

International Centre for Local and Regional Development

**The Changing Business, Community and Spatial Planning
Landscape: Doing More with Less**



20-21 January 2011, Radisson BLU Hotel, Ballincar, Sligo

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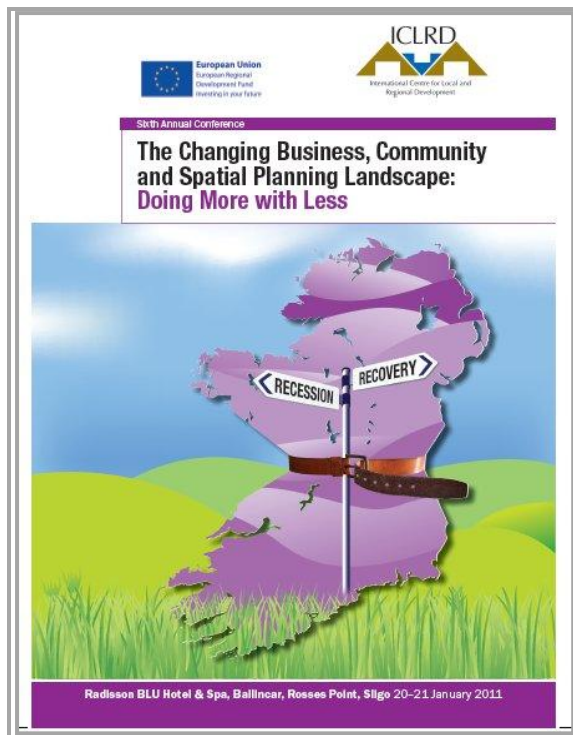
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INTRODUCTION

The sixth annual International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) conference took place on 20-21 January 2011 in the Raddison Blu Hotel and Spa, Ballinacra, County Sligo. Our annual ICLR D gathering plays an important role in shaping collaboration on the island of Ireland in the areas of spatial planning and local and regional development. Our conferences – which bring together decision and policy makers, practitioners and academics – have become a leading forum for debate, networking and mutual learning for those interested in cross-border and inter-jurisdictional cooperation.



Carrying on from last year's conference theme – 'Preparing for Economic Recovery: Planning Ireland, North and South, out of Recession' – this year's conference continued to focus on the role of communities, businesses and the planning system in shaping economic recovery on the island of Ireland.

Recognising the shifting parameters of the economic and policy context in a time of shrinking resources, the conference ran under the iterative title of 'Doing More with Less'. It was attended by over 120 people representing central, regional and local government, elected representatives, policy-makers, cross-border networks, community activists, academics and representatives of the business community. The outstanding level of frank and productive engagement with the conference theme testified to the commitment of speakers and delegates to finding innovative solutions to the impacts of the current global financial crisis on local and regional development on the island of Ireland, and to cross-border cooperation.

The conference was organised around four sessions over two days. The first session focussed on how, in the context of severe budget cutbacks and legislative and policy changes (both proposed and ongoing), the landscape for spatial planning and economic development in both jurisdictions – Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland – is changing. The second session took as its impetus the challenges facing regional development and sustainable community agendas, in terms of the significant oversupply of housing and the proliferation of land banks.

Day Two offered an opportunity for exploring potential solutions to the crisis, with the third session focussed on the critical role that innovation can play in economic recovery in terms of building strategic partnerships and linkages. The fourth and final session then explored the key messages emanating from the

conference, and focussed on how to harness these ideas for future action through networking and collaboration.

This year's conference was sponsored by the Special EU Programmes Body under the ICLRD's Cross-Border Spatial Planning and Training Network (CroSPlaN), an EU INTERREG IVA funded programme. Both the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and the Irish Planning Institute (IPI) continued to count attendance at the event as Continuing Professional Development for their respective members; an emerging relationship we hope to maintain.

All conference material is available [online](#).

ICLRD – Who are we?



A registered charity based in Armagh, Northern Ireland, the ICLRD is a North-South-US partnership that brings together practitioners, academics, researchers and policy makers to explore and expand the contribution that local and regional development can make to the peace and reconciliation process, and improve the lives of people on the island of Ireland and elsewhere. The ICLRD has developed out of a unique collaboration between academics and spatial planning specialists from the National Institute for Regional

and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) at the National University of Ireland Maynooth, the School of the Built Environment at University of Ulster, the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh, and the Institute for International Urban Development in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The ICLRD is pleased to be working with faculty and researchers from: the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University; Queens University Belfast; and Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Further information is available at www.iclrd.org

The Cross-Border Spatial Planning and Training Network (CroSPlaN) is an EU INTERREG IVA funded programme administered by the Special EU Programmes Body. The objective of this programme is to strengthen the policy and operational linkages between central and local policy makers and among officials and practitioners involved in spatial planning in the Irish border region. Under CroSPlaN, the ICLRD is undertaking six applied research studies over the course of the three year programme; three of which will focus on the island of Ireland and the remaining three taking an international perspective.

Under CroSPlaN, the ICLRD is hosting a series of executive training programmes for council officials and elected representatives in neighbouring cross-border councils.

The third element of the CroSPlaN Programme is the hosting of conferences and technical workshops on topical spatial planning themes across the island of Ireland. This conference was organised in part fulfilment of this obligation.

DAY ONE

OPENING ADDRESSES



Feargal McCormack, ICLR D Chairman

[|Audio|](#)

Mr McCormack's opening address to the conference highlighted how he had seen the ICLR D grow considerably over the years, and complimented the key role that the ICLR D plays in the important work of cross-border collaboration in the island of Ireland. The hosting of roundtables, workshops and conferences has been one of the cornerstones of the work of the ICLR D, and these events have a significant role to play in the ongoing process of peace and reconciliation.

He noted that this is a challenging time for the ICLR D given the context of ever dwindling resources, but that he was confident the ICLR D would rise to this challenge to continue to play a key role in assisting in the development and roll-out of the framework for collaborative spatial planning and local and regional development. The ever-strengthening, high-quality research agenda of the Centre, he noted, was key to this.

As the outgoing Chairman of the ICLR D, a position he has held for three years, Mr McCormack joked that this would be his 'lazy conference'; he closed by declaring it an honour and a privilege to serve with the staff and associates of the Centre.

John Driscoll, Director, ICLR D

[|Audio|](#) [|Presentation|](#)

In his address Mr Driscoll emphasised that while conferences were getting more difficult to hold – with budget cutbacks and staff no longer being able to secure funding to attend – there is still a strong interest for these types of events. They provide a space for dialogue and a place for people to get together and, even more significantly, to keep meeting each other to exchange ideas. Mr Driscoll spoke briefly on the history of the ICLR D, its various partners and affiliates, and the range of projects in which it engages. Taken together, the Centre has become an important resource in the sharing of experiences, knowledge, insights and resources across the island of Ireland.

He emphasised that the conference was an integral part of the wider ICLR D mission that translates policy into action. He highlighted the new ICLR D journal, *Borderlands*, the executive training programmes and the growing series of briefing papers as examples of how the various ICLR D operational strands are linked and reinforce each other.

The essence of the ICLR D: an integrated, holistic Centre encouraging dialogue, joined-up thinking and action across borders and disciplines.



Shaun Henry, Director - Managing Authority, Special EU Programmes Body (left) and John Driscoll, ICLR Director (right)

[|Audio|](#) [|Presentation|](#)

Mr Henry spoke to the challenges and opportunities of cross-border collaboration in a changing economic landscape. Ireland's cross-border region is one of fifty such regions in Europe. While each border region is different, they face common challenges such as worker mobility,

distorted trade flows and poor services. Mr Henry outlined the different activities of the Special EU Programmes Body that are addressing the specific challenges and opportunities of the Irish Border Region.

Mr Henry expressed his belief that the ICLR has a key role to play through its CroSPiAN programme and by providing an intellectual basis for strengthening cross border co-operation. He suggested that while there remain significant challenges, we are now working in a context of significant opportunities in what he suggests is a 'benign political environment'. He closed by noting that the barriers to cross-border cooperation have never been lower and that future activities should focus on developing more efficient and better public services; creating jobs and managing growth; and contributing to the environment.

SESSION I: Planning for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Growth



**Welcome by Chair, Prof. Greg Lloyd,
Head of School of the Built
Environment, University of Ulster**

Prof. Greg Lloyd opened the session by welcoming everybody to this initial session of the sixth annual ICLRD Conference. This opening session considered how spatial planning and local governance policy and practices are changing to reflect the economic crisis in which both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland find themselves.

PRESENTATION

*Spatial Planning for New Realities:
Economic Recovery & Sustainable Growth*

**Mr. David Walsh, Principal Officer,
Department of Environment, Heritage
and Local Government (DoEHLG)**

[|Audio](#) | [|Presentation](#)

**Ms. Jenny Pyper, Director - Regional
Planning and Transportation Division,
Department for Regional Development
(DRD)**

[|Audio](#) | [|Presentation](#)



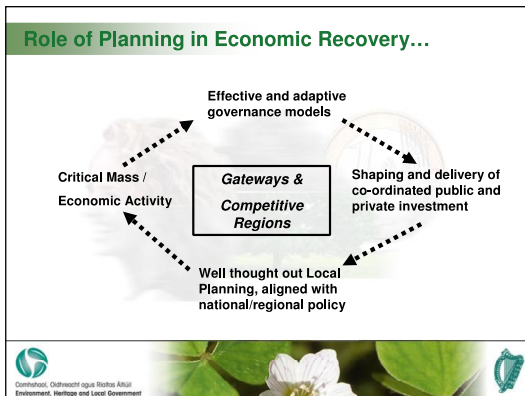
In this joint presentation, Ms Pyper and Mr Walsh considered the strategic spatial planning environment of the island of Ireland from a cross-border perspective. In this, they emphasised the features of compatibility between the spatial planning frameworks, North and South.

Mr Walsh opened his presentation by highlighting the economic and spatial challenges faced by the Republic of Ireland and proposed that spatial planning has a key role to play in mitigating these vulnerabilities. He described planning as a potential driver that can coordinate the public and private sectors within effective local, regional and national planning policies to catalyze economic activity.

The DoEHLG has identified six new key challenges to tackle, all of which have a spatial planning dimension:

1. The combination of the budgetary and banking difficulties providing difficulties in thinking (and acting) in long-term interests;
2. Flight of confidence in and credit for scheme-type housing;
3. Mismatch between funding and development models for 2010+ and "traditional" planning concepts;
4. Implementation of the NAMA project;

5. Addressing key infrastructural deficits in strategic locations and in coordination in a challenging budgetary context; and
6. Delivering the governance models that the Smart Economy demands.



(Source: From Mr David Walsh's presentation)

Placing the island of Ireland within the context of a number of strategic goals, he argued that given the current financial climate in Europe, Ireland's peripheral location and small scale require collaboration in order to survive and grow.

He outlined a range of current and future initiatives of the DoEHLG including: an update on the NSS, the preparation of Core Strategies as part of City/County Development Plans (under the *Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, 2010*), initiatives to address unfinished housing estates, and the DevPlan GIS project to provide mapping data to local and central government authorities.

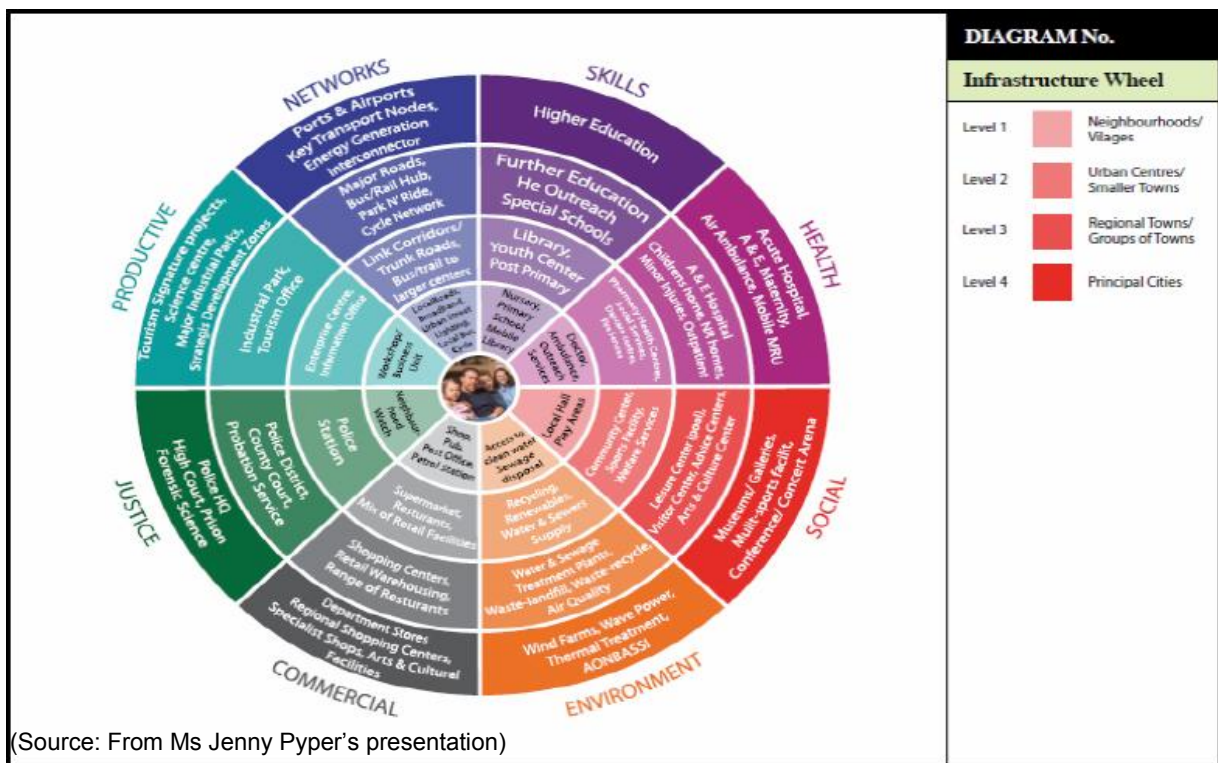
Mr Walsh concluded by emphasising opportunities for collaboration between both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, including: an integrated approach to providing planning information, shared GIS capabilities, and a framework for collaboration between the NSS and the *Regional Development Strategy (RDS)* for Northern Ireland.

Ms Pyper discussed the RDS for Northern Ireland, which is currently being reviewed. She emphasised that the RDS reflects how spatial planning is more than just land-use planning; it is the basis for the physical, social and economic development of regions. As such, the RDS is linked to a new Economic Development Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Of key significance to the RDS is the recognition of the need for a hierarchy of settlements. She highlighted the significance of Belfast as the driver of regional economic growth and of Derry/Londonderry as the centre of an expanding North West Region; while also recognising the significance of sub-regional centres to provide employment and services. At the centre of the RDS is the concept of compact urban form as a way to reduce car reliance, deal with climate change issues, and mitigate the potentially disastrous socioeconomic and environmental impacts of sprawl.

Steering development through strategic infrastructure investments will be important to creating transport and economic corridors. The RDS, thus, includes provisions for the implementation of regionally significant economic infrastructure projects.

Ms Pyper finished the presentation by emphasising that the RDS and the NSS share similar messages. She identified four main areas for collaboration – Urban corridors and gateways, Transportation, Energy, and Telecoms – and highlighted the continued role of the ICLRD in this process.



(Source: From Ms Jenny Pyper's presentation)

PRESENTATION

Adjusting to Reduced Budgets: The Practical Realities of Doing More with Less - A Local Government Perspective



Mr. Eddy Curtis,
Director of
Administration, Newry
& Mourne District
Council

[Audio](#) | [Presentation](#)

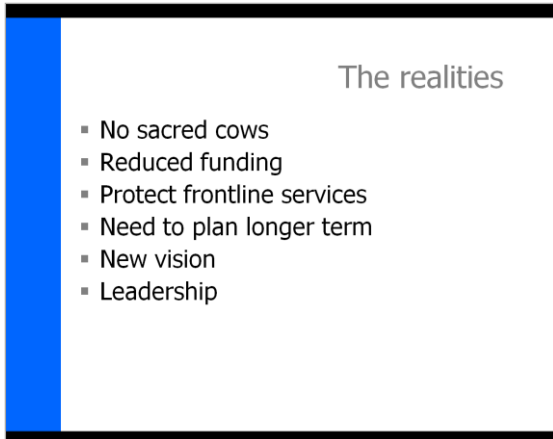
According to Mr Curtis, the key challenges currently facing local governments include cuts in public sector funding, increasing tax burden on citizens, and local government reform. The rate-payer, he suggests, will expect frontline services to remain at the current standard but that, with budgetary cuts, Councils will struggle to maintain these levels of services.

In this context of reduced internal and external financial resources, local councils

can be left with little recourse for raising tax revenue, apart from raising rates. Mr Curtis, however, suggested that this is not something being considered at present.

The definition of 'more for less' according to Mr. Curtis is "more outputs or improved quality in return for less resources". Achieving this goal will involve a major review of all local government services to avoid waste and duplication. He cautioned that there should be no 'sacred cows'- that everything is up for debate. There is also an opportunity to grow the collaborative capacities of local councils to provide key frontline shared services.

Mr Curtis gave examples of securing better value for money that have been rolled out by Newry and Mourne District Council, including: the establishment of a scrutiny committee, mechanisms to reduce absenteeism and postage costs, and the achievement of a 10% reduction in energy costs.



(Source: From Mr Eddy Curtis' Presentation)

He suggested that local government will need to: plan for the longer term, and more crucially, to stick to these plans; to have a new vision; and to practice 'transformational' rather than 'transactional' leadership. He reiterated that politically and operationally it was unacceptable for local authorities to reduce the quality or the level of frontline services.

To emphasise the potential of shared services among councils as a way of retaining core services, he highlighted the case of Danny McSorley, Chief Executive of Omagh District Council and Chair of the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) Working Group. This Northern Ireland working group is identifying savings of approximately €480million across local government over the next twenty-five years. If implemented by local authorities, the ICE programme can begin to put in place longer, more strategic, more collaborative, and more innovative ways of working together across local councils.

Mr Curtis' concluding message was that securing a longer-term response to the current budgetary challenges will require a commitment from leaders to adopt more innovative and collaborative thinking.

PRESENTATION

Adjusting to reduced budgets: the practical realities of doing more with less - a planning perspective.



**Mr. Pádraig Maguire, RPG
Implementation Officer, Border
Regional Authority**

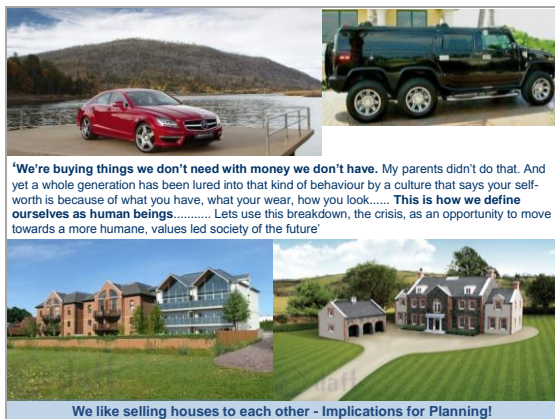
[|Audio](#) | [|Presentation](#)

Mr Maguire provided an overview of planning in the Republic of Ireland; past, present, and future. In it he emphasised the need to take a practical look at both the achievements and mistakes of the past years from a planning perspective.

He started his presentation by looking at the relationships between the three arms of the planning system – Development Management, Forward Planning, and Enforcement – and how these feed into a framework of plans, strategies, regulations and procedures. He then made a case for the achievements made through spatial planning during the boom years, including improved standards of living, educational attainment, and water and roads infrastructure. However, he conceded that there were major problems with how Irish society developed during the Celtic Tiger period. He emphasised that we were buying things we didn't need with money we didn't have, and that housing was a major part of what these systems of

exchange entailed. There was a superficial sense of how we defined ourselves during the boom, which he argued is now changing.

Mr Maguire shared his belief in the importance of communicating what it is that planners do, and what the planning authority actually means for citizens. He suggested that during the boom, understaffed planning departments were inundated with planning applications. A lack of strategic spatial planning, he suggested, partly driven by excessive workloads, resulted in planning standards slipping during the boom. This resulted in poor planning decisions.



(Source: From Pádraig Maguire's Presentation)

In recent years these same departments have experienced severe reductions in budgets and staffing. Within this context of diminishing resources, he argued, there is a responsibility on planning departments to find new ways of providing services. Now is the time for more and not less planning!

He made the case that we need to learn from our mistakes and not repeat them, but that not all planning during the boom was 'bad planning'. The content of development plans, he suggested, was good but they did not deliver what they laid out. Similarly, the basic principles of

sustainable communities were good, but it was unclear as to what exactly these meant and how they should be achieved. He argued that we need to assess what went wrong – and what worked – with these policies, and figure out where to go next with them; taking cognisance of the current circumstances. He finished by mapping out five suggestions for reform:

1. **Streamline Planning** – Look at the size of County Development Plans and number of Local Area Plans. What should a Development Plan deliver?;
2. **Environment knows no boundaries** – River Basin Management Plans should follow natural catchments rather than administrative boundaries, which results in duplication of work. Local Authorities should work with adjoining authorities and provide development plans for natural catchments;
3. **Pooling Resources** – Local Authorities have less staff and greater demands. Specialised services - flood risk assessment, strategic environmental assessment and Habitats Assessment- should be shared between Local Authorities or set up within Regional Authorities;
4. **Evidence Based Planning** – Its absence is at the heart of our current problems. We need it to inform the decision makers. Don't re-invent the wheel. Use existing Council Services – no need for private Consultants. Use Third Level bodies' existing research (ICLRD/NIRSA/AIRO); and
5. **Planning is not only about Planners** – planning encompasses all sectors of the economy. Local Authorities must be creative and utilise their resources to maximize their potential in terms of delivery of services. Need to set up multi-disciplinary teams to review of plans.

Q&A for the Morning Sessions

[|Audio|](#)

Mr Shaun Henry responded to a question from the floor about the disconnection between the EU's matched funding schemes as rolled out in the local or regional contexts. He suggested that there is an agreement with the governments, North and South, whereby funding would be matched.

Cllr Aidan Murray, Monaghan County Council, asked what the position of governments, North and South, was in relation to the planning and provision of infrastructure between the regions, specifically the Eirgrid project. He was particularly interested in the time delay between the two systems. Ms Jenny Pyper responded that she was aware of the importance of the project, but that she

couldn't predict how long the process would take in Northern Ireland. She pointed out that in the past, these types of projects have been delivered on time and on budget. She suggested that if there is political will to implement it, this will continue.

Mr Andy Pollak asked Mr Pádraig Maguire how feasible it would be to provide specialist services such as flood risk assessments or habitat assessments on a cross-border basis. Mr Maguire responded that there are both procedural and legal difficulties, but that there certainly is the opportunity. The key issue would be funding. There are ways and means but both governments would need to push out the boundaries to do it.

SESSION II: PLANNING FOR HOMES AND PEOPLE: NEW CHALLENGES, NEW AGENDAS



Welcome by Chair, Mr Brian Rowntree, Chairman, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

[|Audio|](#)

Mr Rowntree opened the second session of the conference by suggesting that the focus of the discussion should be more about opportunity than 'doom and gloom'. He indicated that the presentations were not only about assessing past and present economic problems, but also emphasised the need for strategic approaches and information in order to face the island of Ireland's economic and social challenges.

He suggested that the mistakes of the past happened because individuals were planning for profit and not for people. Recognizing this harmful trend, the session's theme of "homes and people" was aimed at underpinning a new approach grounded on people and place.

PRESENTATION

Understanding housing from an all island perspective



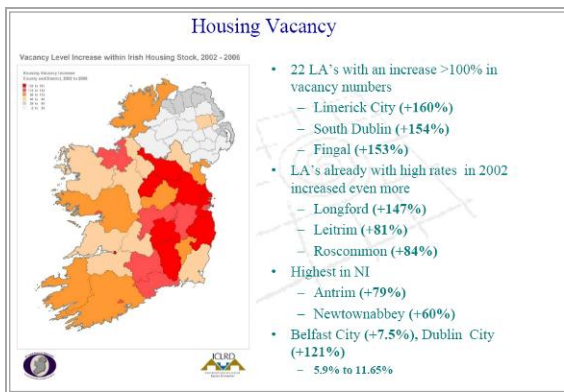
Mr Justin Gleeson, Project Manager, All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO)

[|Audio|](#) [|Presentation|](#)

Mr Gleeson's presentation focussed on how we can better understand the housing crisis by using spatial data visualisation tools that are now available on a cross-border basis.

Mr Gleeson introduced his work with the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) and ICLRD on the All-Island Housing Atlas. Still a work in progress, this will provide a series of data-sets and compiled statistics, time series maps, and other data visualisations. He showed graphs comparing the output of housing in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland over the period 1991-2009 and compared them to other countries in Europe. He offered a breakdown by County, showing the importance of mapping for understanding the impact of spatial trends.

He made comparisons between the housing sectors in the North and South and suggested that the main difference between the two contexts was in terms of housing tenure, in that the North had much more social housing provision. Despite the fact that the number of social housing units in Northern Ireland decreased slightly during the period 2002 to 2006, when compared to the overall levels of housing completion in the South the level of social housing provision remains relatively better. Similarly, after 2002 the vacancy rate in the Republic of Ireland far outstripped that of the North, with 22 local authorities increasing their vacancy rate by over 100% between 2002 and 2006.



(Source: From Mr Justin Gleeson's Presentation)

In the second portion of his talk he demonstrated the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO), www.airo.ie. Mr Gleeson showed how the various housing datasets that have been accumulated and merged into a simple mapping tool allow the user to visualise trends spatially, in time series, and in comparison with other counties and regions. He closed by emphasising that these data are freely available to everybody in the public sector. The goal is to provide these data and mapping in a user-friendly manner as a means of contributing to evidence-informed planning.

PRESENTATION

Northern Ireland's housing market: Review and perspectives



**Mr Joe Frey, Head of Research,
Northern Ireland Housing Executive**

[Audio](#) | [Presentation](#)

Mr Frey spoke about the housing sector in Northern Ireland and in particular the new key strategic document *Review and Perspectives*. He suggested that the key challenge is how to restart the market and make credit available. Mr Frey's presentation provided an overview of the key trends in the market in the North over the last number of years, and where it is likely to be headed in the future.

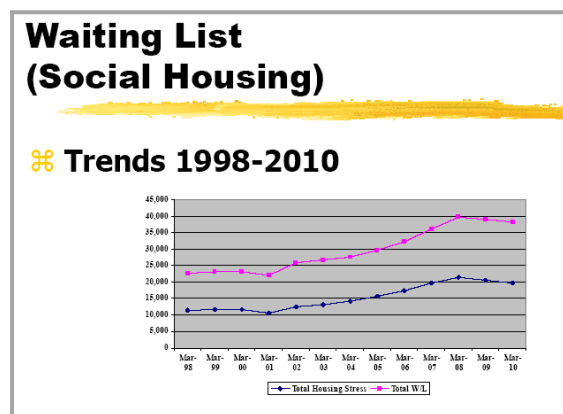
The Northern Ireland housing stock is relatively new given that 34% of stock was built post-1980. Nearly 90% of homes are heated by gas or oil; this raises the issue of fuel poverty as a problem that needs to be systematically addressed.

Mr. Frey showed that over the last twelve years, there has been a consistent growth in the social housing waiting list, together with a growth in homelessness. This implies that the need for social housing continues to be significant. He suggested that demographic changes over the next ten years and an increase in single-person households will have an impact on household formation.

The high levels of unemployment in Northern Ireland remain a key problem, and as the public purse tightens, conditions will only get more difficult. Many of those jobs lost were in the construction industry, so an increase in social housing programmes would also offer economic stimulus via the local economic multiplier effect.

He also pointed out that between 2006 and 2009, there has been a rapid growth in the private rental sector. The proportion of stock that is owner-occupied has now fallen for the first time since 2009, while the average house price for new build had dropped 40% from the peak. Interestingly, overall affordability has improved quite significantly. However, the previous model of 95% mortgages has generally been abandoned in favour of a system of requiring borrowers to have a 25% deposit and, he argued, lenders are perhaps now a little too cautious.

He concluded by suggesting that the recession was the result of unsustainable increases in consumer debt, which was now being constrained by lender caution. The key challenge for policy makers and the housing sector, as he sees it, is to reawaken confidence in the private sector on the basis of a new realism in terms of prices and mortgage availability.



(Source: From Mr Joe Frey's Presentation)

PRESENTATION

NAMA: Challenges and opportunities



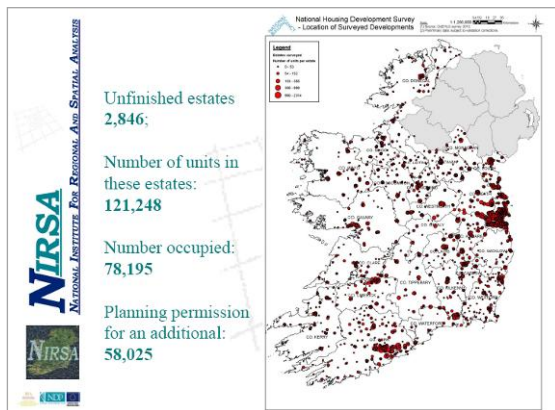
Prof Rob Kitchin, Director, National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), NUI Maynooth
[|Audio](#) | [Presentation](#)

Prof Kitchin's talk focussed on the challenges and opportunities presented by the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA). He argued that the operations of NAMA will have a significant bearing on the future of the island of Ireland.

He identified five areas – financial, political, planning, commercial, and social – that present NAMA with challenges. He shared his belief that, thus far, NAMA has disproportionately focussed on the financial challenges at the expense of the others. In terms of political challenges, NAMA is criticised from both left and right political perspectives. Critically, he suggested, NAMA has failed in its primary goal to inject liquidity into the banking system. In terms of planning, there are many instruments and regulations that need to be addressed to deal with the problems of unfinished housing estates and housing oversupply. NAMA has a key role to play in this process.

Prof Kitchin proposed that NAMA has six options in relation to the properties it manages – sell, lease, hold, develop, manage/maintain, or demolish – and that each of these will have implications for the areas in which the properties are located.

Additionally, NAMA will have to contend with a series of issues that are both commercial and social, such as lack of mortgage credit, high levels of unemployment, negative equity and emigration. Furthermore, the residential properties and estates that NAMA manages are characterised by a series of social issues – such as those relating to health, safety and lack of community - and estate management issues, which must also be addressed if the housing sector is ever to recover.



(Source: From Prof Rob Kitchin's Presentation)

Prof Kitchin argued that despite these challenges, NAMA does stand a good chance of stabilising the housing market—if it is done in a sensible and sensitive way -while also catering for social housing provision, creating land-banks for the future, and reframing the opportunities for future strategic planning. In order to achieve these goals, NAMA will need to: push towards the 'public good' as well as meet its commercial remit; become more open and transparent to gain investor and public confidence; find some early quick wins; be more aware of local contexts; see its role as a facilitator between local authorities, developers, and other groups; have a better understanding of spatial and commercial datasets; and examine and follow international experience.

PRESENTATION

The end of 'muddling through': Making the case for strategy



Ms Grainia Long, Director, Chartered Institute of Housing Northern Ireland

[|Audio](#) | [|Presentation](#)

Ms Long suggested in her presentation that she wanted to 'make a play for strategy'. She argued that, in the context of such rapid change, when we are all so busy dealing with crisis, we can forget the importance of forward planning.

Ms Long mapped out what has happened recently in both the North and South in relation to the housing sector and drew out a number of commonalities between the two contexts. What they shared was (a) a lack of confidence in housing, (b) an undervaluing of housing, (c) the assumption that housing has only monetary value, (d) a lack of protection, and (e) inequality of space in regard to supply and demand issues (some people are living in housing far too big for their requirements).

She went on to pose the question: What have we learned? She suggested that the public funding model is unsustainable and therefore, we need to be more strategic about how we use grants. Furthermore, she suggested that housing does have economic value, but that this can be overplayed. She argued that planning has a positive role to play and should be working in partnership with housing to

meet economic priorities. Ms Long further contended that a sustainable mixed-housing economy will require several policy levers to be working together in tandem. All this, she proposed, speaks to the importance of strategy.

Ms Long shared her belief that the achievement of a more economically and socially sustainable housing sector will require us to make some fundamental and difficult restructurings. She suggested that getting the supply and demand right will require a better evidence base. She recognised the importance of removing the barriers for first-time buyers. However, she saw the fundamental need to make decisions in regard to issues relating to regulating housing demand in more socially, rather than economically, oriented ways.



final thoughts

- housing could lose its political focus
- We must make the case for the economic value of our housing system
- Be honest about learning lessons
- Plan strategically for the next cycle!

www.cih.org

(Source: From Ms Grainia Long's presentation)

She made the point that welfare reforms should not reduce mobility and that we need policy reforms that reduce inequality. In this, she also saw a long-term strategic role for planning in ensuring that the right homes are in the right places. Importantly, she argued that we must all work to ensure that housing does not lose its importance politically.

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

Our Communities, Our Homes: The U.S. Perspective



Mr Nicolas P. Retsinas, Senior Lecturer in Real Estate, Harvard Business School, Director Emeritus of Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies & Former Assistant Secretary for Housing-Federal Housing Commissioner at the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

[Audio](#)

Mr. Retsinas' talk focussed on his experience with the Resolution Trust Corporation (RTC) in the US – a similar vehicle to NAMA – and the lessons that can be drawn upon for the island of Ireland. He highlighted that the last time he stood in front of this group was in January 2008¹. Then, he suggested, he stood under a bright light whereas now he stands in shadows. The context of Ireland has dramatically shifted in these few short years. Within this context, Mr Retsinas' talk focussed on three key questions: What happened? What did we learn? And what can we do?

In regard to the first of these questions, he suggested the answer now seemed very simple; builders overbuilt, lenders over-

¹ Providing the closing keynote address at the Third Annual ICLRD Conference.

lent, and regulators under-regulated. In terms of the second question, he drew out five lessons.

- A home is not first and foremost a financial asset, but rather it is shelter, a place to live, raise family and establish roots.
- Rent is not a four-letter word, and it is o.k. to rent.
- Bigger and nicer isn't always better. We don't always have to conspicuously consume.
- Sprawl is ugly and dangerous.
- We need to have regulated markets.

In terms of what can we do now Mr Retsinas laid out seven key points:

1. He questioned the appropriateness of the conference title; arguing that, in his experience, you can only do less with less, not more. Nevertheless, 'doing more with less' gives us an opportunity for reengineering, a chance to consider what we were doing that we shouldn't have been doing.
2. Prices have fallen and sadly we don't have money to buy or build. But this will also offer an opportunity to bring some normalcy to house prices.
3. There is a significant opportunity around land-banking. The island of Ireland is going to need land tomorrow, and therefore it makes sense to take some back and plan for future services.
4. The Republic of Ireland has some new tools at its disposal; some of which have implications for, and 'reach into', Northern Ireland. NAMA is the 'new sheriff'. We must put a value proposition to them about working with local communities.

5. Instead of building 'new', we can rediscover remodelling and repair. This offers a chance to introduce energy efficiency, new technologies, etc.
6. It is important that we do not wait for the national level to bail us out at the local level! One needs to turn to the local level for how best to intervene.
7. There is a need to have a new constituency as we contemplate development, which is not profitable or even sustainable. This new constituency is our children. We need to endeavour to create suitable environments for our children and theirs. This ensures an understanding that planning for the long run really matters.

Mr Retsinas was quick to point out that we should not jump to the conclusion that these opportunities are simply there for the grabbing. These opportunities, he suggested, are "very effectively disguised". However, he shared his belief in the resilience of the Irish people, and that he had every faith that the island of Ireland would pull through this crisis.

CLOSING ADDRESS: DAY 1



Mr David Walsh, DoEHLG speaking on behalf of Michael Finneran T.D., Minister of State for Housing and Local Services

[Audio](#)

Mr Walsh recorded the Minister's apologies for not being able to attend, and noted that the Minister recognised that we are in a very changed scenario from even a couple of years ago². During his short address on behalf of the Minister, Mr Walsh mapped out three key priorities for the immediate future.

Firstly, the Government must concentrate on implementing the new *Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010*; a key piece of legislation in ensuring vertical and horizontal integration across the spatial planning hierarchy. A second critical issue was ensuring a timely response to unfinished housing estates. Thirdly, and more broadly, the Government needs to refocus its priorities to the changing circumstances, and within this regard, to decide on new fundamental projects.

He finished by extending the Minister's thanks to John Driscoll and the ICLRD for their support in looking at issues such as cross-border spatial planning, the sustainable communities agenda, and the inter-relationship between social, economic, physical and environmental planning.

Q&A for Afternoon Sessions | [Audio](#)

Andy Pollak asked Prof Kitchin whether he had had a chance to speak with NAMA about the potential for 'social good' through the project. Prof Kitchin responded that he had recently spoken to NAMA; and that while there were a number of examples of NAMA engaging

with public bodies to provide social housing, his impression was that they saw their primary role as optimising return to the taxpayer. However, he shared the belief of Mr Retsinas that NAMA should have a third operational pillar to do as much social good as possible. Responding to a further question, Prof Kitchin suggested that he would be surprised if the incoming government (a general election was scheduled in the Republic of Ireland for the 25th February 2011) would not alter NAMA in some form.

Mr Retsinas added that in the case of the RTC in the U.S., there were a number of major amendments to its statute by the Congress, in response to the criticisms that were being made of the programme in the public domain. He suggested that no organisation can insulate itself from the public and that there will always be the opportunity for interventions and amendments, whether they be good or bad. NAMA will need to respond to, and work with, the changing times.

Ms Long added that there had been very little public debate in Northern Ireland on the implications of NAMA, and that she would see this debate as something very positive and necessary.

Mr Rowntree suggested that public engagement has been difficult for NAMA up to this point, mainly because the Agency is still in the process of transferring assets and therefore would be guessing as to the outcome of a lot of these processes.

² Minister Finneran addressed the fourth Annual ICLRD Conference in January 2009.

DAY TWO

SESSION III: PLANNING FOR SHARED INNOVATION – INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT INNOVATION-LED RECOVERY



Welcome by Mr Aidan Gough, Strategy and Policy Director, InterTradelreland

[Audio](#)

Mr Aidan Gough welcomed the contribution of spatial planning and advocated the role of a joint North/South planning framework. He noted that InterTradelreland have long recognised the important link between spatial planning and economic development, and that InterTradelreland has funded studies to promote cross-border collaboration in spatial planning and infrastructure investments. He suggested that the topic under discussion, innovation, was critical to economic recovery, and that city regions would be crucial in developing Ireland's innovative capacity.

PRESENTATION

Transforming the Power System on the Island of Ireland to Facilitate Recovery



Mr. Dermot Byrne, Chief Executive, Eirgrid

[Audio](#) | [Presentation](#)

Mr Byrne's offered an overview of the key issues relating to the renewable energy industry on the island of Ireland. He noted that it was interesting to see how the energy sector has evolved over the last years, suggesting that deregulation and

competition has made it a more diverse energy industry. This has helped to create the Single Electricity Market with Eirgrid operating as an all-island energy company. Energy is a growing sector, with demand forecasts projecting a surge in energy requirements over the coming years. The push to more sustainable forms of energy will further require the growth of the renewables sector.

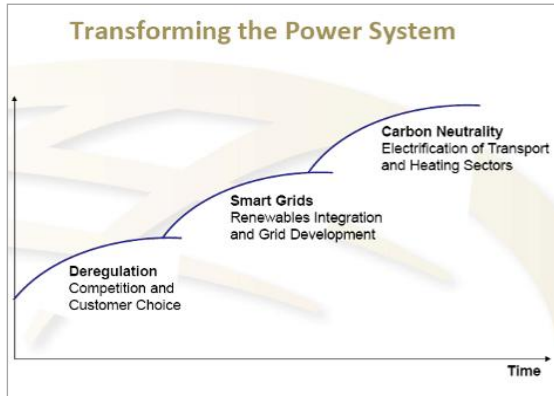
Mr Byrne outlined three phases for transforming the power system in Ireland:

- Deregulation to encourage competition and customer choice;
- Smart Grids to integrate renewable sources; and
- Carbon neutrality.

He suggested that in terms of Ireland's target of 40% renewable energy by 2020, the majority of this would come from wind energy, A challenge to meeting this target is that the high capacity grid hasn't changed in 20 years and does not service areas with highest wind capacity.

A number of key projects are underway to address the infrastructure deficits. Firstly, the Grid 25 plan outlines a national strategy worth €4billion to upgrade the energy infrastructure by 2025. Secondly, on a cross-border basis, the Renewable Integration Development Project (RIDP) is a joint venture between Eirgrid, Northern Ireland Electricity, and System Operator for Northern Ireland Ltd. (SONI) to identify the best all-island transmission reinforcement scheme to (a) meet future demand and (b) provide access to

renewable generation in the north west of the island. Thirdly, the east-west Interconnector project, currently on target for 2012, will connect the Irish grid to Wales.



(Source: From Mr Dermot Byrne's Presentation)

In terms of wind energy, dealing with variances in wind output is of critical significance to successfully manage the sector. Mr Byrne referenced a ground-breaking work being carried out between Eirgrid and its northern partners to more effectively monitor and predict wind variances. The crucial element of managing wind power is the ability to manage the surplus energy produced. This will require linking the Irish grid more effectively with Europe, and he raised the possibility of a European super grid for these purposes.

Mr Byrne finished by suggesting that the greatest challenge for future generations would be that of achieving carbon neutrality. This requires the consideration of a portfolio of options for planning and moving towards carbon neutrality by 2035.

PRESENTATION



Innovation and the human perspective

**Dr. Gary McDarby,
SMART project**

[Audio](#) | [Presentation](#)

Dr McDarby began his talk by suggesting that it would follow a different route than the other papers in this session; focussing primarily on the human perspective in innovation through a number of personal stories. He shared his belief that, while we often talk about innovation as part of complex relationships between companies, capital, and policy, at the heart of change is the power of human beings doing incredible things. He noted that human capabilities are constantly evolving in their relationships with technology and educational practices, and that such relationships are reciprocal. A computer, for example, is a creative, expressive and organisational device that is enabling, rather than merely functional. Education systems, he argued, are falling behind the youth of today and what they are capable of doing with technology, proposing that technology constantly surpasses the uses for which it is programmed through the innovative ways in which it is put to use by human beings.

Quoting the children's novel *The Little Prince* he suggested "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; What is

essential is invisible to the eye". Using this as a motif, Dr McDarby recounted a series of stories of moments in his life when technology and humanity combined to empower people. The first of these stories concerned his time spent working with former child soldiers in Liberia in 1992. One of the children had been in a firing squad and was having recurrent nightmares about this experience. Dr Darby gave the boy a walkman together with an Enya cassette; this helped him sleep. In witnessing the profound effect that such a simple technological vehicle could achieve, this singular moment changed his life, forging a sustained engagement with the empowering capabilities of technology. He went on to recount how reading *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* – a book by Jean-Dominique Bauby, a sufferer of lock-in syndrome, written entirely by blinking his eyes to spell out words – inspired him to invent the Cerebus, a device that sits on the head and allows the person to answer 'yes' or 'no' through neurological responses.

Dr McDarby went on to talk about three projects in which he is involved – in Dublin, Kenya, and Belfast – that seek to bring technology and training to disadvantaged youth. The 'Computer Clubhouse' initiative started in 2002 in Dublin's inner city and brings young people from the area into the Media Lab Europe base in the Digital Hub. The Clubhouse exposes them to computers and aids their learning through design experiences, in a way that is participatory and builds on their own interests. The Clubhouse project has also more recently been rolled out in Belfast as a way of forwarding the peace process in divided communities. In 2003, the 'Camera Project' was initiated. This project brings used laptops, which are cleaned and to which open source software is added, into

slum schools outside Nairobi, Kenya. Another related project, Hotspots, was subsequently rolled out in Ireland; taking state of the art computers from Google, who renew their stock yearly, and selling them for a nominal fee to schools and youth centres. This, he suggests, is an example of 'doing more with less' – and for the right reasons.



(Source: From Dr Gary McDarby's presentation)

He concluded by reiterating that technology is profoundly changing the way we learn, and that it is essential that there is a human dimension to this. Given our location in Sligo, Dr. McDarby took the opportunity to conclude his presentation by quoting WB Yeats, stressing "Education is not the filling of a pale but the lighting of a fire".

PRESENTATION

Investing in Innovation



**Ms Tracy Meharg,
Managing Director –
Innovation and
Capability
Development Group,
Invest Northern Ireland**
[|Audio](#) | [|Presentation](#)

Ms Meharg began her talk on an optimistic note, declaring that amidst all the doom and gloom, she had a ray of sunshine to share in the rise in Research and

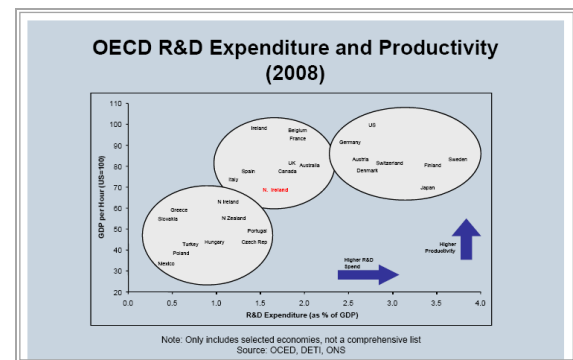
Development (R&D) spending in Northern Ireland. In 2009 a total of Sterling 483 million had been spent on R&D in Northern Ireland; particularly significant was that 76% of this R&D was in the business sector. This is the highest figure ever recorded in Northern Ireland, and the percentage increase was the highest of any region in the UK.

This, she explained, needs to be put in the context of how Northern Ireland performed in the past. The UK has placed a strategic premium on developing R&D capabilities, and Ms Meharg suggested they are not alone in this regard. R&D is increasingly recognised as a key driver of the economic performance of areas. Northern Ireland's traditional R&D expenditure is 1.2% of its GDP. This rate is around one third of that of the two OECD countries with the highest rate (Sweden and Finland), and just half of the OECD average of 2.3%. Taking into account the recent increase in R&D, Ms Meharg hypothesised that Northern Ireland will increase to above 1.5% when more recent results are tabulated. She went on then to suggest a link between R&D and better living standards.

Given the prevalence of small and medium sized enterprises in Northern Ireland, it has been difficult to demonstrate the benefit of an R&D focus in this type of economy, or to set realistic targets. She advocated that with the right policies, interventions and resources, Northern Ireland can perform at a significantly higher level than it has historically.

Invest Northern Ireland has taken a series of actions to address the R&D deficit. Firstly, they made innovation a key focal point and policy agenda. They introduced a simplified and streamlined grant application process for businesses. They

introduced a number of innovation advisors whose sole remit was to guide and 'handhold' companies through the process of setting up R&D functions. Additionally, they introduced, in partnership with Enterprise Ireland in the South, a system of 'Innovation Vouchers'. These seek to provide companies with an easy first step to engaging with higher education institutions to develop their R&D capabilities. Since its launch, around 480 vouchers have been awarded and 250 projects completed. They also focus on exploiting growing global R&D opportunities by making inwards and outward linkages.



(Source: From Ms Tracy Meharg's Presentation)

Invest Northern Ireland have reallocated an increasing part of their budget to R&D. Also, where companies had a choice between redundancies and investment, Invest Northern Ireland actively sought to steer towards investment, which Ms Meharg suggests was a risky – but rewarding – strategy for the businesses involved.

Going forward, Northern Ireland will need to continue the growth achieved in 2009 on a sustained basis. The challenge will be how to do this in a climate of constricting resources. She suggested, however, that the message is clear: the only way to win the battle for economic recovery is to support innovation and high

tech businesses with the capacity for high-tech growth. The challenge will not be only doing more with less but achieving more with less. Northern Ireland will need to hold on to and sustain the advances made in 2009, and grasp the prize that it holds.

Q&A--First Morning Session | [Audio](#)

Prof Greg Lloyd asked a question to Mr Byrne regarding the status of energy storage. Mr Byrne suggested massive storage capability would be required to deal with wind energy. He noted that there are a number of technologies available, and they already have some proposals for pump storage. However, the outcome – or success – of these will depend on a range of factors. When asked another question on the economics of wind energy, Mr Byrne suggested that there were economic pros and cons to the argument, but that on the whole there is a very clear case for having wind energy in the portfolio.

Mr Gough asked the panel what the island of Ireland needs to do to ensure it can capitalise on its strategic position as a site for renewable energy. Ms Meharg suggested that from an economic development perspective, Invest NI are working to get companies into the supply chain of renewables, in attracting investors into the island of Ireland, and also in developing new technologies in this sector. Mr Byrne, however, cautioned against expanding too quickly; suggesting that we will need to link with European markets, and that the parameters of a pan-European market had as yet not been defined or assured. This may require some policy interventions at the European level.

Mr Michael Darcy asked Mr Byrne what would be his ideal energy portfolio for the future of the island of Ireland, bearing in mind the potential developing technologies for harvesting energy from other sources apart from wind. Mr Byrne suggested that self-sufficiency isn't enough on its own - we also need to be competitive and sustainable. Renewables will account for a large portion of the portfolio in 2030, and wind will be a major part of this, but there will also be small-scale distributed generation from biomass. He also suggested that increased energy efficiency will be crucial. Dr McDarby suggested that hydrogen technology might be something to look into, in that it could be produced through the excess in wind energy at times of surplus.

DISCUSSANT:

Towards a Framework for Understanding Shared Services in Modern Governance



Prof Greg Lloyd, Head – School of the Built Environment, University of Ulster | [Audio](#)

In a short discussion paper, Prof Lloyd provided a synthesis of key ideas that emerged from the previous three sessions and their applicability to spatial planning. Spatial planning, he suggested, is dynamic, fluid and exciting. It allows us to respond to all sorts of problems and

issues involving different areas and people, and at different times. However, he cautioned that we need to be realistic about the context in which we are working. The island of Ireland is facing a real major crisis and challenge to our society, and this will require some fundamental rethinking of our strategies. This recession, he argued, is different from past recessions, with a range of unique and diverse issues that are combining to create cumulative and 'wild card' effects.

Prof Lloyd went on to talk about some key ideas around the shared services agenda. Shared services, he suggested, has a real role to play in the future. Moreover, he proposed – based on earlier papers – that shared services has clearly already 'arrived'. He expressed his concern with the assumption that "more can be achieved with less", and cautioned that we may need to put in more; that cutting isn't always the best strategic choice. He suggested there are two levels to shared services; the strategic level and the lower level where many of these services actually take place. We have not gotten to the strategic level yet but, he argued, the strategic level is the precondition for the lower order. Therefore, it is important that we get the strategic level right in order that services on the ground work as they should.

He also expressed concern about the growing 'uncritical perspective' on shared services. The shared services agenda, he suggested, is drawn from neoliberal

thinking, and is part of the spectrum of policies designed to roll back the state, including outsourcing, public-private partnerships, and so on. This perspective is based on cost-cutting, on the notion that government is bad and inefficient. This argument is not non-ideological, and has frequently proven to be incorrect. We, therefore, have to be careful in these strategies that we do not lose essential services and resources. Prof Lloyd went on to offer examples from the shared services agendas in Scotland that reflect proportionate and strategic planning, the fact that the National Planning Framework in Scotland has statutory authority, and the two-tiered development plan for Scottish cities that allows for a city-regional strategic plan in which the individual local authorities are able to conduct shared service delivery. This approach recognises institutional complexity and challenges some of the old ways of planning.

He finished with one last caveat. The world is a very different place now. We tend to imagine the relationship between the state, the market and civil society as a benign one. However, what happens if the state is bankrupt of wealth and ideas? What happens in the context of dysfunctional markets and states? Within this changing environment, the public that the shared services agendas are meant to serve may be unwilling to listen to what we construe as rational ideas about the way forward. These will be unpredictable issues that we need to face going forward.

SESSION IV: A CHANGING LANDSCAPE – NETWORKING, COLLABORATING AND ACHIEVING GREATER EFFICIENCIES



Welcome by Frank McDonald,
Environment Editor,
The Irish Times
[\[Audio\]](#)

In opening this session, Frank McDonald expressed how the new ICLRD Journal, *Borderlands*, had touched a chord with him. Borders have always fascinated him since he was a child seeing his first red phonebox in the north of Ireland, being struck by how they differed from the green ones in the South, and wondering what this meant in terms of dividing lines and a host of other issues, both political and cultural. He spoke of his visit to a place called Point Roberts, a small isolated peninsula near Vancouver, Canada, which due to a strange and arbitrary border placement has found itself a part of the USA. On entering the area, he told the border guard he was there out of “curiosity”, to which the guard replied “Yeah, whoever drew this line must have been drunk, but hey we’re here”. And, he went on, we are all here too on this island in rather changed circumstances.

Moving on to a more critical stance on issues that have shaped the current geography of the island, he raised concerns about the money that was invested in roads in the Republic of Ireland during the boom. Given the limited amount of traffic on some of these, he suggested, they could very well be described as ‘ghost motorways’. He shared his belief that we have locked ourselves into car reliance, and that the

motorways have induced the conditions of sprawl. Particularly, in regard to the current financial circumstances, there is an urgent need for a review of investment priorities and the tabling of other solutions.

PANEL DISCUSSION

‘Doing More with Less’ - The Big Ideas Emerging from this Conference

A Business Perspective



Mr. Feargal McCormack, Managing Partner, FPM Accountants and Chairman of ICLRD

[\[Audio\]](#)

In his short set of comments, Mr McCormack firstly suggested that in the current economic situation, only rapidly changing organisations will survive. Many of these changes were ‘transitional’, but now we need to move towards ‘transformational’ adjustments.

He suggested that the two most important questions a business must pose to itself are: How do we make ourselves more valuable to customers and clients? And how can we help our customers and clients succeed?

One of the key features that will differentiate successful business in the

future will be leadership. But, he stressed, leadership is about attitude – not hierarchy. We must think laterally. The gravest risk is the risk of doing nothing. There is a key need to focus on international competitiveness. There is also a key need for creativity and innovation and we must have the courage to make these decisions in the short term. In this, we need every individual to stand up and be counted within organisations. He finished by stressing that he is approaching the future with confidence, and it is onwards and upwards for those who are proactive and courageously looking for a better future.

For further insight into Mr McCormack's thoughts on the challenges facing businesses, and the opportunities these open up, see [ICLRD Briefing Paper 7, *Doing More with Less: A Business Perspective*](#)

An Economic Perspective



**Dr James Cunningham,
Director, Centre for
Innovation and
Structural Change
(CISC), NUI Galway**
[|Audio|](#)

Dr Cunningham started by suggesting that he looks at innovation as creating environments for experimentation that have economic, environmental, social, and public good outcomes. Therefore, innovation should create value for society. There will be, he argued, a number of key changes coming down the line. Firstly, there will be a big management revolution. Google are at the forefront of this management revolution for having dramatically reconfigured how they internally manage their staff. Also, the nature of innovation is changing. It is now

multi-partner in approach. In this context, the role of universities is also changing. We need to look at how to mobilise intellectual property in Universities to stimulate economic innovation in particular places. Furthermore, he suggested, we need to change how we educate our students.

Dr Cunningham talked about the importance of drawing out the creative links between universities and industry, in stimulating the growth and development of the creative industries, and in making our cities and towns liveable places.

In terms of 'doing more with less', he suggested that when international companies look to where to put their R&D functions, they look at many different factors including economic and social factors and government attitude towards business.

In terms of thoughts on government, he posed the question as to who is thinking of the big issues. Are we thinking ahead of the trends? Do we have the appropriate configuration between the public and private sectors? He suggested that we need to restructure how we deliver our public services. With high emigration, we also need to ensure where the future workforce are going to come from. He argued that we will need a fundamental and systematic change in how we support and understand innovation and our public infrastructure. This, he argued, will require persuasion, passion, and persistence.

For a further insight into Dr Cunningham's thoughts on addressing the challenges in building an adaptive and innovative society, see [ICLRD Briefing Paper 8, *Innovation: The Challenge of Building an Adaptive and Innovative Society*](#).

A Social Perspective



**Dr Patricia O'Hara,
Chairperson, National
Statistics Board and
former Policy Manager,
Western Development
Commission** [\[Audio\]](#)

Dr O'Hara began her talk noting that much of the discourse around the recession and recovery has been couched within a set of economic debates. As such, in her closing comments she wished to look at the main themes that came out of the conference with particular regard for their implications on the social context.

What happened and why it happened. Dr O'Hara suggested that there seemed to be generally a consensus around the explanation that there were failures in banking, regulation and planning. There was also a questioning of democracy and even acknowledgement that democracy at the local level actually propelled some of the problems. Furthermore, there was a general acceptance that what drove the era of excessive growth and development was an emphasis on profit over people. Particularly pertinent, she believed, was the relationship alluded to by Prof Lloyd between the state, market, and civil society.

Reactions and analysis. Dr O'Hara noted that we need a more nuanced political perspective on what actually went on. As someone who lived in the Upper Shannon area while all this was happening, she saw on a daily basis the often mundane practices through which these large, and ultimately catastrophic, changes took place. While this is often constructed as a large-scale event – encompassing large developers, banks, loans, and tax incentives – there were also small

developers on the ground who welcomed any building in counties that suffered years of out-migration. This worked itself out in terms of local systems of politics – where land was zoned, where development occurred, how pressure was put on politicians – in a way that folded into the larger narrative. The story of the local, social, and political dimension of the recession has not yet been told, nor its complexity acknowledged.

The response to the global financial crisis – and how it plays out locally – is also complex. In terms of the reactions and analysis, she suggested that the first thing that came out of the conference was a palpable sense of anger, which seems to be directed at the banks and the political systems that failed to regulate them, but also she felt there was a sense of anger at the local level about the failure of the state to recognise the future for their children, anger at their own failure to foresee this and plan for it.

Reform. Dr O'Hara noted that reform needs to occur at the political level in terms of how democracy functions, but also at the structural level in terms of how government and governance functions. Another point that emerged as critical was why, after some years of wealth generation, both North and South, we still do not have efficient public services. While we made key investments in infrastructure, we did not aim to create sustainable and equitable health and education systems. She also proposed that there are problems with the local government system. While we clearly need to retain local councils, we need to reform them structurally and in terms of the skill base of the people within them. There is a growing need to connect inputs to outputs. There is a need for more and better data and congruence between

North and South – in as much as possible. She praised the work of both the ICLRD and NIRSA in bringing this agenda forward. Additionally, while there was a lot of talk about bottom-up processes, this has not been concretely followed through. She suggested that we need to be more specific in how we do this.

Emerging Big Ideas. One shocking realisation that emerged over the course of the conference was that we came to consider houses primarily as investments rather than homes. During the Celtic Tiger this became so normalised that ordinary people began to talk about their investment portfolios. Dr O'Hara argued that we need to pay more attention to this shift in thinking. In the short-term, this should involve dealing with the very obvious mismatch between supply and demand, particularly in terms of addressing issues of social equality through housing. In the longer-term, this will involve more difficult choices relating to the right houses in the right places, and to what extent we as a society should respect people's preferences for how and where they want to live. Very clearly, this cannot be decided by economic means alone.

Another important point that emerged during the course of the conference was the need to respect the voluntary sector, and work with them. The issue of inequality of space and the concept of appropriate living models for different stages in the life cycle will need to be addressed in the future. Dr O'Hara noted that she was really heartened by the presentation by Dr McDarby, and suggested we continue to think in these

terms. She concluded by highlighting that the one thing that unites people is thinking about the future of their children; this encompasses a range of issues and will be key to reformulating how we envision, plan for and create our future.

Q&A [Audio](#)

Prof Rob Kitchin asked about the potential of merging local authorities to help to roll out a shared services agenda. Because of the political and cultural dimensions of county divisions, he noted that we have been reluctant to have this debate. Dr O'Hara agreed that there was a lot of scope for the merging of councils and/or services but that any such move would need to be undertaken in a very sensitive way, largely because county identity is the primary 'place attachment' in Ireland. Contributing to the debate, Mr McDonald suggested that local taxation might be a way to change some of these perspectives.

A discussion was raised about the role of the media in portraying the crisis. Concern was expressed that negative media portrayals would damage Ireland's chances of recovery. Mr McDonald responded that the role and responsibility of journalists is to report the news as it happens, good or bad, and the adverse of this situation is one of censorship.

Regarding Dr O'Hara's intervention on dealing with inequalities of space, Mr Driscoll commented that there are good examples of how affordable housing can be developed to allow the elderly to stay within their community and free up housing stock for new households.

CLOSE OF CONFERENCE



**Dr Tim O'Connor,
Business Consultant &
former Secretary-
General to President
McAleese's Office**

[|Audio|](#)

In his closing comments, Dr O'Connor focussed on three points. Firstly, he suggested that we clearly have huge problems, and it is important not to minimise these. But we should not forget that we are on a human journey – and that hope for the future is a profound requirement for this journey. He emphasised that the island of Ireland has advantages in that it is small and nimble, and therefore can make changes quickly.

In terms of hidden investment potential, there is a huge infrastructure already present. He emphasised that the leadership of a lot of multinationals – such as British Airways and QUANTAS – is Irish. These people are secret weapons, wearing both the hats of Ireland and the companies they work for. This is a crucial new asset that wasn't here previously and has helped breed a whole new spirit of entrepreneurialism across the island.

Dr O'Connor also emphasised the importance of the new Irish who have come to Ireland. In addition, the Irish Diaspora form a key resource that we need to take more seriously. Our arts and

culture are also of international importance; this is one asset base that really puts Ireland 'on the map'. He recommended that any Irish company going out into the world to market themselves should have ties to the arts.

He continued to highlight the need to harness the many strengths of the island. The Peace Process has helped to break down the cross-border and cross-community barriers, and he argued that we should drive progress through the diversity and potentials that this encompasses. He highlighted the vision and energy of the Derry/Londonderry European Capital of Culture 2013 campaign, and the opportunities emerging from this.

Drawing on WB Yeats, in his reimagining of what Ireland meant, he suggested that the mood at this conference has been very much about reimagining what Ireland means at this point in time, and what it will mean in the future. Dr O'Connor shared his belief that everyone attending the conference was displaying leadership. He thanked the ICLRD and all its partners for their work in continuing to break down these walls, and pushing the boundaries of what is possible across the island of Ireland. He finished by quoting Yeats, suggesting that "Too long a sacrifice makes a stone in the heart" and it is time to melt some hearts.

CONFERENCE PHOTOS







Our ICLRD annual gatherings are growing in reputation and are now considered as leading forums for debate, networking and cross-learning on the themes of inter-jurisdictional collaboration in spatial planning and local and regional development.

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Full presentations (power point and audio files) from this conference as well as previous conferences are available as embedded files within this report and on the ICLRD website.

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