipperary are all predominantly rural (i.e. 60%+ of the population living in rural settlements). Across a range of economic and social indicators, such as employment, age structure or social class profile, an urban–rural divide can be identified (Nolan and Maitre 2008). The Haase–Pratschke Deprivation Index30 has also highlighted a more pronounced urban–rural divide in Ireland than in Northern Ireland, noting that factors, such as access to dynamic labour markets, give rise to a much greater degree of differentiation between urban and rural areas in the Republic of Ireland with regard to population growth and decline, their ability to retain residents in the central working-age cohorts and their attractiveness to more highly-educated individuals. It would therefore appear that rural areas in the Republic of Ireland are much more negatively affected by opportunity deprivation than equivalent areas in Northern Ireland. (Haase, Pratschke and Gleeson 2014) Political analyses of some recent political and social events such as the introduction of water charges (Water Charges 2014; The Irish Examiner 2015) and property taxes (Political World 2012; The Irish Independent 2015) and introduction of broad band (Sorry, Country Folk 2014b) have all identified the urban–rural divide as still existing and being important.31 This is the political reality with implications both for the design and implementation of regional policy and spatial planning. In a Proportional Representation electoral system, such as in Ireland, where many countries are still predominantly rural, the ability of politicians to introduce growth models that are perceived as being urban-focused level may be limited. But with the dynamics of regional economies changing and globalizing, it is no longer clear that it is sustainable to promote dispersed development. Despite this, logical approaches such as selective growth in some regions balanced with selective, deliberately

managed, decline in what others (Daly and Kitchen, 2013) term ‘smart decline’ or ‘planned shrinkage’ may be impossible to implement.

9. Conclusion

Since the late 1950s the priority given to regional issues has ebbed and flowed with Ireland’s economic and political fortunes. That importance has had several different motives: economic failure in the 1950s; membership of the EEC in the 1970s; restructuring of EU funding in the 1990s and congestion fuelled by rapid economic growth at the turn of the century. This variable approach to regional issues has, in general, led to reactive spatial planning and regional policies that have typically been short term and opportunistic in nature. The continued uncertainty as to whether regional development undermines or supports national development in the minds of policy-makers has contributed to this erratic progression.

As a consequence, sub-national regional issues in Ireland have remained secondary to national ones. Despite a NSS and two National Development Plans having placed balanced regional development as a core objective, there is little evidence to-date to suggest that this objective is being achieved. Both the Buchanan Report and the NSS were effectively rejected by the Governments of the day. The status of the most recent plan – Putting People First – remains unclear but it is difficult to see how it can be implemented in any meaningful way having missed the European legislative 2015–2017 window for amending NUTS regions.

Unlike the UK, developments in regional economic policy in Ireland have not been ideologically driven but rather have been motivated by more short-term objectives. Since joining the EEC Ireland’s regional policy has been shaped in ways to optimize European funding. Membership led to the creation of the politically and financially expedient NUTS regions, but has contributed little to real regional democracy. Unlike the UK, there has been no real attempt to develop a genuinely ‘bottom-up’ regional democratic system or define concepts so that baseline and follow-up metrics can be properly developed.

Over-reliance on industrial policy as the primary tool to implement, regional policy must be re-evaluated. The NSS envisaged a ‘pivotal’ role for the IDA and Enterprise Ireland (EI) in fostering regional development. However, with manufacturing accounting for less than 13% of total employment (Central Statistics Office 2013a) and less than 47% of total exports (Central Statistics Office 2013d), a new and wider approach to regional planning is required. Furthermore, evidence of positive productivity spillovers from multinational enterprises operating in the manufacturing sectors (Barry, Görg, and Strobl 2005; Ruane and Uğur 2005) or services sectors (Haller 2014) in Ireland is weak thus calling into question how effective the contribution of IDA and EI can be. Fitzgerald has argued that greater attention must be given to ‘social and recreational infrastructure’ along with tackling the supply of urban transport, water and housing (1999, 105). Forfas (2008) has also highlighted the significant investment required across a range of infrastructure and services to realize the potential of the gateways and hubs. Knowledge capital is another key infra-structural deficit that must be addressed if regional balance is to be achieved in a globalized economy and increasingly knowledge-based society (Boyle, McCarthy, and Walsh 1999; Doring and Schnellenbach 2006; Doring, Knappitsch, and Aigner 2010). Although the IDA (2005) noted that they cannot achieve the aims of the NSS alone, a quick scan of recent Dáil32 debates suggest that this is not necessarily understood by decision-makers.33

Today, as Ireland grapples with the repercussions of the ‘Great Recession’, the achievement of balanced regional development (however defined) has become a more complex proposition. Any cohesive regional policy must now address the legacies of poor economic and spatial management. Future spatial and infrastructure planning must also contend with the political complexities of a shared All-Island approach (InterTradeIreland 2006; Department for Regional Development in Northern Ireland 2010). The recent announcement that a new NSS

is to be launched in 2016 offers hope and significant opportunities. The existing NUTS regions are financially expedient administrative constructs rather than real economies. The rationale and status of the proposed regions outlined in 'Putting People First' is unclear. Introducing another set of artificial regions that do not make sense from a policy perspective will only leave existing problems unresolved while creating additional ones, raising questions as to their sustainability and suitability.34 A new NSS provides an opportunity to carefully design, justify and implement from 2018, regional boundaries that from an economic and spatial perspective are more appropriate to policy setting and coordination. It also offers an opportunity to highlight the importance and benefits of properly integrated regional and city spatial plans and properly functioning local government.35 A new strategy also provides an opening to consider whether the selective 'growth' paradigm envisioned in the previous NSS should to be balanced with a selective 'decline' paradigm where a decline in some peripheral regions is deliberately managed. Finally, a new NSS offers the opportunity to define in advance what appropriate performance metrics might be and organize local and regional administrative data so that baseline and progress indicators could be compiled from the very beginning.

Notes

1. O'Faolain's description of de Valera's Ireland (1939).
2. The 'Mini Famine'.
3. Keogh (1994) questions whether this is really true? He notes that while the official rhetoric favoured an end to high emigration, in reality this was not the case as the trade-off would have resulted in higher unemployment, lower wages and a further reduction in living standards. Emigration did however excite real ecclesiastic concerns prompting the Irish bishops to issue a public statement expressing their great alarm at the rapid rise as it threatened the religious and moral well-being of young emigrants.
4. Thomas Kenneth 'Ken' Whitaker was appointed as Secretary of the Department of Finance in 1956 at the exceptionally young age, by the standards of the time, of 39. He subsequently served as Governor of the Central Bank, as Chancellor of the National University of Ireland and President of the Economic and Social Research Institute.
5. Technically, the White Paper was published first, but as Whitaker himself notes, it owed its 'inspiration and nearly all of its content to Economic Development' (1983, 90)
6. Seán Francis Lemass served as Taoiseach (Prime Minister) between 1959 and 1966.
7. Cornelius Lucey was appointed bishop of the diocese of Cork in 1951 and the united diocese of Cork-Ross in 1958. He retired as bishop in 1980. He was known for outspoken sermons. His views on matters of faith and morals were conservative.
8. See Section 8 (Discussion) for some further elaboration on growth centre models.
9. 'Objective 1' EU Funding is designed to assist regions with per capita GDP of 75% or less than the EU average (over 3 reference years).
10. The GDA is the conglomeration of Dublin and the Mid-east NUTS 3 regions, that is, Dublin, Wicklow, Meath and Kildare. NUTS regions are the regional classification used by the EU for statistical purposes – NUTS (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics).
11. Regarding the BMW acronym, Clinch et al. (2002, 100) had this to say 'We…applaud the no doubt deliberate irony by the anonymous civil servant in the Department of Finance who named the ostensibly impoverished region after one of the world's leading luxury car brands'.
12. Even the terminology was borrowed. It is noteworthy that the European Commission policy documents at the time, referred to 'Gateway cities' (European Commission 1997, 1999).
13. In particular, Article 130A of the Maastrict Treaty that states 'In particular the Community shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions, including rural areas' (Commission of the European Commission 1992).

14. (1) Population; (2) Enterprise and Employment; (3) Learning and Innovation; (4) Natural and Physical Environment; (5) Transport and Connectivity; (6) Health and Wellness; (7) Social Facilities and Networks and (8) Affluence and Deprivation.
15. (1) Population; (2) Enterprise and Employment; (3) Knowledge and Innovation; (4) Natural and Physical Environment; (5) Transport and Connectivity; (6) Health and Wellness; (7) Crime and Disorder and (8) Deprivation and Affluence.
16. POWSCAR – Place of Work, School or College Census of Anonymized Records.
17. See Discussion.
18. Regulation (EC) No. 1059/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003 (Commission of the European Communities 2003), on the establishment of a common classification of territorial units for statistics
(NUTS), Official Journal, L 154, 21.6.2003.
19. According to the 2011 Census of Population, the population of the NUTS 2 Southern & Eastern region was 3.3 million persons and the population in the NUTS 3 Dublin region was 1.25 million persons.
20. Sourced from: http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/111024-those-who-don-t-know-history-are-doomed-torepeat-it.
21. Certainly, the postponement of the 2001 Census of Population owing to the outbreak of Foot & Mouth was unfortunate from the perspective of planning for the NSS.
22. Some issues regarding data are discussed in Section 8.3 (Issues).
23. 'Balanced regional development means developing the full potential of each area to contribute to the optimal performance of the State as a whole – economically, socially and environmentally' (Department of Environment and Local Government 2002, 11).

24. In 1969, the European Commission published 'A regional policy for the Community' (Commission of the European Communities 1969). This report articulated the need to develop 'community instruments' to support regional development and clearly laid out the many deficits in regional statistical reporting in the community at the time, including the lack of a consistent territorial unit. This, in turn, led to the small but important step in 1970 with the establishment of the European statistical regions (NUTS). Initially, like many early developments in European statistics, these regions were established under a Gentlemen's Agreement. The NUTS regions were not formalized by European Legislation until 2003 (Regulation No. 1059/2003).
25. What this meant exactly was not made clear. As Walsh notes, for political and tactical reasons the Indications paper was 'parsimonious on specifics' (2013, 27).
26. Although 'functional areas' were rejected in the lead up to the NSS, it is interesting to note that elements of this approach have reappeared. Most notably, Future Analytics and Behaviour & Attitudes have defined 'functional areas' (using catchment area) in order to build the 'Gateway Development Indices' for Ireland. This was inspired by the nodal approach adopted by the United States Census Bureau to delineate metropolitan statistical areas to operationalize functional economic areas using commuting patterns. In the Irish case, this is done using the 2011 Census of Population POWSCAR micro dataset (see Figure 3). The US approach was a variation of the 'functional economic area' concept proposed by Fox and Kumar (1965) and the concept of spatially interdependent 'nodes' proposed by Hoover and Giarratani (1985) which integrates capital and labour flows of surrounding peripheral areas.
27. The 'New Era' of regional policy ushered in by President Jacques Delors (Commission of the European Communities 1985, 5) led to what for many is the de facto birth document of European regional policy – the Single European Act (1986) (Felderean 2012). This Act clearly set out the core pillars of European regional policy (economic cohesion, social cohesion and the reduction of imbalances between regions by supporting disadvantaged regions) in law and

laid the basis for a genuine cohesion and structural policy designed to offset the burden of the single market for the less-favoured regions of the Community. It also brought reforms or new ideas, shifting and widening the emphasis from regional development to competition, transport and environment and transforming regional policy into a community economic and social cohesion policy. This more complex policy mix set out to reduce regional discrepancies to prepare for the Single Market and ultimately Economic and Monetary Union. The importance of addressing regional imbalances, providing assistance to disadvantaged and declining regions but also the importance for competition and innovation for developing competitive internal markets found intellectual support from two academic works sponsored by the European Commission (Padoa-Schioppa 1987; Cecchini, Catinat, and Jacqemin 1988).

28. See National Spatial Strategy: Appendix IV.

29. Putting People First made it quite clear that it will not happen. Section 8.2.5 articulates clearly the arguments against harmonizing the various state regions but does not provide any of the counter arguments.

30. http://airo.maynoothuniversity.ie/mapping-resources/airo-census-mapping/national-viewers/all-island-deprivation-index.

31. The one recent exception appears to have been the same sex marriage referendum. The Minister for Health, Leo Varadkar, was reported by the BBC as saying said that the vote showed that the 'traditional cultural divide' between rural and urban areas had vanished (BBC News, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32858501).

32. Dáil Éireann is the lower house, and principal chamber, of the Oireachtas (Irish legislature).

33. For an example, see Dáil Debates 13 June 2012 (Houses of the Oireachtas. 2012) – 'Topical Issue Debate', Vol. 1, No. 768, 20.

34. This challenge is not unique to Ireland. Hildreth (2008, 327) notes that in the UK too, regions are 'administrative constructs, not real economies'.

35. In the light of the severe flooding in 2015, O'Toole (2016) stressed the link between genuine local democracy and planning (and flooding). It is also interesting to review, for example, the 2003 Office of Public Works
'Report of the Flood Policy Review Group' which only briefly mentions spatial planning as an area to be improved. Retrieved from http://www.cfram.ie/pdfs-downloads/Flood_Policy_Review_Group.pdf.

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