

TWICE THE SIZE ?

IMAGINEERING THE FUTURE
OF IRISH GATEWAYS

A REPORT FOR THE URBAN FORUM
MARCH 2008



School of Spatial Planning



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"This report for the Urban Forum is based on a study that was commissioned by the Urban Forum. The purpose of the report is to stimulate debate about future spatial development in Ireland. The report does not necessarily represent, nor does it intend to represent, specific policy actions that are recommended by any of the individual professional institutes that make up the Urban Forum."

The full report is available at www.dit.ie/futuresacademy

ABOUT THE TWICE THE SIZE

Imagine Ireland with 8 million people in 2030 ... Imagine the effects that would have on planning, governance, society and the environment... Imagine people with different values and expectations...

Why the Study?

Over the past 15 years Ireland has been profoundly transformed from a poor nation on the periphery of Europe to a country with a rapidly increasing population and growing prosperity. Change has swept through all areas of life touching everything and everyone. Yet, many argue this is just the beginning. As the pace of change accelerates, even more profound shifts and transformations will take place.

One of many effects of the recent changes is that former long-term plans and strategies are no longer relevant, and yet it seems there are no adequate plans for any other future. Instead present plans and policies are continually playing catch-up to the new realities already in place.

This study was undertaken to instigate thought and provoke discussion about the long-term future of the eight Irish gateways designated in the National Spatial Strategy of 2002. Their designation as national centres of growth means that they need to consider, and be prepared to accommodate, higher rates of growth and the ensuing spatial, economic, social and environmental consequences.

What?

Through the systematic and rigorous examination of a range of alternative futures, the project is intended to assist local stakeholders in defining the roles and possible functions of their cities and towns and in creating robust and flexible future-proof strategies for their continuous development. The exploration of futures options for the gateways was done within a broader national context.

Who?

The study, commissioned by the Urban Forum, was carried out by The Futures Academy in conjunction with the School of Spatial Planning, at Dublin Institute of Technology.

How?

The study adopted a futures approach, believing that time and effort spent on strategic thinking prior to strategic planning ultimately pays enormous dividends in terms of discovering, exploring and evaluating possible, probable and preferable futures.

The project applied a Prospective Through Scenarios methodology and consisted of the following steps.

1. Identification of strategic questions, which were set to be: "What might Ireland be like in 2030?" and "What might the gateway of ... be like in 2030?"
2. Exploration of the driving forces of change, trends and issues that will shape the future. This was done under six categories: Demography, Economy, Governance, Environment, Society and Technology.
3. Identification of the key uncertainties for the future.
4. Creation of three alternative future scenarios for Ireland and each of the gateways based on an analysis of the driving forces of change, key uncertainties and the interrelationships between various factors.
5. Development of policy proposals and recommendations arising from a detailed analysis of the scenarios.

As one of the key objectives of the study was to encourage dialogue and collaboration about the long-term future amongst the key stakeholders in each of the gateways, every phase of the process was based on active involvement of local and national stakeholders. This was facilitated through a series of futures workshops in each gateway as well as conducting strategic conversations and futures surveys.

This Document

This document presents the key aspects of the study. It starts with an overview and discussion of the biggest changes that are likely to occur globally (21st Century Challenges) and in Ireland (Changing Ireland). Then three scenarios (The Sow of Liberty, Wild Cats of Equality and The Fragility of Mé Féin) for the future of Ireland are presented. Each of these provides a description of what Ireland might become as a result of such changes interacting in different circumstances. Next, the key findings arising from the analysis of the scenarios are discussed (Emerging Territorial Future). The document concludes with a set of proposals for policy actions and recommendations for Ireland, together with a selection of ideas that could be used for the development of future strategies for individual gateways.

□□□ KEY MESSAGES

The Twice the Size: Imagineering the Future of Irish Gateways study systematically evaluated alternative futures options for Ireland and its gateway cities. The following key messages emerged from the study.

Gateways: Distinctiveness rather than size. Gateway cities outside the Eastern Corridor should be encouraged to develop 'distinctiveness' and not focus solely on population growth, and seek complementarity to the Eastern Corridor. Strategies based on these principles would be more robust and future-proof. (Examples of ideas for the development of future strategies for the individual gateways generated in this project are presented on pages 16-17. The principles of distinctiveness and complementarity to the Eastern Corridor emerged from the analysis of these ideas.)

Need for city-based regional governance. As governance was the strongest point of concern for all the gateway cities and towns, the study recognised a fundamental requirement for a major reform of local and regional structures of governance to be conducted based on the concepts of sustainable city regions, subsidiarity and integrated policy formulation, decision-making and implementation.

Encouragement of collaborative leadership. The study identified a strong need for fostering collaborative visionary leadership at all levels and across all sectors, as all participants recognised leadership, vision and collaboration as the main ingredients for the future success of their cities and regions.

Benefits of population concentration on the East coast. Analysis of the three scenarios of possible spatial futures for Ireland has shown that the strengthening and further development of the already existing critical mass on the East coast, centred on the Greater Dublin Area, is the most realistic way forward. High concentration of the population on the East coast is highly beneficial to the provision of high-capacity infrastructure, such as transport, waste, water and energy infrastructure, and services such as health and education.

Need for the revision of the National Spatial Strategy. The study identified a critical need to revisit and revise the NSS to reflect the dominant role of the Greater Dublin Area in securing the future of Irish society and the continued prosperity of the national economy, as well as ensuring progress towards spatial and economic cohesiveness with Northern Ireland. The revision of the Strategy should also address the need to formulate development policy in a way that would reflect the distinctiveness of the Eastern and Western regions. The revision should also include the review of the critical mass argument in Balanced Regional Development.

SWITZERLAND OF THE ATLANTIC

Imagine, small cities such as Montreaux and Lucerne, set in the great scenic areas of the west of Ireland, concentrating on special activities, a potential home for the movers and shakers of the world. The West and particularly North-West losing much of its agriculture and having little employment growth in other sectors to compensate. But imagine, as other parts of Ireland continue to grow, particularly along the Eastern seaboard, their population growth and increased affluence creating demands for leisure and recreation activities. Imagine also the towns of the West becoming 'niche markets' for leisure and recreation based on environmental quality and availability of different lifestyles. Imagine cultural tourism products, local cuisine, hill walking and other activities creating picturesque destinations - the Switzerland of Ireland.



21ST CENTURY CHALLENGES

Too many people. As the world's population grows to about 9 billion around 2050, global tensions will climb as a result of dropping water tables, rising and changing consumer demand, uncontrolled migratory movements, demands for equality in healthcare, pollution, famine, congestion, unemployment, poverty, disease, starvation, social violence and the like. The challenge is to determine and achieve a stable and sustainable population for the earth.

It takes time. Many, if not most, of the major 'momentum trends' for the 21st century are long-term in their formation, impact and necessary control. We need to 'stand in the future' and create a strategic view that is unrestricted by the exigencies of the present – imagine ahead and plan backwards. Whilst we cannot predict the future in detail or with surety, we can study the alternative directions it might take and how to influence them over time. The challenge is to learn how to handle long-term, intergenerational, lead-times.

Redefining the enemy. Increasingly, we are at war not with enemy states or foreign armies but with small groups of people or specific individuals: fugitive terrorists, drug traffickers, warlords, dangerous dictators, rogue scientists, villainous zealots and the like. The needs of safety, security and defence are different. Yet powerful institutional barriers to fundamental change remain. The challenge is to alter radically how we organise to defend and to fight.

Economics are complex. When viewed in out-of-equilibrium formation, economic patterns are all too often simplified into the facile equilibrium of standard economic models. In reality, economics are ever-changing, showing perpetually novel behaviour and emergent phenomena. The challenge is to portray the economy not as deterministic, predictable and mechanistic; but as complex, process-dependent, organic and continually evolving.

Running the show. There will be a redistribution and relayering of power and governance at all scales and across all sectors of society. Representative government is fine in theory, but frequently fails in practice. Why? Three reasons are suggested. First, populations tend to elect the average. Second, elected representatives tend to be members of short-sighted, self-serving political parties; and third, large numbers of people in the 'democracies' feel alienated from the political process. The challenge is to promote more effective leadership, bring about a step change in the degree of collaboration between key players in a process, and foster a deeper engagement between local people and large organisations.

Not enough resources. Conflict over valuable resources – and the power and wealth they confer – is fast becoming a prominent feature of the global landscape. International security experts argue that in the early decades of the new millennium, wars will be fought not over ideology, but over dwindling supplies of precious natural commodities. The challenge is to shift economic thinking from an emphasis on human productivity to a radical increase in resource productivity through the concept of natural capitalism.

There will be new technologies. With 20th century technology, there was a massive gulf between natural systems and man-made systems. At the dawn of a new century we are witnessing new discoveries, innovations and adaptations that combine living and non-living systems. There are new forms of medicine and farming. There is also the prospect of new forms of 'artificial life'. The challenge is to decide how to use these technologies responsibly and harness them to create a better world.

What's the risk? Risk in the future could reach magnitudes of harm hitherto unimaginable. Due to the interdependence of economics and society, risks in one country can spread rapidly to others, so the notion of risk needs to be broadened and precautions put in place at global, regional and national levels. Vital systems need greater protection and citizens need to be more fully involved as partners in decisions. The challenge is to build trust and share the burden between the public and those in charge.

Détente with dilemma. Well-schooled in solving problems, governance at all scales needs to re-educate itself in the art of acting intelligently and compassionately in situations that have no solution. Agencies and organisations of all kinds will have to find tools and processes for teasing-out the first-, second-, and third-order dilemmas in these situations. They will also have to reconcile multiple stakeholders and design processes that generate new values out of apparent conflicts of interest. The challenge is to reach some kind of détente with dilemma in a world with no externalities.

There will be surprises. Wildcards or jokers will be played from time-to-time. Some of these might be totally unexpected – some could be unlikely yet predictable. Leaders in organisations at all levels, and in all situations, need to collect the information, study the signs and confront the issues surrounding the degree of probability and scale of impact of macro-uncertainties that might impinge upon their areas of responsibility. The challenge is to avoid tragedy by both anticipating and preparing to mitigate damage done by 'predictable surprises'.

CHANGING IRELAND

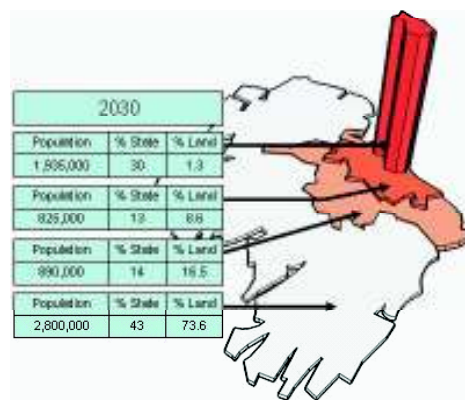
The biggest changes that are likely to occur in Ireland. The future of Ireland and its gateway cities is being shaped by many driving forces of change and an extensive range of trends, issues and factors. Most of the drivers that will deeply affect Ireland have global origins. What follows concentrates on the more direct and immediate effects on Ireland.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- **Population growth.** It is expected that growth of the Irish population will continue into the long-term future. Given the world population prediction of nine billion by 2050, it is inevitable that countries like Ireland will be subjected to ever-increasing in-migration pressures.
- **Population of the gateways.** The population growth in the gateways in the period between 2002 and 2006 has been rather modest compared to the State's average (Tab. 1). Only two gateways, Galway and Letterkenny, which are not in Dublin's sphere of influence, achieved a growth rate higher than the State's average. It is unlikely that the gateways outside Dublin's sphere of influence will achieve high rates of population growth in the future, as projected in the NSS, without robust implementation of specific growth policies.
- **Domination of the East coast.** The very strong concentration of population eastward (40% of population living in the Greater Dublin Area) is likely to continue as the relative size of the rest of the State continues to fall. This Eastern region will most notably remain the primary engine of the Irish economy because of intrinsic competitive advantages conferred by scale and a critical mass of urban population.
- **Size matters.** There is a significant problem of scale with the gateways outside Dublin. Eight gateways combined constitute a population of 533,265, which is just over half of Dublin's population. The six smaller gateways (Sligo, Letterkenny, Athlone, Tullamore & Mullingar (ATM), and Dundalk) combined make up a population size that is only 63.5% of that of Cork.

Gateways	2002 Population	2006 Population	% Growth Rate
Cork	186,200	190,400	2.2
Limerick / Shannon	95,600	100,000	4.3
Galway	66,200	72,700	9.9
Waterford	46,700	49,200	5.3
Dundalk	32,500	35,100	7.9
Sligo	19,700	19,400	-1.7
Letterkenny	15,200	17,600	15.5
Athlone / Mullingar / Tullamore	42,600	48,800	14.5
TOTAL	504,700	533,200	5.6
State	3,917,200	4,239,800	8.2

Table 1: Rates of population growth for the gateways. Source: CSO. Note. Population of cities and towns with their environs and suburbs.



VALUES

- **Change in value systems.** At present, Irish society has a unique combination of strong traditional values with well-developed self-expression values in comparison to other countries. As cultural modernisation progresses, the values of Irish people will most likely move away from those that emphasise traditional centralised control and concern for economic betterment towards values based on rationality and a concern for personal development and self-expression.
- **Democratic reform potential.** As values change from a focus on constraint towards one of choice, a potential for democratic reform is created as people increasingly place more emphasis on democracy whilst becoming more critical of actual democratic performance.
- **Rural vs. urban values conflict.** The shift in value systems will create potential conflicts between rural-based Western regions seeking to preserve the status quo and urban-based Eastern regions seeking a more autonomous, responsive, rational and effective mode of politics and governance.
- **Values and Irish politics.** Since the foundation of the State, politics in Ireland has been heavily influenced by parties with strong rural values. As Ireland becomes increasingly urbanised, with a growing majority of voters coming from cities, politics will increasingly reflect the values of an urbanised society (concentrated mainly on the East coast).

SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Spatial continuity.** The low density spatial pattern of development, following coasts, river valleys, favourable topography and transportation corridors is unlikely to change – although there will continue to be increased local urbanisation in all areas.
- **Cities are the future.** The evolving processes of globalisation have transformed the economic system so that it is now more internationalised, knowledge intensive and competitive. The main winners of such a system, where knowledge and innovation are the key source of comparative advantage, are cities, as they are the places that are most conducive to knowledge sharing, and to the consumption benefits attractive to the highly skilled workers required to make the knowledge sharing more productive.
- **Dublin is the only 'real' Irish city.** According to international standards, Ireland has only one city – Dublin, and population-wise, it is a modest city in global terms. In the knowledge based economy, the Greater Dublin Area is, and is likely to be in the future, the only Irish region able to compete at an international scale.
- **Dublin – Belfast Corridor.** The peace process in Northern Ireland through the 1990s has led to a significant growth in trade across the border. Improved transport infrastructure on both sides of the border has facilitated growth in linkages between Dublin and Belfast and the development of an economic corridor along the East coast. This corridor is likely to develop into a large metropolitan region in the future.

GOVERNANCE

- **Centralisation and planning.** One of the legacies of colonisation has been the inheritance of highly centralised administrative structures with a deep distrust of local autonomy. Modernising societies often struggle to overcome this influence until it begins overtly to threaten personal or local well-being. As value systems change there will be increasing pressure for more autonomous and responsive local governance.
- **Current governance deficiencies.** A number of serious deficits in the current governance system have been identified. The timing, and the way these deficiencies will be tackled, will have strong implications for the future of urban centres in Ireland. These include:
 - a deficiency in the balance of powers between central, regional and local tiers;
 - a lack of regional government structures with executive powers and adequate levels of funding to implement strategic policy and tactical decisions;
 - inefficient competition between City and County authorities due to inappropriate boundaries;
 - no democratic representation at the regional level;
 - little cohesion or coherence between planning and politics, especially in the long-term context;
 - excessive level of clientelism at local level; and
 - poor access and practices regarding effective and meaningful citizen participation in planning for the future.
- **Regional governance.** As urbanisation progresses and cities become even stronger economic engines, it is likely, and desirable, that powerful city-based regional-level authorities will replace increasingly inadequate county-based administration.

“Ireland is a 21st century economy, with a 20th century infrastructure and 19th century governance”

Prof Michael Parkinson

- **National Spatial Strategy.** There are high risks associated with the current National Spatial Strategy as it provides plans for only one future based on the notion of achieving balanced regional development. However, the existing trends show that the concentration of two-thirds of population of the island on the East coast is more likely, yet there is no evidence of any alternative plans to prepare and provide for this future.

ENVIRONMENT

- **Changing agriculture.** The completion of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy by 2015 will create widening differences between an area of intensive agribusiness in the South and the East compared to very large areas in the West and North where agriculture will cease to be a dominant and full-time activity, and where environmental designations are likely to become the dominant determinant for development.
- **Climate change.** Climate change will have effects on all areas of life. Rising sea levels and possible flooding are a major concern for most gateway towns and cities.

“The most profound shift that will occur in the near future will be the growing recognition that Ireland has become an urban society.”

SCENARIOS

Three alternative scenarios for Ireland in 2030. Scenarios are not predictions or forecasts for the future; they are simply pictures of different futures that could develop. Their primary role is to help planners and decision-makers to test policies and decisions taken today against alternative futures that could emerge.

THE SOW OF LIBERTY



This scenario pictures a **world** of expanding globalisation and growing libertarianism that encourages economic growth, the further opening-up of markets and rapid technological advances. The role of national governments diminishes, while an increasing emphasis on international collaboration emerges, largely aiming to facilitate global competition and the enhancement of market efficiency. Developed nations are fragmented into many differentiated and competing sub-national regions and interests. The accent overall is on the individual, and the prime motivation is materialistic.

Europe has largely been shaped by constant economic growth driven by continuing processes of globalisation, privatisation and the liberalisation of key markets, including energy, air transport, pharmaceuticals, and financial services. The EU has been enlarged by the accession of new states, including Turkey. European societies are more fragmented than ever, and people are focused on their immediate associates and families.

Ireland is a major player on the world stage, specialising in highly advanced areas of science and technology. The island of Ireland, where the boundaries between North and South have become vague and irrelevant, is home to 7.4 million of which 5.45 million live in the 'Old Republic'.

The Eastern seaboard is home to some of the wealthiest cities in Europe. Over the last 25 years, the seeds of a large urban metropolis that at the time was the Dublin – Belfast corridor has grown into a huge polycentric city region, often called the Eastern Conurbation, which stretches from Belfast and Armagh to Waterford, is home to 70% of Ireland's population, and has a world class infrastructure. The region is a dense weave of intensive and highly profitable agriculture, based on GM foods, functional food research and very large-scale industries, such as IT, bio- and nanotechnology. Dublin's role as centre of gravity has been replaced by a gravitation towards 'plug-in' connections to the corridor – dramatically reducing perceived peripherality of many midland and Western areas.

The Eastern Conurbation developed as market forces, coupled with demographics, led to the attainment of the critical mass necessary for an urban agglomeration of sufficient scale to be able to compete as a European city region. The scale of internal markets for goods and services supported the emergence of domestic innovation which resulted in the establishment of a new strong cluster of companies, often described as the Irish Power. These companies became major exporters and, over time, have reduced the reliability of the Irish economy on Foreign Direct Investment. This means that sustainable wealth could be generated from indigenous innovation. At the same time, the political centre of gravity has moved eastwards as an increasing share of the population was drawn to the Eastern region, which accelerated the urbanisation of values and priorities.

The West of Ireland in 2030 is quite the opposite of its Eastern regions. After long years of lagging behind, abandoned villages and towns are coming back to life again. Cultural creativity, beautiful landscapes and the feel of the 'old Irishness' became attractive again when the East lost its identity and distinctiveness. However, it is not the paradise it seems. The West, designated out of its existence, became a playground for urbanites. Tourism, leisure and cultural activities create employment prospects, but most of the benefits drift back to the East. High land prices and generally inflated costs of living allow the best quality of life in the West only for the very rich.

Although Ireland has achieved outstanding economic success, many aspects of social life have been suffering. As political parties progressively privatised, liberalised, deregulated and reduced public spending, the provision of services, such as health, education and environmental protection has deteriorated. This resulted in a low quality of life despite high standards of living; poor health facilities for people without good private insurance; education becoming an expensive, though high-quality commodity accessible only to the rich; and crime rising to alarming levels. The gap between rich and poor, and the racial tensions arising as a high proportion of Irish society is of non-European descent, are increasingly becoming a real threat to Irish cities, especially those in the East.

Rapid economic growth, combined with regulatory neglect, has led to the rapid worsening of levels of pollution and congestion to the country's centres of population. Although the market has been providing some of the necessary environmental services, the apathy towards climate change and other environmental threats is increasingly distressing.

SCENARIOS

THE WILDCATS OF EQUALITY

In this scenario, the future is underpinned by a system of shared values, an equitable distribution of opportunity together with a desire for sustainable development. A **worldwide** metamorphosis is taking place with commercial and institutional renewal accelerating across the developed world, with policy-making and decision-taking becoming increasingly delegated and expert. The overall focus is on collective, collaborative and consensual actions, shaped by commonly held attitudes and aspirations.

The EU has forged a strong framework for public policy pursuing sustainable development. Economic growth is sustained due to legal certainties and market transparency. A sustainable and high quality of life is enjoyed by all, and the integration of **Europe** has dramatically altered the global political and economic landscape.

Over the past two decades Ireland has enjoyed stable economic conditions, which were founded on a commitment to innovation and international competition in most sectors. There has been a strong growth of services and high-tech industries offering a low environmental impact and high social value, while agriculture and resource intensive sectors have declined. People enjoy a good standard of living, even though there is a greater policy intervention in both civic affairs and the market. Two distinct societies live side by side: the 'knowledge' society of towns and cities; and the 'wisdom' society of rural areas.

There are 5.13 million people living in the Republic and the country has finally achieved a regional balance. The threat of the Dublin Region's emergence as the demographic centre of gravity prompted the formation of a Western political alliance under the championship of a group of business leaders that put differences aside to form an integrated, coherent platform to promote and support the development of 'A Western Way of Living'. Strong lobbying by the alliance, and successive governments commitment to a balanced regional development, have led to the creation of a new National Spatial Strategy II (NSS II) and National Development Plan II (NDP II) of 2014 and 2015 respectively, both drafted and implemented by the Pan European Strategic Planning Alliance.

The island in 2030 has two parallel cultures and economies that are different but highly integrated. The Western Corridor, also sometimes called Switzerland of the Atlantic, consists of a 'necklace' of seven well developed, cultured urban centres and their rural hinterlands which support some of the highest quality of life communities in Europe. It stretches from Letterkenny and Derry in the North to Cork in the South. The Western Corridor economy is a classic example of the modern knowledge economy based on science, culture, marine administration, education, high-tech medical and biopharmaceutical industries. The urban centres are integrated into high quality rural settlements and wilderness management areas. The high quality of life, choice and diversity offered in the West continually attract skilled labour and investment follows suit.

The Eastern Corridor contains almost 50% of the island's population and stretches from Belfast to Dublin and down to Kilkenny. The corridor consists of two metropolitan regions (Dublin and Belfast) and a number of larger cities, and more continuous large-scale infrastructure to support intensive agriculture, agri-business and 'traditional' electronic and nano-tech industries. Although the East's economy performs well, the cracks start to appear as the best people increasingly are on the move to the West.

Ireland achieved a regional balance, but a high price is paid in terms of increased environmental foot-print, competition-reducing efficiency and frequent political and policy conflicts.

Since the beginning of the century, Ireland underwent a profound transformation in its value systems. Irish society became increasingly practical and pragmatic. Efficient and effective organisation of public life is the key issue on the agenda. Things impossible back then are the reality in 2030: compulsory voting, slimming-down of the Oireachtas to 100 TDs, greatly increased powers of the local government, and the establishment of an All-Ireland Forum that led to the unification of the island. And, though many criticise the state's control of people's lives, most enjoy its benefits, such as the significant reduction in crime.

As a result of changing values the role of the family has largely declined. Families are smaller and one-third of them is formed by one parent. Most 'communities' are based on non-family and non-geographical links such as interest groups, professional associations and voluntary organisations.

Ireland in 2030, despite its exemplary achievements in balancing social, economic and environmental priorities, is at the point where growing bureaucracy, rising costs and domestic complacency threaten the future.

SCENARIOS

THE FRAGILITY OF ME FEIN

In this scenario, the world is shaped by a socio-political backlash against the forces of change leading to regressive developments in institutions, a failure of cohesion among the wealthy nations and a dislocation in developed economies. The desire to preserve personal independence within a distinctive national identity prevails. Patriotism dictates that political power remains within the nation state in an increasingly fragmented world. The main emphasis is placed on continuance of individual freedom, protected by state security, and a consciousness of cultural difference. Overall, the world moves towards greater instability.



For Europe it is a turbulent and insecure world that has primarily been shaped by long periods of global economic instability, technological development and international competition. Europeans perceive the world beyond their border as fearsome and are highly anxious about the future. Economic integration is virtually abandoned and the EU is collapsing into a loose arrangement of separate treaties and bilateral agreements.

The Ireland of 2030 is a closed and independent country and one of few European states that escaped the homogenising effects of globalisation. It is a richly vibrant and distinctive society that still exhibits strong continuity with its rural origins, though much of the population lead highly urbanised lives, often in a rural setting. People are proud to be Irish and much emphasis is placed on the preservation of culture and heritage. The attitudes of personal responsibility have increasingly been developing, while at the same time government has been decreasing its role in the provision of healthcare, education and other social services.

The population of Ireland is 5.6 million, with around 2 million people living in the Greater Dublin Area. Aside from Dublin, on the island there is one large city – Belfast – and there are also 12 vigorous self-sufficient regional centres, all closely linked with their rural hinterland. Economic success of these centres is usually linked to the dynamic activities of their local entrepreneurs. However, on the grand scale of things, Ireland is gradually losing touch with global leaders in industrial production. Instead, the economy starts increasingly to rely on small-scale manufacturing, the arts and crafts, slow food, heritage tourism, organic farming and allied services.

Over the past two decades, the dominance of the Dublin region has been halted by economic contraction and a resurgence of organised rural politics. Slower economic growth combined with the instability of global and European relations stalled the deepening of North-South links. This agenda was even further pursued by a new political party that emerged in 2024. Political and economic regionalism saw the emergence of many vibrant regional centres – each with strong and often unique identities, and fierce regional and local pride. Local markets for products and services expanded and witnessed the surfacing of a new breed of local business leaders who became the backbone of a modern conservative, regionalised system of local governance – with high degrees of local autonomy.

Increased congestion in the Greater Dublin Area and other major urban centres like Galway and Cork, coupled with the cultural preference for rural living, weakened the economy; and the lack of effective and integrated land-use planning, resulted in an unabated continuation of urban sprawl. Due to growing congestion in the main urban centres people and businesses have been moving out, creating ‘edge city’ employment and industry nodes along the main transport corridors. All of this, combined with a growing number of one-off housing spread around the countryside, led to a decline in many small villages, the slow growth of towns and a resulting weak urban structure. These highly unsustainable patterns support the car dominant mindset, which is again reinforced by Ireland’s very poor rail network. Such spatial arrangements also leave various social groups, such as the elderly, excluded.

But, there is a flip-side to this coin – with people taking their own responsibility and using creativity and innovation in adapting to such patterns. Since the late 2010s a new movement of eco-living has been sweeping the country. Eco-villages, with carbon neutral houses, producing their own energy from renewable sources and self-sufficient food production, have been springing-up around the country. Working from home, the emergence of a new concept of community centres as hubs for working, learning and socialising, bus lanes on motorways and a number of other initiatives show how good ideas and collaboration can alleviate money problems.

Quality of life is the key priority for most Irish people who also value their traditional local communities and family circles. And, despite all the focus on people, there are still strong disparities in income, wealth and spatial placement. Crime and corruption touch all levels of society, and for years there has been a brain-drain of the brightest and the best. In 2030 Ireland’s future still looks quite uncertain.

EMERGING TERRITORIAL FUTURE

The main findings relating to the spatial development of Ireland that have emerged from a detailed analysis of the three alternative scenarios are discussed below.

Eastern Corridor – the Trend Scenario

- The most plausible future spatial model of Ireland would be based on a single city-region serving the entire country.
- It is likely that such a city will be located on the East coast and would initially be based on the pre-existing Dublin-Belfast Corridor. Eventually, such an urban region would stretch from Waterford to Belfast.
- This future is likely to develop as political and economic integration between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland progresses. Additionally, it would be reinforced by the weak urban structure of the island outside the Dublin-Belfast Corridor, the existing strength of the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) and the proximity to the UK and Europe.
- Such a model for the future represents a major change from the radial model focused on Dublin which has been dominant for more than 40 years, to a linear structure based on the dynamics of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor. This would differ hugely from the current policy ideal expressed in the National Spatial Strategy of 2002.

Testing the Spatial Options

- Out of the three national spatial options represented by the scenarios and summarised below, the Eastern Corridor is the most likely and robust option. The development of the Atlantic Corridor requires strong policy measures and high levels of investment, and is not robust at times of economic uncertainty. While the Urban Sprawl pattern is vulnerable in an energy shortage/high prices situation, and is also environmentally unsustainable.
- Development of the Eastern conurbation would mean that a continued policy based on the radial model, as exemplified by the current national road and rail infrastructure strategies, may be ill-conceived. Development of transverse links between the East and West would be a more viable and future-proof option.
- If transport policy were to be based on access to the Eastern Corridor and not just Dublin, transversal transport connections could shorten travel distances between centres in the West and the Eastern Corridor (for example Sligo to Belfast, Cork to Waterford) to 40 minutes.

Eastern Corridor (The Sow of Liberty)

In this scenario, the development of the Dublin – Belfast corridor will increase momentum in terms of urban growth and population concentration aided by the increased political, economic and cultural integration between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Increases in infrastructure capacity (Dublin Airport, relocated Dublin Port) will drive this process, coupled with improved rail and road connections between Dublin and Belfast. In addition, Waterford/Wexford is increasingly able to capture growth in sea trade. The result is that none of the Gateway cities other than Dublin and Belfast is able to achieve sufficient critical mass to attract significant economic development.

Atlantic Gateway (Wild Cats of Equality)

In this scenario, the Atlantic Gateway concept of achieving critical mass by linking the cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford has achieved success and is able to provide a counterweight to the Greater Dublin Area. This is assisted by increasing congestion in the GDA and a disappointing level of economic integration between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Improved infrastructure, including rail and road connections between the cities (Western Rail Corridor, Atlantic Corridor), has succeeded in reducing actual and perceived distances between the Gateway cities. Shannon Airport has successfully developed its strategic advantage of capacity for long haul flights.

Urban Sprawl (The Fragility of Mé Féin)

In this scenario, urban sprawl continues unabated. This is encouraged by increased congestion in the Greater Dublin Area forcing more and more people to live greater distances from the city centre although commuting times are reduced by the 'edge city' of dispersed employment nodes, such as City West/Naas Corridor, Cherrywood/Bray and Dublin Airport/Swords. The pattern of sprawl is further encouraged by policies to allow one-off housing particularly in the West of Ireland. This has resulted in the decline of a number of small villages, the slow growth of towns and a resulting weak urban structure. Energy consumption rates are out-of-line with targets based on climate change policies.

Risks Associated with the Current Policies

- There are a number of risks associated with current national policy. There is a risk that continued policy support for the development of counterweights to Dublin may not be successful, as planning policies that 'fight trends' are often doomed to fail. Also, the shift of population from rural to urban will likely result in the loss of political support for shifting resources from the East to the West, as the political and electoral base becomes increasingly urban.
- Past experiences also show that planning policies which have the effect of frustrating entrepreneurial activity are usually doomed to fail in the long run.
- Recent trends in population growth show that the counties that grew the fastest were the ones without gateway status, while the counties with the gateways grew the slowest. It can be interpreted from this that the NSS has focused on rather weak centres, and therefore, the return on public investment is commensurately low.

Implications for the gateways

- Although the vision of the future which involves the development of a relatively confined large urban region on the Eastern seaboard may be disliked by many, the statistics are compelling (Table 1) and the consequences of such development should be examined. It is recommended that policies at national and gateway level should be tested against this highly probable future.
- Analysis of the alternative futures of the gateway cities and towns outside the Eastern Corridor shows that the gateways plans and strategies would be more robust and future-proof if they were based on distinctiveness and complementarity to the Eastern Corridor rather than on ability to attract population growth. The gateways could develop 'niche markets' serving the demands of an increasingly urban population in terms of leisure activity, quality of environment and cultural identity.
- Although not the intention of policy makers in Dublin, it is possible that Dublin may lose its distinctiveness as a uniquely Irish city, which represents an opportunity for the other gateway cities.
- The study identified a selection of ideas for the development of a preferred vision and strategy for each of the gateways (these are presented on pages 16-17).

POLICY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic development

- Excellent education at all levels. Strengthen and enhance the current education system in order to provide world-class education at all levels: primary, secondary, tertiary and fourth-level.
- Agility, flexibility and speed. Provide and continuously develop agile, flexible and transparent support structures for various types of economic activity.
- World-class infrastructure. Ensure the provision of effective and efficient transport, municipal, information and social infrastructure and improve physical and virtual connectivity.
- Indigenous industry and services. Promote and support indigenous industry and services in order to decrease the risk attached to FDI. Facilitate the development of links between companies and educational institutions.
- Local strengths. Identify and build upon distinctive local strengths in order to create comprehensive, complementary and polycentric economic structures on the island of Ireland.

Governance

- Regional government with executive powers. Strengthen local and regional governance allowing for directly elected representatives to hold executive functions and have appropriate budgets.
- Collaboration. Encourage and foster coalition, collaboration and co-operation internally and externally and amongst multiple actors.
- Vision and leadership for the future. Identify the preferred long-term direction for the future of Ireland and its regions and provide leadership and take ownership for achieving it.
- One size does not fit all. Allow for regional differences in the way key stakeholders interact and regularly revise their visions and strategies.
- Strategic national policy. Prepare and implement a national strategy that would deal with the development and location of strategic infrastructure (i.e. ports and airports), according to national needs and without duplication and diseconomy.

People and Quality of Life

- Social inclusion. Close the gap between rich and poor, build a society of equal opportunities for all, and foster an attitude of tolerance.
- Living - variety and choice. Plan adequately to provide for high-quality living spaces in urban areas and the countryside for different types of residents.
- Healthy society. Provide high-quality health services accessible to all, develop facilities that will encourage healthy active living, promote work/life balance and support family living.
- Heritage and culture. Protect and promote Irish heritage and culture, and develop a wide range of cultural facilities.
- Values and attitudes. Promote and foster tolerant and open, socially and environmentally responsible, forward-looking and flexible attitudes and values.

Built and Natural Environment

- High quality urban environment. Create high-quality urban environments by promoting distinctiveness and innovative people-friendly urban design, as well as providing good accessibility to education, health, sport and recreation facilities, culture and transport.
- Management of resources. Develop and implement an efficient national sustainable resource management system that would ensure security of energy provision, efficient management of water resources, and effective control and proper restoration of other natural resources.
- Vision for the countryside. Build and implement a long-term cohesive vision for the development of the countryside and rural areas.
- 'Golden circles'. Provide public transport accessible for all within 10 minutes walking distance.
- Climate change. Test all plans against the possible implications of climate change and adopt adequate strategies to mitigate its consequences.

Creativity and Innovation

- Collaboration in education. Foster collaboration between Irish third-level institutions and promote links with global centres of excellence. Encourage cooperation instead of competition to strengthen the existing centres and eliminate overlaps.
- Developing new attitudes. Construct a new curriculum for primary and secondary education that would promote creativity and innovation, the development of flexible and complexity-friendly mindsets that would be geared to developing individual skills.
- Strengths in distinctiveness. Build upon the existing cultural and artistic traditions of the Irish nation, as well as on unique local strengths in developing new types of economic activity and creative clusters.
- Innovative society. Develop mechanisms to harvest the innate innovativeness and creativity of individual citizens and communities in the search for imaginative and inspired solutions across all areas of public life.
- Commercialisation of R&D. Facilitate collaboration between universities and industry in order to create an environment in which a high commercialisation of research can be achieved.

A selection of ideas for the development of a preferred future for each gateway. These were developed upon the analysis of the future scenarios and the material collected during the whole process.

CORK

Brand	City of Water	Stronghold of Irish Culture	Modern Industries
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River Lee • The harbour • The Docklands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural and recreational facilities • Strong GAA spirit of the county • Urban heritage and natural beauty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing pharmaceutical and food sectors • Third level educational institutes
Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational use of Lough and the harbour • Water sold as a resource • Tidal barrages • Advanced water technologies • Water based energy generation • Stop for cruise ships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital of Irish culture and sports • Musical centre of the West • Tourism sector strengthened through development of unique tourism product 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-value added employment in pharmaceutical and food sectors around the strong R&D base

DUNDALK

Brand	Vibrant and Modern City	Clean and Green Technologies	Recreation, Sport and Leisure
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration of local business in 'Dundalk – feel the energy' initiative • Existing cluster of indigenous and foreign firms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Concerto' programme - renewable energy cluster • Research centres at DkIT in renewable energy & fresh water studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of leisure, sport & recreational facilities • High quality of natural environment (sea and mountains)
Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of new identity for Dundalk around its existing strengths: natural environment, possible twinning with Newry, high quality of life & hard working people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of renewable energy and clean technology sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational & leisure hub within the Dublin-Belfast Corridor based on the high quality of natural resources & wide range of facilities

GALWAY

Brand	The City of Talent and Creativity	Smart Partnerships	Green Capital
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong brand linked to arts, crafts, festivals and vibrancy • Pool of young & talented people in universities & magnet for artists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong ICT and medical devices sector • Two third level institutes: NUI Galway and GMIT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality local natural environment • Combination of wind and wave resources
Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of indigenous industry based on arts, creative sector & multicultural population • Using creativity in developing innovative solutions to ensure high quality of natural & built environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further development of high value added services in ICT, life sciences and medical devices sectors upon collaboration of NUI Galway & GMIT with industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening of tourist industry through provision of unique products linked to water and wind • Potential for generation of renewable energy – ocean based

LETTERKENNY

Brand	'We are Different Up Here'	Heaven of the North	Northern Alliance
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong identity and uniqueness characteristic for Donegal • Existing vibrancy, community spirit & partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful scenery and natural resources • High quality of life • Arts and crafts traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close location to Derry and other parts of Northern Ireland • Existing relationship with Derry
Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a distinct brand around quality of life and good work-life balance • People and environment as the key focus for the brand • Attracting people & investment by offering a different way of doing things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of specific tourism products based on natural beauty, heritage, culture and sports • Establishment of eco-communities and educational programmes • Renewable energy production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of synergy with Derry and other towns in Northern Ireland in order to improve infrastructure and attract investment and skilled labour

LIMERICK

Brand	Campus City	River City	From the Past to the Future
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration between University of Limerick & Limerick Institute of Technology • High student population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River Shannon as a physical and social resource • Shannon as a symbol – the longest river, division of East and West 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interesting history of the city • A number of remarkable heritage sites and districts • Modern industries
Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building of a 'campus city' known worldwide for its multicultural learning environment, arts & sporting facilities, as well as centre for languages studies • Creation of open and friendly atmosphere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a new cluster of the city around Shannon, based on quality of life, sports and leisure • Protection of Shannon as a source of clean water • Development of clean water technologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restoration of historic sites • Successful social regeneration of disadvantaged areas • Development of centres of excellence in cooperation with universities

MIDLANDS

Brand	Excellence in Rural Living	'Back Office' for Eastern Engine	Centres of Excellence
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas with good environmental quality • Network of canals, heritage sites and villages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location in the middle between Dublin & Galway • Proximity to the Eastern Economic Engine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Athlone Institute of Technology as a key driver for the local economy
Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of variety of options for rural living through creation of unique rural settlements, niche activities and sports • Development of excellent educational facilities at primary & second level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of various 'back office' type services, such as logistics, waste management and treatment, water processing, energy generation etc. • Managed forests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of new centres of excellence at AIT in collaboration with industry • Establishment of National Administration Hub

SLIGO

Brand	Cultural Centre of North West	Garden of North West	Creative industries
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literary traditions of the Yeats Country • Plans for cultural quarter around the Model Gallery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding natural scenery • Seeds of organic agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sligo Institute of Technology • Growing number of artists and talented people moving to Sligo
Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering initiatives based on culture and creativity • Development of specific tourism products around literary traditions, natural beauty and dynamic multicultural atmosphere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of 'eco' image based on renewable energy, organic farming and green tourism • Promoting the image of the highest quality of life and slower pace of life • Establishment of protected areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the creative industries cluster upon the collaboration of Sligo IT with local industries and diverse, talented artists' community • Role of Sligo IT in fostering innovative learning & entrepreneurship

WATERFORD

Brand	Old-New City	Water Garden City	Regional Centre for South East
Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing features: Viking origins, Waterford Crystal, Tall Ships and other amenities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality of natural environment around Waterford • River and sea location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Already functions as services, education & health regional centre
Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a new brand for the city by merging old with new 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vibrant city centre with exposed water features • High quality of life, supported by outer lying towns and villages for energy, food production, tourism products and recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening of its position as a regional centre for the South East by providing education, health and professional services • Southern gateway to the Eastern Corridor (proximity to Southern England)

Project Team

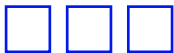


The Urban Forum is an initiative of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland, Engineers Ireland, the Irish Planning Institute, the Irish Landscape Institute and the Society of Chartered Surveyors. The aims of the Forum are:

- to promote the discipline of urban design in the public and private sectors;
- to develop education courses for members of the above bodies to improve the levels of Urban Design knowledge and skills within the professions; and
- to promote the benefits of good urban design to the public.



The Futures Academy is an active research organisation, which was founded in response to the need for a fresh, more effective approach towards forward planning. Established in January 2003, it is located in the Faculty of the Built Environment at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Ireland. Through futures thinking, the Academy aims to promote new ways of exploring and approaching the future. Using various futures methodologies and techniques we examine the future of society, the economy and the environment. In order to encourage creative and innovative thinking we introduce futures methodologies to industry and government and assist public and private parties in applying futures methods.



School of Spatial Planning

The School of Spatial Planning at Dublin Institute of Technology is the largest planning school in Ireland and educates professionals in the areas of land use planning, environmental management and geomatics. The appropriate use of limited space and resources is one of the most pressing concerns in modern times. Questions of the location of public facilities, how to move around efficiently, how to use limited resources with best regard to future generations, and concerns about the spatial consequences of climate change, are pressing issues at this time. Graduates of the School of Spatial Planning at DIT have gone on to play leadership roles equipped with the strategic foresight and practical skills that are essential for this role.

Project Team

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