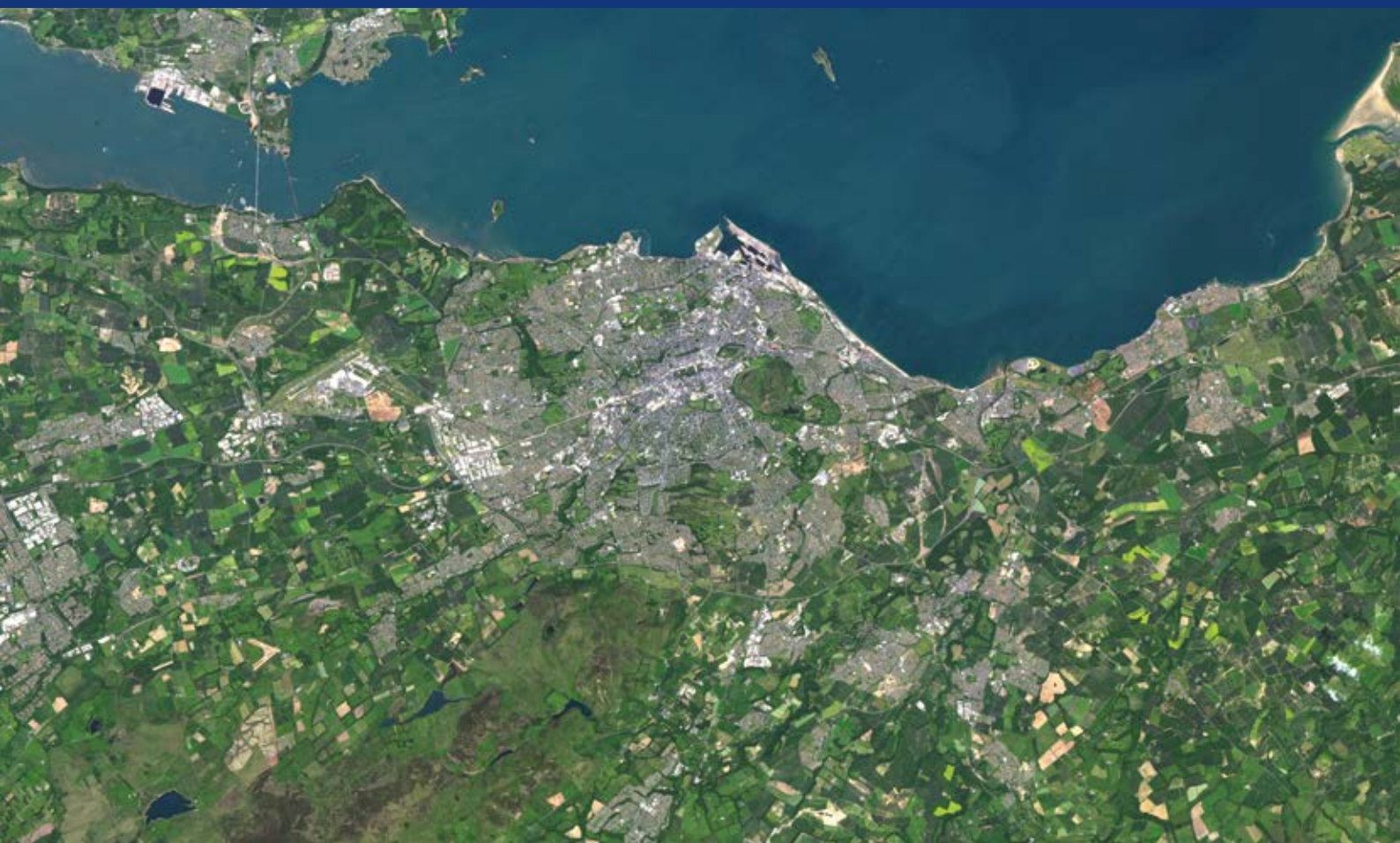




UNIVERSITY OF  
LIVERPOOL

Heseltine Institute for Public  
Policy, Practice and Place



# ‘National’ Spatial Strategies in an Age of Inequality

## *Insights from the United Kingdom, Ireland and France*

### **Edited and introduced by:**

Mark Boyle (*University of Liverpool*)

Aileen Jones (*Liverpool City-Region Combined Authority*)

Olivier Sykes (*University of Liverpool*)

Ian Wray (*University of Liverpool*)

### **With articles by:**

Neil Harris (*Cardiff University*) on *Planning Wales Spatially*

Xavier Desjardins (*Sorbonne Université*) on *Planning France Spatially*

Brendan Murtagh (*Queen's University Belfast*) on *Planning Northern Ireland Spatially*

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### About the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place:

The Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place is a University of Liverpool research institute dedicated to bringing together academic expertise and policy makers in support of a new generation of public policy for successful cities and city-regions. This report has its origins in a Heseltine Institute sponsored event held on June 21st 2018 on National Spatial Strategies at the University of Liverpool as part of the Department of Geography and Planning’s Civic Design Conference. It also originates from a submission made on the basis of this conference to the Lord Kerslake UK2070 Commission on city and regional inequalities in the United Kingdom. The editors would like to thank contributors for presenting at this conference and submitting written versions of their papers for publication herein.


Further details about the Heseltine Institute can be obtained at:  
[www.liverpool.ac.uk/heseltine-institute](http://www.liverpool.ac.uk/heseltine-institute)



CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b> .....	5
<i>Lord Kerslake, Chair of the UK2070 Commission inquiry into city and regional inequalities in the United Kingdom.</i>	
<b>1. Introducing ‘National’ Spatial Strategies In An Age Of Inequality: Insights From The United Kingdom, Ireland And France</b> .....	6
<i>Mark Boyle University of Liverpool, Aileen Jones Liverpool City-Region Combined Authority, Olivier Sykes University of Liverpool, and Ian Wray University of Liverpool.</i>	
<b>2. The Evolution Of National-Level Planning In Wales: A Retrenchment From Spatial Planning To Land-Use Planning</b> .....	18
<i>Neil Harris Cardiff University</i>	
<b>3. National Spatial Planning In France: From Nostalgia To Reinvention?</b> .....	26
<i>Xavier Desjardins Sorbonne Université</i>	
<b>4. The Regional Development Strategy Northern Ireland, Inequality And Balanced Development</b> .....	34
<i>Brendan Murtagh Queen’s University Belfast</i>	
<b>5. National Strategic Planning In Scotland: Past, Present And Future</b> .....	44
<i>Greg Lloyd Ulster University and Wageningen University</i>	
<b>6. Project Ireland 2040: Business As Usual Or A New Dawn?</b> .....	50
<i>Niamh Moore-Cherry University College Dublin</i>	
<b>7. A New Agenda For England: The Missing Pieces In The Jigsaw</b> .....	58
<i>Vincent Goodstadt Common Futures Network and University of Manchester</i>	

FOREWORD



The persistent social and economic inequalities across the UK need to be challenged. This need is heightened by the political and economic uncertainties brought by Brexit and the global challenges of technological and climate change. This report by the University of Liverpool Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place, titled “National’ Spatial Strategies in an Age of Inequality’, is therefore very timely.

Cities and regions are increasingly taking ownership of their futures through the devolution agenda, yet deeper structural inequalities cannot be tackled by local action alone. National frameworks are needed, not least, given the lack of one for England and, more generally, because of the sectoral approach which is taken to policy.

In October 2018 I therefore launched the UK2070 Commission, an independent inquiry into city and regional inequalities in the UK. The UK2070 Commission not only aims to illuminate the nature of these inequalities but also to illustrate the potential value of national spatial frameworks, and to identify the range of policy interventions needed to address them, including governance and fiscal instruments. The UK2070 Commission will report its findings in November 2019.

This report profiles international practice and draws together valuable experience from Wales, France, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Ireland, and England. It identifies fifteen ‘lessons’ which in combination have implications for a potential new generation of national spatial planning in the UK and beyond.

This report was submitted initially as a response to the UK2070 Commission’s call for evidence. I am therefore delighted to see it now published as a Policy Report by the University of Liverpool Heseltine Institute. Gleaned from direct experience in the practice of national spatial planning, it will inform the considerations of the UK2070 Commission and of all those seeking more effective planning of development across the UK.

**Lord Kerslake**  
Chair of the UK2070 Commission

# PROJECT IRELAND 2040: BUSINESS AS USUAL OR A NEW DAWN?

Niamh Moore-Cherry, University College Dublin



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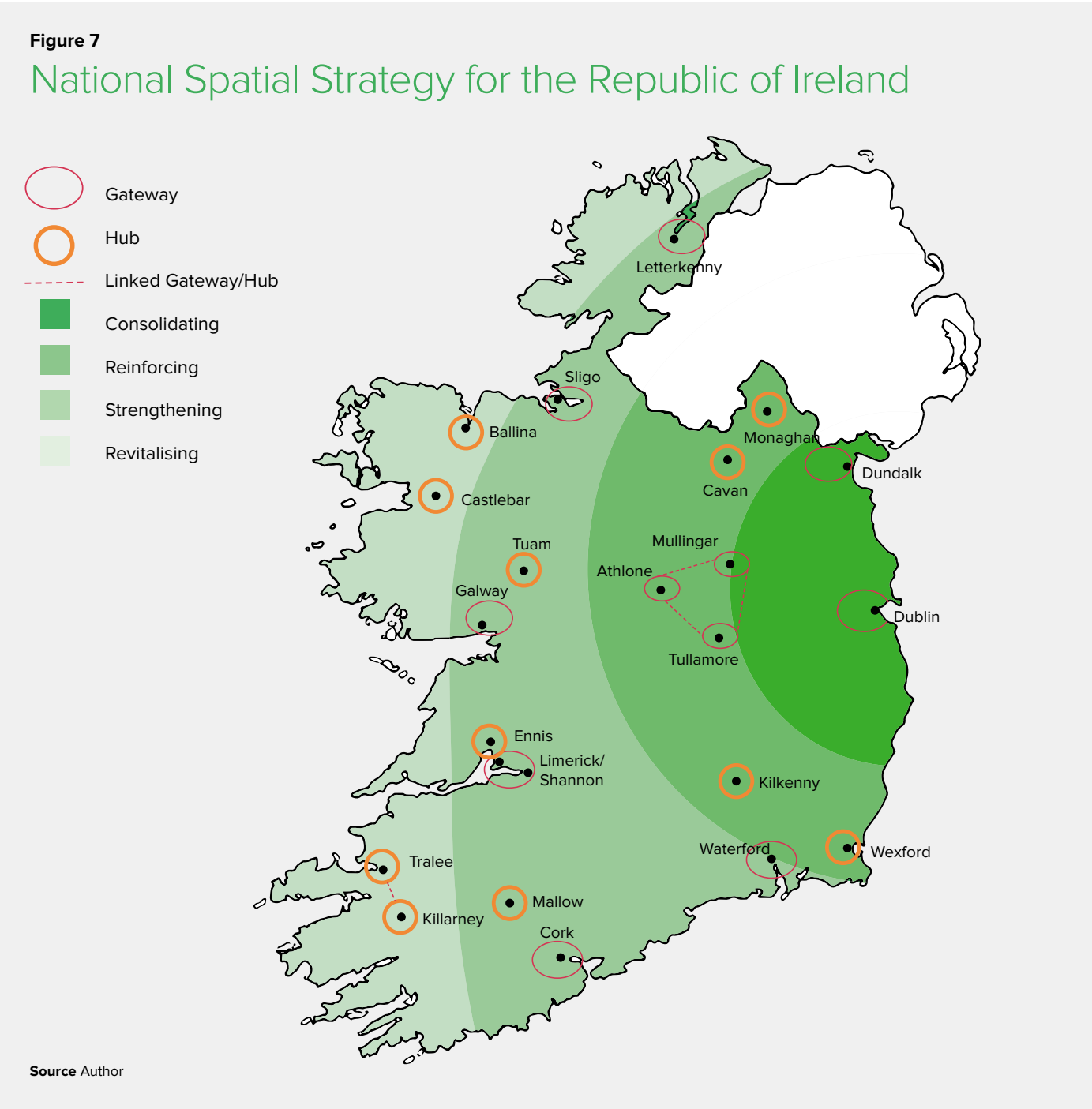
# PROJECT IRELAND 2040: BUSINESS AS USUAL OR A NEW DAWN?

## Abstract

The National Planning Framework published in February 2018 marks a new departure for planning in an Irish context. It is ambitious in scope and aims to integrate public policy horizontally and vertically across government departments and at multiple scales. The regional tier of government is empowered, and new regional policy tools in the form of the RSES and MASP have been introduced. For the first time capital investment is being closely aligned with spatial planning. Nonetheless, despite attempts at central government level to ‘de-politicise’ the policy development phase, implementation at the local level faces a number of significant challenges.

## Planning the Republic of Ireland Spatially

The publication of the National Spatial Strategy (2002-2020) was heralded as the first formal attempt at spatial planning in Ireland, but broader regional planning had been on the agenda for many decades since the publication of *Regional Studies in Ireland*, commonly known as the ‘Buchanan Report’ in 1969 which advocated a hierarchy of growth centres approach to regional development. Considered politically unpalatable, the report was reviewed by government but largely ignored and a policy of dispersal of economic activity was supported through the 1970s until the late 1990s. Arising out of a booming economy, a changed political environment in Northern Ireland, and heavily influenced by the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) published in 1999, government attention at the turn of the millennium turned to how to better balance spatial development across the island. Responding to a call in the *National Development Plan 2000-2006* for a spatial strategy, the NSS was published in 2002 and, in the spirit of Buchanan adopted a growth centre type approach. Nine gateway cities and towns were identified to act as key drivers of regional growth and a series of connected ‘hubs’ would connect to rural areas and ‘other towns’ (Figure 7). However the Decentralisation Programme for the Civil Service, announced in 2003, undermined the NSS at a very early stage. Decisions on locations for decentralisation were purely political and ignored to a significant extent the designated gateways and hubs. Although Regional Planning Guidelines were produced by the regional authorities in 2004 and revised in 2010 in the wake of the crash, to aid the translation of the NSS objectives to the local level, these were largely ineffective as they had no statutory basis. While some finance was put in place to support the NSS through the National Development Plan (2007-2013) and the Gateway Innovation Fund (2008), the recession, crisis, party politics and sectoral interests largely undermined implementation. Although not formally replaced until February 2018, the NSS as a guiding strategy for planning in Ireland was essentially abandoned when a scoping group for a successor plan was established in August 2013 and the eight regional authorities that had responsibility for translating the strategy were dissolved in June 2014.



*The Irish National Planning Framework*

Over the last fifteen years, Ireland has experienced an unprecedented economic boom that resulted in particular in the uncontrolled growth of Dublin into surrounding counties, followed by a dramatic downturn and crisis that resulted in extreme austerity (see Heffernan et al. 2018). This brought into sharp focus dramatic spatial and social divides across the country: economically as measured by unemployment for

example; socially in terms of access to housing and emigration, particularly from western seaboard counties; and physically in terms of abandoned unfinished developments and quality of life. One measure of the scale of divergence is population change and from 1991-2016 the mid-Eastern area (broadly defined as the counties surrounding Dublin) had almost doubled in population while in the same period the population of the northwest had shrunk to 67% of their 1991 values. Despite plans for a successor

to the National Spatial Strategy being mooted since 2014, the new National Planning Framework was only formally launched in February 2018. The premise of the new plan is that continuing to facilitate a 'Business as Usual' scenario in Ireland is not an option given growing regional divergence and projections that population will grow by approximately 1 million people up to 2040 and that 550,000 extra homes will be needed.

Unlike previous attempts at spatial or regional planning in Ireland, unprecedented emphasis was placed in the NPF process on creating opportunities for debate around the shape of the plan to build 'buy-in' and legitimacy ultimately for the implementation stage. During the consultation phase, public town-hall style meetings attended by the relevant Minister and senior officials were held across the regions, in third level institutions, and through stakeholder roundtable fora. Following 18 months of extensive consultation the new National Planning Framework was launched together with a National Investment Plan, as part of a wider public policy initiative entitled Project Ireland 2040. The purpose of the National Planning Framework is to enable strategic choices to be made about the future and to provide a general framework within which sectoral investment and other priorities can be decided upon. As its name suggests, rather than being entirely prescriptive the new document outlines the general principles and framework within which the entire planning system and investment decision-making will be realigned. The core concepts relate to achieving regional balance, optimising investment through concentration in a smaller number of growth centres, achieving compact growth within urban centres, and alignment with capital investment and infrastructure delivery. Critically, the regional scale is identified as being a crucial driver to achieve the range of national strategic objectives, which marks a significant shift in thinking.

One of the marked features of previous attempts at national scale planning in Ireland was the absence of meaningful power and institutions at the meso-scale. The National Planning Framework identifies the regional level as critical to mediate between the overarching principles of the national plan and the realities of implementation and alignment at the local level. In January 2015, three new regional assemblies were established (Figure 8) and each of them have now been tasked as a priority with developing Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES).

The RSES are required under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) to address employment, retail, housing, transport, water services, energy and communications, waste management, education, health, sports and community facilities, environment and heritage, landscape, sustainable development and climate change. Preparation of these plans commenced in October 2017 and each regional assembly produced an 'issues paper' outlining the business as usual approach and making the case for thinking more strategically to optimise the potential of the region. Evidence-based, they raise key questions about how the region will look in 2030 and how growth should be directed and managed. The plans went on public consultation until 16th February 2018, interim drafts were produced, with final publication in Spring 2019. For the first time, the RSES will require interaction with and between national sectoral plans and for the 5 cities

### Key plans and legislation related to Ireland

- European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). May 1999. Potsdam: European Commission.
- Colin Buchanan and Partners (1968) Regional Studies in Ireland. Dublin: An Foras Forbartha.
- National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 (2002). Dublin: Government Publications.
- National Planning Framework: Project Ireland 2040. (2018) Dublin: Government Publications.
- Urban Agenda of the EU (2016). Amsterdam: European Commission.

**Abbreviations**

MASP	Metropolitan Area Spatial Plan
NPF	National Planning Framework
NRDA	National Regeneration and Development Agency
NSS	National Spatial Strategy
RDS	Regional Development Strategy, Northern Ireland
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies

(Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford) Metropolitan Area Spatial Plans will also have to be developed.

Once the RSES and MASP process is complete, a process of alignment with city and county development plans, local economic and community plans and sectoral plans such as the NTA Transport Strategy for Dublin 2016-2035 and the Retail Strategy for Dublin will commence or recommence.

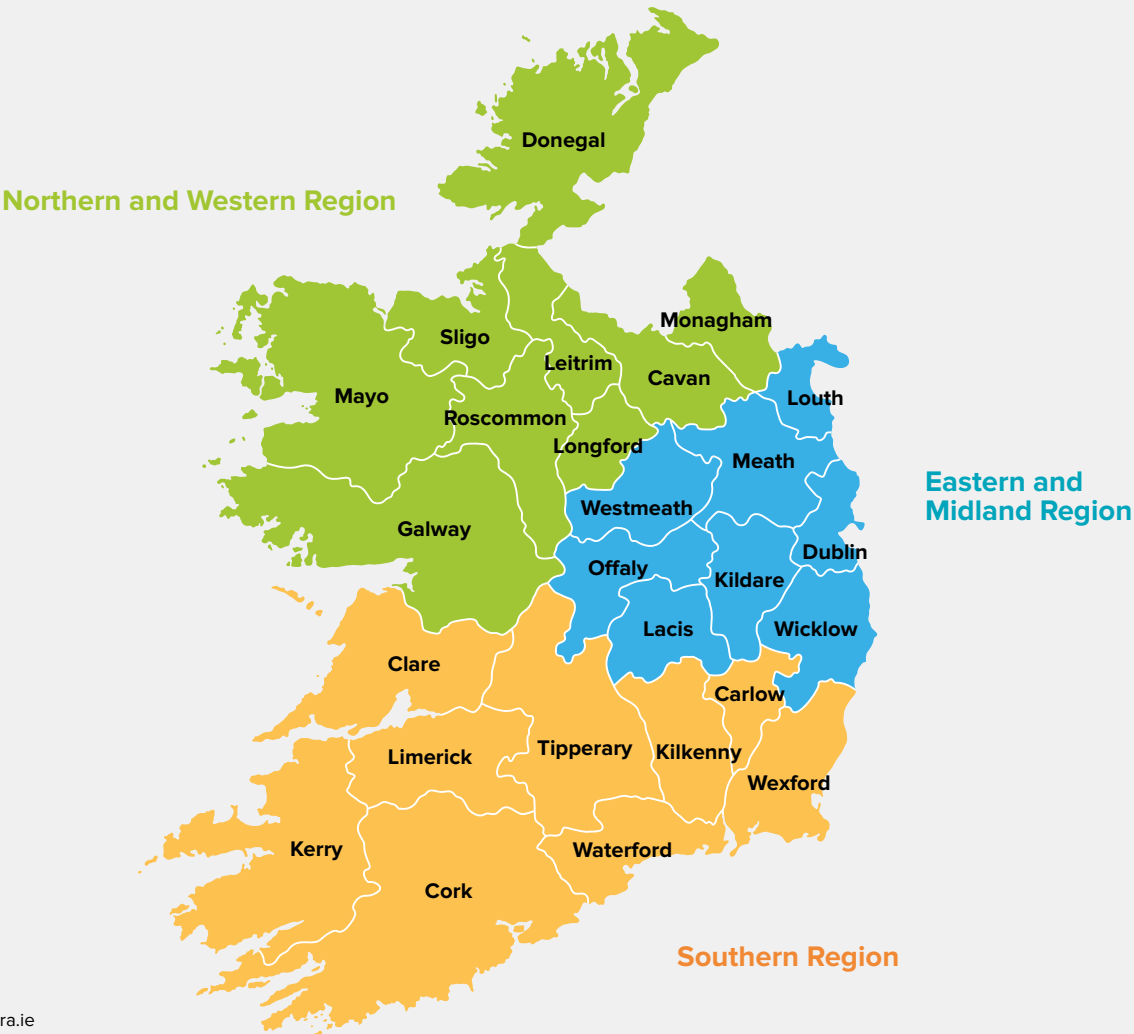
### Commentary: Efficacy and Key Issues

*The NPF in context*

The NPF is a significant departure from previous attempts at national planning through its emphasis on equitable growth, strengthened regional governance structures, statutory underpinning and its foregrounding of 'plan-led' development. Since its publication, significant attention has been placed from the highest level of government in the form of the Taoiseach (prime Minister) on raising public awareness of the plan and a mass marketing campaign was undertaken to ultimately prepare the ground for the strategic decision-making that will need to happen. Among policymakers, the emphasis has already shifted to how the new policy tools of the RSES and MASPs can operationalise the broad principles of the NPF at a local level and regional assemblies are working to tight deadlines for implementation. Given the current housing crisis and previous scandals around planning corruption, there is particular public and media interest in the new Office of Planning Regulator, provided for in the NPF as a new independent institution to provide oversight of all local and regional forward planning and zoning decisions.



Figure 8  
Configuration of the regional assemblies in Ireland



A major conceptual departure from previous attempts at regional or national planning, has been the emphasis on balanced growth. Although first mooted in the Buchanan report of the late 1960s, the discourse over the last four decades was on achieving balanced regional development through dispersal which resulted in sub-optimal outcomes. The National Spatial Strategy (2002) tried to address this by identifying gateways and hubs to focus development but the number of them, for the scale of the country, meant that dispersal predominated. The NPF is now focused on balanced growth with the ‘core’ strategy targeting 50% of growth in the Eastern Midland region with 50% to be achieved in the other two regions combined. There is also a significant emphasis placed on the role of cities in delivering the objectives and this urban emphasis is a significant cultural and policy shift. For the first time, metropolitan spatial planning is being embedded within the plan as a key tool.

Unlike in other European jurisdictions such as Manchester, Barcelona or Paris, where planning has been accompanied by institutional reform at the metropolitan scale, there are no immediate plans to re-align or create new institutional structures. Rather the governance framework is predicated on enhancing the role of the region and the oversight functions of the regional assembly and planning regulator. The NPF does make provision for governance reform to be considered at a later stage but this would be at the discretion of central government. The most fundamental change however between the NPF, its predecessor and earlier attempts at regional scale planning has been the cross-government commitment to the plan. In aligning the NPF with the €116 billion National Development Plan as *Project Ireland 2040*, the financial backing required to deliver on the promise has been put in place. A number of new funds including a recently

announced €3bn urban and rural regeneration fund will provide the investment to deliver relatively quickly on some proposals and enhance the credibility of the plan at local level. A new National Regeneration and Development Agency will strategically manage public and state lands for future affordable housing, an important institutional underpinning for the ambitious national strategic outcomes identified in the NPF.

*Towards implementation of the National Planning Framework*

The NPF has the potential to radically transform the spatial and economic development patterns of the Republic of Ireland, enhance quality of life and aid progress towards environmental sustainability. It is ambitious, evidence-based and coherent but also challenges regional and local government, the spatial planning system, and sectoral planning and policymakers. One of the first challenges facing the regional assemblies is how they align the new RSES approach with a well-established tradition of sectoral planning and policymaking that has characterised Irish public policy.

**Policy integration at the regional scale** One of the key tenets of the NPF is that it promotes vertical alignment in a multi-level governance context from central through to local plans and that it supports horizontal, cross-sectoral alignment by adopting a spatial focus. However given the plethora of state agencies and quasi-state agencies operating across a variety of sectors, identifying all the key actors and aligning them as part of the development of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies is an important challenge. This has already been evident in the context of Dublin where across one sector – transport – an estimated 62 agencies/ organisations have been identified as potential stakeholders to be consulted about one large-scale redevelopment proposal in the city centre. However the direct link that has been made between the NPF, and ultimately the RSES for each region, and capital investment should be the necessary ‘carrot’ to encourage cross-

sectoral cooperation. This was clearly articulated by the Minister responsible for the plan, at the launch event:

*“By aligning our spatial planning with our investment decisions – by aligning the National Planning Framework with the ten-year National Development Plan – we will for the first time have a meaningful planning framework that people can have confidence will deliver for their communities”* (Eoghan Murphy, TD; Minister for Housing and Planning).

This alignment of the National Investment Plan with the NPF should ensure that future infrastructure investment will be more strategically deployed by central government, thus acting as an incentive not just for cross-sectoral cooperation across central government departments but through various regional and local structures. The potential of the RSES, backed by this funding and new oversight arrangements, to frame the plans and policies of local authorities, state agencies and private sector investment in the medium-term should ensure that future development is planned rather than developer-driven as has happened in the past.

**Cities as strategic regional growth centres** Given the traditional rural emphasis in Irish spatial policy, the new emphasis in the NPF on the role of the urban is an important recognition of the reality of contemporary Ireland but also exceptionally challenging politically. The framework recognises the strategic role of Dublin as a capital city, and a gateway to the global economy, and acknowledges that growth will continue and that public policy should sustain the city. However achieving the kind of equitable growth envisaged in the plan can only happen if a balance is achieved between the growth of Dublin and the four other cities. Ambitious growth targets have been set as illustrated in Figure 9 for the cities outside of Dublin. However even if these are met, the exceptional dominance of Dublin within the urban system will remain unchallenged.

Figure 9  
Targeted pattern of population growth in Ireland’s cities

City	Population 2016	Population Growth to 2040		Minimum Target Population 2040
		% Range	People	
Dublin - City and Suburbs	1,173,000	20-25%	235,000 - 293,000	1,408,000
Cork - City and Suburbs	209,000	50-60%	105,000 - 125,000	314,000
Limerick - City and Suburbs	94,000	50-60%	47,000 - 56,000	141,000
Galway - City and Suburbs	80,000	50-60%	40,000 - 48,000	120,000
Waterford - City and Suburbs	54,000	50-60%	27,000 - 32,000	81,000

Source National Planning Framework, 2018, 62

Along with the emphasis on growing cities, National Policy Objective 67 within the NPF requires the production of 12-year Metropolitan Area Spatial Plans (MASPs) in tandem with, and as part of, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES). This new policy tool recognises for the first time the reality of city-regionalism in Ireland and MASPs have been given statutory underpinning. The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund will provide critical funding for the realisation of the MASPs and urban development generally in large urban centres beyond the five cities. While the MASPs are strategically important, their development and subsequent implementation is not straight forward. At regional assembly level significant urban/rural cleavages, stronger than party political divides, are beginning to emerge. For assemblies that are dominated by rural based representatives, it will be a major challenge to both develop and implement the MASP approach particularly in the context of upcoming local elections in Spring/Summer 2019. The National Planning Framework as an overarching vision has achieved cross-party support in the Dáil (national parliament). However given the inherently political nature of planning as a process - involving strategic choice-making about distribution of investment and services - it would be impossible to de-politicise the process despite what central government ministers might argue.

**The politics of planning in Ireland** The National Planning Framework has many obvious attributes and transformational ambitions, but implementation and its ultimate success will depend on learning from the lessons of previous attempts at national spatial planning. While central government departments and policy appear to be aligning in a way not heretofore seen, how the newly empowered regional assemblies, policy tools, and offices/agencies will be embedded or aligned within existing institutional structures is critical and potentially fraught with tension. The new National Regeneration and Development Agency (NRDA) has a remit to: “drive the renewal of strategic areas not being utilised to their full potential, (e.g. through CPO and other incentives) from cities and larger towns to opportunities at a smaller scale in rural towns and villages” yet how this intersects with regional and local government has not been established. One might assume that the NRDA role will be to operationalise the RSES and MASPs but this is not yet clear. In some ways this emphasis on the national and regional level runs contrary to the principles of the Urban Agenda of the European Union (2016) which suggests that urban authorities as the level of government often closest to citizens have the key role to play. However the Local Government Reform Act (2014) abolished urban district councils so the county council is the smallest unit of administration meaning that for some cities and towns, rural-based politicians are making key decisions.

For the NPF to deliver on its full potential within a multi-level governance framework clear functional demarcation is essential. Yet elements of the plan seem to blur functions and boundaries between different arms of government. One example relates to the coordination of development in towns that may cross administrative boundaries. The NPF (p. 136) states that in such circumstances “[central] government will work with the relevant local authorities in developing preparation of joint urban/local area plans, utilising current Local Area Plan (LAP) legislation”,

thus calling into question the role and place of the regional level of governance. This is just one of a number of places where implementation of the NPF, despite the best intentions, may fall foul of politics but it also potentially indicates increased centralisation of power in an already highly centralised polity.

A related issue is the effectiveness of the regional tier in Ireland. Given the new powers and responsibilities that now sit at the regional level, are the make-up and structure of the regional assemblies fit for purpose? The assemblies are a nominee-based regional layer of governance with each constituent local authority sending a stated number of representatives to the assembly. While theoretically councillors leave their local authority identities at the door of the assembly chamber, the reality is that local councillors will have the best interests of their county or district in mind when decision-making is taking place. The NPF suggests that growth within the regions should be redirected within and close to cities/urban centres rather than on their fringe but rural-based councillors face tremendous political difficulty in supporting this kind of strategic change. While the relationship between the national plan in its long-term and statutory based framework and the electoral cycle has been broken, the same cannot be said for decision-making at the regional and local level. Even the identification of boundaries for the MASPs is highly contentious. Whether the structures of regional assemblies require realignment to include some nominees from local authorities with other stakeholders, or indeed directly elected regional representatives, may be worth considering to ensure effective implementation and promote strategic choice-making.

**Future development of national spatial planning in Ireland** Although *The National Planning Framework* is in its infancy, early indications suggest that the ambition shown in its development is being continued through the implementation phase. A Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board was established and first met in May 2018 to agree a set of initial priorities and a detailed implementation roadmap was circulated by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to key stakeholders in July 2018. The Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 which gives statutory footing to the framework was enacted and signed into law in July 2018 enabling key offices and agencies to be established and ensuring all County Development Plan reviews and Local Area Plan reviews can be rendered consistent with the RSES. Recognising that all level of plans require updated population projections and new systems and approaches need time to become embedded, a period of transition up to 2026/27 is envisaged for implementation. While pragmatic, the danger of operating such a long window of transition is that old practices remain in place and careful monitoring and oversight will be needed to ensure that transformation is already underway during the transition phase.

One of the key concepts introduced in the NPF is the need for a strategic and effective urban settlement hierarchy for Ireland. This advocates particular types of services that would be available at four tiers through the settlement system: cities, large towns, smaller towns and villages, and smaller settlements/rural areas. While a strong and admirable principle and an effective

mechanism for prioritising service provision, critical infrastructure and strategic investment, how this is translated through the RSES, MASPs, county and local area plans will be of interest. In recent years, local public protests about post office, bank and hospital rationalisation have been very strong and the politics of service provision has become a critical aspect of recent general election campaigns and delivered a large number of independent TDs (MPs) to the national parliament.

But perhaps the biggest challenge facing the NPF and its immediate and longer-term effectiveness is the uncertainty associated with Brexit. The National Spatial Strategy (2002) was developed to closely align with the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland and the NPF has an entire chapter dedicated to Ireland’s relationship with Northern Ireland and the broader United Kingdom. While the framework recognises the opportunities of Brexit for the Republic of Ireland – it will become the principal English-speaking country in the EU – there will also be significant challenges in terms of harnessing the potential of an all-island economy and a coordinated approach to key environmental, economic and social issues. National Policy Objective 43 states that the Irish government will “work with the relevant Departments in Northern Ireland for mutual advantage in areas such as spatial planning, economic development and promotion, co-ordination of social and physical infrastructure provision and environmental protection and management.” (NPF, 109). In the context of a non-functioning devolved administration in Northern Ireland, this is particularly problematic and an impediment to coordinated cross-border planning. How this evolves in the coming years will very much depend on the type of Brexit that is eventually negotiated.

## Wider lessons from the Irish case

- A critical feature of effective national spatial planning is alignment with capital and infrastructure investment planning.
- To ensure ‘buy-in’ and create the optimum conditions for implementation, the plan and its sub-components must be given a statutory footing with support from across government departments and across sectors.
- Recognising that planning is an inherently political process, ‘de-politicisation’ is not possible but it is important to break, as much as possible, the linkage between plan development and implementation and the political cycle.
- Institutions must be sufficiently empowered and resourced to fulfil their role within the system and functional demarcation must be clearly articulated.

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