

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

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Regional Studies Association Irish Branch Conference

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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?