Spatial Development Policy in Ireland: Lessons for The New Member States?

ECPR Workshop "European Spatial Politics or Spatial Policy for Europe? Uppsala, Sweden

Draft Paper

Irene McMaster

13-18 April 2004

European Policies Research Centre
University of Strathclyde
40 George Street
Glasgow G1 1QE
Tel: +44-141-548-4905
Fax: +44-141-548-4898
e-mail: irene.mcmaster@strath.ac.uk
Preface

This paper is the development of work undertaken by the author as part of two EPRC research projects. It draws on reviews of national regional policy in Ireland, carried out for the EoRPA consortium of European governments,¹ and the results of a Leverhulme-funded research project, *The regional challenge of industrial restructuring: a Polish-Czech comparison*, carried out by Irene McMaster and Martin Ferry in 2002-2003. All the views expressed in the paper are the authors own.

EPRC March 2004.

¹ [http://www.eprc.strath.ac.uk/eprc/projectLookup.cfm?ID=96](http://www.eprc.strath.ac.uk/eprc/projectLookup.cfm?ID=96)
Abstract

Across Europe the spatial policy agenda is rapidly gaining attention throughout academic and policy debates. The adoption of national spatial development strategies and spatial development goals suggest that notions of spatial policy and balanced spatial development are informing policy practice in both the EU-15 and the new Member States.

This paper focuses on the Irish case, where the concept of pursuing balanced spatial development appears to have been taken up relatively quickly and with enthusiasm. The paper addresses the following questions: what are the main elements of the Irish spatial approach, why was the plan adopted and is it only a bureaucratic exercise in the field of planning, or is it a politicised process? The final section of the paper examines the extent to which wider lessons can be drawn from this case. For instance, could a similar approach be applied in the new Member States of Central and Eastern Europe? Alternatively, is it the case that the case that the Irish approach is very much rooted within the national development context, making it a politicised, and nation specific process, which is potentially problematic to implement elsewhere?

Key words: Ireland, National Spatial Strategy, Central Eastern Europe
SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND: LESSONS FOR THE NEW MEMBER STATES?

1. INTRODUCTION

The spatial policy agenda is rapidly gaining attention throughout academic and policy debates. At this stage, there are numerous complex and involved deliberations on the merits of this approach and the meaning of its key concepts and terms, e.g. polycentric development, territorial cohesion, spatial cohesion, territorial development. The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), held up as a core element of the European spatial planning framework, is itself the subject of much debate. The uncertainty, complexity and disagreements surrounding these concepts imply that, from a policy point of view, they are likely to be difficult to work with and to apply. Yet, the adoption of national spatial development strategies and spatial development goals suggest that notions of spatial policy and balanced spatial development are informing policy practice.

This paper focuses on the Irish case, where the concept of pursuing balanced spatial development appears to have been taken up relatively quickly and with enthusiasm. Most notably, the country has recently adopted a National Spatial Development Strategy. The paper addresses the following questions: what are the main elements of the Irish spatial approach, why was the plan adopted and is it only a bureaucratic exercise in the field of planning, or is it a politicised process? Having drawn conclusions based on the experience of Ireland, the final section of the paper considers whether wider lessons can be drawn from this case. For instance, could a similar approach be applied in the new Member States of Central and Eastern Europe? The paper concludes with the suggestion that while a spatial development approach, compatible with the ESDP, has found a place in Irish development policy, it is very much rooted within the national development context, making it a politicised, and nation specific process, which is potentially problematic to implement elsewhere.
2. NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY OF IRELAND

The Irish National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was launched by the Taoiseach and Minister for the Environment, on 28 November 2002. The Strategy sets out a long-term, strategic approach to planning for the development of the country, at national, regional and local level. It aims to provide a broad planning framework for the location of development in Ireland over the next 20 years by identifying potential development patterns for different areas and by setting out overall policies for creating the conditions necessary to influence the location of different types of development in the future.

In summary, the Strategy aims to

- support a better balance of activity and development between areas experiencing rapid development and congestion and areas that are economically under utilised
- guide Government departments and agencies in formulating and implementing policies and public investment decisions which have a strong spatial dimension or which may otherwise be affected by spatial considerations
- set a national context for spatial planning to inform regional planning guidelines and strategies and county and city development plans and strategies
- provide a framework, in conjunction with the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland, *Shaping our Future*, for the spatial dimension of the development of an all-island economy
- inform strategic investment, transport and other infrastructure policy decisions, for both the public and private sector; it will also help to shape future National Development Plans and other investment plans
- promote certain strategically located places as part of an all-Ireland network which
will energise the potential of urban and rural areas

- support spatially balanced provision of key social and economic infrastructure, with a particular focus on this network of strategically located places

- set out general principles of good spatial planning practice to help to develop ways in which the location of people and employment and the use of environmental resources can best serve national competitiveness, sustainability and a high quality of life

- be complemented by relevant plans and strategies of other public bodies.\(^2\)

In terms of its impact on regions, the Strategy aims to facilitate growth in all regions of the country. To achieve this goal, the Strategy’s approach is the designation of regional gateways - “strategically placed engines of growth”. Dublin, Cork, Limerick/Shannon, Galway and Waterford were already identified in Ireland’s 2000-2006 National Development Plan as existing gateways. Additional gateways identified include Dundalk and Sligo and “linked gateways” Letterkenny/(Derry) and Athlone/Tullamore/Mullingar (see Figure 1). Linked to the gateway concept, the Strategy also highlights differing types of regions and regional needs across the country, e.g. ‘consolidating’ regions – building upon successes already achieved through to ‘revitalising’ regions where economic diversification away from agriculture could be harnessed further and extended.

Figure 1: National Development Gateways and Strategic Spatial Roles

Key

Strategic Spatial Roles

- Consolidating
- Reinforcing
- Strengthening
- Revitalising

Development Gateways
Linked Gateways
Linked Cross-border Gateway

Source: National Spatial Strategy, p. 58 and map CIA World Fact book
The Strategy views building on the existing strengths of these areas as a key part of promoting balanced regional development. More generally, the gateways are intended to act as a focus for public and private investment, which in turn gives them the capacity to drive national and regional development. Strategically located medium sized hubs are also designated, which should support and be supported by gateways as well as link out to wider rural areas. How this process is expected to unfold is examined in regional analyses that also stress the importance of linkages and the complementary role of rural regions, especially in regions such as in the West of the country (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Structures and mechanisms to integrate the Strategy into planning and activities at the level of government departments, state agencies, regional and local levels are to be put in place. For instance, implementing the NSS now requires that “Regional Planning Guidelines” be put in place across the country and that the Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area be reviewed. These guidelines will take the form of a single document and will act as a regional framework for the development plans.
Figure 2: Regional Plan for Dublin and the South East

Source: http://www.irishspatialstrategy.ie/RegionalBriefing.shtml
Figure 3: Regional Development Plan for the West of Ireland

Source: http://www.irishspatialstrategy.ie/RegionalBriefing.shtml
3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

Provision for the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was originally made in the country’s 2000-2006 National Development Plan. However, initial progress with the development of the Strategy was slow. In February 2000, the Department of the Environment and Local Government released a consultation paper outlining the types of issue the Strategy could address. This document, and a subsequent consultation period, allowed input from regional and local authorities, social partners, development interests and the general public. The aim of the process was not only to gather opinion but also to build a sense of consensus and ownership of the Strategy amongst various stakeholders. In May 2000, a further document, ‘National Spatial Strategy - Scope & Delivery’ outlined the scope and focus of the strategy and its means of implementation. In terms of spatial development issues in Ireland, a broad range of issues were identified as important by these documents, including:

- the needs of Dublin as a European capital city region set against the desire to ensure the promotion of growth and development in other areas;
- the interdependence between urban and rural areas and the spatial implications of continuing major structural changes in agriculture;
- the land use implications of a major house-building programme over the next 10 years, the appropriate balance between suburban development and urban regeneration and the need for special policies for coastal zones and other high amenity areas;
- mechanisms for better integration of sectoral policies, for ensuring parity of access to knowledge, research and infrastructure and for developing the role of technology, particularly in relation to overcoming problems of remoteness;
- possibilities for enhanced North-South co-operation with particular reference to the regional strategy "Shaping our Future" which has been prepared for Northern Ireland;
• criteria for the designation of new regional gateways.³

In the course of 2001 and early-mid 2002, work on preparing the National Spatial Strategy was ongoing. Particular challenges included:

• defining clearly what “balanced regional development” means and addressing deficiencies in social infrastructure and social exclusion issues in a balanced regional development context;

• incorporating sustainable development principles and determining how balanced and sustainable development of industrial, enterprise, tourism and service activities can be assisted in all regions without undermining competitiveness;

• developing the “gateway” concept within the urban structure as a means of maximising national performance, while also taking full advantage of local and regional development potential.

• identifying strategic infrastructure needs and coordinating strategic development issues relating to the whole island of Ireland and between Ireland and its EU partners;

• strengthening settlement patterns, taking account of the need to build at least 500,000 houses over the next 10 years;

• identifying statutory and institutional requirements needed to implement the National Spatial Strategy effectively.⁴

On one level, the production of a spatial strategy can be understood purely as a strategic planning document aimed at balanced territorial development and reflecting a general, renewed focus on spatial development planning. On the other hand, the process reflects national political and economic aims beyond those set out in the document and has been shaped by a broad range of political and economic debates and structures. These factors, specifically EU policy frameworks, national economic development, actor involvement

---


⁴ http://www.irishspatialstrategy.com/docs/spatial.pdf
and national debated and structures are considered in greater depth in the following sections.

3.1 EU Policy Frameworks

The influence of developments in EU development planning is an important reference point for the Strategy. In particular, the development of the ESDP and a more 'strategic' approach to development policy has had an important influence on the development and direction of the National Spatial Strategy. For instance, original provisions for the NSS, made in the NDP, state that the National Strategy will draw upon the European Spatial Development Perspective and will take account of the fundamental goals of European policy, notably:

- economic and social cohesion
- conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage
- more balanced competitiveness of the European territory,

and the ESDP’s policy orientations for spatial development:

- polycentric spatial development and a new urban-rural relationship
- parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge
- wise management of the natural and cultural heritage.\(^5\)

In the Strategy itself, references are made to key ESDP objectives. For instance, provisions made in the NSS to promote rural-urban partnership are expressly linked to the ESDP.\(^6\)

More generally, experience of the EU's Structural Fund programming has promoted a 'strategic approach' to development planning in Ireland. As a cohesion country, with

Objective 1 Funding, Ireland has in place a National Development Plan, which involves an investment of over EUR 52 billion of public, private and EU funds (in 1999 prices) over the period 2000-2006. In a number of respects, the experience of working with the NDP could have smoothed the way for a National Spatial Strategy. For instance, policies have become increasingly integrated and coherent through using these types of multi-sectoral, long-term programmes. Some of the more controversial investment decisions and debates are more closely linked to the National Development Plan, taking the emphasis off the Spatial Strategy.

Linked the NDP, in the current Structural Funds programming period, several regions are designated as ‘phasing-out’ regions, (see Figure 4). Therefore, after 2006, the country will lose its entitlement to Structural Funds support across the country as a whole. Associated with this change, the overarching role of the NDP as a strategic, national development document potentially could be lost and continuity in development planning could be reduced. In this context the National Spatial Strategy offers a stable, long-term reference point, which runs beyond the end of the current Structural Funds programming period and on to 2020. Thus, it could offer an important coordination mechanism for long-term policy making across the country.

---

6 National Spatial Strategy p. 36
3.2 Economic development

By considering Ireland's economic development context, strong arguments in favour of a strategic planning approach can also be highlighted. First, in order to limit overheating of the Dublin economy, there is a perceived need to actively promote more balanced development across the country. In the recent past, a combination of attractive inward
investment conditions matched with targeted education strategies, social partner agreements on wage restraint and intervention from the European Structural Funds, resulted in record expansion in the economy and substantial employment creation. Over the 1995-1997 period, GNP grew at 6 percent per annum. The rate of unemployment has decreased from 16 percent in the 1986-1990 period to 12.2 percent between 1995 and 1997. In the late 1990s – early 2000, employment continued to grow with the rate of unemployment registered at 3.9 percent in 2001. Yet, despite this overall growth, the national economy remains dominated by Dublin, which contains around 30 percent of the national population and is acknowledged as the powerhouse of the recent expansion in the Irish economy.

Disparities in the regional and spatial development of the regions in Ireland are marked. The Border, Midlands and West (BMW) Objective 1 region still lags well behind national averages in terms of GDP and job creation. It has particular deficits in terms of communications and infrastructure and has experienced depopulation for a number of years. Within the Southern and Eastern region there are also distinctive needs and challenges. The region is dominated by Dublin. However, there are also dense pockets of poverty and deprivation in specific areas. Additionally, the rapid growth and overall affluence of the Dublin region has led to skills and labour shortages and infrastructure problems. A combination of the economic dominance of the Dublin-region, its associated infrastructural and labour shortages, and lagging conditions in the BMW region suggest that, in order to promote continued overall growth, more balanced development must be an objective. Additionally, the country must focus on increased competitiveness, particularly in light of increased competition from the new EU Member States.

More recently, Ireland has experienced a slight economic downturn, which has again indicated a need to promote growth throughout the country. 2002, in particular, was a challenging year in economic terms. According to Ireland’s main inward investment agency, IDA-Ireland, “2002 has been the most difficult year for Irish companies in the

---

last 10 years”. Indigenous manufacturing and international services client firms of Enterprise Ireland showed net employment losses of 4,044 (-3.3 percent) in 2002, the first net loss in jobs since 1993. Interestingly, the Dublin/Mid East region has experienced the most significant losses (-4.9 percent). This is a reversal from the position in 2001 where the region grew by 3.6 percent and points up the relative resilience of the regions outside of Dublin in 2002. Particular constraints to the ongoing economic development of the country include infrastructure deficits, skills shortages, increased competition for FDI and a tougher global economic environment. A number of these conditions, e.g. poor infrastructure and skills shortages, can be linked to the unbalanced development of the country. Hence, in terms of traditional regional development debates, on one level the National Spatial Strategy appears to have a strong emphasis on ‘equity’ related goals, e.g. promoting development beyond the South Eastern. However, it should also be considered that national economic conditions, and related political objectives, are increasingly dependent on promoting more balanced development across the whole country. Consequently, the National Spatial Strategy also relates well to 'efficiency goals'.

### 3.3 Support from Key Policy Actors

The preceding arguments mean that a range of actors broadly welcomed the Strategy’s emphasis on spatial development and more balanced economic development. Two hundred and fifty-nine submissions were received in response to the Strategy’s public consultation process. The general principles of the NSS outlined in the consultation document were broadly welcomed by 89% of the submissions. In terms of economic development, the two main development agencies in Ireland, IDA-Ireland (for multinationals) and Enterprise Ireland (for indigenous industry), also support the Strategy’s over all approach, since the aim of balanced regional development fits well with their own agendas.

---

9 [http://www.cso.ie/principalstats/pristatlab.html](http://www.cso.ie/principalstats/pristatlab.html)
12 National Spatial Strategy p. 131
The IDA has been quick to take on the approach of the National Spatial Strategy. According to the IDA’s Annual Report 2002,

“Our commitment to regional development is stronger than ever and now with the National Spatial Strategy in place. IDA is determined to see the emergence of strong magnets of attraction in each region.”\(^{13}\)

The idea of development ‘gateways’ complements the agency's focus on creating ‘magnets’ for attracting FDI, each targeting specific sectors according to its particular resources and strengths. For instance, in 2002, IDA Business and Technology Parks were developed at key gateway and hub locations with business parks at other towns of emphasis.\(^{14}\) This type of approach fits with the recent shift of focus away from Dublin as a target location for FDI; it also accords with the stated aim of winning half of all new greenfield project jobs for the BMW Objective 1 region. Currently, cities and the South East still appear to be the preferred location and persistent problems infrastructure and scale are making it difficult for some regions to be sufficiently competitive. As a result, tackling deficiencies in infrastructure and taking a long-term strategic approach is seen as crucial to development in the country. Investment incentives are recognised to be insufficient, of themselves, to attract investment and promote development if there is a lack of suitable infrastructure on the ground (e.g. as in parts of the BMW region in particular). According to IDA-Ireland’s chief executive,

“Achieving progress in infrastructure and services is essential over the next three years, as at the end of 2006 Ireland will have less discretion in giving regional grants under EU state aids policy and regions will then depend largely on the quality of such services locally to be attractive to investors. This means that regions that want to attract inward investment will have to do so more on their own merits rather than depending on grants as the differentiator to draw in

inward investment projects. That timeframe is very short and we are not sure that regions realise the limited timeframe available to achieve the necessary developments.” ¹⁵

Enterprise Ireland share related regional development objectives. EI's regional development role is set out in their strategy document “Driving Growth in the Regions”. The approach involves four main elements:

- developing the competitiveness and export potential of existing businesses in the regions;
- enhancing the operating environment for business, particularly in facilitating companies to develop/access new products and technologies, and by working with other key players to address the telecommunications and other infrastructure needs of companies throughout the country.
- supporting an increased level of new high-potential start-ups throughout the country.
- facilitating the expansion of Dublin companies to regional locations.

More recently, the agency’s revised funding approach, launched in May 2003, is developed in line with the objective of 'more balanced regional development'. More favourable packages of support are allocated to companies located in BMW, and the South East, South West and Mid West regions.

3.4 National Political Debates and Frameworks

The development of a widely acceptable strategic planning document is generally an extremely complex and contested process, even when external influences and internal economic conditions appear to favour this approach. However, in the development of the National Spatial Strategy, the Irish Government had a number of strategic advantages.

First, national government had the opportunity to pursue its chosen approach with limited opposition from strong regional interests. Ireland is a relatively small country with a

unitary state. Development policy is to a great extent centralised, with power largely concentrated in the hands of sectoral national ministries. For instance, according to representatives of the Department for Enterprise Trade and Employment, existing regional policy is still very much driven from the centre and policy is largely delivered through the two national agencies, IDA-Ireland and Enterprise Ireland. In comparison, local government is widely acknowledged to have a comparatively weak.

Second, the country has a tradition of consultative policymaking – a resource which could be used to strengthen the content, awareness of and ownership of the final strategy. Experience of partnership working is based around civil society groups as opposed to regional representatives. According to the Ireland’s National Development Plan, “Ireland’s experience of social partnership has been very positive. The consensus approach to the development of economic and social policy which successive government have pursed since 1987 has been a significant contributory factor to Ireland’s economic success.”16 The partnership requirements of EU funding have, according to some commentators, also led to a strengthening of these networks at the expense of links with local and regional government.17 Regional Authorities are even dismissed by some as “window dressing designed to cut off Commission complaints about a lack of devolution and subsidiarity in Ireland”.18

More recently, moves towards a greater emphasis on regionalisation have been put in place, which again usefully link with the development and implementation of the NSS. For instance, in order to better meet regional development goals, Ireland economic development organisations have adopted more regionalised structures. Regional offices have been upgraded - they now have more personnel, better IT resources, greater responsibility and take more decisions on issues affecting local development. Enterprise Ireland's structure is now aligned to the Ireland regional structure. Similarly, IDA-Ireland

16 National Development Plan p. 261
has now relocated nearly one third of its staff into the regions.\textsuperscript{19} They advocate a regional approach to development which is 'ground up'. “The traditional expectation of regions to have someone else, outside the regions, deliver resources and results is no longer valid. The job of agencies, such as IDA, is to stimulate resources and support local effort….But [they] are only one of a broad range of partners required to achieve that necessary forward leap regionally”.\textsuperscript{20}

4. \hspace{1em} ON GOING DEBATES OVER THE NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

So far, the discussion has presented a relatively favourable, almost one-sided view of the experience of the development of the Strategy. The previous three sections suggest that there are strong arguments in favour of the National Spatial Strategy. They also imply that the Irish Government has been in a favourable position to develop and to implement the Strategy. However, beneath the broad arguments in favour of the strategy and factors supporting its adoption are a range of controversies that mean, in practice, the process of developing and starting to deliver the National Spatial Strategy has proved challenging.

A range of debates are linked the Strategy, one of the most controversial elements of the plan was the designation of development gateways. The gateways are envisaged as strategically located centres that, by virtue of their critical mass of population, skills, economic base, support services and infrastructure, have the capacity to drive development throughout their surrounding counties and regions. At an early stage it was recognised that the identification of regional gateways was not going to be straightforward.

“Rather than nominating new gateways when the National Development Plan was announced, the Government took the view that these should emerge on the basis of the principles to be developed and agreed in the context of preparing the

\begin{footnotesize}\begin{enumerate}
\item www.ida.ie/news/showRelease.asp?storyid=159
\end{enumerate}\end{footnotesize}
National Spatial Strategy. Simply nominating towns selectively as new ‘growth centres’ has not succeeded in the past in promoting a better balance of regional development. The challenge for the National Spatial Strategy is to go beyond simply nominating gateway centres. It must outline how alternative major attractors of investment and population can be successfully developed and linked with smaller centres and rural areas, in the interests of regeneration throughout regions, rather than at just one centre in a region.”

It is clear that gateways will not operate in isolation but, rather, will be dependent on support, infrastructure and links with surrounding areas. An emphasis on the associated economic benefits for surrounding areas – such as infrastructure improvements and the potential to develop linkages – was seen as a way to help justify and ‘sell’ the possibly controversial issue of singling out a particular centre as a gateway. In practice, allocation of ‘gateway’ status to some towns rather over others and local rivalries meant the process of establishing has had a strong political element.

In consultations, the subject of gateways was one of the most debated points. 62.04 % of the submissions made during the public consultation exercise focused on this issue. Common concerns were that gateway towns may receive benefits to the detriment of other towns and rural areas and that the system for selecting gateways should be transparent. Given the sensitivities involved, it is perhaps not surprising that progress with respect to the nomination of gateways slowed in the run-up to national elections in May 2002. Ultimately, the decision to include hubs and linked gateways into the Strategy suggests a level of compromise had to be made in order to limit opposition and disagreement between urban centres which were not eligible as gateways in their own right.

As previously mentioned, submissions on the Strategy were invited from a range of interests including regional and economic development institutions. For organisations

21 http://www.irishspatialstrategy.ie/faq-6.shtml
such as Government ministries, Enterprise Ireland and the IDA-Ireland, an important issue concerns how to combine a new ‘gateway’ approach with existing commitments. In this context, Enterprise Ireland participated in the joint agency group which prepared detailed submissions on the National Spatial Strategy. An analysis of the spatial distribution of the Enterprise Ireland’s client base showed the high dependence of rural areas and centres with a population of less than 30,000. Consequently, in its submissions on the Strategy, Enterprise Ireland emphasised its particular commitment to these companies and the locations in which they operate, which may not necessarily be in gateway or hub areas. Similarly, concerns have been expressed over the extent to which the needs of rural areas are covered in the Strategy, especially bearing in mind its emphasis on polycentric development and the development of urban centres.

Further criticisms have emerged as the Strategy has progressed and has begun to be acted upon. In particular, lack of consistency in the application of the Strategy has been highlighted as a problem. For instance, towns have been designated as 'gateways' whilst key infrastructure development plans servicing the towns have been shelved. Meanwhile, in recent plans to decentralise new government department headquarters, only three of the nine towns selected were also identified as development gateways in the National Spatial Strategy. As a result, critics have also expressed a concern that the key actors involved in the Strategy are not coordinating their efforts to a sufficient extent. Some foresee a need to develop a more active, regional role in the actual implementation of the Strategy, e.g. through the establishment of local development agencies, which have already proved to be particularly successful in the Dublin area regeneration.

More generally, and fundamentally, it is also possible to question whether an approach of promoting development through a ‘gateway’ and ‘hub’ approach will actually work. As Davoudi (2003) notes, empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of type of approach

---

23 www.ciarancuffe.com
24 www.unison.ie/irish_independemt 19 April 2002
approach is “patchy and inconclusive”\textsuperscript{25} and the extent to which it is actually an effective mechanism for increasing competitiveness and economic development is questioned. First, evidence from regions, e.g. Basque region, which have adopted similar strategies suggest that they have struggled to achieve functional integration between urban centres.\textsuperscript{26} Second, centres may struggle to develop their role as ‘gateways’. Centres are not equally well endowed with development potential, suggesting that it could be important to take into account measures to support associational structures, local capacities and overcome potential inter regional/centre rivalries. Finally, a spatial plan and designation of gateway centres, on their own, will not promote balanced economic development. They need to be supported by a range of long-term policy measures. It should also be noted that plans, inevitably, will be subject to macro-economic development processes, e.g. a period of sustained economic decline could lead to a policy shift towards consolidation of areas of growth.

This paper’s brief review of some of the controversies and debates surrounding spatial policy in Ireland suggest that the spatial policy is potentially a highly politicised and complex process. Looking to the future, a particular concern will be whether the Strategy remains as a reference point for policy makers and practitioners. Will the Strategy be followed though to completion? Will it be acted upon in a consistent manner? Will it work? Alternatively, will problems persist with policy co-ordination and lead to the Strategy becoming little more than a bureaucratic document? These questions and uncertainties suggest that it is still early to draw clear-cut lessons from the Irish experience. However, the following section makes some preliminary observations, with particular reference to conditions in Central and Eastern Europe.

\textsuperscript{25} Davoudi, S. (2003) Polycentricity in European Spatial Planning: From an Analytical Tool to a Normative Agenda European Planning Studies Vol. 11 No. 8 p 995
\textsuperscript{26} Op cit
5. LESSONS FOR NEW MEMBER STATES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE?

In terms of economic development, the Central and East European Member States and Candidate Countries frequently refer the Irish case. In particular, references are made to Ireland’s use of EU Cohesion Funds and economic development policies. According to the Financial Times, many of the new Member States view Ireland as a possible role model, as the country has transformed itself from a predominantly agrarian dominated economy to one of the most attractive high tech business locations in Europe.27 Could the new Member States draw lessons from Ireland’s experience of spatial development policy?

It is crucial to take into account the distinct developmental background of the CEE new Member States. However, at a superficial level, the situation of many of the new Member States is roughly comparable to that of Ireland. The countries are generally small, with the exception of Poland and possibly Hungary, with centralised economic and political structures. In terms of their economic geographies, capital city regions dominate the economic geography of the Central East European Countries, e.g. in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The dominance of the capital city regions contrasts to the weak position of, particularly, rural regions, eastern areas and heavy industrial regions. The Central East European Countries also require substantial investment in strategic infrastructure connections in order to address current deficits and promote development. Thus, similar to Ireland, issues linked to balanced territorial development, polycentric development and connectivity are development concerns.

The lingering dominance of centralised political structures in these counties could suggest that national governments are in a good position to adopt and implement a coherent spatial development strategy across the whole country. This is particularly the case as there is generally a lack of regionally based and resourced economic development actions and the regions are highly reliant on central government for support. These broad

---

similarities between conditions in the Central Eastern Europe and Ireland could suggest that a Spatial Strategy addressing similar issues would be a useful addition to the policy frameworks of the CEE New Member States. In fact, some, e.g. Poland and Slovakia, have already adopted national spatial development plans.

However, as the Irish example demonstrates, it is one thing to adopt a spatial development plan but quite another to put into practice. It is likely that the Central East European Countries could face even greater implementation problems than in Ireland. The requirement for policy and actor co-ordination in the development and implementation of spatial development programmes is likely to be one of the biggest challenges. In Central and Eastern Europe institutional weaknesses and complexities have already contributed to a lack of co-ordination across a range of development activities. A common complaint from actors in the region is that there is now no shortage of ideas and initiatives, but what is missing is co-ordinated action between organisations and actors, such as national government ministries, regional authorities, RDAs, municipalities and local business associations. As a result of recent regional and policy reforms in the late 1990’s – early 2000, at least on paper, there are now numerous organisations delivering a wide variety of services and meeting a wide range of development requirements. However, many of these are newly formed and are trying to operate in a fluid institutional environment. Functions are still being clarified, resource allocations are uncertain or seen as insufficient, there remains a high level of uncertainty on the ground about their respective responsibilities, and their positions within institutional frameworks are still being established. All of this contributes to institutional weakness and persistent uncertainties.

As well as a lack of co-ordination, a strong tradition of sectoral policy making prevails. For example, a requirement to reinforce inter-ministerial co-ordination is often referred to in European Commission reports on country preparations for the receipt of Structural

---

Funds. This represents a considerable problem for the delivery of a coherent and co-ordinated development strategy. At the same time as a lack of co-ordination, there is also a potentially wide range of vested interests involved in elements of spatial development, e.g. groups with particular interests in the designation of gateway cities, transport nodes and the allocation of services. In many cases, CEE regional level administrations are relatively new and not yet established. However, municipal administrations and sectoral interests remain strong. Whilst robust structures and identities can be a development resource, they can also lead to conflict and rivalries. For instance, in the Czech Republic the establishment of new regional structures and development programmes have already been plagued by disagreements between municipalities and also between levels of government.

One of the strengths of the Irish position is, despite the centralised governance structures of the country, the country has a tradition of consultative policy, which means that that the views of interest groups and local and regional administration could be taken into account. In the CEE context, the extent to which the opinions of interest groups could be adequately reflected in a government proposed strategy is more open to question. Examples of new co-operative networks and partnerships are increasingly apparent in CEE and recent reforms stress a new, multi-level, partnership-driven approach to development policies. However, meaningful partnerships and frameworks of co-operation are still relatively weak. For instance, while the partnership principle is applied in its most formal sense, according to the 2002 EC Progress Report on the Czech Republic: “increased efforts are needed to develop the appropriate channels of communication to enable local authorities, social and economic partners (including bodies representing employment, environment and equal opportunities at national, regional and local levels) to be directly and more visibly involved in formal consultation processes”. 30

---

It should also be recognised that levels of commitment to spatial development planning could also be weaker in the CEECs. Spatial development planning in Central and Eastern Europe has a chequered past. The command economy relied heavily on economic plans and spatial development was manipulated to promote structures adapted to the needs of the state socialist system, e.g. transport infrastructure oriented towards the East, development of heavy industrial towns etc. Thus, there may be a conceptual or political aversion to wide ranging development planning due to an objection to subsidies and reliance on central government, a goal of promoting market-driven development and, related, an aim of promoting a market-oriented mentality.

There is also the wider question of the regarding the objective of actively promoting growth across the country and of committing scarce resources to the goal of balanced development, as opposed to focussing on the development of growth centres. With this in mind, it is important to take into account the distinct economic position of the Central East European Countries relative to the EU-15. The New Member States are in a position where the whole country lags behind the EU-15. This means that the dilemma over the appropriate balance between ‘equity’ and ‘efficiency’ oriented policy approaches has particular resonance in the case of the Central East European Counties. In the context of accession to the EU, the most important problem is not differentiation between regions but the comparatively low economic potential of all regions. At the same time, regional disparities within the CEECs remain severe, which implies the need for government assistance. While the principle of encouraging regions throughout the country to develop their individual potential is logical given comparatively low levels of regional development generally, it seems likely that resource constraints and the particularly underdeveloped state of peripheral regions are going to ensure that considerable selectivity will have to apply in practice. At least in the short term, achieving an appropriate balance between national development objectives, supporting lagging regions and the goal of more balanced territorial development is likely to be difficult.

---

6. CONCLUSION

According to the European Commission’s Third Cohesion Report strengthening regional competitiveness and securing a more balanced spread of activity will boost growth potential of economies and reduce the risk of development bottlenecks. The development and implementation of strategies for spatial development is one way for national governments to begin to address these types of objectives. For instance, spatial development strategies can be a means through which a consistent approach to spatial planning is ‘mainstreamed’ across a variety of policy areas, they can address a range of economic development issues and correspond to a selection of interests and needs. However, the development and implementation of successful policies are highly dependent upon the political and economic contexts in which they are produced and applied. The potential for spatial development plans to become more than just bureaucratic exercise in planning is likely to vary over time, in accordance with national economic development priorities, and from place to place. As this paper suggests, specific national development conditions in Ireland can be viewed as favouring spatial planning and the goal of balanced territorial development. The extent to which the Central East European countries could adopt and successfully implement this type of development approach is, at least in the short-term, more open to question.

---
