

THE SPATIAL PLANNING MODEL: BALANCING PRIVATE SECTOR INTERESTS WITH THE 'COMMON GOOD'



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Spatial planning is very clearly an idea of its time: it has proven to be influential in a number of different ways on the various debates and processes concerned with the reform and modernisation of statutory land use planning systems across Europe (Healey, 2004; Haughton et al, 2009). Spatial planning emphasises the importance of cohesion, connectivity, civil engagement and delivery in public policy, and the pivotal role of infrastructure is once again centre stage for a host of strategic planning issues – economic, social and environmental. Spatial planning is essentially an ongoing process; it is not based on the more traditional concepts of blueprint planning (European Commission, 1999).

Such considerations are becoming evident in the reviews of the statutory land use planning and spatial planning arrangements taking place across the island of Ireland. Whilst these may not be taking place in the same form or indeed at the same pace, they suggest that our understanding of the spatial planning model is continuing to evolve through the 2002 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and 1999 National Development Plan in the Republic of Ireland and the 2001 Regional Development Strategy (RDS) in Northern Ireland. While these represent separate spatial planning infrastructures, there is an emerging interest in facilitating a spatial development context for the island of Ireland to secure functional efficiency gains in infrastructure and public policy priorities (International Centre for Local and Regional

Development, 2006). Such iteration and ongoing critical reflection is endemic to the spatial planning project. In the Netherlands, for example, which has been long held as an early champion of spatial planning practice, reforms have continued to be invoked in order to ensure greater policy consistency and demonstrate an evident sensitivity to the basic management of the land resource (Janssen-Jansen, 2007). Spatial planning may then be seen as a dynamic form of intervention to serve what is held to be the public interest in defined territories. That is no mean feat given the complex of vested interests associated with the use and development of land in Ireland as a whole.

In particular, spatial planning thinking has influenced the design and adoption of broader strategic planning frameworks for guiding the management of change across wider territorial spaces (Davoudi & Strange, 2008). In Scotland, for example, the introduction of a National Planning Framework (*see figure 1*) as a pivot in the redesigned land use planning regulatory system presents a strategic context against which local decisions can be made (Peel & Lloyd, 2007a). Significantly, the attention to larger-scale territorial domains has served to recast the traditional and inherited perspective of the statutory land use planning system which is relatively more site-specific in its focus. As demonstrated by the respective spatial plans produced, this has broadened the territorial canvas of local land use planning decision-making by seeking to facilitate greater connectivity between spaces and places and, where appropriate, by inviting deliberate discussions around integration and cross-border relations. Again in Scotland, and mimicking the interest in England, the interest in city-regions reflects an interest in devising more appropriate forms of space management (Lloyd & Peel, 2006). In effect, spatial planning can provide for a more sensitive strategic context to land use planning.



Yet the ideas, processes and administrative arrangements associated with spatial planning are not uncontested. In England, for example, in the run up to the 2010 general election, the Conservative Party published a policy paper on spatial planning which argued that the spatial planning system in England was 'broken'. The critique suggested that spatial planning imposes too many 'one size fits all' rules on various localities and developments. It also asserted that spatial planning did not allow community-led solutions to address the tensions between development and conservation. It advocated more active civic engagement and collaborative democracy to balance economic development with quality of life agendas. Whilst proposing the potential of a national contextual framework for planning priorities, and policy frameworks within which local communities can produce distinctive local policies, the paper promoted a more active localism in planning matters and a re-balancing of power to local communities.

Against these various dimensions, this paper explores the spirit and purposes of spatial planning in order to understand the balance of public and private interests involved. The methodology of the paper rests on a literature review, a survey of spatial planning practices in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and includes an advocacy element. The latter explores a position that considers that contemporary economic, social and environmental conditions are so deleterious to the broader notion of the public interest that there is a case to rethink our approach to planning and intervention. This line of reasoning is influenced by the philosophical arguments put forward by Judt (2010) that circumstances are such that the old ways of doing things are no longer appropriate. The paper is also influenced by the work of Ormerod (2005) who argues that the measures and instruments of state intervention tend to parrot market processes and business arrangements which have failed and created the problems in the first place. This would support the argument that we need to critically reflect on where we are, where we might be going, and to rethink the nature of state-market-civil relations. That does not suggest the paper

surrenders to the prevailing *zeitgeist* that society as a whole is broken, but it does argue that we need to re-craft the regulatory framework to secure the public interest in spaces and places, and particularly so in the context of the island of Ireland.

Planning interests?

The concept of the public interest is bound up with the prevailing and inherited cultures in a given society, with the mediation and expression of power, of the construction of knowledge, of ideology and political thinking, of property rights, and of rules of law – all of which then make it difficult to pin down exact definitions of the concept. Society's version of the public interest is constrained by its form of democracy and its relationship with free market capitalism, the articulation and protection of private property rights, and its expression in representative and participative forms of government and governance (Dunn, 2005). This is no easy task. Context, time, and place as well as the positions of different politics will influence whatever is socially constructed as the collective representation of well-being.

As Campbell and Marshall (2002) suggest, however, the public interest can be distilled in different ways: through political processes and assumptions of rational deliberation, or through liberal governmental forms with a greater sensitivity to the diversity of pluralist societies with associated open and transparent checks and balances. All this makes the concept of the public interest highly elusive, and specifically so for spatial planning, which is essentially engaged with the strategic mediation and reconciliation of different interests in different places, at different scales and at different times. The diverse constituencies involved in spatial planning and development relationships are highly fluid. This then makes the public interest a real challenge for spatial planning at a time when the wider contextual conditions and competing social, economic and environmental agendas are so complex.

Context is, as ever, all important in considering the what, why and how of spatial planning and the



ways in which it seeks to facilitate the wider public interest. Here it is important to reflect that the immediate operational context for spatial planning in the UK and Ireland is that of private property rights and interests, of the motivations and behaviours of landowners, developers and builders; of speculative land and property developments, and of specific purposes for the administration of land use planning regulations and infrastructure provision. Evidence would confirm this to very much be the case in Ireland (McDonald and Sheridan, 2008; O'Toole, 2009). Adopting a regulationalist perspective which explores a structural political economy context to planning, Prior (2005), for example, argues that a failure to fully locate spatial planning in the systems of power and influence in modern societies can inhibit any attempts to reform and implement those planning systems. Seeking to serve a public interest within a powerful hegemony and mindset of private rights and interests in land is not an easy task.

This may then explain the observation that land use planners increasingly view the public interest as an abstraction (Grant, 2005). In effect, it is too difficult and elusive a concept to understand, explain and propagate. Further, this could suggest that the rational response in such circumstances is for the planning system to revert to a relatively more mundane focus on public administration, process and problem-solving. The characteristics of the new economy – based on short termism, expediency, claims to potential ability rather than demonstrated achievement, and a willingness to discount or abandon past experience – have led to what has been described as an enfeebled culture (Sennett, 2006). Over and above these features, the modern economy is highly spatially differentiated in economic, social, institutional and environmental terms. Uneven economic activity and institutional engagement characterise modern space. Seeking to reconcile these is now acknowledged to be a necessary pre-requisite for effective governance. In a report to the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), for example, Wong et al (2000) point to the urgency of unifying spatial planning arrangements in the UK, thereby enabling more effective spatial planning

at a national scale as a consequence of devolution and the uneven geography of land and property development pressures. Lying behind this concern is the issue of infrastructure to support that land and property development.

No wonder the public interest notion in land use planning and spatial planning is confused. Both statutory land use planning and spatial planning are always looking over their shoulders, or glancing furtively sideways to anticipate any disruptions, and both are certainly moving backwards rather than 'planning forward' as intended (Lloyd, 2006). This is particularly important when the role of infrastructure relative to land and property development and land use planning is considered. Indeed, central to adopting the longer-term thinking which is foundational to spatial planning is the role of the strategic and local infrastructure in supporting appropriate land and property development which serves the public interest. Yet spatial planning is not able to look forward, as suggested by its ambitions, while society remains confused about the concept of a public interest, and cannot devise what it should actually comprise in practice.

In the beginning?

In modern economies the use and development of land is critical to securing economic growth and development, well served and sustainable communities, appropriate investment in transport and other facilities, and in enabling an appropriate quality of life. Arguably, and notwithstanding the fundamental importance of land to societies, its wider community value as a basic factor of production has either been ignored, under-valued or misunderstood over time. In short, as market economic relations have penetrated wider aspects of society and polity, so land has been increasingly commodified or marketised. It is essentially exploited for its natural resource or its location, or used for its speculative value (highest and best use) rather than reflecting its more fundamental social and community value. Anthropocentric accounts of land discovery and settlement highlight the concept



of stewardship at centre stage in resolving the land question (Massey & Catalano, 1978). For the purposes of this paper it is possible to identify two countervailing and parallel processes and agendas taking shape.

On the one hand, the role of land and property development in the economic growth bubble experienced throughout the 2000s was perhaps unprecedented. It was a driver and vehicle for economic growth and development, and was itself driven by the economic activity and financial investment associated with it. The result was extensive land and property development in all sectors across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and beyond (Adair et al, 2009). Such levels of property development have proven to be disadvantageous in social, economic, political and environmental terms in certain localities (McDonald & Sheridan, 2008). This would suggest that both the statutory land use planning regulatory and spatial planning arrangements lacked a strategic perspective. Spatial planning frameworks in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were unable to establish a more orderly scalar and temporal perspective on the developments being driven by the markets. This raises questions as to the strategic capacity of spatial planning.

On the other hand, there would appear to be a growing awareness of the wider societal and community dimension in which private land and property development takes place. This is layered and could be seen as an idea which is still at an immature stage in its articulation. There is an emerging interest, for example, in the challenge of climate change, casting the use and development of land onto a wider and more sensitive environmental canvas. Here, research into the economics of climate change and the degree of environmental vulnerability has acknowledged the importance of the basic land and environmental resource, and the need to put appropriate societal measures in place to manage it in the public interest (Stern 2006). Indeed, this argument advocates the innovative use of spatial planning in exploring the deployment of more

appropriate energy technologies in development schemes, and in promoting greater efficiencies through the strategic coordination and integration of land use planning and infrastructure investment and provision so as to reduce long-run transport demand.

The reality of environmental vulnerability was illustrated by the extreme flooding which took place in northern England in 2007 and in Fermanagh and Cork City in 2009. In England the independent Pitt Review (2008) reported that some 55,000 properties were flooded, around 7,000 people were rescued by the emergency services and 13 people died. This represented the largest loss of essential services since World War II, resulting in half a million people without mains water or electricity. Transport networks failed, a dam breach was narrowly averted and emergency facilities were put out of action. The costs involved were significant: the insurance industry, for example, was faced with a liability of £3 billion and other substantial costs were met by central government, local public bodies, businesses and private individuals.

The Pitt Review reprised and affirmed the Stern advocacy of the need for active intervention and spatial planning, and the deliberate incorporation of mitigation and adaptation measures into planning for climate change. Similar thinking in Northern Ireland showed the need for civil engagement in the arrangements to address flooding risks (Flooding Taskforce, 2010). This advocacy raises questions as to whether spatial planning can achieve these expectations.

Evidence that a change may be taking place in the ways in which society views land and the environment continue to emerge. The Foresight Land Use Futures Group (2010), for example, has drawn critical attention to the importance of land as a key asset in the societal collective well-being of England. It argues that pervasive effects of changes in land use and its management underline the need to take the broadest possible perspective in developing future policies and strategies on land. In particular, the study argues the need to promote an



understanding of the appropriate governance of land at different scales, of which land use planning is but one element.

In particular, in rethinking the appropriate governance for land, attention is drawn to decision-making taking place at different scales, whilst factoring in the complex external benefits and costs as metrics in overall social welfare. It suggests there is a need to reconcile market mechanisms and state regulation, whilst respecting a legacy of historical priorities for land use and development. In short, it argues that the regulatory, management, governance and planning of the land resource must respond to the new economic, social and demographic, environmental and institutional pressures prevailing, whilst addressing new and future aspirations and priorities in land and property development.

Intrinsic to these ambitions is the notion of a socially acceptable balance between development and environment, between urban and rural, and, in effect, between now and then. This invokes the contemporary debates around sustainable development, which seeks to reconcile economic, social and environment needs and expectations with an appropriate balance between the needs of the economy and the environment which reflects wider agendas around social justice and what is construed as the public interest.

In practice, however, and notwithstanding the political and institutional momentum associated with the promotion of sustainable development, there remains no real consensus on the societal goals that would serve to count as effective sustainable development in practice (Hales, 2000; Connelly, 2007). There is the danger that the very real



challenges of sustainable development are reduced to relying on more established and conventional practices associated with planning, redevelopment and regeneration which themselves often involve private sector stakeholders, interests and values (Bunce, 2009). Lying behind these concerns and issues is the matter of purpose. What is the public interest? And can spatial planning deliver this public interest?'

Variiegated interventions

In responding to the complex notions and understandings of the role of the land resource in modern societies, attention needs to be paid to the appropriate forms of governance involved. At the outset, following McLoughlin (1969), for example, such complexity in concept and in the associated social constructions, legal paraphernalia and economic imperatives (to serve private interests) demands an equally complex (or sophisticated) form of governance and regulation to serve the public interest. It also requires an understanding of the reciprocal relations of change in economic, social and environmental conditions and institutional forms and capacities – specifically the differentiated effects of exogenous forces and the variegated nature of endogenous responses – as shown in earlier work on the relative performance of various localities in the face of change (Cooke, 1988). Caution is then required as this is a layered domain to consider.

Land, property and state intervention through land use planning – and by extension spatial planning – involves competing ideologies (McAuslan, 1981). These include a traditional common law approach to protect private property interests; an orthodox public administration approach to advance what is held to be (and competed over as) the public interest; and the relatively more 'populist' concept of public participation to enhance democracy in land and property development and its regulation, and to serve as a countervailing force against the other ideologies.

Whilst public participation is now a generally accepted component of land use planning, it has evolved markedly over time in response to changing

market and property development conditions (Campbell & Marshall, 2000). Now it involves an ever changing inter-working of the individual self interest, a sense of a collective well-being, and the promotion of choice depending on context, place and issue. These find expression in different ways: a dedicated protection of private space and property, advocacy of specific facilities to serve a neighbourhood or community, and resistance to particular developments which are perceived as antithetical to the well-being of a locality, such as pylons or mobile telephony infrastructure. Spatial planning, by definition, covers wider territories with a more complex composite constituencies and interest, and it follows that this will involve even more competing ideologies.

Spatial planning has been described as going

beyond traditional land use planning to bring together and integrate policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they can function. That will include policies which can impact on land use, for example, by influencing the demands on or needs for development, but which are not capable of being delivered solely or mainly through the granting or refusal of planning permission and which may be implemented by other means (Dept. of Communities and Local Government, 2006, pp. 12-13).

Yet spatial planning has evolved from, built on and innovated from the longer established land use planning traditions in different nation states. To understand the full significance of the spatial planning approach thus requires an appreciation of land use planning, and the variegated ways in which land use planning has itself responded and adapted to uncertainty and economic, social and environmental change. This can provide a better insight into the different social constructions of, and the appropriate balance between, private interests and the wider public interest in the broad realm of planning and development.

Figure 1: The National Planning Framework in Scotland

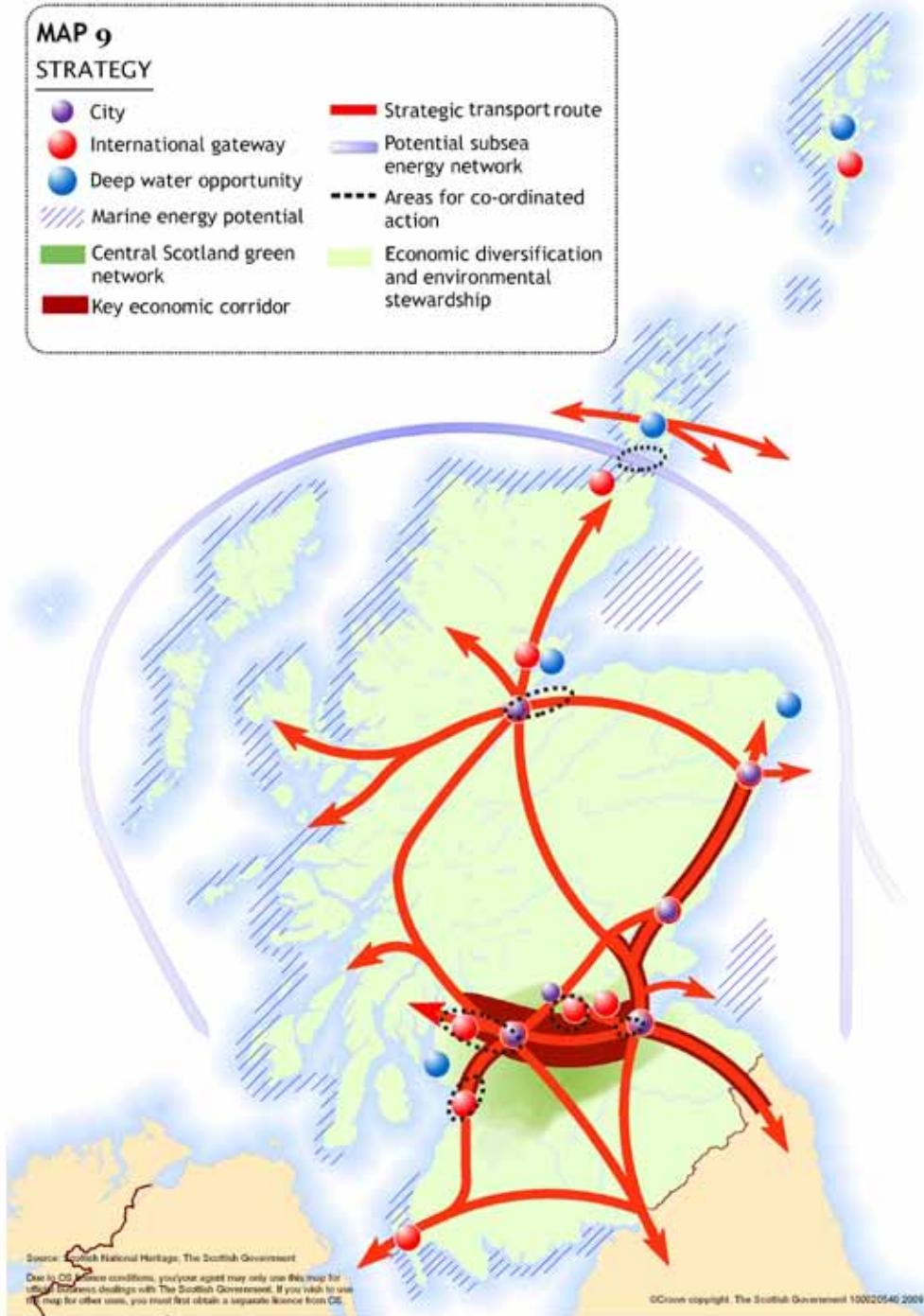


Image taken from NPF2 (2009). Produced by Scottish Government and data taken from Scottish Natural Heritage.



Essentially, spatial planning is seeking to create a much deeper, broader and longer-term perspective of public policy design and implementation within which the statutory land use planning system plays a core function. There is a rich psychological stratum to spatial planning, which is evident by the referencing of the pre-requisite of deliberate culture change to effect spatial planning practices.

In Scotland, for example, this was identified as a necessary change in the way in which society perceives and articulates the value and purpose of planning as a social activity to facilitate reform (Scottish Executive, 2005). This is no easy task; yet research from Scotland shows that a concerted effort to engage key stakeholders in the process of spatial planning can bring deeper understandings of its role at times of uncertainty (Peel & Lloyd, 2007b). In England, whilst the notion of culture change in spatial planning has been described as 'fuzzy' (Shaw, 2006), an assertion of the need for a fundamental re-thinking of the role of planning in modern society remains a powerful 'call to arms' at a time of considerable uncertainty. This nurturing of the spatial planning concept takes time, energy and investment.

Conclusions: the new challenges

Spatial planning offers considerable potential to provide a strategic framework for public policy implementation at large; for establishing appropriate priorities; for enabling more effective statutory land use planning, including zoning of land use and development; and for securing a more effective infrastructure. In Ireland, whilst spatial planning is still emerging on either side of the border, there is the potential to secure more integrated arrangements for promoting cohesion, connectivity and delivery across the island.

In England, a report for the National Planning Forum (Morphet et al, 2008) argued that the new planning legislation and policy there was creating a new kind of planning, and asserted that planners, and all those involved in planning, need to be ready to change to ensure that this new system works effectively. This would involve all interests in land

use planning and development learning new skills and doing things differently. The National Planning Forum (2009) subsequently asserted that there is a prima facie case for investing in the development of strong, positive, medium and long-term spatial plans and delivery strategies. In part, this approach seeks to promote a greater understanding of the role of spatial planning, and to secure greater civil and political legitimacy in the role of planning in a modern and uncertain society.

The priorities for a 'fit for purpose' spatial planning infrastructure are held to be five-fold (National Planning Forum, 2009). First, it should establish a sound strategy with a clear emphasis on integrated arrangements and working. Examples include joining-up national policy statements; developing consistent planning arrangements across regeneration, environment, housing, transport and the economy; and longer-term planning for investment in infrastructure. Second, it advocates securing quality in planning to enable environmental sensitivity and sustainable communities with a sense of people and place. Third, it seeks to achieve greater effectiveness through investment in training for elected representatives and other decision-makers, enhancing skills, and community engagement with attention to appropriate process and decision-making and resourcing. Fourth, it seeks to secure delivery through promoting a deliberate focus on the purpose of spatial planning, and in making sure that things do take place on the ground. Finally, it envisages greater stability in allowing the reforms in place to take effect and to encourage critical reflection on lessons learned.

The potential of spatial planning could be enhanced by a rethinking of prevailing state-market-civil relations around the ideas associated with institutionalism. Here the arguments of the new institutional economics seek to adapt and reframe conventional understandings of regulation on land use and development (Buitelaar, Lagendijk & Jacobs, 2007). This does not represent a rejection of the traditional regulatory forms (associated with statutory land use planning), but is a recasting of the



mix of measures which are intended to address the particular spillover issues involved (Elsner, 2005). Here, the new forms of planning interventions which are being devised, combining legal, fiscal and economic incentives to promote the public interest, are challenging the institutional congestion that tends to prevail (Pemberton & Lloyd, 2008), and could provide new ways forward to spatial planning across wider territories. The use of contracts and agreements, for example, could prove to be very effective in reconciling diverse and complex interest across space.

At the same time, reflecting a new understanding that land, natural resources and the environment are under threat, and allied to which are the implications of this for economic well-being and social cohesion, there is considerable support for spatial planning. It really is an idea of its time. This is particularly so given the linking of 'green' fiscal intervention as a means of securing economic recovery, the climate proofing of economic measures, and ensuring that any infrastructure investment must not be permitted to exacerbate the current position by subsidising greenhouse gas emissions or locking in a high carbon infrastructure (Bowen et al, 2009). Spatial planning would have a key role to play in sustaining this potential positive complementarity of environment and economy.

Yet spatial planning is beset with many challenges. These remain fundamental to the wider appreciation of its role in the modern world. First, there is a contested understanding of the role of spatial planning, as evidenced by the continuing arguments associated with free market 'think tanks'. Their role in modern policy-making and governance is becoming more evident, and their contributions to policy ideas more acute as the broader political environment becomes increasingly uncertain and contested (Rich, 2004). Think tanks, of whatever ideological hue, can provide influential ideas to influence policy innovation and implementation, and can challenge established political priorities (Cockett, 1995).

In the context of land use planning, for example, critical positions have been generally asserted from a free market position based on the view of land use planning as a 'government failure'. This is held to result in a catalogue of social, economic and environmental costs such as smaller development plots, higher densities and the imposition of wider costs on land and property development (Evans & Hartwich, 2005). This contestation of the role of spatial planning further confounds and inhibits its potential to address the issues facing society.

Second, there are concerns around the capacity of spatial planning to deliver in terms of the funding of the planning resource itself and the numbers of staff and the skills required at a time of considerable expectation, change and uncertainty (Communities and Local Government Committee, 2008). This may involve an uneven geography of regulation which may lead to further inconsistencies in spatial planning (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, 2009) and potentially negative effects on development and investment (Killian Pretty Review, 2008). Similar concerns have been raised in Northern Ireland, for example, with respect to the preparation time associated with Planning Policy Statements (PPSs); the incomplete coverage of development plans, and development management targets which have not been met, suggesting a performance below that achieved six years ago (Comptroller & Auditor General for Northern Ireland, 2009). This would itself suggest a need to rethink the nature of the land use planning and spatial planning systems.

Thus whilst spatial planning represents a new way of thinking about interventions to serve the public interest in land use and development, and has the potential to contribute to economic recovery through integrated working across sectors (and in Ireland across borders) through effective and appropriate infrastructure investment and provision, it is bedevilled by questions of culture, understanding and capacity. Arguably, these have characterised the relatively longer established land use planning

Figure 2: The Regional Development Strategy (NI) and the National Spatial Strategy (RoI) in the northern part of Ireland



This image was used on page 20 of the 'Adjustments to the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2005' document, published by DRDNI in June 2008.

and zoning systems in the UK and Ireland and they remain unresolved.

It is clear, for example, that the spirit and purpose of spatial planning remains relatively marginalised within political debates. In practice there is only a very limited discussion of the role of spatial planning in the media. There does not appear to be a deep political awareness of the role that spatial planning can fulfil with respect to ensuring long term development and infrastructure to meet the complex economic, demographic and environmental changes which are already in train. In effect there remains a relatively limited understanding of and engagement with spatial planning in a wider public interest. There is a paradox here, as whilst there may be an evident spatial planning framework in place, this may simply be an instrumental device which does not realise its transformative potential. This point is of significance in the Irish context.

On the island of Ireland, there are two different jurisdictional planning arrangements. Lying behind

these there are different planning cultures and development experiences, institutional structures, processes and capacities. Reflecting this – and indicative of the divide – there are two spatial planning traditions in place: the National Spatial Strategy in the Republic of Ireland and the Regional Development Strategy in Northern Ireland. Both these spatial planning arrangements are currently in the process of being reviewed. Each represents a different social construction of spatial planning practice. The National Spatial Strategy in Ireland, for example, has the feel of mainland European approaches to spatial planning, whilst in Northern Ireland there is a distinct essence of more traditional regional planning and development associated with the UK. Both spatial planning frameworks have different relationships with their funding and public infrastructure investment strategies (Counsell and Lloyd, 2009).

In the Republic of Ireland recent economic changes have triggered concerns about the effectiveness of spatial planning in policy implementation



and decision-making around land and property development, both at a strategic and local levels (Bartley, 2007). Indeed, it has been suggested that this represented a laissez faire form of planning which has resulted in a hugely destabilising over-supply of housing (Kitchen et al, 2010). In Northern Ireland, the reform of the statutory land use planning system is progressing in tandem with the separate review of the regional spatial planning strategy (Morrison, 2009). This suggests that whilst there are spatial planning arrangements in place (see Figure 2), there remain gaps, and this points to different capacities for implementation of spatial development across the island of Ireland, and highlights a deficit with respect to any reconciliation of the spatial planning agendas.

Thus there are both general and specific challenges for spatial planning on the island of Ireland. Attention must be paid to addressing these internal deficits, and to exploring the potential for a more integrated and connected spatial planning framework for Ireland as a whole in order to realise the benefits of greater cohesiveness in addressing common issues around economic development, strategic infrastructure provision, effective public policy delivery, community well-being and civil engagement, and the whole environmental agenda. Much remains to be done to use spatial planning in Ireland as a transformative process rather than an instrumental device.

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