Regional Growth: Rural areas, towns & cities

RSA Irish Branch Annual Conference

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September 2017
Outline

- The Western Region
- Regional Growth – NPF
- Cities, Towns & Rural Areas
- Levers of Regional Development
- NPF implementation
Western Development Commission (WDC)

- 7 county Western Region
- State body – Department of Rural & Community Development
- WDC Act 1998
  ‘...foster and promote the economic and social development of the Western Region’
The Western Region

- 828,697 people (2016)
- Share of national population
  - 1841: 30.7%
  - 2016: 17.4%
- Population change
  - 0.95% in WR v 3.8% in State (2011-2016)
  - Home to only 2 counties in Ireland with pop decline
- 64.7% live in rural areas v 37% in State
- Urban centres: 1 city; 5 towns 10,000+; 34 towns 1,500-9,999
Regional Growth – National Planning Framework

- All areas of Ireland – Capital, 2\textsuperscript{nd} tier cities, large, medium & small-sized towns, villages & open countryside – have role to play in national economy & as locations to live
- Many aspects of life change very slowly – demographics, settlement patterns. Need to plan \textit{given current & historical patterns}
- Job opportunities critical in decision of where to live, but not the only factor
- NPF needs to recognise complexity of social & personal reasons for people’s location decisions
National Population by Urban Size (2016)

- **Dublin**: 1,431,724 (30%)
- **Other Cities**: 1,173,179 (25%)
- **10,000+**: 436,299 (9%)
- **5,000-9,999**: 344,360 (7%)
- **1,500-4,999**: 303,599 (7%)
- **Under 1,500 but at least 50 houses**: 294,020 (6%)
- **Remainder of country**: 778,684 (16%)

*Note: The percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding.*
2\textsuperscript{nd} Tier Cities

- To effectively support national growth there can’t be excessive urban concentration – housing, congestion ...
- Primacy of Ireland’s capital unusual compared to other advanced small countries
- One goal of NPF should be promote 2\textsuperscript{nd} tier cities
  - Galway the only built-up area which experienced consistent population growth greater than national avg. 1996-2016 (41% v 31%)
  - Why? Quality of life appeal, good employment opportunities, tech. & medical devices, strong educational & health facilities ... Absence of a larger growth centre to the North, drew from large catchment
- Can’t assume that development of key cities will constitute regional development
What about the North West?

- Donegal & Mayo: only counties with population decline 2011-2016
- Roscommon & Mayo: highest decline in enterprise numbers 2011-2015
- Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal & Mayo: highest commercial vacancy rates
- Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon & Donegal: highest shares working in Public Services

**North West needs a stronger urban centre**
- Sligo best located to serve wider region
- With effective linkages to other urban centres throughout region, Sligo can become a more effective regional driver
- Real commitment & co-ordination across all public & private stakeholders
- Letterkenny has particular role in terms of cross-border growth
Motorway network, Natural Gas Transmission & Population change 2011-2016
What role for towns?

- Towns often play similar role to that of cities & equally important to their regions – **A matter of scale**
- Emphasis in NPF on cities & their role, BUT for large share of Ireland’s population, towns are key service centre education, retail, recreation & primary health
- Even within city hinterlands, people access many daily services in smaller centres
- NPF needs to be clear on the role it sees for towns in effective regional development, detailed in RSEs
What role for towns?

- Context of each town differs e.g. distance from other towns & cities, size of hinterland, population, local governance. Infrastructure & service needs differ.

- **Traditional role of many towns & villages being challenged** e.g. retail, public services, agriculture, transport links

- Many towns & villages suffered lack of infrastructure investment which connects them locally, nationally & internationally
  - Local & regional roads
  - Broadband
  - Public transport
Future for towns

- Need realistic assessment of assets of individual towns, their role in urban hierarchy ‘now’ not ‘then’, why people come in to the town ...
- Sense of place, strong community attachment at town/village level
- Infrastructure investment could improve their capacity to provide services, maintain & attract enterprise & support their rural hinterlands
- Jobs ...
... and rural areas?

- Location of natural resources & most environmental, biodiversity & landscape assets. Places of residence & employment, as well as amenity, recreation & refuge

- But all rural areas & rural communities not the same:
  - remoteness & accessibility
  - demography – age profile
  - natural resource assets
  - economic/employment structure
  - access to infrastructure & technology
  - influence of neighbouring urban centres
% living in rural areas in western counties (2016)

- Clare: 60.7%
- Galway: 54.0%
- Leitrim: 89.3%
- Mayo: 71.4%
- Roscommon: 73.2%
- Sligo: 60.2%
- Donegal: 72.7%
- Western Region: 64.7%
- State: 37.0%
Levers of Regional Development

Growing Regions

3Es (Enterprise, Employment & Education)

Infrastructure

Innovation
Enterprise, Employment & Education

- Availability of jobs key to maintaining vibrant populations in towns, villages & rural areas
- Limited concept of ‘job’/‘work’ in NPF. Self-employment, ‘gig’ economy, e-Working redefining concepts of work, enterprise & their location
- More effective intra-regional transport links extend labour catchments & open new opportunities
- Support diversification of enterprise base particularly in sectors where regions have comparative advantage e.g. medical devices, tourism, marine
- Focus on training in sectors & skill areas with growth opportunities for rural areas & towns with rural hinterlands
The Western Region – Enterprise & Employment

- **Active Enterprises**
  - -0.8% in WR v 3.3% in State (2011-2015)
  - Clare only WR county with increase
- **No. in employment**
  - Growth of 7.5% in WR v 11% in State (2011-2016)
  - 5 of 6 lowest growing counties in State
- **Employment Sectors**
  - More reliant on traditional sectors, public & local services
  - Industry performing very strongly
  - Small but growing knowledge services
% of employment by sector in Western Region and Rest of State (2016)
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- Industry
- Wholesale & retail
- Health & social work
- Education
- Accommodation & food
- Agri, forestry & fishing
- Public Admin
- Construction
- Prof., scientific & tech.
- Other
- Transport & storage
- Info. & comms
- Fin., insurance & real estate
- Administrative services

Rest of State vs Western Region

- Administrative services
- Education
- Public Admin
- Prof., scientific & tech.
Infrastructure

- New infrastructure can be transformative, so where do we place new investments?
- Capital appraisal & evaluation methods need to be re-examined if we want to move from ‘business as usual’
- Investment in infrastructure can strongly influence the location of other infrastructure e.g. motorway & rail
- Intra-regional linkages, local & regional roads needed to develop cities, towns & rural areas
Implementation of NPF

- A single body with responsibility & designated budget
- Sectoral policy is real driver of what happens in regions
- Essential that all spending, investment & policy decisions are in line with NPF, rather than operating counter to it
- Clear relationship between delivery of the NPF & the RSES in each of the three regions
Final Thoughts

- Can’t assume that development of key cities will constitute regional development
- Objective is to improve economic & social opportunities for people who live in regions
- Change is slow – current settlement pattern will largely persist
- Towns act as key regional centres – what is their future role?
- Rural areas differ in opportunities & challenges but jobs only solution for viable rural areas & communities
Thank You

Q&A

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Employer/Own account as % of Employed (2016)