Regional Studies Association
THE GLOBAL FORUM FOR CITY AND REGIONAL RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY

REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION
IRISH BRANCH

E-NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 15, December 2014

Welcome to the fifteenth issue of the Regional Studies Association (RSA) e-newsletter. This e-newsletter serves as a way for the Irish Branch of the Association to highlight conferences, events, publications and other developments of interest in the broad regional policy area. Contact details are included below.

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1. About the Association

The Regional Studies Association is a learned society interested in regional development, policy and research. The Association carries out a range of activities including:

- publishing a journal, newsletter and books;
- organising conferences and other meetings; and
- establishing and maintaining a branch and international section network.

It has an international membership of individuals, corporate organisations and students. The Irish Branch was formed to provide a forum to discuss regional issues in Ireland.

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2. News

Report of Joint RSAI and DOECLG Workshop on Local Economic and Community Plans

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provides for the preparation, adoption and implementation of integrated Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP) by each local authority. These plans are a central feature of restoring the role of local government to local economic and community development. They are seen as providing a platform for local government to expand its role at local level through providing the leadership needed to help each city and county meet its development potential.

To facilitate and support the local authorities in preparing their Plans, the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government with the Regional Studies Association (Irish Branch) held a one-day workshop on 20th November at the Custom House for Directors of Service with responsibility for the preparation of the LECPs. The eighty plus participants also included the newly appointed chief officers of the Local Community Development Committees. The focus of the workshop was to present the draft national guidelines on the LECP process and to explore best practice examples of evidence based decision-making from two local authorities, Limerick City and County Council and Meath County Council. The workshop focussed in particular on the use of local data to determine local priorities for economic and social development. In addition, the development of LECPs is seen as having a central role in the preparation of the imminent corporate plans in local government. They are also expected to become an integral element in the wider regional, spatial, and economic strategies which will be prepared in 2015. Speakers were drawn from the Department, the RSAI, as well as from local government.

Joint RSAI and DOECLG Workshop speakers (left) and delegates (right)

Following an overview and welcome from Mr. Denis Conlon, of the Department and Dr. Chris Van Egeraat, Chairman of the Irish Branch of the Regional Studies Association, the opening paper was presented by Dr. Seán Ó'Riordáin of the Irish Branch. He covered the implications of the LECP for business planning within local government, noting the critical relationship between the plans and the corporate planning process in each local authority. Dr. Ó'Riordáin highlighted the need to ensure that both sets of plans were clearly integrated and that this might require an on-going review of corporate plans by local authorities rather than the experience of previous corporate planning in local government where the corporate plan was seen as a once-in-an-electoral-cycle obligation to be fulfilled by each authority.

Mr. Pat Gallagher, Senior Planner with Meath County Council then set out that Council's experience in undertaking an economic strategy which is nearing completion. The process was undertaken with direction from a cross disciplinary group of political and business figures in the county, the Meath Economic Forum, ranging from senior political leadership in the form of the former Taoiseach, Mr. John Bruton, to industry leaders within Meath. This focused public-private group provided the necessary drive to ensure that the strategy would be relevant, innovative, and complementary to the preparation of the LECP.
Of particular note, Mr. Gallagher highlighted the use of relevant data which allowed the Council and its contributors take a realistic look at the possible options for underpinning economic development in the County. This included acknowledging the central role played by indigenous development, something which is often given less prevalence as decision-makers seek to focus on foreign direct investment opportunities.

Dr. Van Egeraat and Justin Gleeson of the Association and Maynooth University focused on the experience of working alongside Meath County Council in producing the Meath Economic Baseline Study, which provided the evidence base underpinning the Economic Strategy for Meath. Both highlighted the experience as a positive contribution to understanding the dynamics of economic planning in a county like Meath. Both argued that the benefits of undertaking an LECP would be considerably enhanced by including a regional perspective as counties cannot be seen as separate economic units but rather, given the influence of FDI, travel patterns etc., are influencing and influenced by dynamics that are as much regional as are local.

The experience of Limerick was outlined by Dr. Eileen Humphries of the University of Limerick. This is set against the back drop of considerable re-configuration of local government in Limerick which includes the merger of a city council and a county council into a unified City and County Council. Dr. Humphries set out the basis for the evidence used in developing the thinking which underpinned the preparation of the LECP. The use of Small Area Level Data prepared by the Central Statistics Office from the 2011 Census has played a particularly important role as it allows policy-makers to take a targeted approach to addressing the social strand of the LECP. This, Dr. Humphries noted, has significance in that social data, when used appropriately, complements thinking on economic policy development and *vice versa.* The initial stages in the Limerick Plan are now advancing with this understanding at the heart of the consultation process. This process provides a possible model for other authorities to follow.

Dr. Edgar Morgenroth, of the ESRI and the Association continued on the theme of planning being essential, but only if based upon data which was genuinely based upon proper analysis. In his view, anything else would be counterproductive. Dr. Morgenroth also noted the on-going exclusion of market appraisal in the planning process, providing one of the most basic reasons for much policy failure in Ireland. He called for an evidence-based approach to the LECPs which should be set within agreed principles. Such principles should reflect values driven by consistency across policies as well as complementarity within all spatial and economic planning exercises, from the local to regional and national plans. Of particular note Dr. Morgenroth noted that coherence in plans would:

- Require acknowledgement that it is not unusual to find contradictory objectives in policy documents – economic development goals may be contradictory to environmental goals. However, an explicit ranking helps in prioritising policies and allows for a proper debate.

- Accept that planning objectives should be feasible – having an aspiration to achieve an impossible goal is not helpful in identifying sensible policies. Most places want to be a

world leader in the industry that generates the fastest growth, but by definition not every place can be specialised in a particular industry.

- Avoid, if they are to work, contradictory objectives: contradictory policies can and should be avoided, as these have real cost.

Mr. Donal Enright of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government continued on the detail of the policy reforms and the expected outcomes from introduction of the LECP process within local government. The Department, while recognising that many local authorities had already commenced the LECP in their areas, needed to ensure that all authorities would take a pro-active approach to preparation of the Plans as these are seen as a central pillar in the overall local government reform process. The Department, Mr. Enright noted, was not seeking to be overly prescriptive, but rather to recognise that economic development will be delivered differently in each local authority depending on the characteristics of the area. Nonetheless it also has to recognise that each plan will help inform the drafting of the forthcoming regional economic strategies as well as the regional planning of agencies such as the IDA and Enterprise Ireland. He encouraged the authorities to take economic development as a mainstream role alongside their more traditional functions. As the Department sees the process it is about the leadership of the local authority in looking at how it performs, at how it create and support better "place making", how it can sell a place to new industries, and, most importantly, how it can engage with business, industry, third-level institutions etc. to ensure a coherent and cohesive approach to economic development across the area.

Following the presentations the participants had the opportunity for an intensive question and answer session under the chairmanship of Ms. Sinéad Carr, Director of Planning and Economic Development in Tipperary County Council. The issues raised during this session included:

- How other structures, who were not sitting on the LCDC, would engage with the LECP and sign up to the actions outlined
- How such structures would subsequently engage with the LCDC on feeding back progress in their action areas
- How the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategy would link in with the LECPs given the timeline for its commencement and how the Regional Authorities would service the need to feedback on all LECPs
- The need for an integrated forum at national government level to oversee the LECP and ensure agency buy-in with the responsible Minister
- The need to recognise the Dublin situation and structures (particularly in the context of the municipal districts)

- Timeframe for the LECP cycle was less than the Development Plan two year cycle and yet significant consultation was required
- The need for the resolution to kick start the process

Some clarification was provided by the Department's representatives in response to the above. This included:

- The intention is to have an integrated forum at a high level in Government which would try and ensure that there was a more active integrated approach to local economic and community development activity at a local level with the support and, where required, the direction of central bodies. Significant engagement with various departments was already underway in this context and in the context of how the LCDC/LECP would assist them to achieve the overriding Government aim of ensuring a more efficient, effective and transparent spend of public funds locally
- The Regional Assemblies would be expected to comment on the LECPs and ensure that each tied in with the key regional priorities. In addition, the current Regional Enterprise Strategies (RESS) being drawn up by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation would also inform the LECP in a regional context. Whilst the timeframes were currently out of sync, the expectation is that the LECP would be amended once the RESS was adopted to ensure it aligned with the priorities of the Regional Plan.

A protocol document is being drawn up by the Department which is going to address the potential inputs of those structures that currently do not have a seat on the LCDC. It is expected that this would address the current gap. Where such agencies are assigned and signed up to actions on the LECP, there would be an expectation that they would report back on progress with same to the LCDC/SPC for Economic Development – whichever is appropriate.

The workshop provided an opportunity for those charged with the responsibility of delivering the LECPs to draw upon the experience of members of the Association which was fully acknowledged, as well as the opportunity to access expertise not otherwise available to them. It was evident that much effort could be addressed though inter-authority information sharing, as well as having access to the data sources developed by members of the Association in their professional daily activities, something which the Department might reasonably be expected to address as quickly as possible in order to reduce duplication and displacement of scare resources.

REPORT OF RSA IRISH BRANCH ONE-DAY CONFERENCE ON THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Pictured are (from left) Professor Bill O'Gorman, Tom Boland, Dr. Chris van Egeraat, Professor David Charles and Dr. Paul Benneworth

In October the Irish Branch of the Regional Studies Association organised a one-day conference exploring the role of universities in regional development. The conference, attended by over 50 delegates, was organised in conjunction with the Waterford Institute of Technology who also provided the venue. Waterford was an interesting backdrop for this particular conference given the ongoing debate concerning the need for a University for the South East.

The opening address was delivered by Mr. Tom Boland, CEO of the Higher Education Authority, Ireland and two keynote speakers were organised: Prof. Paul Benneworth, Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), University of Twente, The Netherlands and Prof. David Charles, European Policies Research Centre, School of Government and Public Policy, University of Strathclyde (Speaker Sponsored by the South East Regional Authority). Other speakers included: Dr. Ronnie Munk and Dr. Deiric Ó Broin (DCU); James Cunningham (NUI Galway); Prof. Michael Cuddy (NUI Galway); Dr. Chris van Egeraat (MU), Dr. Declan Curran (DCU) and Prof. Colm O'Gorman (DCU); Mr. Terry O'Brien (South East Regional Authority), Dr. Valerie Brett (WIT) and Professor Bill O'Gorman (WIT). This report summarises the contributions made by Tom Boland and the two keynote speakers.

In his opening address, Tom Boland took the opportunities to outline the main pillars of the higher education (HE) reform. The national objectives will be met by a smaller number of HE institutions, which will be transformed from a set that currently operates very much in isolation, independently from each other, into a coherent well co-ordinated system. To ensure the rigor of the process the HEA will operate a mandate to negotiate and agree individual compacts, contracts with each HE institution. These will require institutions to set goals and each institution will be held accountable for the performance. This is referred to as "Strategic Dialogue". The relationship is going to change from a focus on inputs to one on outcomes and from a fragmented system of institutions to a co-ordinated system of differentiated institutions. For the conference address Tom Boland focused his remarks on the context of the national strategy and, in particular, the regional clusters as an example of the impact of HE on regional development. The regional clusters are one of the main pillars of reform.

The ultimate vision of the regional clusters is that they will function to build dynamic and innovative regions of knowledge capable of increasing regional capacity, national capability and global competitiveness in order to contribute significantly to economic development. And they will do this by exploiting the strength of individual institutions within the cluster and by maximising their collective capacity. The clusters will bring together HE institutions to work collectively, work with other parts of the education system, with enterprise, with the community and with the regional authorities to provide education and research programmes and to engage in knowledge exchange. Clusters are envisaged to play a leadership role in Ireland's community's social, economic and cultural vibrancy and will contribute to the regions' economic development.

The regional clusters have been invited to prepare three-year plans and will be asked, in the first instance, to address two priority objectives:

1. Shared coordinated academic planning. This effectively means, developing joint programmes, a shared access to common modules, a removal of unnecessary duplication, a coordinated approach to research and research programmes, and regional collaboration on structured PhDs.

2. A regionally coordinated approach to transfer and student progression pathways.
There will be further objectives for the clusters as they roll out such as:

i. Coordinated regional approach to enterprise and the community and to regional development.
ii. Shared services and facilities, including harmonisation of systems and processes.
iii. Shared approach to presentation and promoting of the region internationally.

iv. Developing strategies for foreign student recruitment.

In relation to structure and governance, the HEA is looking for simple and clear structures that facilitate the institutions to manage and work together to agreed common objectives. No additional statutory governance layer will be created. Institutions, within each clusters, are expected to put in place governance agreements as they see best.

Mr. Boland argued that the concept of strategic clusters gels well with the four key findings of the 2007 OECD study into the impact of HE on regions.

1. Local availability skills and knowledge is becoming increasingly important
2. Many countries are meeting regional development goals by nurturing the unique assets and circumstances of the regions.
3. In the past there has been a lack of strategic focus by public policy and HE institutions on the contributions these institutions can make to the regions in which they are located – a lack of strategic regional engagement.
4. There is a clear correlation between thriving regions and thriving HE sectors in those regions.

Mr. Boland expanded on this last finding with the observation that, unless the institution is of a high quality, it will have significantly sub-optimal impact upon its region. And it is for this reason that, in their process of development, Technological Universities in Ireland are required to conform to a rigorous peer review process and to meet the standards that would be expected from a university from an international perspective. He added that the Government, on advice of the HEA, has agreed that a university in the South East would be a welcome development. The institutions now need to do the planning and get themselves into position that will get them through a rigorous process.

The national strategy for HE is based on three pillars: 1) quality teaching and learning; 2) research; 3) engagement. It is the development of robust structures for engagement and meaningful sustained relationships between business and the community and institutions that the HEA will require as part of the performance assessment of HE institutions in the future. The winners, Mr. Boland concluded, will be the regions, the institutions and the country as a whole.
Following from Mr. Boland a key note address was delivered by Prof. Paul Benneworth. In this Prof. Benneworth discussed what a regionally engaged university looks like and the role it plays in regional development. In the first part of his presentation Dr. Benneworth discussed the concept of a university's societal mission. Using examples, such as the role the Catholic University of Leuven played in educating administrators to manage trade in the 15th century, he provided a brief overview of the historic importance of universities in societal development. However, he suggests that universities do not always engage locally and that many will focus

on engaging with the best partners available wherever they are located. He further noted that a university's links to society can be formal (appearing in the university's annual report) or informal (such as student work placement). These types and forms of interaction vary from university to university and depend on the culture of the institution.

Following from this, Prof. Benneworth discussed the rise of the university's regional mission. With the emergence of the knowledge economy and a highly uneven geography of economic development, an increasing importance was placed on the development of human capital. In a regional context this increasingly meant a focus on developing a competitive advantage. Dr. Benneworth outlined the role of universities in a regional innovation system as a key knowledge producer as well as facilitator of knowledge transfer and linkages. However, Prof. Benneworth noted that there can be tensions between the traditional role of a university and a regionally engaged university. Problems can exist such as whether universities should be competing or collaborating with regional actors/businesses with universities and businesses needing to develop trusting relationships over time in order to co-operate effectively. Universities can also be influenced by path dependence, locked into a particular way of conducting their business and reluctant to change and engage with their region.

In his conclusion Prof. Benneworth noted that, while these tensions might exist, universities play a central role in regional development. Their contributions include, but are not limited to, the typically cited examples of clusters, linkages and the development of global pipelines arguments. Their roles evolve over time and become incorporated into a fully developed regional innovation system which is multi-levelled, incorporating a diverse set of actors.

Following from Prof. Benneworth, Professor Charles discussed the conceptual foundation of an engaged university and its region. He argued that engagement was usually seen as an empirical question, with a focus on quantifying the level of engagement and its impact, but that it should be more conceptually driven. He asked a number of key questions such as: how does regional engagement fit in with a university's mission? What is the right spatial scale for engagement? Universities are comprised of individuals but how do we stimulate good individual engagement? Professor Charles noted that a number of theories suggest that university engagement is important for regional development but that these theories all suggested that universities would have different territorial focuses and demands and require different activities. He suggested that an engaged university would possess a number of characteristics such as building and strengthening relationships with local partners, working with those partners to identify needs and opportunities of engagement, encouraging students and faculty to engage with community needs and reward such engagement and, finally, it would have an increased awareness of local partners.

Professor Charles then noted that the spatial scale of engagement was also a matter for discussion. Is the relevant spatial scale the local/city scale, the regional (but who defines what the region is?), the national or even the international? He noted that all may be relevant but that judgements must be made as to the effort exerted by the university to engage at these different spatial scales. He then proceeded to discuss the role individuals play in university engagement, noting that many engagement activities are driven by individuals and that individual relationships are important. He notes that knowledge exchange takes place between individuals rather than between organisations. However, interaction may take place based on cognitive proximity rather than simply spatial proximity, so that individuals may be driven to engage with people outside the region. Therefore, there is a need for a clear incentive process to reward regional interaction at the individual level. He concluded by noting that further research needs to be done on engagement, placing a greater focus on the level of the individual. However, there also needs to be better analysis of national and regional variation in institutional contexts which may make certain types of policies more relevant in one area than another.

3. Upcoming Events

FORTHCOMING AGM AND COMMITTEE MEETING OF REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION IRISH BRANCH

The next RSA Irish Branch AGM will take place at 1 p.m on Thursday 8 January 2015 in DIT Bolton Street, Dublin (Room 309). The RSA AGM will be followed directly by the RSA Committee meeting.

RSA ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2015

Date: 24th - 27th May 2015

Venue: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Piacenza, Italy

"Global Growth Agendas: Regions, Institutions and Sustainability"

Social and economic imbalances of the current phase of globalization require a rethinking of the model of international and regional development. The issues of inequality, ecological risks, and poor growth in some areas put at the center of the scientific and political debate the theme of values and institutions. What are the values for sustainable regional development in the future? And what institutional reforms are needed to overcome the negative consequences of the recession triggered by the financial turmoil of recent years? Which tools can strengthen the capacity of regions and cities to adapt to all changes and to increase the resilience of areas?

To answer these questions the RSA 2015 Annual Conference in Piacenza offers some lines of reflection about the themes of well-being and quality of life, technological and social innovation, individual and collective entrepreneurship, by starting from the analysis of the values and motivations that drive individual and institutional action.

Abstract submission deadline: Friday 30th January 2015. Further information can be found on the RSA website: http://www.regionalstudies.org/conferences/conference/regional-studies-association-annual-conference-2015-piacenza-italy.

If you have a submission or suggestion on any upcoming events, seminars, presentations or conferences and would like them to be included in a future edition, please email chris.vanegaeraat@nuim.ie
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4. Funding Opportunities

WDC MICRO-LOAN FUND: CREATIVE INDUSTRIES CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

The Western Development Commission (WDC) has launched a call for applications under its Micro-Loan Fund for Creative Industries. The fund is a pilot initiative, allocating €1m over a three year period from the Western Investment Fund to the creative industries sector.

The Micro-Loan Fund will operate on a competitive 'Call for Applications' basis with four calls in 2014, the fourth of which is currently open for applications, with a closing date of 31st December, 2014. Loans of between €5,000 and €25,000 are available to successful applicants. Applications will be accepted from the first working day to the last working day of each quarter (March, June, September and December).

Creative Industries are defined as "occupations and industries centered on creativity, for the production and distribution of original goods and services". The following 12 creative industries make up the creative sector and businesses from these sectors are eligible to apply: Advertising; Architecture; Art/Antiques trade; Crafts; Design; Digital media; Fashion; Internet and software; Music, visual and performing arts; Publishing Radio and TV broadcasting; Video, film and photography.

Further details at: http://www.wdc.ie/microfundci/

SFI SPOKES PROGRAM 2014

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) has recently launched the SFI Spokes Programme 2014. This programme is a vehicle to enable the addition of new industrial and academic partners and projects to a SFI Research Centre, so allowing the Centre to expand and develop in line with new priorities and opportunities. This will ensure that the Research Centre retains its ability to do cutting edge research and its industrial relevance, and so enhance its sustainability. The Spokes programme also provides a vehicle to link together, in a meaningful and relevant way, different Research Centres.

The Spokes Fixed call will be an open competition for a planned amount of funding from SFI's budget, with a fixed deadline for applications. A minimum budgetary contribution of 30% will be required from industry, which can be composed of both in-kind and cash contributions; the cash contribution must be a minimum of 10% of the total award size, in line with the cost-share criteria of the main Research Centres call. The deadline for submission of proposals for the fixed call is 16th December 2014 13:00 GMT. There is no pre-proposal stage.

The Spokes Rolling call will remain open, with no closing date (until further notice), to allow Research Centres to apply for funding at any time for new collaborative research projects with an industry partner(s).To apply for a Spokes award under the rolling call mechanism, the industry partner (or partners) must make a minimum 50% cash contribution to the research programme. For further details see: http://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/open-calls/

If you are aware of, or your organisation is responsible for the administration of, funding opportunities and you would like them to be included in a future edition, please email declan.curran@dcu.ie

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5. Publications of Interest

Research Papers

Crawford, S., Feeney, B., Morgenroth, E., and A. Murphy (2014) "Demographic and Economic Forecasting Report: National Transport Model Volume 3" Dublin: National Roads Authority. http://www.nra.ie/policy-publications/national-transport-model/Demographic-and-Economic-Forecasting-Report_15.09.14.pdf

Kitchin, R, O'Callaghan, C, Gleeson, J (2014) 'The new ruins of Ireland?: Unfinished estates in the post-Celtic Tiger era'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38:1069 - 1080.

Morgenroth, E. (2014) "The Regional Development Impacts of Transport Infrastructure", Background Paper Seven for Investing In Our Transport Future: A Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport. Dublin: Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. http://igees.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/sfilt-background-paper-7-regional-development-impacts-transport-infastructure.pdf

Morgenroth, E., (2014)"Projected Population Change and Housing Demand: A County Level Analysis" ESRI Research Note.

http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/RN20140203/RN20140203.pdf

O'Callaghan, C, Boyle, M, Kitchin, R (2014) 'Post-politics, crisis, and Ireland's 'ghost estates". *Political Geography*, 42:121 - 133.

Western Development Commission (2014) Where Will Future Population Growth Occur? Regional Population Projections 2016-2031. WDC Report, December 2014 http://www.wdc.ie/wp-content/uploads/Reional-Pop-Projections-WDC-Report-Dec-2014.pdf

Working papers:

Breathnach, P., Van Egeraat, C. and Curran, D. (2014) Regional Economic Resilience in Ireland: The Roles of Industrial Structure and Foreign Inward Investment, NIRSA Working Paper 76. https://www.dropbox.com/s/mvv7c6yj7zwgobv/NIRSA%20WP76.pdf?dl=0 *[website under development - location subject to change]*

Morgenroth, E., (2014) "Modelling the Impact of Fundamentals on County Housing Markets in Ireland" MPRA Working Paper No. 57665.

If you wish to have a recently published book/paper listed in this section of future newsletters, please e-mail details formatted as above to Declan.curran@dcu.ie

6. SPECIAL FEATURE

RSA IRISH BRANCH CONFERENCE ON REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, UCD

David Bailey, Professor of Industrial Strategy at Aston Business School, delivering his keynote address.

The RSA Irish Branch organized three themes sessions on Regional Economic Development as part of the Conference of Irish Geographers, UCD, 9th May 2014. Contributors included: Martin Sokol (TCD); Zoltan Gal (Hungarian Academy); Pat Collins (NUIG); Majella Giblin (TCD) and Paul Ryan (NUIG); Brendan Williams (UCD); Enda Keenan and Des McCafferty (MIC/UL); Proinnsias Breathnach (MU), Chris van Egeraat (MU) and Declan Curran (DCU); Justin Doran (UCC); Dieter Kogler (UCD), Jürgen Essletzbichler (UCL) and David Rigby (UCLA)

The keynote address was delivered by David Bailey, Professor of Industrial Strategy at the Aston Business School, Birmingham. David has written extensively on economic restructuring and industrial and regional policy, especially in relation to manufacturing and the auto industry. He has acted as Specialist Advisor to the House of Commons Select Committee on the West Midlands. David delivered an insightful paper on “place-based policy approaches and the UK government’s Localism Agenda”. Below we present a summary of the key points.

David explored the current policy debate and substantial discussion surrounding two competing policy instruments to deal with uneven economic development, the first being place-based policy, the second being people-centred policy. Place-based policy argues that there is a need

to support regions and that central policy instruments cannot be relied upon to re-balance economic growth across regions. One argument is that a lack of place-based policy can result in capital cities predominately capturing and dominating economic policy. This approach often argues for multi-level government and the decentralization of decision making powers along with direct support to lagging regions to encourage the generation of employment, infrastructural development and inward investment by firms. It advocates an avoidance of top down policy making in favour of more organic and tailored polices which focus on the specific characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the region. The aim of this type of policy is to promote spatially balanced economic development, allowing each region to perhaps specialize in particular areas of industrial development to which they are best suited.

The alternative is a people-centred or space blind policy. In this type of policy intervention it is people, not regions, which are the focus of policy intervention. The idea being that support is provided in the form of training and education to individuals so that they achieve the necessary skills to gain and maintain employment. However, the assumption is that these individuals are mobile, essentially going where the jobs are rather than remaining within the region and the jobs coming to them. So individuals may be trained and educated in the periphery but then would flow to major metropolitan areas for employment. In this view it is not about balanced growth across regions but about providing everyone with equal opportunities for employment and equality. This policy focuses on a few major 'engines' of growth and allows these to pull ahead of the peripheral regions, stimulating internal migration from the periphery to the key urban areas. While this promotes regionally uneven economic development, proponents of this policy argue that it provides individuals with equal opportunities and that it is the individual, not the region, which is important.

David used the simple example of the uneven distribution of unemployment rates across regions to show how a place-based policy would differ to a people-centred policy. The essential problem underlying regional disparities in unemployment rates may be an uneven distribution of employment opportunities, with certain regions possessing greater demand for employees than others. In a people-centred policy intervention the aim would be to reduce the barriers faced by people in the periphery to obtaining jobs in the core where there is higher employment demand. This could involve ensuring that the training and education provided in the periphery matched the demand for skills in the core. The policy could also focus on reducing any existing barriers which present problems for individuals migrating from the periphery to the core. These could include issues such as affordable housing supplies and adequate infrastructure to support a growing population. The end result would be a flow of individuals from the periphery to the core, perhaps further driving spatially unbalanced economic development.

The place-based approach on the other hand would acknowledge that the larger urban cores would expect natural growth to occur due to agglomeration effects. That is to say that these cores could be expected to have relatively higher levels of infrastructure, to have better quality infrastructure and to be relatively more prosperous due to their size and history. Place-based policy would suggest that an a-spatial policy will not work as barriers exist which prevent regional migration and also that historical differences across regions matter. This is essentially saying that it is not as simple as providing even educational opportunities and expecting individuals to flow smoothly from one locality to another. Place-based policies argue that local regional governance should be given the opportunity and resources to respond to uneven economic development and that the approach adopted by different regions may differ substantially.

For a more extensive discussion of David Bailey's presentation, see: *Council Review 2014*, Issue 44

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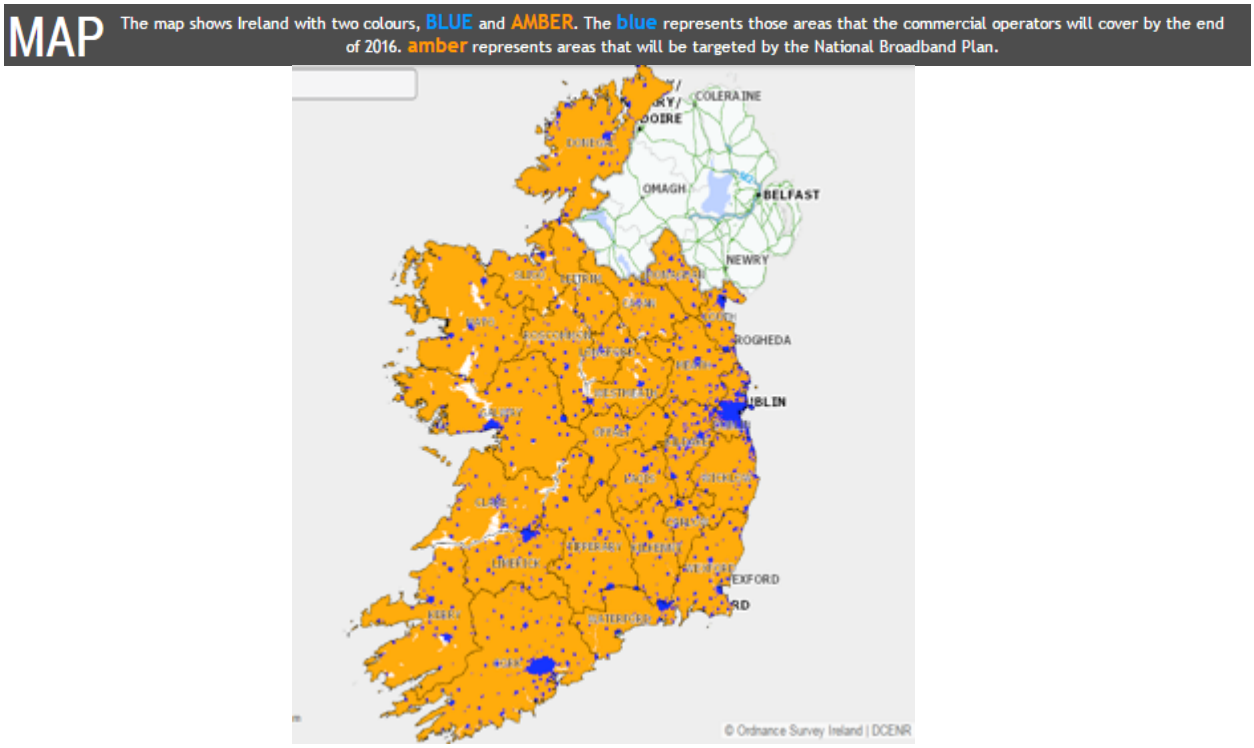
7. Regional Policy: What's New?

INTERACTIVE MAPS OF NATIONAL BROADBAND AVAILABILITY

The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources has launched the public consultation process for the National Broadband Plan (NBP). This process has been accompanied by the publication of online maps showing Next Generation Broadband will be delivered to every home and business across the country. Public consultation on the maps is seen as an important part of the process of roll-out, and will be critical in ensuring that all homes and businesses can access Next Generation broadband of at least 30 Mbps. The consultation is important because it helps us to further develop the accuracy of the map. The consultation process aims to identify the areas that the State should intervene. It is also a key part of the EU State Aid approval for the Connecting Communities intervention.



Source: http://www.broadband.gov.ie/

The Next Generation Broadband Map can be accessed at http://www.broadband.gov.ie/ .

NEW FINANCING STREAM FOR SME RESEARCH & INNOVATION

A new guarantee facility to assist innovative small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with accessing finance for investment in research and innovation activities was launched by the European Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) on 5 December. The risk-sharing instrument (RSI) for SMEs is modelled on the success of the large-scale Risk-Sharing

Finance Facility (RSFF) under the 7th Research Framework Programme as a means of unlocking significant new investment for firms.

The RSI version will be managed by the European Investment Fund (EIF) which will provide participating banks with guarantees covering specific lending to SMEs undertaking research, development or innovation, for investments in assets (tangible or intangible) and/or working capital. The loans and leases may amount to between EUR25,000 and EUR7.5 million (an average of EUR2.4 million is estimated in each case with repayment periods over two to seven years. This will have the effect of freeing up more affordable lending. It is being particularly aimed towards enabling dynamic and fast-growing start-up SMEs to grow their businesses. It is intended to expand the scheme from 2014 onwards as part of the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research & Innovation. In the meantime, up to EUR1.2 billion is expected to be unlocked by banks for SME use over the next two years. Additionally, the EIB and the Commission will provide EUR300 million for research infrastructure.

Source: http://www.iro.ie/

8. Contacting the RSA Newsletter

If you have any queries regarding the newsletter, or any comments, suggestions or submissions for future editions (incl. details on upcoming events, publications of interest, job vacancies), please email declan.curran@dcu.ie.

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9. Membership of the RSA

Membership of the Association is open to all individuals and organisations with an interest in the analysis and development of regional policy.

The benefits of membership include nine issues of the international journal *Regional Studies*, four issues of *Regions: The Newsletter of the Regional Studies Association* (overall body), three issues of *Spatial Economic Analysis*, discount on other Routledge publications, access to Association events, and ability to participate in any local branch or section activities.

Membership is based on the calendar year. For the year 2014, membership costs are: Individual £85 (€101); Student £40 (€47); Associate Membership £65 (€77); Corporate £175 (€208). Further details and application forms can be found on the RSA international website: www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk.

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10. Current Irish Committee Members

The current RSA committee for 2014 are: Chris Van Egeraat (Maynooth University - Chairman); Justin Doran (UCC) – Hon. Secretary);; Patrick Collins (NUI Galway Micheál Collins (TCD and NERI) - treasurer; Edgar Morgenroth (ESRI);; David Meredith (Teagasc); Deirdre Frost (Western Development Commission), Ronnie O'Toole (NIB); Sean O'Riordain; Philip O'Connor (Dublin Employment Pact); Finbarr Brereton (UCD); Simon Conry (National Transport Authority); Jamie Cudden (Dublín City Council); Celine McHugh (Forfas); Deiric O'Broin (DCU); Damian Thomas (NESC); Brendan Williams (UCD); Declan Curran (DCU); Jim Fitzpatrick; Dieter Kogler (UCD); William O'Gorman (WIT);

The following are the contact details of the Association: RSA Chairman Chris Van Egeraat: chris.vanegaeraat@nuim.ie; RSA Secretary Justin Doran: Justin.Doran@ucc.ie

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11. Joining/Leaving the RSA (Irish Branch) Mailing List

If you wish to have your details added to, or removed from, the RSA mailing list, please e-mail justin.doran@ucc.ie The RSA updates its mailing list approximately once every six weeks.

A pdf copy of this newsletter is available on the RSA International website at http://www.regionalstudies.org/networks/network/rsair.