

Rural Society in Transition: Planning for 21st Century Rural Potentials and Challenges

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List of Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CLÁR	Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtainais
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESPON	European Spatial Planning Observation Network
EU	European Union
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GB	Great Britain
GFA	Good Friday Agreement
ICLRD	International Centre for Local and Regional Development
ICT	Information Communication Technology
LCDC	Local Community Development Committees
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LEO	Local Enterprise Office
NDP	National Development Plan
NI	Northern Ireland
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NPF	National Planning Framework
NSS	National Spatial Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPN	Public Participation Network
RCN	Rural Community Network
REDZ	Rural Economic Development Zones
RoI	Republic of Ireland
RSES	Regional Economic and Spatial Strategy
UK	United Kingdom
USP	Unique Selling Point
VAT	Value Added Tax

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We wish to thank Pauline Laborde, Intern with Co-operation Ireland, who both engaged with the conference theme and immersed herself in the transcribing of these proceedings, and Dr Brendan O’Keeffe, who, in addition to being one of our speakers, compiled this report.

Preface

Rural areas are diverse, with development affected by the interactions of a range of sectoral policies. Too often rural policy is determined at the edge of more established policies – whether agriculture, environment or planning. Instead, rural policymaking must be cross-cutting. Research tells us that the make-up of rural communities and the rural economy is changing.

The population is ageing faster than in urban areas; agriculture is no longer the dominant employer; and issues of deprivation, connectivity, access to services and energy supply remain key challenges. Furthermore, relying on communities themselves to build vibrant communities using the asset-base of the rural is no longer sufficient.

A shared challenge for central, regional and local government, together with rural communities, is to co-design and co-deliver vibrant rural societies that are sustainable into the future...and to fully understand the implications of following a ‘business as usual’ model.

This event aimed to begin an all-island conversation on the interventions required to sustain rural societies across Ireland. It focused not only on sustaining but also on building vibrant rural communities. As a holistic approach, this is not about economic regeneration; rather, it requires a cross-disciplinary dialogue that has regard to economics, spatial planning, community planning, rural development, social inclusion, heritage, and environmental management/protection.

This event considered the broader challenges and opportunities at play and the policy environment in which rural society must find a defined and legislative context to be an integral part of a Master Plan for all Society.



Introduction

Ms Kate Clifford,
Director,
Rural Community Network.

We are here today to discuss one of the most persistent issues we face today; the evolving nature of our rural regions and the future of rural society. No current debate on the future of our rural regions can ignore the issue of Brexit looming large in the foreground as we grapple to understand what it will mean for the future of this Island, for people in both jurisdictions, and importantly for our rural border regions.

Rural areas throughout Europe, across the island of Ireland, have evolved in different ways over the past half century. This has resulted in there being many types of 'rural' with each experiencing its own range of challenges; some of which are generic and some of which are place-specific.

We have been speaking about a rural crisis in Ireland since the late 1970s. Initial responses focused on the disadvantages of the 'rural', the inequalities of the rural - and subsequently, 'rural' was viewed, by many, as a liability. More recently, over the past fifteen to twenty years, the emphasis has turned to focusing on the potential of place, the potential of 'rural' and what it has to offer.

More recent rural development and diversification policies have placed an emphasis on exploiting local asset-bases, the harnessing of the endogenous potential; the overall objective being to ensure that rural was more self-sustaining and did not become over-reliant on external funding or other interventions.

As an approach, this is the right way to go: places playing to and capitalising on their strengths. Indeed, it is what many rural communities have always done, even in the absence of supporting policy. They have sought to build on their strengths and exploit their assets. The key difference now is that this must be done in an integrated way, a collaborative way - not just through consultation, but through partnership working in co-design, co-production and co-delivery.

The recent OECD Policy Note, *Rural 3.0: A Framework for Rural Development* speaks of rural regions playing a crucial role in meeting the major global opportunities and challenges of the 21st century (for example, energy supply, climate adaptation, and innovation in food production). It further notes the role of rural areas as engines of national prosperity - that they are not synonymous with decline but can be places of growth. This is our vision too.

In my organisation, established over 25 years ago, we began with a clear picture of rural deprivation, rural disadvantage and we lobbied hard for equality of investment and attention from policy-makers. We invested in the development of skills and capacity of communities to harness community spirit, invest in their infrastructure and to build strong and sustainable community groups addressing issues that the community faced. Today, despite a wealth of data collection and data availability we fail to hold a clear picture of 'rural'. Despite access to multiple data sources the analysis of the data, insight into 'rural' is much less clear than it was in the past. When we talk about rural deprivation or rural disadvantage, what is that? How is it manifesting? How do we measure any change or impact if we are unsure of the starting point?

Insight into what is working and not working for rural regions is lacking. Insight into the capacity and capabilities of our community groups is missing, investment in rural development as a practice is largely absent. What we see are groups of people, trained and schooled twenty years ago, still holding the reins of local groups, little investment in succession planning for these groups and little insight for them as to how they could attract new blood onto committees and galvanise the work they have been doing, many on a voluntary basis. In recent times, we have asked for a baseline of information for rural regions so that the impact and outcome of any future intervention or investment can be tracked and analysed. This has yet to materialise.

I represent a broad church of a membership base of 300 rural groups. They have voted for and against Brexit. We remained neutral on the issue simply because we agreed to honor the democratic vote and make the best of the outcome for our rural regions and communities.

That said I remain uncertain that the Brexit project is in anyway good for those of us living and working in rural Northern Ireland and the border regions. I am a firm believer in the concept of the European Project and the work that has been done since the Second World War to build a collaboration of countries and people, with a commitment to peace, through a process which has enabled, supported and invested in its members since its inception. That's not to say I think the European project is flawless, and indeed it has been fraught with tensions in the past thirty years as it became motivated by economic agendas and moved considerably from its social responsibilities. But I would have much preferred to have seen a project of much needed European reform from the inside rather than being part of this ill-conceived and ill-thought out Brexit process.

Being an optimist I wanted to explore the potential and the opportunities arising from Brexit for the region and for the rural communities that we represent, and I have struggled. Rural development is broad and multi-faceted, it covers a wide range of areas and interests but, by and large, it is about people and place. It is about ensuring that people can continue to live and work in the communities in which they were born or where they have an attachment, it's about ensuring these communities are vibrant, sustainable and have adequate access to services and jobs locally. Rural Development Policy in Northern Ireland to date has largely been directed, influenced and supported by the EU's Rural Development Programme. The consequence of the Brexit vote introduces uncertainty around the continuity of Rural Development and long-term funding support for the broader rural economy. We are entering unprecedented times, and we need to collectively ensure that rural development, in its broadest sense, as a tool for economic and social development and as the single most influential driver for rural economic and social development is not forgotten about in the plan to exit the EU.



There are many excellent examples of Rural Development Projects in Northern Ireland and Ireland, many of these have advanced through the application of the LEADER approach which is a vital component of the Rural Development Programme. LEADER is a tried and tested model, it operates on the principles of bottom up development and the basis that local people are best placed to identify local solutions to local problems. The current and previous LEADER programmes in Northern Ireland have been worth €170 million in funding to the rural economy, matched by project promoter contributions the real value is likely to be well in excess of €250 million. While LEADER in Northern Ireland has not capitalised as much as it should have on community-led local development models, and instead has become too bound up with being a grant-making fund rather than a driver for change, it still remains the single largest investor in rural regions – outside the farm gate. South of the border, LEADER has generally been more bottom-up, although bureaucratic burdens on it have also increased there. LEADER has levered additional investments into the six southern border counties and supported entrepreneurship. The LEADER approach, and specifically its emphasis on capacity-building, represents a template and a mechanism for increased community involvement in planning and in ensuring that this island delivers on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – in line with the maxim ‘think global, act local’. As our conference demonstrated, communities need to be front and centre as we deal with challenges and avail of opportunities for our region.

A further challenge of Brexit will be the contraction of the farming sector due to reduced payment to farmers (NI) and reduced access to markets (for NI and ROI). For rural development practitioners and voluntary groups, the ongoing knock-on effect in local economies will be significant and widespread – leaving many areas facing further hardship and potentially more economic hardship. What current domestic policy will address this in the absence of a rural development policy? How will those, who have been long-term employed in farming, be supported to transition to new opportunities including those of farm business enterprise and farm diversification?

I work in the third sector; my working life has been devoted to working with community groups, small volunteer-led rural groups, who are working to make their rural towns, villages and townlands better places. But, this past two years have brought great change for civic society. A time of great uncertainty, instability even before Brexit. For some it feels like the voice of the third sector has never been more compromised or silenced. Let me explain.

Austerity measures, competitive tendering process and the introduction of service level agreements have meant the survival of some groups and the demise of others. Survival has been of the fittest, most agile, voluntary groups... but not necessarily the best groups. The withdrawal and deliberate, and unnecessary, complexity of funding streams have all led to a depleted third sector, which is over-reliant on government investment and is afraid to speak its mind for fear of upsetting the paymaster. All that in a time when the sector is being asked to do more with less, while in parallel the process of welfare reform places sanctions on those who are reliant on a small income for minor infringements in their conditions without thought for the consequences for those individuals. It is our sector that picks up those broken lives.



The Northern Ireland Assembly, before it dissolved, mitigated the worst of the welfare reforms for this region, but for how long and to what end? With no local Assembly, with a Government plan of further cuts and further hardship targeted mainly at those who are workless or disabled or older, we can only anticipate more food-banks, more hardship and a growing number of vulnerable individuals reliant on a sector which is struggling to survive. Ireland has also endured considerable levels of austerity, and while current macro-level statistics are positive, there is no denying the divergence between Dublin and other regions.

In all of this mix too we cannot forget that this region, on both sides of the border, is vulnerable, it has emerged scarred and weary from a time of violence and sectarian division. We are still building peace, looking for reconciliation and trying to develop pathways out of the past that will attempt to close off those options of violence and conflict for future generations and we have a long way to go.

Investment in communities, in groups and in places has seen some transformation of hearts and minds and place and space, where people feel a fragile acceptance that we are not like we were. But issues of the past, victims, paramilitarism and violence still exist in our communities and, in times of uncertainty, in times of hardship and fear, we easily revert to the ways of the past, and hand leadership and power to those whom we believe will stand for us and with us when the hard times come. That is the reality of life in Northern Ireland.

So what opportunities from Brexit for our region?

Securing a commitment to a Human Rights agenda should be a first call for civic society – we should look to protect the human rights that have been long-won over time. We should look to ensure the rights of the most vulnerable and most marginalised are protected and our sector should be very vocal in calling for that to happen.

We should look to ensure the commitments made within the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), as laid out and signed-up by both governments, are honored and considered through the Brexit negotiations. The assumption that Brexit’s national interests should serve the majority in the UK, and not pay attention to the binding agreement that is the GFA, is wrong, and should not be enabled in any way by any of the parties. Peace has not yet been achieved; we need to keep working at it.

We should look to learn from the past. At a recent meeting in RCN we spoke about Partition. Less than 100 years ago, partition happened on this Island, it was hard and fraught with tension. What can we learn from that process? What should be considered from the lessons learned from that time? Let’s not let history repeat itself. We could utilise the opportunities arising from the decade of centenaries to raise and explore these issues.

EU PEACE money or the peace dividend was very important in creating a local volunteer-led appetite for building peace at a local level, especially the peace programmes one and two. These programmes enabled risk-taking on a scale which local governments would have found difficult to support. It mobilised local action, and allowed groups an opportunity to explore issues of the other in ways that were largely untested. That capacity still exists on the ground, and it should and could be utilised to consolidate the peace project.

Communities on the border had begun to forget that the border was an issue for them; the Brexit result has placed the issue of identity front and center for many communities. In more recent times, other than a change of currency, it was difficult to know where one region ended and another began. The blurring of the boundary was welcomed by border communities and the hardship of the previous hard border was a distant memory, but with Brexit that changed. There is a need to campaign for something softer, something less intrusive and something smooth that will not interrupt or disrupt the daily lives of those living in those regions. We must ensure the co-existence of those communities is not lessened, or harmed in future negotiations. For my organisation this is a huge ask...these are peripheral regions, who largely didn't vote for Brexit but who will feel its impacts greatest. Their needs really need to be considered in future policy and future negotiations.

Our conference deliberations, as captured in this report, highlight many issues and opportunities, and identify ways forward. The lessons and insights that our speakers and delegates shared – formally and informally – represent valuable contributions to policy and practice, and I look forward to seeing and supporting their advancement.



Keynote Address: Rural Potential and Challenges in the 21st Century

Dr Ruth McAreavey,
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Newcastle University.

Uncertainty has always been part-and-parcel of rural life, particularly in farming. Rural communities, and farmers in particular, have to contend with the vagaries of our weather, market trends, interest rates and other factors that are often outside their control. While uncertainty and change have been constants in rural areas, Brexit brings with it a new set of challenges, and we need specific tools to deal with those challenges. In this paper, I am going to look at how academics, policymakers and practitioners, including those in local government, might best respond to new and emerging challenges, and stimulate and avail of opportunities that are likely to emerge over the coming years.

The recent OECD (2018) policy statement entitled *Rural 3.0* provides a useful summation of the changing dynamics that are affecting rural societies. We see increased diversity, accelerated migration – forced and voluntary, pressures on natural resources and landscapes, conflicts over the management of rural resources and divergent views about the future trajectory of rural society. Rural areas are challenged to answer questions many of which are posed by external actors. We need to ask ourselves about ecosystem services, environmental resource management, ameliorating conflicts, fostering tolerance and diversity among other issues. Technological innovations are accelerating, and these present rural areas with questions, challenges and opportunities. They are bringing about changes in the rural labour market and are affecting relationships and reshaping the power play between the global north and global south. New markets and new production spaces are emerging. These global trends are manifest here on the island of Ireland, and we see, for example, rural stakeholders and public bodies here collaborating to try to access new markets and to engage with partners across the globe.

In understanding the new and emerging dynamics in which rural society, on this island, finds itself, we need to avoid simplification or compartmentalisation. Relations within rural areas are increasingly complex, and relations between rural communities and others are increasingly nuanced and significant. It is unhelpful, therefore, to attempt to create boundaries between rural and urban issues. Instead, we need to speak about more fluid spaces, such as regions, and to emphasise the principles of equity, equality and quality. These are inter-related and mutually re-enforcing. Moreover, they are associated with justice, and this is evident when we speak, for example, about labour, employment and quality of life.

In this changing context, we see particular vulnerabilities in Northern Ireland (Creamer *et al.*, 2017). Agriculture and the food sector are more important here than across the UK. Agri-food sales are worth €4bn to the north's economy and the agri-food sector employs ten percent of the entire workforce. In addition, however, there is a disproportionately high level of dependence on the direct payments from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Thus, farm incomes and the ability of agriculture to contribute to the rural economy are vulnerable in the context of Brexit. Moreover, approximately seventy percent of Northern Ireland's food exports go to the Republic of Ireland. North-south trade interdependence is hugely significant. The current profile of the north's rural economy and its likely configuration, were Brexit to take effect, are not homogenous; some parts of Northern Ireland exhibit much greater vulnerability. A recent NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency) study (2018) has illustrated, albeit on other indicators, the heterogeneity that exists across Northern Ireland with respect to social wellbeing and quality of life. That research indicates that,

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in most rural areas, poverty and deprivation are less overtly manifest than in urban areas, and that mean incomes and employment levels are higher. Recorded levels of personal satisfaction with life are also higher in rural, than urban, areas. When we consider findings such as these, we need to recognise the need for concerted and strategic approaches to making any case for additional supports for rural areas (Shortall, 2010).

As we work towards promoting vibrant and sustainable rural communities, we must, as I have eluded to already, apply concepts of regional, rather than exclusively rural development and emphasise constructive relationships between rural and urban places. There is no escaping the reality of the growing significance of, and emphasis on, urban areas. The United Nations predicts that by 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities. In Northern Ireland, ninety-three percent of the population lives within thirty minutes' drive time of urban centres with populations of at least 100,000 Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (2015). Relative to many other parts of Europe, such as Scandinavia and Iberia, we have very few remote rural areas on the island of Ireland (OECD, 2011). Urban-rural economic and social linkages, on this island, are strong, and many transcend the border. Thus, we need to be resolute about sustaining these linkages in the context of Brexit.

In tandem with supporting spatial linkages, we need to be mindful of sectoral and social dimensions. Across the UK, we are witnessing increases in child poverty and there are worrying inequalities in respect of educational attainment and wage levels. There are retrograde trends in employment. Addressing social and human development issues is integral to rural development, and is arguably more important than 'rural proofing'. The Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (1990) emphasised rural poverty and disadvantage, and focussed on ensuring access to services, in particularly schools and health care. Experiences, over the past twenty years, point to the importance of quality services – as much as accessibility and quantity. The delivery of high-quality public services and concerted efforts to eradicate inequalities and social exclusion transcend any traditional notion of an urban-rural divide.

Service provision generates economic and social gains (Breen 2012; Smith and Sparks 2000). Services provide employment – directly and in ancillary activities. They facilitate social interaction, and are highly valued by rural communities. They are seen as a mark of identity and a badge of vitality and independence. Thus, there is a need to create more space for discussion on the value of quality service provision, and, as we plan for rural service provision, we need to take a holistic, strategic and innovative approach that considers the totality of the associated benefits. This requires creativity and new ways of thinking about rural communities, as well as more innovative approaches to service delivery along the urban-rural continuum. In this context, regional approaches need to take precedence over dichotomous rural or urban outlooks. It also requires going beyond a needs-based approach, so that we look at the potential of rural areas in line with the vision articulated in *Rural 3.0*.

The changing dynamics of rural societies are also manifest in respect of transnational interactions and connectivity. While peripherality persists, in some respects, rural areas are no longer cut-off, backward or conservative, but are increasingly interwoven within a set of global flows. Consequently, rural areas have become more diverse – socially and ethnically. Diversity brings innovation and we see many new businesses in Irish

While digital connectivity is of universal significance for rural areas, the physical connectivity currently experienced by border communities, which has been hard won, thanks to European Integration and the Peace Process is threatened by Brexit.

small towns and villages that have been established by migrants. Similarly, there are many new businesses in rural Poland that have been established by migrants who spent time in Ireland and the UK. There are increasing connections between places – urban and rural, and these connections generate new ideas and changed aspirations.

In the light of increasing diversity, innovation, opportunities and connectedness, but mindful of persistent and emerging uncertainties, it is imperative that we ensure that rural – regional and community development processes are inclusive; all voices need to be heard, and not just those who shout loudest. Thus, local government ought to be proactive in mediating between those who have varying ideas, perspectives and aspirations. To date, local area partnerships have been strong, and have developed particular competencies in rural development. They should continue to be the fore in supporting communities, particularly in dealing with uncertainties and in shaping changes, rather than being on the receiving end of externalities. Communities also need to be supported to strengthen connectivity, which I have already identified as a driver of diversity, creativity and innovation, and while most of the emphasis of late has been on digital connectivity, we also need to focus on digital literacy and to ensure that connectivity delivers for rural communities, rather than exposing them to the vagrancies of globalisation.

While digital connectivity is of universal significance for rural areas, the physical connectivity currently experienced by border communities, which has been hard won, thanks to European Integration and the Peace Process is threatened by Brexit. The border on this island is different to other borders in Europe; in Eastern Europe, there are 137 land border crossings along 6,000km / 3,700 miles, in contrast, along the Irish border, which is approximately 500km long, there are 275 border crossings. Thus, in the light of what I have outlined previously in respect of the all-island economy and agriculture, not to mention local-level social interactions, any hardening of the border would have very practical implications. An external EU border would have customs and excise implications, which invariably and unfortunately, would lead to clandestine activities. Divergences in respect of environmental regulations could threaten the ecology of rural areas, which in turn, would undermine agriculture, tourism and other aspect of the rural economy, as well as citizens' quality of life. Indeed, the whole management of an external EU border on the island of Ireland would be particularly challenging.

Environmental conservation and the integrity of natural resources are intertwined with EU environmental and agricultural policies. Under the CAP, European farmers receive agri-environmental payments, and farmers play important roles in landscape conservation and rural resource management. Were CAP no longer applicable in Northern Ireland, who would support farmers there in performing such valuable ecological services? How will environmental quality monitoring in Northern Ireland take place? Indeed, the UK has often been called "the dirty corner of Europe", and there are concerns that the UK's environment could be further degraded in the absence of EU environmental regulations. In such circumstances, the clientelist relationship between government and the agri-chemical industry, which already exists, would become more profound, thus marginalising those who advocate in favour of the family farm and multi-functional agriculture. Intensification of pig and poultry production has already led to serious problems in respect of waste disposal, and our planning system has been challenged to respond to such trends in agri-industry. In rural

planning, we need a profound conversation about the type of agriculture we want, and how agriculture can best serve society; the emphasis clearly has to be on quality over quantity.

I have already referred to the importance of addressing the social dimensions of the rural, and the interconnectedness between social and economic issues. One of the most pertinent aspects, in this respect, is that of migrant labour. Several NGOs have highlighted the plight of migrant workers, and how they are being exploited in the agri-food industry and in other spheres (Wallace *et al.*, 2013). Ensuring a high-quality work environment and embeddedness within local food systems have to be the hallmarks of Ireland – the food island.

This rather scoping and wide-ranging paper has argued that in the face of growing uncertainties and new and emerging challenges, rural areas need to pursue development trajectories and apply processes that emphasise long-term sustainability and are socially oriented. This implies that all stakeholders are facilitated and enabled to contribute to planning processes and all other aspects of local decision-making. It also implies collaboration between places – especially between rural and urban areas, as we give effect to regional and transboundary dynamics, including and most importantly, on a cross-border basis. Local authorities, among other stakeholders need to actively contribute to such processes, and can in many respects contribute to, and lead, the coordination of various initiatives, the empowerment of citizens and marginalised communities, and the advancement of evidence-based policymaking.

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Rural Policy: A Coherent Approach or Mis-mash?

Mr Eugene Cummins,
Chief Executive,
Roscommon County Council.

The rural policy landscape in Ireland is certainly complex, and evokes a range of emotions and reactions. In the past, we were guilty of devising strategies, but failing to implement them. The current National Planning Framework (NPF) offers a strategic approach to promoting the development of our towns, villages and rural communities. This comes at a time of change for local authorities, and responds to a number of the issues that have been raised locally, including connectivity, broadband, energy, transport, wastewater networks, innovation, energy, food and tourism, among others. This holistic approach is essential, and it represents an advance on the National Spatial Strategy, which was notable by the lack of a political drive to deliver it. Now, we need to ensure that the NPF stays on track, and that it is delivered in full.

In addition to having policy coherence and policy drive, we need to ensure consistency and common purpose in respect of the various programmes, schemes, structures and initiatives that relate to rural Ireland. In this respect, I can refer to, for example, the Regional Action Plans for Jobs, the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), LEADER, town and village renewal schemes, Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) and Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtainais and Fáilte Ireland, among others. Following the success of the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East, Fáilte Ireland launched 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands'. While very welcome, this needs to dovetail not just with the initiatives I have already mentioned, but also with the current and anticipated tourism infrastructure, including greenways, blueways and peatways, among others.

Local government is increasingly at the centre of ensuring coherence and partnership among agencies. However, we also find ourselves on the receiving end of policy frameworks, as instanced by the obligation now placed on us to revise County Development Plans to take account of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), arising from the publication of the NPF and National Development Plan (NDP). The need for alignment between these tiers in spatial planning needs to be balanced with the imperative for democratic input and participation from the regions. Indeed, when we look at the content of the NPF, we see clear provisions in respect of Dublin and the major urban centres, but absences in respect of the future trajectories of the Western Region, outside Galway, and in respect of rural Ireland in general. It is imperative that we redress the current imbalances, not just in the interest of the regions, but in order to alleviate the excessive pressures that are on Dublin and Galway. As local authorities, through instruments such as the Local Employment Offices, we complement the work of the IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, and can further progress the delivery of regional economic development.

Local government is an important player, not just in ensuring coherence at the local level, but in contributing to policy, not least in respect of regional development. To these ends, the 2014 *Local Government Reform Act* ought not to be seen as an end in itself, but as an on-going process of change and empowerment. Delivering on the Act and on the promotion of regional development implies investment, and sadly, to date, there continue to be deficits in respect of public investment in vital infrastructure. We are, for example, committed to town centre renewal, but town renewal plans cannot happen without due resources. The same can be said, and I can give examples, in

Local authorities also need to be empowered to address vacant properties; there is a need for both carrot and stick. Our local authority Community and Enterprise Departments need to be more proactively involved in all aspects of community development.

respect of village renewal; planning needs to be supported by resources. Planning also needs to align with national goals, as evidenced by the need to accelerate the generation of energy from renewable sources and the rollout of broadband. At the same time, financial systems need to align with planning cycles, so that as community and spatial plans are rolled-out, the finances are in sync with them. We must avoid the wasteful practices associated with planners and others having to operate to financial calendars; we are all too familiar with the pressure to 'spend it tomorrow... and if you don't want to spend it tomorrow, make sure that you spend it the day after, or you will lose it!'

I have already made mention of democracy, and in this respect the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and LEADER / Local Development Companies (LDCs) play a very important role. They motivate communities and build their capacity, and capacity building is integral to the local delivery of the higher-tier goals and policy objectives to which I referred earlier. However, in ensuring local delivery we need to be mindful and respectful of geography and of the needs and potential of particular places and actors; we must not impose 'pieces of the jig-saw' in the wrong places. Indeed, there is much latent capacity in our regions, and this needs to be stimulated and developed.

As we develop our counties and our regions, we in local government continue to pay due attention to hard infrastructure, including roads, motorways and water connections. However, we place increasing emphasis on community and enterprise development, which in our case, in Roscommon, incorporates tourism development. By doing so, we position our county to best avail of the rollout of 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' and of associated infrastructure such as greenways and blueways.

Local action and capacity building are also integral to the development of our town and village centres, as these have been suffering considerably over recent years, due to on-line shopping and one-off housing in the countryside. Local authorities also need to be empowered to address vacant properties; there is a need for both carrot and stick. Our local authority Community and Enterprise Departments need to be more proactively involved in all aspects of community development. Their technical skills and know-how, in areas such as architecture and engineering, complement the knowledge of local people in developing local enterprises and in creating vibrant and liveable towns, with attractive public realms, sustainable transport connectivity and a range of leisure options. Our abilities in risk management, project management and health-and-safety procedures will enhance the expertise of local communities in areas such as tidy towns and organising festivals and fairs. We need to be more supportive of them, and our town teams, Municipal District (MD) officers and elected members are key players in working with communities. At the same time, we need to ensure ongoing and consistent adherence to good governance and the implementation of stringent accounting procedures. Thus, an integrated approach is essential locally, as is a coherent and coordinated approach from the top-down.

Delivering on the objectives I have outlined in this paper will require local authorities to be increasingly proactive on several fronts. This will include the development of town centre development units, as we did in Boyle. It will also imply controlling one-off rural housing, which has done tremendous damage to the countryside, and which is depleting our towns and villages. LEO supports will need to be enhanced, and broadband delivered. We are already demonstrating our capacity and willingness at local level, and will continue to innovate and to make structural adjustments. In the meantime, it behoves central government to re-examine the local government funding model, and to ensure coherence in respect of policy, financing, delivery and agency commitment.



Through a Rural Lens: Programmes, Policy & Practice - Developing or Supporting the Rural?

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This paper addresses three issues in rural development: the role of policy; engendering opportunities; and capitalising on strengths. With respect to policy, this paper asks if policy is actually supporting rural development or simply providing supports and subsidies to rural areas. In examining how we tap into the opportunities and potential of rural areas, this paper argues that we need to pursue territorial approaches that respect the contemporary geographies and are driven by good governance. Capitalising on the strengths of rural areas requires a changed narrative, so that rural areas are no longer associated with decline, but are rightfully acknowledged as delivering vital economic, social and ecological services.

The contemporary predominant narrative about the rural tends to emphasise decline over growth. This contrasts with public discourses about the urban. We make considerable investments in urban renewal and in enabling urban areas to rejuvenate, in response to economic and demographic changes – and rightly so, as public policy should serve citizens and communities. However, there seems to be an acceptance that rural decline is somehow predestined or inevitable. Consequently, public policy responses tend to emphasise ways of supporting the existing economic model, rather than stimulating and developing new opportunities in rural areas. Furthermore, the agri-industry receives a disproportionate amount of the supports provided. There is a need to focus more on the untapped potential of rural spaces and places (Creamer *et al.*, 2009). While some notable progress has been made, particularly by endogenous actors, there is an element of *déjà-vu* in rural policy. Since the 1950s, we have had four broad iterations of rural policy. The first set of policies sought to increase agriculture output and food security, and the emphasis was on ‘productivism’. By the 1980s, due to over-production of particular commodities (notably beef and butter, in Ireland’s case) and the environmental degradation caused by productivism, policy sought to regulate production levels and to enable farmers to pursue more ecological and sustainable approaches. Thus, policy, since the 1980s, is generally classified as being ‘post productivist’. In the 1990s, and notably as a result of the McSharry Reforms of the CAP, policy began to be more respectful of geography and of the diversity of landscapes across Europe. Consequently, area-based and spatially differentiated initiatives commenced. Among the more enduring of these initiatives is LEADER (*Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Economie Rurale*), which supports place-based and endogenous development, thus representing investment in activities ‘outside the farm gate’.

The trajectory through the four main policy iterations has been neither linear nor free of challenges. Moreover, elements of earlier policy approaches continue to loom large in current policies and approaches. Indeed, some would say that productivism has reasserted itself in the form of neo-productivism (Wilson, 2015), as extensive and family farmers are wrongly stereotyped as being unproductive, so that larger farmers continue to attract the bulk of farm subsidies. Given the imperatives associated with climate change and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, we are obliged to question, to a greater extent than was the case in the 1980s, the persistence of policies and practices that ought to deliver more for rural society and for future generations. Indeed, one also has to question the return on investment, for the EU, of allocating such a large proportion of its budget to a single sector, which notwithstanding the efficiencies associated with technological advancements, is actually failing to sustain many farming families and is not yielding high quality employment in ancillary or related activities.

In advancing rural policy and practice, it is necessary to look also at the term 'rural development'.

The emergence of evidence in the 1980s (O'Hara and Cummins, 1998) that revealed the economic and ecological shortcomings of the productivist model, as supported by the CAP, motivated the European Commission to produce a White Paper entitled *The Future of Rural Society* (1988). This signalled and enabled subsequent CAP reforms, including the establishment of the Rural Development Pillar (Second Pillar). In the intervening thirty years, we have learned a great deal about the effects of the CAP and about the dynamics of rural territories, and we have considerably more evidence to enable us to be more ambitious for rural areas (ESPON, 2003). The 1988 White Paper stated that "rural areas would function as an economic buffer, between urban spaces; there should be support for scope and development for an area providing recreation and leisure for city dwellers" (1988: 32). Consigning rural areas to such a subordinate position relative to urban / metropolitan zones is like putting a glass ceiling on them. In contrast, the more recent OECD analysis, and indeed the work of the ICLRD among others, note the merits of unleashing the development potential of rural spaces and places (OECD, 2016; 2018).

Despite the growing body of evidence to the contrary and considering the increasingly complex nature of rural territories, governance approaches have fallen short in enabling rural areas to fully realise their potential (Breathnach, 2013). Indeed, in both jurisdictions on this island, we have witnessed, particularly since the 1970s, a growing centralisation of decision-making and a reduction in the range of functions assigned to local authorities. While we have had several schemes and supports both north and south, we have not created any robust mechanisms through which local communities can take ownership of, and drive the processes of place making. Over the past thirty years, communities – north and south – have demonstrated, and have built up, the capacity to give effect to Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), which the European Commission had envisaged would be the mainstream model not just for the delivery of LEADER, but also for the delivery of initiatives under the European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). In advancing rural policy and practice, it is necessary to look also at the term 'rural development'. This is, in many respects, a fusion of two terms that are problematic and contested. There are varying understandings of the rural. Policy makers in the Republic of Ireland define rural as the open countryside and settlements with a population of less than 1,500. The population threshold is higher in Northern Ireland. These statistical indicators, while unambiguous, do not necessarily capture the essence of rural territories or the interactions between rural and urban areas. The term 'development' is a globally contentious concept. It implies an improvement from one condition to another, but must take a fully comprehensive and integrational approach to economic, political, social and cultural goals (Douglas, 2010).

There is also a need to dispense with some of the traditional sectoral boundaries in rural development and to ensure that processes are fully inclusive of all rural stakeholders, in addition to agriculture.

In examining how policy and practice can best promote rural development, it is important to work on the basis of fluid, flexible and fuzzy boundaries – sectorally and spatially, in order to harness the totality of resources, assets and stakeholders that can contribute to the territorial and regional competitiveness. This implies giving effect to inter-territorial and cross-border collaboration, as development spaces, arenas, and sets of resources transcend administrative boundaries. While, in theory, policy frameworks advocate area-based and territorial approaches to rural development, the reality is that sectoral approaches tend to dominate, and potential synergies are not being fully realised. We need to be more courageous in defining and mapping the contemporary geographies of rural development and to enable stakeholders within those geographies to pool their expertise and the totality of the resources they can mobilise on behalf of that territory. We cannot allow administrative borders, not least the inter-jurisdictional boundary on this island, to temper or delimit the development trajectory of any rural territory or community. There is also a need to dispense with some of the traditional sectoral boundaries in rural development and to ensure that processes are fully inclusive of all rural stakeholders, in addition to agriculture. While agriculture is the most important economic activity in rural areas, there are several other drivers and potential drivers whose voices need to be better heard. The aforementioned OECD report (2018) *Rural 3.0* sets out what is required with respect to participative governance in rural territories. Indeed, it is somewhat paradoxical that we needed Brexit to remind some commentators that economic and social realities transcend boundaries and that the voices of local communities ought to be heard – and listened to.

In addition to reconceptualising the rural, so that approaches better align with contemporary realities, we also need to give effect to new models of development that are rooted in place-based approaches. While we have some noteworthy innovations in respect of development, many have occurred by accident, rather than by design. We see some progress, at government level, in the dismantling of traditional silos, that enables inter-departmental and inter-agency collaboration. This is evident, for example in the National Planning Framework (NPF), although the NPF also reflects and articulates a traditional rather than contemporary perspective of rural areas when it envisages them being propped up by adjoining urban areas. National Policy Objective 6, in the NPF, is to regenerate and rejuvenate cities in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding areas (Government of Ireland, 2018a). This mentality and this approach do not take advantage of the evidence amassed since the publication of the *Future of Rural Society* (European Commission, 1988). The OECD has consistently projected a more positive outlook for rural areas. Indeed, its more recent policy document refers to rural regions playing a central role in meeting the major global opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. The language used is no longer that of 'hinterland' or 'peripherality'; it speaks of proximity. While proximity is primarily geographical, it is also institutional, technological and governance related, and can be shaped by public policy interventions. Some rural areas will face greater challenges than others, particularly in ameliorating the mega-trends to which other speakers have referred, but they all have potential that can be better harnessed. Indeed, there are both challenges and opportunities in the six mega-trends, which the OECD (2018) has identified as: population ageing and migration; urbanisation; global shifts in production; rise of emerging economies; climate change and environmental pressures; and technological breakthroughs.

The third and final dimension this paper addresses is that of 'capitalising on strengths'. While this dimension has been evident in much of what has already been presented, I think it is important to reinforce the points in respect of the narrative of the rural – who and how. The 'who' is important, as there is a need, as acknowledged by other speakers, to give greater voice to those outside the agriculture lobby, and to acknowledge the increased diversity of rural communities. The 'how' is important, as there is an imperative to desist from perceiving and presenting the rural in negative or pejorative terms. Yes, we need to recognise the many stark realities that are facing rural communities and we cannot sugar-coat many of the challenges. However, the antagonistic language that is all too often used, such as, for example, about one-off rural housing, is unhelpful and counterproductive. While policy impacts manifest themselves locally, it behoves us to join up the evidence and to avoid dismissing rural issues as simply local issues. We also need to ensure that all development is ecologically sound and sustainable.

There are new and emerging opportunities – and we need to grasp these. Developing the bioeconomy (often referred to as the green economy) would generate new opportunities in rural areas and represent a clear manifestation of the public good associated with rural areas' contributions to our wider society. We also have opportunities in respect of community and local development – and genuinely given effect to CLLD. Much of the knowledge and expertise enabled and acquired through LEADER, since the early 1990s can be better harnessed. Whatever the intentions of policymakers, the current arrangements for the delivery of LEADER are not as effective as earlier models, and there is a need to return to a more bottom-up and area-based approach in the next iteration of LEADER and other community and local development programmes.



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Rural Society in Transition: The Changing Role of the Rural Town

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My conviction, which is based on almost thirty years in local and community development, is that proper planning is integral to sustainable development and the future of rural towns. I make this statement, based on my experience with IRD Kiltimagh, with which I was strongly associated, and based on several experiences garnered as CEO of the then Western Development Partnership Board (now the Western Development Commission), prior to establishing my own community and social enterprise development company. More recently, I have been involved with local authorities in community planning in counties Roscommon, Longford, Kildare, Meath and Galway. I have experienced how planning processes, when properly supported and facilitated enable diverse interests to come together effectively and to agree a vision and associated strategic actions. Community planning demands an integrated approach, and, in this paper, I am going to deal with three stages or strands in the planning process, before looking at the ingredients and conditions that enable and sustain vibrant towns.

The first stage in planning, and in community development, is that of animation and capacity building. This includes stimulating and fostering local leadership capacity. The second stage is generally referred to as the 'brainstorming' phase, and this is when the 'blue-sky thinking' and visioning takes place – usually in workshops. This leads to the third stage, during which stakeholders agree specific projects and commit to implementing them. While stage two is imaginative and creative, stage three is more applied, and has to be guided by financial and other imperatives and realities. In order to bring coherence to these three strands, we, as facilitators, generally organise the process and the deliverables in respect of four thematic areas: economic, social, cultural (including heritage) and public realm. Communities are advised to bear in mind 'the three As', namely that their town is Attractive, Active and Accessible. Moreover, stakeholders are encouraged to ensure that the longitudinal dimensions of the local economy are in sync; this implies fostering the three main daily economies (retail, lunch, public services), evening (meals, entertainment) and night-time (accommodation, socialising).

Attractive, active and accessible towns need to capitalise on their distinctiveness, while also engaging collaboratively. In this respect, I would refer to the initiative promoted by Roscommon County Council, with which my company was privileged to be involved. This integrated and incremental planning processes, led to the establishment of six town teams, which ultimately led to the delivery of specific development creative hubs. These hubs are in various stages of development. Ballaghaderreen is working on the establishment of a creative hub; Boyle, the tourism hub; Castlerea, a food training and incubation hub; Roscommon Town, an ICT hub; Strokestown, a heritage hub; and Monksland a pharma hub. Local authority support has been integral to the planning and development processes in respect of all six hubs, and this need is now being acknowledged at a Central Government Level through the Department of Rural and Community Affairs as well as at Local Authority levels.

Town planning and development needs to be cognisant of the interactions and relationships between towns, and with their surrounding villages and countryside. It is important that the catchment areas around towns be included in the planning process, as these areas, which are generally rural, contain valuable resources that are integral to the town's development. A singular focus on town centres fails to garner the totality of assets and resources that can contribute to planning and development. Involving the people and communities beyond the town boundaries adds to a local sense of pride, and pride-of-place is a valuable ingredient in unlocking potential, and in making places attractive to visitors and locals alike. I concur with the remarks of Roscommon CEO Eugene Cummins in respect of a coordinated approach to the delivery of schemes and initiatives, backed up by effective and relevant policies and strategies.

A coherent approach to town planning ensures that we identify and include what can otherwise be 'missing ingredients'. These are a harnessing of voluntary input and a realisation of local job creation. The former, all too often, manifests itself in the form of a depleted civic spirit, as people are too tired or too busy to engage in community structures. Thus, we need to nurture local capacity, and, in particular, leadership capacity. The latter is evident when towns fall short in respect of promoting local footfall. Towns that function as dormitory or commuter towns lack the vibrancy we find in those that have successfully promoted local economic development and have generated local employment. Most commuters would certainly prefer to work locally than to continuously travel to the major cities.

In harnessing volunteerism and in generating local jobs, there is a need for innovation and creativity. At present, as a volunteer in my own local area of Laytown/Bettystown we see initiatives, under the aegis of Meath County Council that seek to engage locals together with new residents in community and local economic development and in assuming leadership positions. I have hands-on experience of working with communities in Roscommon, and elsewhere, in which older people and retirees have been successfully encouraged to come forward to assume leadership positions and to manage projects. Many towns are also harnessing and capitalising on their ethnic diversity, and immigrants are to the fore in establishing new businesses in several of our main streets. Leadership and entrepreneurship can come from many sources and have a range of stimulants including love of place, personal motivations, business needs, hobbies and philanthropy, among others. Thus, I see a need for a profound conversation with long-distance commuters, and the enactment of a policy or set of policies to stimulate local economic development as an alternative to long-distance commuting and to the stresses and social costs associated with it. I have regularly called, in publications, for a new Reverse Flow Economic Programme. In simple terms, Reverse Flow Commuter Corridors, initially on a pilot basis, would start a process of more efficient use of our motorways and road networks. Commuting times would no longer have all traffic flowing one-way bumper-to-bumper to the job-centres every morning and then the same volume of traffic flowing the opposite way, as people make their way home bumper-to-bumper after each day's work. Imagine the decrease in stress levels and traffic congestion by a new policy of two-directional traffic commutes, quite aside from the reduced carbon-footprint!

The dramatic structural change to the retail industry is mainly evidenced by changing consumer behaviour, driven by technology, which is now termed 'the fourth industrial revolution'.

Current and recent patterns are such that our towns have to be increasingly proactive and innovative in responding to the externalities that affect them. Towns that I have worked in recently such as Rooskey and Ballaghaderreen in County Roscommon and Edgeworthstown in County Longford, among many others, have been affected by bypasses. Licenced premises have been affected by changes to the drink-driving laws, and all towns have been adversely affected by out-of-town stores and retail parks. Consumer preferences and lifestyles are also significant factors in driving changes in our towns. The dramatic structural change to the retail industry is mainly evidenced by changing consumer behaviour, driven by technology, which is now termed 'the fourth industrial revolution'. This has brought about a blurring of the real world with the technological world. The current models of retailing no longer have any real purpose and are gradually being consigned to history. What must now be accepted is the fact that smaller towns throughout our country and beyond can no longer be revived as traditional retail trading centres. There is no one cause that has brought about the change in the form and function of town centres. This gradual change is global in its function, and is driven by consumer behaviour, and is enabled through technology and a connected global economy. Irish on-line shopping accounted for a whopping €5 billion euro in 2017, a ten-fold increase in a decade.

Therefore, while local action and stakeholder-led planning are essential, there is a need also for supportive policy frameworks, including revisions to the regulations governing the size and scale of out-of-town development and one-off rural housing. Dynamics are also affected by consumer attitudes and behaviours, and, in this regard, we see many of our smaller towns becoming, what I call 'errand towns', whereby people use them to purchase a small number of basic items, but travel to the larger urban centres for their main shopping. It is now generally accepted that our smaller towns still have too many of the same type of shops. Towns now must start to repurpose themselves from shops and outlets once solely for goods transaction to opportunities for the experiential consumption of services such as differentiated cafés and restaurants, and health, fitness and beauty services. In terms of changing consumer behaviour, we see the proliferation of coffee machines in our supermarkets and the growth of laundrettes, fitness centres and a range of other services and amenities, consumer-driven as distinct from product-driven transactions.

While the objective needs to be for towns to offer a mix of products and services, this is not always attained, and towns need, therefore, to develop their unique selling points (USPs) - just as we see happening in County Roscommon in respect of town-development-hubs. In addition, towns need to better market what they have to offer. We all know a number of businesses, including in retail, which attract customers from distances in excess of 100km. One example in my former hometown, a drapery shop not only offers top-class products, but also advertises extensively and trades on-line bringing in shoppers from at least 80km radius. Towns also need to capitalise on opportunities and to be 'ahead of the curve' in responding to consumer demand.

The dynamics within towns are also important ingredients in unlocking their potential, and while I have previously referred to capacity issues in respect of civil society, there is also a need to consider the capacity of entrepreneurs, and in particular that of second-generation business-owners, who may lack the drive and commitment that had characterised their parents. This along with the nature of fractured property ownership arising from what is frequently termed "old money" leads to further difficulties in creating new and enterprising developments in town centres. Several towns have increasingly diverse populations, and ethnic diversity brings new business opportunities, as well as increased levels of entrepreneurship.

To conclude, I wish to illustrate some of the trends, changing dynamics and new opportunities that are manifest in our small and medium-sized towns. Using my former hometown Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo (pop. 2,700) as an example, we see:

There were:

- 52 licenced pubs; there are now 6
- 15 grocery outlets; there are now 2: one in-town and one out-of-town; and
- 3 banks, now 1.

We can also observe changes in premises' use within two generations:

- The former AIB bank is now a computer repairs' store;
- The Ulster Bank is now being converted to residential
- The former Ford car-dealership is now a fast-food outlet;
- The former Hillman car-dealership is now the local Credit Union;
- A main builders' providers is now an Asian food market while a second is now houses the headquarters of the main regional radio station
- A small convenience food store (I used to own) is now an Asian barbershop
- The travel agency has closed, because of online booking
- Here, as elsewhere, we have seen the arrival and expansion of charity shops.

We must face the fact that while we wonder why our local towns may be in decline towns are changing, our towns are population diverse, and responses need to be innovative and diverse. Local-level planning and community engagement, supported by national policies and frameworks, are integral to the future of rural towns in this prolonged period of transition.





The Prospects for the Post-Brexit Border

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The Irish border has been very much at the centre of public discourse and political negotiations since the UK referendum decision to leave the EU in 2016. The unprecedented event of a member state leaving the European Union and the lack of a coherent UK approach to the management of its withdrawal from the EU have created several uncertainties. Indeed, the overriding characteristic of the current geopolitical environment is one of uncertainty. This uncertainty and the fact that a 'no deal' scenario remains a strong possibility have stark implications for the Irish border. This paper teases out the factors that are associated with the possibility or indeed, the prospect of, a 'no deal' scenario. It also looks at the other possible arrangements in relation to the border, specifically, the backstop coming into play, or the pursuit of bespoke arrangements for Northern Ireland. In addition, this paper addresses the issue of cross-border movements, as freedom-of-movement has emerged as an overriding concern. The observations and remarks, presented here, are subject to constant change, such is the frantic nature of negotiations and diplomatic overtures.

The processes of European integration that have been at play since the 1950s have been about diluting and dismantling borders, and about enabling freedom of movement. These manifest themselves, and are given effect, through the customs' union, the single market, the Eurozone, the Schengen area and other EU initiatives and frameworks. Thus, in every respect, Brexit, which runs contrary to European integration, will imply a hardening of the border on the island of Ireland. It is also worth bearing in mind that the UK has already exempted itself from other inter-governmental and supranational arrangements. Although, as the relationship between the UK and EU is reconfigured, there may be provisions for UK opt-ins, such as in respect of security cooperation. Such engagements, and the wider Brexit-related negotiations, are shaped by varying, and sometimes, divergent perspectives of borders and their significance – largely depending on which side of the border one finds oneself.

Since the UK Government triggered Article 50 (of the Lisbon Treaty) in order to give effect to Brexit, a three-stage roadmap has emerged, but the milestones envisaged therein have been subject to change and slippage. The anticipated resulting withdrawal agreement will require unanimous ratification, by all member states, including Ireland. In addition to calibrating its future relationship with the EU, the UK will have to negotiate its relationships and trading arrangements with other countries. As the various sets of negotiations have proceeded since the triggering of Article 50, the date on which Brexit would take effect has been pushed back. These negotiations and the uncertainties that surround them carry considerable risks; there is the risk that a deal may not be ratified, and there is the risk that a free trade deal may falter. Above all, there is the risk of a no-deal.

Over the past two years, the border in Ireland has loomed large, and it continues to occupy a central position in the dynamics and foci of the interfaces between the UK and the EU. There have been several pronouncements and commitments, not least in Paragraph 43 of the December 2017 EU-UK Joint Report¹, in which the UK committed to avoiding a hard border, including any physical infrastructure or 'related checks and controls'. Those last four words are significant, as they indicate what I referred to earlier in respect of varying or divergent perspectives of borders.

For the EU, preserving the integrity of the single market implies having checks and controls on all external borders. For the UK, the priority is to avoid physical infrastructure, and pronouncements emanating from there tend to emphasise 'technological solutions' – in preference to physical customs' posts. The aforementioned Joint Report lays out three scenarios: a free trade agreement; specific solutions for Northern Ireland; and full regulatory alignment between the UK and the EU. Since then, we have seen the emergence of a fourth option, which is articulated in the draft withdrawal agreement, namely the 'backstop'. This (backstop) protocol comes into play, and takes legal effect, in the event that there is no free trade agreement. The protocol is indicative of the particular and distinctive place of Northern Ireland in the context of Brexit. Indeed, protecting the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement will, in any event, imply a specific protocol.

As we take stock of what has been achieved since the triggering of Article 50, we note that progress has been more evident in respect of the withdrawal agreement than in respect of the protocol. As regards these islands, there is agreement on the preservation of the Common Travel Area (CTA) and on the continuation of north-south cooperation. There is a commitment to the establishment of a UK-EU Joint Consultative Working Group on the implementation of the Protocol, relating closely to the all-island implementation bodies, including the North-South Ministerial Council. We also have agreement in respect of citizenship and individual rights, including the rights of Irish citizens living in Northern Ireland to exercise their rights as EU citizens. There is agreement in respect of state aid (in Northern Ireland) and the all-island electricity market. While these aspects are important, particularly for border communities, they are not hugely significant in the overall scheme of things, and omissions remain. Among the outstanding items are the common regulatory area, free movement of goods and environmental protection.

The Common Travel Area, which is based on Ireland and the UK mutually recognising the rights of their respective citizens, is comprehensive in that it covers residency rights, the transferability of social security, labour market access, social housing and mutual recognition of professional qualifications. While this bilateral agreement will continue, it is noteworthy that this does not provide for the freedom to establish or move services, nor does it cover non-Irish and non-UK nationals, thereby excluding workers / residents from other EU member states. These and other matters need to be encompassed within the provisions of the future agreements between the UK and the EU.

¹ Joint report from the negotiators of the European Union and the United Kingdom Government on progress during phase 1 of negotiations under Article 50 TEU on the United Kingdom's orderly withdrawal from the European Union.

While the backstop would avoid a hardening of the Irish border, there would be limitations on the movement of services and for EU citizens in Northern Ireland (NI) and British citizens in Ireland (Republic).

Considering what has been agreed, and mindful of the outstanding elements, we need to be open to a range of possible outcomes and to plan for all possible scenarios – including a ‘no deal’. While talk of ‘no deal’ may sound dramatic, public discourse in Britain and debates in the House of Commons, particularly about the customs union have been fraught with tension. Members of parliament and of government talk of cliff-edge scenarios, with some vociferously arguing for Brexit at any cost. In such a scenario, commitments given by the UK would be thrown into doubt; these include commitments in respect of protecting the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement, north-south cooperation, and, possibly, aspects of the CTA.

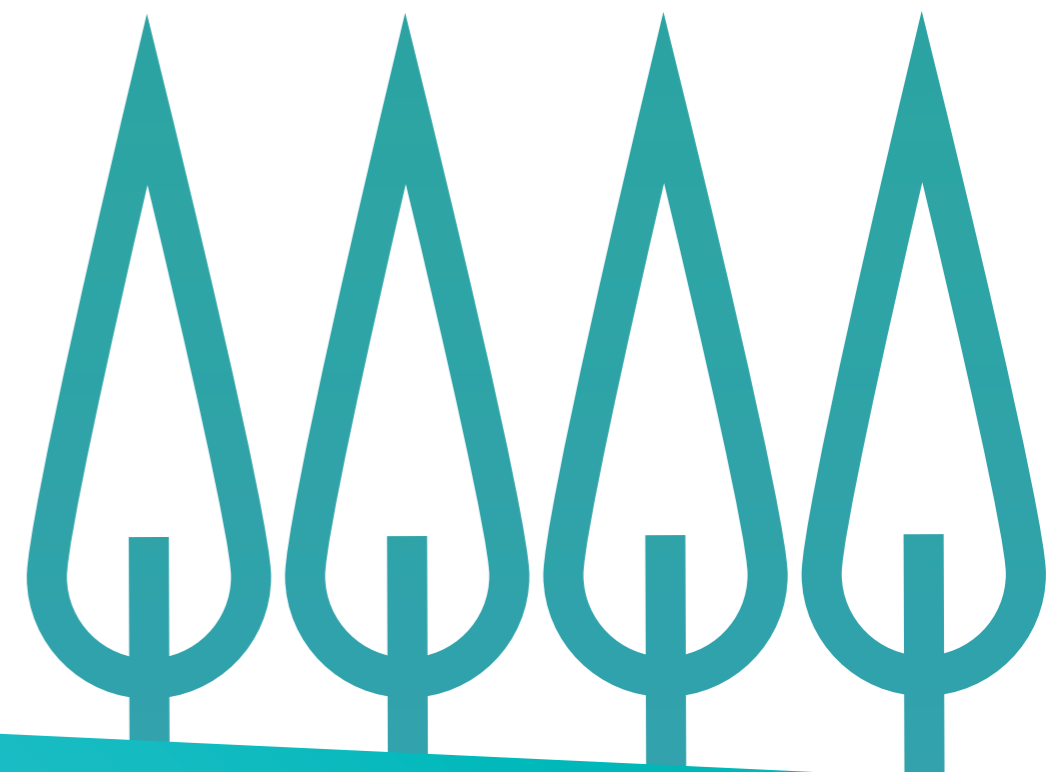
Failure to conclude a withdrawal agreement would have profound implications for the Irish border. In practice, World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules would come into force, thus implying significant tariffs on several goods and services. There would be a notable hardening of the border, as goods would have to be checked / declared on crossing it. Trade would be affected, as Value Added Tax (VAT) would have to be paid at the point of entry. The increased bureaucracy would affect businesses, and costs would invariably be passed on to consumers.

In the event that the current withdrawal agreement *were* to come into effect, but without an EU-UK free trade agreement, the backstop would be activated. This would give Northern Ireland continued membership of the EU Customs Union and access to the Single Market. While the backstop would avoid a hardening of the Irish border, there would be limitations on the movement of services and for EU citizens in Northern Ireland (NI) and British citizens in Ireland (Republic). However, the most significant change would be on an east-west basis, with increased checks and controls on a limited range of products and goods crossing from Great Britain into Northern Ireland.

Another possible scenario is that of a set of special or bespoke arrangements for Northern Ireland. In such an event, there would be some hardening of the Irish border, as NI would be part of a third country and regulatory divergence would restrict freedom of movement. There may also be Great Britain-Northern Ireland divergences, but the prospect and extent of these would be affected by whether the UK remains inside the Customs’ Union and by the terms of the UK-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The coming into force of any such provisions is potentially contingent on the operation of the Stormont Executive. In this scenario, Northern Ireland’s interests would be best served by a comprehensive UK/GB-EU FTA and close regulatory alignment.

This paper has noted that achievements have been made in reconfiguring the relationship between the UK and EU since the triggering of Article 50. It notes the commitments given to ensuring the persistence of a frictionless border on the island of Ireland. However, this paper has sounded notes of caution; it outlines how uncertainties and omissions persist, and it indicates that a no-deal scenario remains a distinct possibility. While this would have profound implications for the Irish border and would inevitably lead to a considerable hardening thereof, other potential scenarios, as outlined here, are not without their challenges either.

As we grapple with these challenges, we need to be mindful of the geopolitical environment and economic factors that are shaping the new and emerging relationship between the UK and the EU. The EU’s Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier has stated that the EU’s goal is to reach an ambitious and wide-ranging FTA with the UK that would imply zero tariffs, customs cooperation, convergence of rules, an open market for services and protection of intellectual property rights, among other provisions that would be facilitative of businesses and citizens in both territories. While a great deal has happened over the past few years, it is clear that more change is yet to come, and it is important in managing change and in responding to challenges, that we maintain sight of the Irish border; its future is emblematic of the shared future of the UK and the EU.





Rural Development: A County Strategic Approach

Mr Leonard Cleary,
Director of Rural Development,
Clare County Council.

Our strategic approach to rural development in County Clare can be described as a 'team' approach. Generally, when we, in Clare, talk about a winning team, we refer to the 2013 All-Ireland Hurling Champions. But in this case, we are talking about the rural development team, which Clare County Council has put in place, and which has brought players together since 2016.

In Clare, we recognised the need for a team or collaborative approach to addressing the challenges facing rural areas and to enabling the rural parts of our county to realise their full potential. Therefore, we established a Rural Development Forum, comprising representatives from forty organisations. These include the local authority itself, the Local Development Company, community and voluntary organisations, state agencies, service providers, business community and the farming organisations, among others. The Forum's objective is to ensure that all agencies and service providers adopt and maintain a strategic focus on, and deliver for, rural County Clare. This implies, in many respects, re-orienting ways of thinking and ways of delivering, so that we positively discriminate in favour of rural Clare. The Forum members and constituent organisations worked hard to produce a Rural Development Strategy. Our elected members also made sterling contributions, and they continue to support the work of the Forum. It was a source of great pride to us when Minister Michael Ring, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, formally launched our Clare Rural Development Strategy in September 2017. While the strategy applies to all of Clare, we recognise the county's diversity – from the Ennis-Shannon-Limerick economic corridor, to the more peripheral Atlantic seaboard. This paper explores some of the Rural Development Forum's experiences, processes, outputs and achievements. It also provides some reflection and analysis.

While Clare is a predominantly rural county, it is not homogenous, and we started out facing a range of challenges. Indeed, the scale of many of the challenges served to motivate us. Some of these are evident across rural Ireland, while others are associated with local features and peculiarities. In Clare, between 1981 and 2016, areas in the south east of the county witnessed population increases in excess of sixty percent, while other parts of the county lost population. West Clare has borne the brunt of rising sea levels and increasingly tempestuous storms, which are indicative of the challenges we are facing – locally and globally. Rural areas, in Clare and in other counties, have been affected by service depletion, contracting economic bases, agricultural restructuring, the decline of the family farm and the withdrawal of public services such as post offices and garda stations. Rural areas have been disproportionately affected by the recession, since 2008, and have suffered due to challenges in the roll out of broadband, insufficient investment in schools, public transport and water, among other elements of the infrastructure that are required to make places competitive and attractive. In Clare, specifically, as is the case in much of rural Ireland, we have an undersupply of jobs in rural areas. The Clare data shows that traditional sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing continue to form the backbone of the rural economy, while newer and more competitive jobs, and indeed those for which increasing numbers of young people are qualified, are located in the towns and cities. Hence, we have witnessed a significant level of commuting from rural to urban areas, as other speakers at this conference have also illustrated.

The changing nature of rural spaces and places, and the challenges they face, manifest themselves in a decrease in their attractiveness as places in which to live. Consequently, rates of family formation decrease, and a cycle of decline can set in. Rural communities face additional burdens as they seek to maintain and upkeep community facilities – often with depleting resource bases and growing demands for social services. While we in Clare did not begin from a point of pessimism, but from a point of realism, we acknowledged that unless all aspects of the challenges facing our rural communities were addressed, in a holistic manner, many would face terminal decline. Thus, we advocated a Rural Development Strategy that would address the economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of rural living. We noted the need to do something different, and like previous speakers today have stated, we were conscious of the importance of top-down – current national and EU – frameworks and policies that would be supportive of local action. This was coupled with a bottom-up approach as one would expect in rural development practice. In this context, the Government's National Action Plan for Rural Development has proven to be a significant and supportive factor for us. It provided a roadmap, as we embarked on formulating our strategy and establishing a Rural Development Directorate within Clare County Council.

As stakeholders in Clare came together to constitute the Rural Development Forum, we articulated our vision of rural development as *'the process of improving the quality of life, social and economic well-being of people living in rural areas. It is a distinct approach to interventions by the state in the social life and economies of underdeveloped counties. It is broader and more specific than 'agricultural development'*. Our team-based and collaborative approach emphasises the importance of process, as much as output. For us, rural development is as much about engaging people in a process to support projects /services /community as it is to provide direct financial and physical interventions. Once the Forum was established, we received funding from the Department of Rural and Community Development to recruit four development officers, who are tasked with supporting the delivery of our agreed strategy and ensuring its alignment with the work of the Local and Community Development Committee (LCDC) and the delivery of the Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). For us, an integrated and coordinated approach is essential, and therefore, we have set out a range of actions in respect of employment generation, service provision and enhancing quality of life.

In essence, the Clare Rural Development Strategy operates under eight thematic areas as follows:

- 1 Jobs & Social Enterprises;
- 2 Multi-Service Centres;
- 3 Co-operating Towns and Parishes;
- 4 Broadband & Digital;
- 5 Managing the Environment;
- 6 Age Friendly Communities;
- 7 Celebrating the Rural Way of Life; and
- 8 Transport, Education and Water.

For the purposes of this conference paper, I will use a number of case studies to outline the activities and achievements, to date, in respect of each of these eight areas.

We are accessing national funding to invest in a new food hub, with the objectives of expanding the local meals-on-wheels service, developing a training facility and creating an incubation unit for start-up companies.

1 Social Enterprise

The jobs focus in the strategy places particular emphasis on rural tourism harnessing the Wild Atlantic way and Hidden heartland assets. The strategy also endeavours to support social enterprise.

Among the case studies under this heading are Kilmaley and Obair Newmarket-on-Fergus. Kilmaley Meitheal has been working in community development for over twenty years, and it operates a day care centre, social housing complex and is the sponsor for local amenity, crèche and community facilities. These provide valuable local social services, while also generating local employment; there are currently seven full-time employees, and it is projected to increase this to twelve. There are over forty persons on related social employment schemes.

Our work with Obair in Newmarket-on-Fergus builds on their experience and expertise in community service provision. We are accessing national funding to invest in a new food hub, with the objectives of expanding the local meals-on-wheels service, developing a training facility and creating an incubation unit for start-up companies. These developments are projected to create approximately twenty new jobs. The Kilmaley and Newmarket-on-Fergus models offer templates for other communities across County Clare.

2 Multi-Service Centres

These represent a strategic response to the vacuum created by the withdrawal of public services, and involve the establishment of multi-service centres as shared spaces that are used by community and statutory bodies. In Milltown-Malbay, for example, we have a multi-service centre incorporating a library, a crèche, an IT training centre, a Youthreach project and some community activities, in what was formerly a VEC school. Taking this model forward, Clare County Council is, as the project promoter, developing a multi-service centre in Ennistymon. Here, we are investing our own monies together with national funding we have received from the Department of Rural and Community Development through the Town and Village Renewal Programme and RRDF to provide high-speed broadband, incubation units, family services and community services. The North-West Clare Family Resource Centre will act as the anchor tenant, with other occupants being TUSLA, the Local Enterprise Office (LEO), Clare county Council and private enterprises.

3 Co-operating Towns and Parishes

Our strategies in this realm enjoy the support of a well-known Clareman – Marty Morrissey and of the Bishop of Killaloe, Fintan Monahan, among others. The objective here is to move away from any destructive town and parish rivalries, and to promote cooperation – in line with the team approach, which underpins everything we do. We have seen the advantages of cooperation and clustering in the private sector, and among faith communities. The processes here, in respect of rural development are similar, and we have clustered geographical communities together on the basis of proximity and shared demographic and socio-economic characteristics. This approach enables communities to attain competitive advantage and to develop economies of scale, thus making them more likely to attract investment – from the public and private sectors. Among the successful examples is the cooperation between communities in West Clare in the provision of sporting and recreation facilities. Another example is the

Lough Derg Blueway. This cooperation project is being rolled out with support from Waterways Ireland, and it links East Clare into Fáilte Ireland's promotion of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. The Lough Derg Blueway involves over one hundred businesses and service providers, three local authorities and its development is projected to generate ninety full-time job equivalents.

Inter-community collaboration and team-working are evident on several fronts in County Clare, and Clare Local Development Company is currently leading a process whereby communities are developing area-based strategies through participatory processes.

4 Broadband & Digital

Reference has already been made to the significance of high-speed broadband and digital connectivity, in respect of the development of social enterprises and in enabling job creation in rural areas. We see this not only in the case studies I have already outlined, but also in other contributions to this conference. The rollout of *Ireland 2040* allows for the transfer, to rural areas, of a bespoke model that incorporates the best of the smart cities concept, as rural communities further embrace digital technologies, build intelligent communities and enable employment creation in the knowledge economy. Thus, Clare County Council is investing in digital hubs in Ennis, Ennistymon, Feakle, Kilrush and Miltown-Malbay.

5 Managing the Environment

Environmental resource management are areas that come within the statutory brief of local authorities, and Clare County Council is taking the lead role in improving coastal protection, strengthening flood relief and flood protection, and in enhancing flood risk management. Conservation is key here coupled with the link between environment, economy and society. The Rural Development Strategy also provides for ongoing support to the Burren Farming and Land-use Programme and Burren Eco-Tourism, both of which are award-winning initiatives that combine local knowledge and cutting-edge science in maintaining vibrant farming communities in the Burren – sustaining family farms and preserving one of Ireland's most important and delicate landscapes.

6 Age Friendly Communities

In advancing our vision whereby ageing is 'living in delightful participation, practical solidarity and comfortable acceptance', we have appointed an Age-Friendly Officer, who is charged with formulating and promoting an intergenerational strategy – focusing on projects from the cradle to the grave, and enabling inter-generational sharing of knowledge, wisdom and experiences. We are also investing in several initiatives over a six-year period, including the expansion of transport options, the enhancement of community alert and personal safety initiatives, the promotion of men's sheds, befriending initiatives and social activities, improvements to public lighting and the reorientation of libraries as more open public spaces.

7 Celebrating the Rural Way of Life

Our rural way of life represents a most valuable set of cultural, heritage and social resources. These resources, in turn, underpin rural economies and contribute to the wider national economy. Their potential has not been fully harnessed, and, in Clare, we are actively promoting festivals and other events that cherish and celebrate all aspects of rural living. These stimulate, support and sustain the creative economy, and they generate jobs in tourism. We have tapped into Creative Ireland funding, and I am proud to say that in 2019 Doonbeg hosts the All-Ireland Drama Festival.

8 Transport, Education and Water

Hard infrastructure – including green transport, active travel and water – represents essential components of the rural economy and society. At present, local authorities face challenges in seeking to influence Irish Water / Uisce Éireann where wastewater infrastructure is required in order to enable villages to grow. The provision of water and wastewater infrastructure needs to respond more effectively to the planning and development priorities identified by local authorities.

Clare County Council and the other constituent members of the Rural Development Forum are promoting a number of innovations in rural and community transport; for example, we are undertaking a feasibility study on the development of an app, supported by Enterprise Ireland, through which rural dwellers who want to share a lift and to connect with one another through digital technology. This will be tested in early 2020 in the Carrigaholt community on the Loop head peninsula. Clare is witnessing increased investments through the Rural Regeneration and development Fund (RRDF), Town and Village Renewal Scheme, CLÁR, Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme and Healthy Ireland Fund, among others. These are all driving infrastructure provision that is integral to sustaining rural communities and enabling them to realise their potential.

This paper opened by emphasising the importance of a team approach. Team working and collaboration have brought our Rural Development Forum a considerable distance in delivering the eight elements of our Rural Development Strategy and in promoting synergies between them. We will continue to play as a team, over the coming years, as we advance this strategy further and deliver a vibrant and living community and countryside in County Clare.



Finding a Place for Community Planning in Ireland

Prof. Deborah Peel, Professor Emeritus, University of Dundee and Visiting Professor, University of Wageningen.

This paper draws on research I did with a colleague in 2016 (Pemberton and Peel, 2016). It deals with three inter-related aspects of community planning as follows: the shared outcomes associated with community planning and integrated service provision; the concept of wellbeing; and the possible re-imagining of rural society. While our research, in the UK, was undertaken in an urban context, it is, in many respects, transferable to rural areas. The research focused on four dimensions of community planning, namely those of its legislative basis, the organisation of community planning partnerships, community engagement and the relationship between community planning and land use planning. We took a case study approach across the devolved UK. The research was primarily qualitative, and we undertook a number of semi-structured interviews with key players at central and local government levels. In addition, we talked with community group members and the respective local authority organisations, to try to get a pan-Scotland or a pan-England context. For the purposes of this conference, I will draw primarily on the Scottish research.

Our research findings illustrate that community planning is about much more than community engagement. It is very much about integrated service delivery. Moreover, the research reveals that there is a strong commitment, among providers, to high quality public service delivery and to the continuous improvement of public services. Thus, community planning is not about producing plans, but is a process of learning and improvement. It incorporates and reflects co-design, and goes beyond engaging different actors and organisations. It is about values and cultures, and about changing mindsets and behaviours. Change requires leadership, and organisations like Cooperation Ireland embody cooperative leadership, which is the type of leadership that best gives effect to community planning. Community planning also implies proactive citizen engagement. As we see from experiences in Scotland, it is about reaching out to those communities who seldom, if ever, engage in community development. Community planning is not just about new actors and / or new organisations, but is about a new ethos of shared understanding and a rescaling of how we actually think about public service delivery.

Community planning focuses on wellbeing, and in Scotland, as across the UK in general, wellbeing has specific legislative underpinnings. Recently, we have seen the Scottish legislative framework translated in to provisions in Northern Ireland, and these cover environmental, social and economic wellbeing. In a formal sense, community planning in Scotland dates to the introduction of specific legislation in 2003. Reflections on the Scottish experience are articulated in the Christie Commission Report (2011), which emphasised four pillars: partnership; prevention (early intervention); people; and performance. To these four, we need to add 'prioritisation'. This pillar has come to the fore over recent years, as societies and governments deal with sparse resources, and as communities are affected by austerity policies.

The following emerge as the key features and dimensions of community planning:

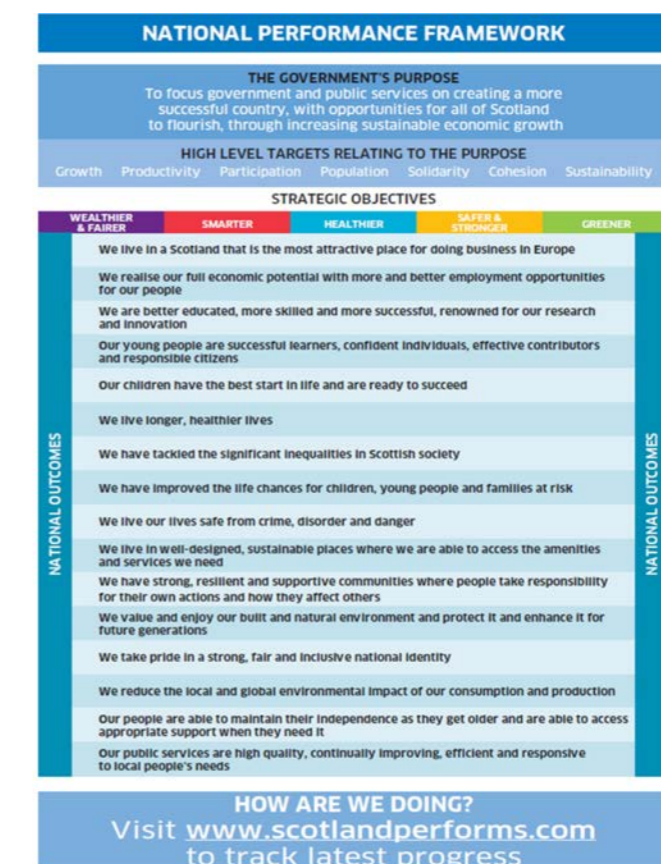
- 1 Rationalisation of services —“integrated service delivery”;
- 2 High quality public services and continuous improvement, as part of a long-term process;
- 3 Joint working (co-production) involving a range of actors, organisations, activities, values, cultures and behaviours;
- 4 Strong, cooperative leadership and citizen centricity;
- 5 An emphasis on proactively engaging communities;
- 6 A focus on wellbeing in environmental, social and economic aspects;
- 7 Partnership, prevention, people, performance and prioritisation;
- 8 Not just new actors and new roles but a rescaling of organisations, relations and an ethos of shared societal goals; and
- 9 New performance regimes.

In addition to these nine dimensions, community planning involves reflecting and learning about what has been working well, and why. In Scotland, this requirement is reflected in a new performance regime, which, while it can be seen as auditing, is in fact enhancing our understanding about which interventions and processes actually make a difference. The Scottish experience specifically, and others more generally, illustrate that community planning is about change and transition and actually doing things a different way. Thus, it is not simply about inputs and outputs, but is about outcomes, and actually defining and delivering those outcomes in different ways over a specific timeframe. Such a vision and sentiments are reflected in the following quotations, as expressed by some of our interviewees. As one stakeholder noted, “community planning is about a group of people that come together to look at unblocking issues, it’s about breaking down barriers, but also working together”. Another interviewee stated, “it is what a thoughtful taxpayer would expect us to be doing anyway”.

The research also showed that community planning requires a strong statutory basis. In Scotland, in 2015, the original (2003) legislation was strengthened to reflect the importance of community empowerment and engagement in community planning. Moreover, the legislation emphasised the merits of focusing on local outcomes – putting communities right at the heart of the process, so that local citizens decide what local outcomes are important to their particular place (Government of Scotland, 2015). Consider the following quote from a local authority strategic officer: the legislation “gives a defined purpose for what community planning should achieve for the first time, which is very much about improving local outcomes and tackling inequality. It places a range of duties on a number of partners, not just the local authority, but also the health board, integrated joint board, etc., to support community planning. And the involvement of communities is right at the heart of it”. In the decade following the enactment of the 2003 legislation, central government, in the UK, had realised the need to go beyond a voluntary approach to community planning and partnership. The consequent legislative framework has evolved differently across the four devolved administrations. The *Local Government Act (Northern Ireland), 2014*, sets out how the eleven councils, as lead partners, will work with statutory bodies and their communities to develop and implement a shared vision for promoting the wellbeing of an area, community cohesion and improving the quality of life of its citizens (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2014).

The specific emphases on wellbeing and quality of life are important. These have become increasingly pervasive in thinking and in approaches across the public sector, and can be traced to the Stiglitz Commission, which stated that “... the time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people’s wellbeing. And measures of wellbeing should be put in a context of sustainability” (2009: 12). This ambition is given effect in legislation, in Wales, through the *Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015* (National Assembly of Wales, 2015), and in Scotland’s *National Performance Framework* (Government of Scotland, 2011) which the Carnegie UK Commission (Wallace, 2013) describes as an international leader in wellbeing measurement.

Scotland’s *National Performance Framework* illustrates how the government there has created a framework and mechanism that is both practical and manageable. As the following extract from it illustrates, the Framework represents a clear move away from silo / sectoral services to more joined-up working – with an emphasis on the outcomes for individuals, families and communities. It also reflects an emphasis on early intervention / prevention and person-centred approaches.



Interestingly, the *Community Empowerment Act of Scotland (2015)* not only places communities at the heart of the community planning process, it also emphasises the role of the *National Performance Framework* as an overarching scaffold for all the public sector in practice. This joined-up approach brings clarity and purpose to the relationship between national and local outcomes. In turn, these outcomes are

They are trying to find ways of using scarce resources, in a sustainable way, to maintain and deliver public services themselves.

organised in terms of these strategic objectives: wealthier, fairer, smarter, healthier, safer and stronger and greener. Local authorities give practical effect to these outcomes, and, at the local level, there is a strong emphasis on crosscutting themes and collaboration. Thus, in Dundee, for example, we have fifty organisations, which, through partnership and community engagement, are giving effect to the national outcomes.

While our research (Pemberton and Peel, 2016) dealt with urban case studies, other research I have undertaken, together with my current experiences of life in rural Cornwall, underscore community planning's transferability and applicability to rural contexts. Those involved, directly and indirectly, in rural development are seeking ways in which strategies and interventions relate to local people and meet their needs. Rural communities are seeking sustainable uses for buildings. They are trying to find ways of using scarce resources, in a sustainable way, to maintain and deliver public services themselves. Thus, community planning is highly relevant. Community planning and rural development are about understanding and valuing place, and the former can enable rural communities to address many of the challenges they currently face, as illustrated, for example, in the outcome improvement plans of Argyll and Bute (2015) and Dumfries and Galloway (2017). *The South Ayrshire Local Outcome Improvement Plan* (2017) addresses issues that were specifically identified by local people as being of concern to them including: child poverty; outcomes for young carers; the prevalence of dementia; and loneliness and social isolation. The process in South Ayrshire, as elsewhere, involved complementing local knowledge and insights with statistics and technical knowhow from government bodies. Processes of improvement are iterative and involve individual workshops, locality planning groups, community consultations and community conferences. These consolidate strategic delivery partnerships and enable agreement on strategic improvement themes and actions.

Community planning experiences across the UK, and in Scotland in particular, offer some lessons for rural Ireland. We are all conscious of the challenges and obstacles facing rural communities, but much of the narrative relating to these reminds me of those who say 'we can't climb that mountain; we are not fit enough, we don't have the right equipment'. However, when we actually stand on that mountain and look back, we are able to see how we got there. The same maxim applies to organisations, sectors and actors; backwards mapping helps reframe action, and all must engage in reflection and learning. The Scottish experience underscores the value of a national framework and of collaboration - moving beyond silos and valuing blended data collection. Actors need to pull together, with each playing to their strengths - as councillors, local government officials, civil society, public bodies, policy-makers and others. We need to monitor service delivery, but not in the traditional sense, but rather in respect of outcomes. Community planning implies the application of alternative indicators (to GDP, inputs and outputs) that focus on citizens and wellbeing and on reducing inequalities. Collaboration must be underpinned by strong community engagement and agreement on mechanisms to enable actors to prioritise the allocation of scarce resources.

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The Role of Digital Technologies in Sustaining Rural Society: Making the Rural Click

Dr Stephen Brennan, Chief Digital Advisor, Irish Government.

In addressing the theme of digital technologies in rural society, I am constantly struck by the growing pervasiveness of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in all our lives. Living in rural County Cavan, and having teenagers in my house, I have, like most of you, a range of personal experiences of ICT use. I also have professional experiences, as a technologist and in my role as digital advisor. Thus, this paper draws on my personal and professional experiences, and it seeks to make connections with you (delegates / readers) in your daily lives.

While the focus of today's conference is on the rural, there are many commonalities and similarities between rural and urban experiences with respect to ICT applications and digital connectivity. Above all, digital media are increasingly pervasive across the globe. There are now over 4.2 billion internet users worldwide, with almost 55% penetration of the global population. Internet usage has grown by over 1,000% since the millennium. Ireland is reflective of, and, in many respects, ahead of global trends. Over three-quarters of us access the internet daily. Almost half the population aged over fifty use on-line media on a daily basis. One in seven adults does at least some business on line, and about forty percent work, at least some of the time, from home. In Ireland, one-third of SMEs trade on line. The digital economy accounts for seven percent of the total EU economy, and is associated with one-third of GDP growth.

We have all witnessed the phenomenal growth of social media over the last decade. Digital devices increasingly mediate our conversations - including those that take place in our homes. Rural planning and development, therefore, must incorporate digital technology, and such technologies can, and need to, enable and support rural development.

Our attitudes to ICT are generally positive. Few, if any of us, consider ICT to be a major threat or source of worry. Yet, few of us are conscious of the extent of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). While AI can lead to increased efficiencies, it also carries threats. AI mediates much of our ICT use, and for the most part, we are not even aware that we are interfacing with it. AI is becoming increasingly sophisticated at anticipating our thoughts - not just in respect of commercial activities and our preferences, but our social outlooks as well. Thus, we have to ask ourselves: How engaged are we in our digital world? There is a continuum, in this respect, from the passive to the creative.

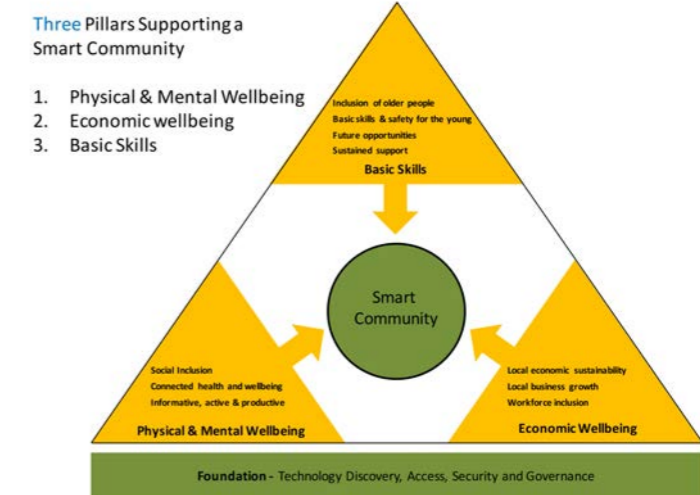
Creativity, which is a driver of innovation - and in turn of development, is increasingly associated with using and adapting digital resources. Being digital drives productivity and creates opportunities. Technology enables innovations arising from connecting people and communities. People are increasingly using ICT to create new brands, new reasons, new perspectives of places and development trajectories for communities - spatial and sectoral. Consequently, conventions are being turned on their heads; up to twenty or so years ago, the dominant approach to the promotion of productivity involved supplying specialist infrastructure to small cohorts of companies, scientists, artists or other innovators, whose products and activities would gradually percolate into the population. Over time, the emergent knowledge economy would employ, engage and sustain considerable numbers of people. In contrast, the contemporary approach, which uses digital technologies, inverts the conventional pyramid. Digital technologies are ubiquitous. Thus, we all have the potential to be productive. The power of digital technology is pervasive.

For most of us, as ICT users, our interest is in connectivity, rather than in the device. In this respect, our interest dovetails with the role of public policy and of central and local government. Our abilities and those of our organisations to publish on line are determined by our levels of connectivity. Connectivity is essential in enabling rural Ireland to tell its own stories and to showcase its unique features.

The association between rural development and ICT is underpinned by four Cs, as follows: Connectivity, Content, Capability, Community. Of these, community is the most important. The concepts of 'smart cities' and 'smart villages' seek to embody the enabling ability of ICT in respect of solving community problems and developing new opportunities. A smart community will 'enable people all over Ireland to discover and experience what is possible with digital technology and content.

As people travel and do business internationally, they record increasing volumes of data and knowledge on their digital devices, and in particular on their smart phones. This knowledge influences and shapes, not just their own economic or commercial decisions e.g., where to holiday or where to have a meal, but those of others as well - as knowledge is shared on open platforms. Businesses and communities, in rural Ireland, have to be on these platforms, and to effectively convey their assets, their potential and their vision. Such communication will, in turn, mobilise other assets and allies.

The three pillars that support and characterise smart communities are: physical and mental wellbeing; economic wellbeing; and basic skills, as the following model illustrates:



ICT-enabled collaboration opens up new opportunities for communities. It strengthens communities' abilities to learn from one another. Particular population cohorts, such as farmers and artists, can access specific knowledge. The internet provides shop windows for town and village redevelopment. It enables would-be customers to discover them, and it expands their catchment areas beyond their traditional geographies. Thus, ICT use and connectivity can represent an incredibly important contributor to sustaining commerce, creativity and the reason to be, to live and / or to work in a particular place.

ICT and digital connectivity are also changing the world of work, such that, in five to ten years' time, the way in which we work will have changed further. This provides tremendous opportunities for rural towns and villages, as those who work from home will want to engage socially with others in the vicinity and those with whom they share common interests.

In essence, the rural transition is about focusing on digital adoption for the good: driving and supporting businesses; inspiring and discovering the optimum use of the technology for community gain; helping to create and sustain jobs; and fundamentally empowering people to choose where they want to live and what they want to do. It can, and must, enable them to do so in their own local rural environments.

Digital adoption has the demonstrable potential to support new business, enable discovery, engender inspiration, unlock creative capacity and foster inclusive communities. It has to be promoted in a way that is empowering of communities. This implies that digital adoption be community driven, industry supported and government enabled.

Technology is changing very quickly, and notwithstanding the length of time it takes to put broadband in place, we are all adopting technology. The pace of adoption is staggering: it took the telephone seventy-five years to reach fifty million users; television took thirteen years; the internet took four years, Facebook took three-and-a-half years and 'Angry Birds' took just thirty-five days.

My office exists to support, among other initiatives, the development of smart communities, and we invite projects, suggestions and innovations that effectively and constructively use and adapt ICT and digital connectivity to promote and sustain rural and regional development.



Rural Vibrancy Tool: Enabling Rural Society to Best Meet its Potential

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This paper seeks to reflect and embody a number of the core themes that have been addressed at today's conference. These include, *inter alia*, the potential of rural places, the application of the New Rural Paradigm, place-based approaches to rural development, citizen-centred governance, inter-community collaboration and the promotion of evidence-based decision-making. The primary focus of this paper is on the application of a methodology for the measurement of rural vibrancy. Thus, the paper seeks to elucidate a tool that can be transferred to rural communities, and which can be an enabler of citizen participation, community planning, consensus-building and goal-setting. The tool is based largely on quantitative data collection, and while this may seem onerous, it is worth noting that there are considerable data deficits in respect of rural communities and society. While we have very considerable amounts of data in respect of crops and animals, we lack data on many of the dynamics that shape rural economies and about what works in rural and regional development. This tool represents an attempt at addressing this deficit, and at giving citizens and rural communities the opportunity to, systematically, take stock of assets, challenges and opportunities for development (O'Keeffe, 2017).

There is an extensive body of literature about rural vibrancy, much of which is in the same genre as that dealing with resilience and vitality. The concept of vibrancy is multi-dimensional; it encapsulates social, economic, cultural, infrastructural, environmental, human resource and governance features, among others (Stolte and Metcalfe, 2008). Measuring vibrancy is about taking stock of the totality of resources across the dimensions of place. This is part realised through the co-collection of data on the parts of public bodies and civil society. It is also part realised, as this paper illustrates, through capturing citizens' sentiment and perceptions.

The experience of measuring rural vibrancy, which this paper presents, was promoted as part of an INTERREG project. The methodology was devised and piloted by fourteen partners, based in five countries in North-West Europe. Two of these are based here in Ireland: Mayo County Council and South Kerry Development Partnership. The fieldwork in South Kerry involved three parallel strands namely: a mapping of service provision; a profiling of civil society organisations and a survey of local citizens. Each research strand contributed to the understanding and capturing of the extent of vibrancy across an extensive rural territory. South Kerry proved to be a useful 'laboratory' for this pilot study, in that it encompasses a wide range of rural area types – from urban and peri-urban in and around Killarney to peripheral and remote rural on the west of the Iveragh Peninsula.

The mapping of service provision referenced the 2002 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2002). The NSS specified the services that ought to be provided to citizens in county towns, small towns and villages. While ICT has enabled innovations in service delivery since the publication of the NSS, this policy document continues to offer an unambiguous set of indicators that allow for an assessment of service provision at varying spatial tiers. When service provision in South Kerry is assessed with respect to the levels recommended in the NSS, the data reveal an aggregate provision level of seventy-five percent; while some communities, such as Killarney, have all of the services recommended in the NSS, others lack many of the basic services that the NSS envisages they ought to have. Some communities have fewer than half of the recommended services. The objective of this research strand was not to castigate any agency, but to identify gaps, and to explore

Over one hundred community and voluntary organisations were surveyed about their membership, activities and resources, and about the challenges and opportunities in their communities.

new ways in which services can be delivered and sustained, particularly in the most peripheral communities. The data gathered, through this research, have stimulated conversations between communities and public bodies.

Civil society organisations in South Kerry were actively involved in this research, including in the design of two survey instruments. Their participation in measuring rural vibrancy is essential when we consider the scope and extent of the services they provide and the activities they promote. Community and voluntary bodies, across this island, are among the main providers of childcare and social care services. They run tourist offices, manage group water schemes, run social enterprises, undertake village and town renewal projects, conserve natural resources and deliver many public goods. Their remit and responsibilities are similar to those of municipalities (the most local tier of government) in several European democracies. In Ireland, north and south, they fill gaps that are associated with our high levels of centralisation and the larger scale of local government units. Yet, our system of governance does not provide for any formal consultative or engagement mechanisms with them. By eliciting their views about their own operations and the vibrancy of their communities, this research has sought to afford them a conduit through which they could co-create knowledge and shape development trajectories.

Over one hundred community and voluntary organisations were surveyed about their membership, activities and resources, and about the challenges and opportunities in their communities. The findings indicate that while membership levels have increased over the past two decades, most groups face challenges in respect of the rotation of officers and attracting young members. The vast majority of organisations have a clear and agreed vision and a strategic plan. They acknowledge the contribution of South Kerry Development Partnership to enabling their organisations to develop and to resourcing projects they promote. When asked to identify the issues they pursue or address, most groups referred to social and cultural issues, including providing services for older people and those with disabilities, maintaining amenities, enhancing the environment and campaigning to safeguard local services. When asked to identify the main issues facing their local communities, groups focused on economic issues, including the lack of jobs, employment opportunities for young people and service depletion. These sets of responses indicate a degree of mismatch between the activities civil society organisations pursue and those they identify as the priorities facing their communities. This suggests a disconnect in respect of vertical governance. It also reveals growing concerns, in rural communities, over the local impacts of neo-liberalism and the expectations and responsibilities that are thrust upon the community and voluntary sector (Douglas, 2017).

Economic concerns also emerged strongly from the survey work that was undertaken among local citizens. Almost 1,000 people (from a total population of 55,000), across all communities in South Kerry, completed a survey questionnaire that captured their views on community vibrancy, using a range of economic, socio-cultural and environmental indicators. The findings reveal that citizens perceive their communities as having higher levels of socio-cultural vibrancy than economic vibrancy. They perceive their communities as being friendly, welcoming and inclusive, and they value the amenities and facilities that have been put in place – mainly by civil society organisations. However, they perceive a need to be more engaging of young people and newcomers. In respect of the economic dimensions of vibrancy, they value the

relationships between local businesses and rural communities. They identify schools and the gardaí (police) as making positive contributions to vibrant communities, but they perceive deficits in respect of public transport provision and local government as problematic. Citizens have mixed perceptions of the vibrancy of their communities, as measured on environmental indicators. Most believe that local farming practices are sustainable, but only a minority believe that planning and development are carried out in a sustainable way.

The citizens' survey generated a very considerable amount of data that can be viewed in the INTERREG project report (O'Keeffe, 2015). The findings provide baselines and have implications for community planning and development. Communities in South Kerry and beyond are now using this methodology to measure vibrancy. Cromane Community Council has recently completed a community economic development plan, the contents of which have been shaped by a vibrancy measuring exercise in the locality. The Gaeltacht communities in Iveragh have, in partnership with Údarás na Gaeltachta and several statutory and non-statutory bodies, prepared a three-year strategic plan that is strongly evidence-based. In Counties Limerick and Cork, Ballyhoura Development has incorporated this rural vibrancy measuring index into a process for the formulation of community plans. Thus, communities are taking increased ownership of the tool, and a growing body of evidence is emerging from the bottom-up, through which planning and other interventions can be informed.

The pilot experience in South Kerry, in measuring rural vibrancy, tallies with the assertions in the international literature that vibrancy is multi-dimensional, and is driven by both bottom-up and top-down actors. It also captures the significance of civil society organisations in enabling development to take place, and it points to the importance of increasing investment in community business and the social economy, to further harness the capacity of civil society to strengthen rural economies, in addition to delivering bespoke services. The process, and in particular the consultative workshops at which citizens, South Kerry Development Partnership and members of Kerry County Council, among others, assessed the survey findings and considered opportunities, reflects the OECD vision, as articulated in *the New Rural Paradigm* – in respect of collaborative governance and unleashing the potential of place. The experience also tallies with the OECD (2013; 2015) assertions that all places have potential, and that rural regions and territories can in fact be important sources of growth, but that a very different approach is needed to tap that potential. In addition, the findings reveal the importance of LEADER and the longitudinal community development work undertaken by South Kerry Development Partnership in building the capacity of community groups and in enabling them to develop projects. The research in South Kerry, like that undertaken in the other INTERREG partner areas, underscored the importance of retaining public service provision and ensuring a supportive and constructive policy environment, in which local citizens are enabled to play an active and meaningful role.

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A Standard for 'The Place'

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The *Encyclopaedia of World Problems and Human Potential*² was first published in 1972. The purpose of this endeavour is to show the range of challenges confronting humankind, globally. The need for the work emerges from a problem of governance; policy often tries to tackle problems one at a time. However, people experience problems all together. Looking at everything together, all at once, at the same time is a problem of complexity.

Life is complex, and it is speeding up. The rate of change, in relationships, uses, meanings, technologies is rapid. It can be hard to make sense of things. Tackling things one at a time seems to be a logical response to overwhelming circumstances. I collaborate regularly with an economist architect who works across public policy and investment in Scotland. In situations in which people are experiencing complexity, he often asks this question: 'how do you eat an elephant?' Some people say: 'take little bits at a time'. He says that could take a lifetime. His suggestion is to invite all your friends around, and be creative in re-imagining different kinds of meals you could make; do it all together, at the same time. You need a different mindset to tackle complex problems - with different tools, strategies and ambitions.

Complex systems

Dave Snowden of the Cynefin Institute³ outlines four ways to describe problems, situations and systems. Each has its own way of thinking, tools and processes. The first is the simple problem. We know the problem, and there is a simple answer. This is the realm of implementing best practice. The second is the complicated system. This is a network of individual systems working together. Think of a building with air systems, electrical systems, water systems. The more things you have, the more complicated it is. However, you can map the logic, the parts and the solutions - in time and space. The third is the complex system. This system is constantly changing in response to internal and external challenges. Communities are complex systems. They are not always predictable, and making sense of the system is about probing, sensing, responding. The final system is chaos: the breakdown of order. The response is crisis management. Snowden suggests one needs the right understanding of the context, and to use the right tools in order to achieve the best results. Complex systems need complex thinking to identify simple, implementable strategies for impact.

The Role of Place

'Place' is a way of localising the experience complexity in geographies people understand. Place sits at the heart of public policy in Scotland. The *National Performance Framework* published by Scottish Government brings together two key pillars of shaping a better future society: inclusive growth and wellbeing. Meeting these objectives implies national and international systems coming together, and different blends of opportunities in different places responding to different contexts and needs.

To emphasise the focus on place, Scottish Government has collaborated with communities and decision makers across the country to agree a 'place principle'. This implies an expectation that policymakers, investors and service providers will work together around a shared understanding of place – focused on generating integrated solutions for people, which are effective, efficient and equitable. Tools like the 'Place

² *The Encyclopaedia of World Problems and Human Potential*, produced by the Union Of International Associations <https://uia.org/encyclopedia>

³ The Cynefin Institute – Art of Social Innovation
<http://aositoronto.weebly.com/cynefin.html>

Standard' are one way in which people can share different understandings of the same place, using a shared language, to capture collaborative priorities, shared intent and collective ambition.

Using Place as a Lens to Tackle Problems

Recently, I worked on a project with an island authority on the re-design of the education system. Though the authority gets good results for learners, young people leave. Some young people do not realise their potential. Thus, changes to public finance mean that the resourcing of the system is being challenged. In this type of context, projects emerge to make change happen. Often, the starting point for this type of project is to save money. The outcome is 'less money doing more'. However, this approach has structural limits. A savings-only mentality misses the opportunity of transformation: new ways of doing old things, new ways of doing new things. This requires re-thinking: how can we use the totality of resources in this place differently to create a different kind of place for people?

A key advantage of the place idea is that it is a shorthand for complexity. One can name any place, and people get a sense of the built environment, the people there, the culture, the histories and the interdependencies. This familiarity gives a spatial context for communities and decision-makers. In a specific geography, people understand the key issues, motivations, resources and decision-makers. It is a scale at which people can re-think levels of complexity in an integrated way. Moreover, it is a geography where people's experiences are important. Everybody is an expert in their own life. Understanding people's sense of place is a real key to understanding how services, assets and systems work, and how they do not work.

In the island project, participants articulated a future place, which directly addresses the key concerns of the place: resilience and repopulation. The 'place future' would have a sustainable population, with learning choices to suit all kind of learners, where all different learning experiences are valued, and are supported by a flexible, relevant qualification system, driving sustainable work in attractive places to live. This vision of the 'place future' allowed future scenario thinking in respect of the kinds of services and built environment that could achieve the vision, and a place-based set of stories about how this would play out in different parts of the island. In some remote parts, people choose remoteness based around a new social contract where communities do more - supported by more and better digital platforms. In more dense areas, the experience urbanises. There are equivalent outcomes in all parts of the island, achieved in radically different ways - using the resources, capabilities and assets of the specific places. Among the consequences of this kind of thinking are better experiences for people, addressing inclusive growth and enhanced wellbeing. Other consequences of that kind of action are financial savings and efficiencies. They are a consequence of directly addressing needs and stimulating the advantages of places.

A Sense of Coherence

The integrated approach to people's experiences and collaboration around place issues sits at the heart of the former Chief Medical Officer for Scotland's approach to public health. Dr Harry Burns is now a Global Professor of Public Health. Based in Glasgow,

Dr. Burns practiced in the communities of the east end of the city and regularly saw men and women suffering poor and deteriorating health. Smoking, alcohol and anxiety were regular problems. He wanted to know why. In researching the influence of the places in which people live on health, Dr Burns discovered that drugs and alcohol were not the causes of poor health. They were coping mechanisms, and they had their own negative consequences. The key cause was the lack of a sense of coherence among the individuals and communities - a loss of a sense of control over both their own internal environment as a person, and in their ability to influence their external environment. Dr Burns calls for 'a sense of coherence' to sit at the heart of the act of creating health. The components of this process include resources of nurture, optimism and stability, which helps people see the world as manageable and meaningful. The skills and capacities this generates equip people with a toolkit to deal with tension and stress and to build their own solutions. Places help create this sense of coherence, because it is at the scale of places that people can tap into networks, change things and shape things.

The Dynamics of Place

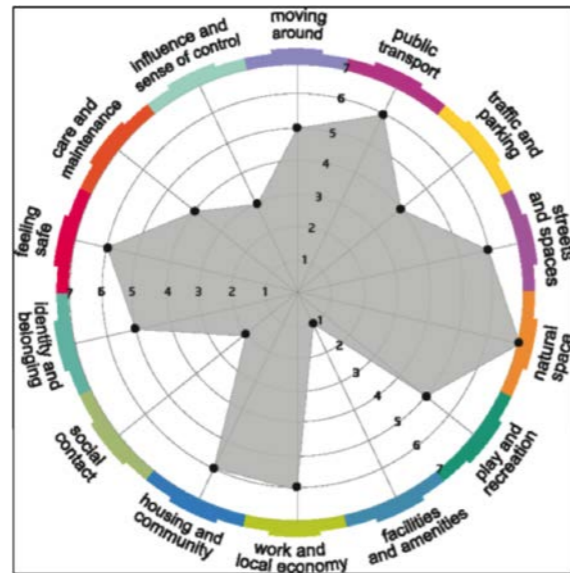
A challenge in place making is the way in which we frame the idea. For some, place making is a consistent set of practices about great streets, great parks and spaces. And, it is. But, we should ensure that we understand the dynamics of the place before we go to solutions too quickly. *Understanding Scottish Places* is a powerful tool for understanding place dynamics. Each of the settlements in Scotland is categorised in terms of its system dynamics, as either [i] dependent places, place, like suburbs to cities [ii] independent places, like rural towns serving rural catchments or [iii] interdependent towns, like the Randstad Region in the Netherlands, where multiple settlements work together as a system. Understanding how places work, or could work, can inform the best strategy with the maximum impact for these places.

A good example of an attempt to use this kind of thinking in Ireland was the *Three Sisters 2020* bid for the European Capital of Culture. Here, Waterford, Kilkenny and Wexford collaborated with each other to create a region, which shared cultural resources - to compete at a European level. Though the bid was not successful, it was a bold move to create a collaborative geography, to reflect the diversity of the individual places and to capitalise on the common interests across the region.

The Place Standard

The *Place Standard* is a tool to support communities and decision makers to talk about places using a common language. It emerged as a recommendation from two policy initiatives; first, *Good Places Better Health*, which explored the role of place on the health outcomes of children, and second *Creating Places* - the national policy for the built environment. The project brings together health professionals and built environment professionals to create a common approach to helping people build 'the sense of coherence' advocated by Dr Harry Burns. Underpinning The *Place Standard* is a logic model, which looks at the determinants of good health. This model takes account of fundamental strategic drivers like politics, societal norms; the environments through which people experience their lives; from formal places like school and work to informal settings like the outdoors; and it also looks at how individual experiences can be shaped by the design of the built environment and service provision.

The Place Standard



Source: <https://www.placestandard.scot>

As the graphic illustrates, the *Place Standard* is built around fourteen questions, which address the social, physical and cultural aspects of place. The process is conversation based. A gathering of people moves through the questions and participants score the key issues on a circular spider web diagram. This generates three outputs [a] a conversation [b] a diagrammatic assessment [c] a set of qualitative priorities, agreed collectively. The process is easy to organise, easy to use, and scale-able. Since its launch, the *Place Standard* has been used across communities, strategic partnerships and policy decision makers, to re-shape public services in Shetland, to shape housing projects in Edinburgh and to engage communities in North Ayrshire.

To support the impact of the tool at community level, a national implementation group has been organised with strategic Scottish Government leadership, and including representatives from each of the local authorities across the country. This ensures that national and local initiatives are aligned, and knowledge is shared consistently. It also ensures a shared awareness of the issues and challenges of embedding priorities in different governance and decision-making processes.

Conclusion

Place sits at the heart of Scottish public policy and investment. It is an important tool to connect communities and to connect decisions. The *Place Principle* seeks to embed place based working as an expectation on all decision makers in all places. The *Place Standard* tool is one technique to bridge the gap between the experience of place by communities and the decision makers. Together with the ambitions of the *National Performance Framework*, it contributes to a more collaborative, place-based approach to improving outcomes for communities, and to tackling local issues holistically.




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