Strategic Spatial Planning in Ireland: a critical review of the NSS and NPF

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Regional Studies Association Irish Branch Conference
Institute of Technology Sligo
September 7 2018
Context for NSS

• 1990s unprecedented economic growth
• Uneven regional distribution of benefits & impacts
• ESDP 1999
• Good Friday Agreement 1998
• Projected population increase of 1.4m (39%) 1996-2020
• Need for framework to guide implementation of NDPs
• Weak knowledge base re spatial patterns and underlying causes
• Confident government, but populist in practice
Context for NPF

• Emergence from austerity phase
• Projected population increase of 1M (22%) by 2040
• Legacy of NSS failure and need for new approach to address “new and altered realities”
• Increased concern for social and environmental dimensions of future development
• Local government reform 2014 –
  • 3 Assemblies replacing 8 regions
  • Consolidation of LAs
• Relationship with Northern Ireland uncertain & less confident
• EU / OECD paradigm shift towards place-based strategies
• Minority government: cautious/risk averse political climate
Key concepts and major themes of NSS

• Balanced regional development: redistribution vs potential (ESDP)
• Greater alignment of where people live & work to sustain a better quality of life, a competitive economy and high-quality environment
• Functional areas of critical mass
• Major inter-regional corridors: Dublin-Belfast Corridor, Atlantic arc
• Rural-urban partnerships (ESDP)
• Northern Ireland connectivity
• Intra-regional planning strategies
Key concepts and major themes of NPF

- Change in focus from Spatial Strategy to Planning Framework
- Effective regional development
- Growth of population in N&WRA and SRA to equal that of EMRA
- Place making: stronger urban places and diverse rural places
- Quality of life in both urban and rural contexts
- Environmental sustainability
- A stronger planning system
Implementation of NSS

Proposals:

• Establish a driving force – cabinet sub-committee
• Inter-departmental Committee of senior officials
• Provide “any statutory support it (NSS) requires”
• Integration with other plans, policies, programmes which should demonstrate consistency with NSS
• Key role of Regional Authorities
• Regional Planning guidelines and alignment of LDPs
• Regional innovation fund
Implementation of NSS

Issues in practice:

• Legacy of Buchanan (anti-urban bias) and IDA regional plans (unrealistic expectations re ability to disperse investment)
• Persistence of traditional view on balanced regional development
• Inconsistent support across government departments
• Absence of statutory support for NSS
• Reluctance to devolve effective authority and responsibility to RAs
• Macroeconomic crisis, austerity, cutbacks including in SPU
• Misrepresentation of NSS core objectives as something for everywhere
Implementation of NPF

Governance and oversight
• Office of Planning Regulator and statutory underpinning
• National Regeneration & Development Fund & Agency

Framework objectives
• 3 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies
• 5 Metropolitan Area Spatial Plans
• Integration of Spatial & Transport planning in GDA & other cities

Investment
• 10 year NDP published simultaneously with, and to be aligned with, NPF
• Alignment of Strategic Investment Priorities with 10 National Strategic Outcomes to be achieved via the NPF
Implementation of NPF

Challenges

• Regional strategies, metropolitan area plans and National Regeneration & Development Agency all require unprecedented levels of cooperation, coordination and collaboration

• Consistent political commitment to NPF

• Alignment of public expenditure programmes to NPF objectives

• Leadership, management & governance at all levels to ensure effective place-based implementation – investment in ‘soft’ capacity building

• More empowering and participative structures required to foster place-based innovation and entrepreneurialism

• Rigorous *ex ante* & *ex post* evaluations of all major projects required to maintain confidence in new approach
Conclusions re regional planning since Buchanan

• Political context has changed profoundly: from state-led welfarist inter-regional redistribution to a more neoliberal & entrepreneurial ideology
• Globalisation an increasingly important source of differentiated transformation of regions
• New emphasis on governance and participation
• New discourses on place and space – relational vs absolutist
• Functional areas more fluid and based on networks that are less place bound
• Change in role of planning from shaping to facilitating
• Shift from Strategy in NSS to Framework in NPF very important recognition of need for adaptable approach to cope with uncertainty
The NPF is a potential game-changer re achieving a radical redirection in social and economic development that is spatially and environmentally sustainable, but is there sufficient commitment and capacity to grasp this opportunity?