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PEOPLE-POWERED PLANNING: PLANNING FROM THE BOTTOM UP IN A TOP-DOWN SYSTEM

Abstract. This paper is concerned with spatial policy in Ireland. It adopts an historical lens to help explain why Ireland currently finds itself at the bottom of the European league table with regard to local governance. After categorising the Irish political and planning system as highly centralised, bureaucratic and linear, the paper uses a case study of the Moycullen village plan to show an alternate path towards place development in Ireland. This case study sets out to contrast the desire of a people to collaborate in the authorship of their place with the top down nature of spatial planning in Ireland. By making clear the methods and results of the project, this paper highlights the latent demand that exists in a community that is subject to national planning system that reduces their ability to affect change. Through the use of some innovative approaches, this project has sought to fire the geographic imaginary of a people with respect to their place.
Key words: spatial planning, centralisation, collaboration, village planning, Ireland.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ireland is a small open economy in Europe's north-western periphery. Over the three decades prior to 2008, it had experienced a level of economic and social prosperity that made it the envy of many small nations. However, the openness of its economic model was called into question when Ireland became exposed to the chill winds of financial collapse resulting from the credit crunch of 2008. Ten

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years later, Ireland had returned to growth. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 it enjoyed high levels of GDP growth (8.2% in 2018) while also bearing the scars of the collapse, most notably in the areas of housing and public service provision.

A recent report from the Irish Central Bank (2020) highlighted the dual economies that exits in Ireland. One is the more traditional economy associated with domestic activity, the other reflects Ireland's unique relationship with foreign direct investment (reaching the equivalent of 80% of GDP in 2015). The presence of large multinational corporations in Ireland skews national accounting. In their questioning of the attractiveness of Ireland for foreign direct investment (FDI) (see Barry, 2019; Collins, 2020) many cite the country's (often times controversial) low tax rate. Others see the picture slightly differently, making reference to educated workforce and a business-friendly environment as determinants of FDI location.

In short, the role played by FDI is determining, not just of economic success, but of the Irish approach to policy making also. For much of the country's history, its geography was a negative factor, an island on the edge lacking any significant natural resources. Now, geography is one of Ireland's biggest advantages, it is the landing point for US MNCs who wish to gain access to the EU's 400 million strong market.

Internally, the picture is not so straightforward. Ireland's pursuit of a service-led economic development has had massive impacts on the country's spatial configuration. While not unique to Ireland, the contrast between bustling cities and vacant rural towns is stark. Ireland's growth, led by the pursuit of an open, outward facing development model has led to a severe spatial imbalance. Irish cities are succeeding after economic downturn, but its towns and villages are left with the physical scars of the last economic boom, speculative land development and the rise of the ghost estate phenomenon (see Grist, 2014; O'Callaghan *et al.*, 2013).

This paper sets out to examine the process of collaborative place authorship in one of Europe's most centralised countries. It utilises a case study approach to highlight the latent demand for active place authorship in a highly centralised country. It focuses on the village of Moycullen in the Galway county, and details the methods adopted in the delivery of a village plan for the area. The Moycullen village plan can be considered unique in its use of a broad consultative approach. The primary objective of the paper is to situate this approach in the broader context of planning in Ireland and reflect on the results of people-authored plan for development at the local level. More broadly, the paper sets out to reflect on the Irish approach to spatial planning. It is one that has been dominated by a highly centralised state that is foremostly concerned with its attractiveness to foreign investors. The lack of any form of regional autonomy together with the urban bias of the Irish industrial policy has brought about a severe spatial imbalance. The next section situates planning in the broader theoretical debate on develop-

ment, then I shall explore the planning context in Europe and in Ireland before introducing the new method and a case study. The paper concludes by making recommendations as to how Ireland might approach development in a more sustainable and equitable way.

2. PLANNING, POWER, AND PRACTICE

Planning is a small word with many connotations. For the purposes of this paper I shall consider planning as the formulation and implementation of spatial public policies. While straightforward, it contains a multitude. It contains aspirations, ideologies, solutions, and imaginaries, it can also be seen as the true manifestation of a state's control over its people. For others, it is the only answer to the impending climate crisis. Indeed, the ongoing ecological crisis has brought planning and the role of planners into sharper focus over the past decade (see Albrechts, 2010).

The practice of planning owes much to the broader evolution of development studies over the past half century. Planning has acted as a key differentiator between economies that tended towards a centralised planning practice and those that abided by the development of economies through more liberalised and free market approaches. One could go as far as to say that planning acted as the incarnation (physical manifestation) of the economic and political ideologies that have defined the world since the end of Second World War. For Yiftachel (1998), the voluminous historical and conceptual literature that describes the emergence of planning over this time can be divided into three main accounts: equity, efficiency and rationality. Here, equity refers to a broader social reform where planning can be seen as a tool to assist the socially disadvantaged and opening up public discourse in a truly democratic sense (see Burgess, 1993; Healey, 1992). Second, planning can increase efficiencies by the use of public intervention to address market failures (Hall, 1998). Finally, planning is a tool for rational and strategic decision-making with respect to environmental and spatial imperatives (Faludi, 1983).

Of the three, it is perhaps the search for efficiencies that has held the greatest sway in recent past. This is most easily identified by the shift from managerialism and Fordism to entrepreneurialism and flexible accumulation that occurred throughout the world's advanced capitalist from the 1970s on (Harvey, 1987, 1989a, 1989b; Brenner, 2006). Planning at the national and sub-national level has been interpreted as a competitive pursuit, with planners tasked with the development of places that 'win' in the competition for global capital flows, what Scott (2006) has termed global interstitial competition. For Holgersen (2020) a clear tension exists between equity and efficiency planning theories. Following on the

work of Foglesong (1986), Holergosn has contended that planning must be understood as rooted in a political economy defined by capitalist social relations.

In some part a response to the proliferation of private interests benefiting from the entrepreneurial approach to planning (see Logan and Molotoch, 1987), attempts at wrestling control from capital interests can be seen in what has been termed a communicative planning approach, imbued with the ideas of deliberative democracy. Based on the Habermasian ideals of openness and truth seeking, communicative planning seeks an enlargement of egalitarian values, through consideration of a wider range of human and natural communities (beyond capital interests) (see Sager, 2007).

2.1. Collaborative Planning

The top-down approach to planning as described by Keeble (1952) has more recently been replaced by the bottom-up, more collaborative practice that has itself been inspired by Habermasian ideas of communication. For Fainstein (2000) the function of this planning approach was seen to be a diverse set of practices in shaping places through consensus building. For Fox-Rogers *et al.* (2002), communicative of collaborative planning has become the dominant discourse in planning theory in recent years. Collaborative planning was seen as the antidote to distortion that resulted from the increased power of capital in development discourses. Best recognised in the work of Healey, the collaborative approach invokes Habermasian communicative techniques by adopting styles of discussion where the points of view of a diverse range of stakeholders can be explored. Here, the role of the planner is that of facilitator, one who is also responsible for the identification and eradication of misinformation of communicative distortion (see Healey, 1996, 2012; McGuirk, 2001).

For Long and Woods (2001) this bottom up approach is a more flexible and efficient way of looking after the needs of places. It involves a commitment from planners and politicians to include multiple stakeholders' viewpoints and experimenting with various methods to ensure effective and open communication (workshops, focus groups, and town hall meetings) (see Healey, 2012). In it we see a change in the role of the planner, constituting something of an about turn from its quantitative roots in the 1950s.

2.2. Critiquing collaboration

Adopting a Marxist perspective Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2011) question the role that class plays in the collaborative planning approach. This is part of an established body of work that highlights the nature of power in planning. Adopting

a Foucauldian approach, theorists such as Flyvberg and Richardson (2002) have contended that the Habermas-inspired approach to collaboration is rooted in an insufficient consideration of power. While agreeing that work inspired by Habermas (i.e. Healey, 1997) does enable a break with instrumentalism, the dominant critique of collaborative planning is that it unwittingly serves as a legitimising strategy for powerful interests and over-emphasises the process rather than producing more equitable outcomes.

In their work on informal strategies of power in the Irish planning system, Fox-Rogers and Murphy (2011) interviewed 20 urban planners and have highlighted how the importance of economic power constitutes what they described as a shadow planning system in Ireland. Purcell (2009) has argued that collaborative approaches have proved attractive for neoliberals to maintain the status quo while also ensuring political sustainability. Explored in further detail in the next section, this chimes with recent work by Collins (2020) who highlighted the enforced entrepreneurialism in Irish local authorities, part of what Molotoch (1976) termed the 'growth machine politics' that has emerged in an attempt to secure new locational advantages in attracting international capital investment (Harvey, 1989; Bartley and Treadwell Shine, 2003; Brenner, 2006). While particularly relevant to the Irish case, my intention here is to consider an augmented approach to collaborative planning at the micro-local level in Ireland. This case study is not naive to the constant multitude of power presences in the Foucauldian sense, but intends to pit collaboration not against a shadow planning system but against a highly centralised one. This is a case study, then, that strives to highlight the shortcomings of the centralised nature of the planning system by encouraging all actors (through a variety of methods) to engage in a collective imagining of a future for their place.

3. THE PLANNING CONTEXT

3.1. The European Approach

Often referred to as an 'experiment', the binding of nations in a Union of Europe has taken many tracks since the European Coal and Steel Treaty of 1951. The forging of stronger ties has been central to this experiment and one way that this has been attempted is through planning. The development of a cohesion policy (bringing together EU regional and social policy) promotes balanced development, sustainability, and policy coherence across the nations and according to Faludi (2010) acts as a kind of spatial planning seeking to integrate forms of spatial development "by the back door." Further, cohesion policy helps legitimise

the EU and its institutions. In terms of visibility, the co-funding of new infra-structure developments from roads to libraries across the continent has enabled a form of branding of the Union in the forms of plaques and roadway signs referring to the importance of cohesion policy and structural funding in making such initiatives happen.

For Faludi (2015) the document resulting from the most sustained attempt at planning is the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC, 1999). The ESDP reflects the diversity of national planning initiatives across the Union and the variety of starting points from which Member States participated in the process. From the Irish perspective, the ESDP together with its outshoot ESPON served as influential documents in national spatial planning (see below). From a critical perspective it served to highlight how much the country could learn from other Member States when it came to planning at the sub-national level.

In their comprehensive compendium of planning approaches both in the US and the European Union, Knapp *et al.* (2014) reflect on the supra, national and sub-national approaches to planning. While the broad trend is towards greater influence of the global flows of capital in affecting development at all spatial scales, Ireland has much to learn from its European neighbours. The EU exam-ples offer clear and unambiguous evidence of devolution in the formulation of planning (especially lands planning). In Denmark, for example, local govern-ments have more responsibility for and discretion over land and spatial planning than at any time in Danish history (Needham, 2016). The second trend noted by (Geppert, 2016) is towards rising regionalism that has become obvious across the continent with France leading the way. The situation is similar in the Netherlands where regions remain the medium for the implementation of the national long-term program for infrastructure, land use and transport investments. A third trend has been the movement away from hierarchy towards territorial governance. This has led to increased co-ordination of actors and institutions, the mobilisation of stakeholder participation, and the realisation of place-based/territorial specifici-ties (Needham, 2016).

3.2. The Irish Approach

The history of spatial planning in Ireland has been explored by a number of writ-ers (see, e.g., Laffan, 1996; Breathnach, 2010, 2013; Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2011; Grist, 2014; MacFeeley, 2016; Murphy, 2019). For the most part these reflections highlight a range of shortcomings and cite aspirational policy docu-ments that rarely become reality. Many such reflections identify the centralised nature of the Irish state. Relative to the European average of close to one quarter, Ireland spends 8% of government finances at the local level (Murphy, 2019). Much of the blame for this lies at the feet of the Irish political system, which

is highly clientelist in nature. National elections are seen as an opportunity to "send a local representative to Dublin" to win opportunities for the locality. Local elections suffer from a double edged sword of decreasing funding / power and increasing voter apathy.

Some argue that the root cause of Ireland's centralist state, one that is dominated by strong (and increasingly professionalised and privatised) public administration, can be traced back to its colonial history (Grist, 2014; Ferriter, 2020). After the turbulent birth of a new nation, the 1920s was a decade dominated by civil war. The absence of a strong government with any real mandate saw development power rest in administrative hands. Nearly a century later, some believe that those hands have only strengthened their grip (Ireland has a proportion of locally elected representative to the public of 1:4,400; equivalent ratios in France and Germany are 1:120 and 1:350 respectively) (*ibid*.). Add to that a political system that veered towards the technocratic and localist, and it becomes easier to understand the disparate nature of spatial development in Ireland (Lynch, 2008; Murray, 2010; Breathnach, 2010).

In terms of legislation, the most recent local government act (2014) saw the merger of city and county councils, as well as the abolishment of town councils. This was the latest in a long line of legislative acts that served to increase power to the national level at the expense of that at the local and regional. From the Ministers and Secretaries Act of 1924, through various amendments to the original Local Government Act of 1898, autonomy at the local level has been undone, leading to what Murphy (2019) termed the dead hands strangling local government in Ireland. Yet that is not to say Ireland has not made attempts to address the spatial imbalance. Let us consider two of these in more detail.

The *Buchanan Plan* of 1968, informed by international best practice, was considered a new and radical approach to regional development in Ireland. Informed by leading contemporary spatial theory, it proposed the development of a growth centre/pole approach to development in Ireland. This was to serve the dual purpose of bettering regional development and ensuring against the overheating of the Dublin city region. The central tenets of the plan were later referred to in the much lauded Kenny Report (noted for its attempts to better manage sprawl in Irish cities, Committee on the Price of Building Land (1973)). The Buchanan Plan saw regional development requiring a reorganisation of subnational local government in Ireland.

The changing geographies of economic development in the 1970s made reports like these all the more necessary. As Ireland entered the EU, it needed to confront the changing nature of the rural. Entry into the 'post-productivist' (Halfacree, 1997) phase of the rural together with decades of mass emigration made the increasing rural urban divide a political issue in Ireland. Ultimately, the urban-led approach of both plans proved too radical for a country that still considered itself rural (Hourihan, 1989).

In the place of a coherent spatial policy, Ireland turned to an industrial policy to spread the wealth. The work of the Irish Industrial Development Agency (IDA) aided better balanced regional development through the dispersal of foreign investors in the country. By the 1970s, a new era of globalisation had seen (primarily US-based) corporations stretch their production networks across ever increasing geographies. A low corporation tax, an educated, English-speaking workforce, and access to the EU market made Ireland an attractive proposition for external investors. The branch plant model of development, aided through a process of regional dispersal by the IDA, saw the establishment of manufacturing in towns and villages across the country (Breathnach, 2013). The 'regional' plans of the IDA ran veritably opposite to the growth centres approach of the Buchanan plan. In essence, Ireland witnessed the cannibalisation of spatial policy by the much more politically palatable industrial policy of job dispersion.

The *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS) of 2002 is another example international best practice, informed by leading contemporary theory, undone by political expediency. Since its accession to the EU, Ireland was required to develop a series of multi-annual development plans. Through their structural funds, the EU helped foster what MacFeely (2016) termed 'pragmatic regionalism' in Ireland. Tantamount to a top-down approach, regional policy was conceived nationally but delivered regionally. It is also widely acknowledged that EU influence on enacting spatial policy in Ireland was best recognised in the development of the NSS. While the influence of the European Spatial Development Perspective (1999) was obvious in the NSS, shadows of Buchanan's 1968 were also evident. New regionalist thinking was to the fore and with that the NSS sought to replace the hierarchical urban structure of core and peripheral regions with a more balanced poly-centric system (see Richardson and Jensen, 2000). The NSS proposed the creation of a poly-centric national urban structure with regional "gateway cities driving a more balanced economic development" (Breathnach, 2013).

While admirable and indeed timely, the NSS suffered from the same underlying issues as the Buchanan Plan. Both were undone by the shadow cast by an industrial policy that was unapologetically neoliberal in its outlook. Sub-national spatial development proved difficult to reconcile with the globalist outlook of an exogenously led economic development model. Timing also played a role on both occasions. A foreign investment spike in the 1970s and the housing development led boom of the 2000s masked the inherent spatial inequalities in infrastructure and service provision in Ireland. The neoliberal logic adopted by successive Irish governments became more influential. Balanced development was left to the market. The rate of housing construction stretched beyond the cities, and towns and villages welcomed the construction of large scale housing developments. Those that were still under construction in 2008 led to the phenomenon of 'ghost estates' (O'Callaghan *et al.*, 2013) the scar borne by a country that had experienced a speculative property bubble. The Planning and Development Acts in 2000 and

2006 adopted a similar hue to the market-led approach to economic and industrial development more broadly. Part V of the Planning Act that acknowledged the need for more public (social) housing placed the onus for their delivery on private developers.

The 2008 crash saw balanced regional development fall further behind in the list of priorities. As the economy began to recover, much was made of the urban location of the green shoots (Collins, 2020). The return to growth coincided with the end of the planning timeline of the National Spatial Strategy. The relative growth of the greater Dublin area concentrated the minds of policy makers. Balanced spatial development returned to national attention with the publication of the National Development Plan.

Sustainable development is one of the main pillars of the Irish government's recently published National Development Plan (NDP) (Department of the Environment, 2018). Owing to its poor standing in terms of its environmental record, a strong statement was needed from the Irish government. The NDP proposes compact growth strategies for large urban areas to address problems associated with economic growth such as urban sprawl, uneven population patterns, and the associated infrastructure pressures. Place-based development plans are also encouraged to address the specific needs of rural locations, enhance social and economic vibrancy, and create a sustainable living space. 116 bilion euro will be set aside for development projects throughout the lifetime of the Ireland 2040 project – the National Planning Framework, ninety-one billion of which will be funded by the exchequer. Regional assemblies, county councils and local community development committees are all expected to play a role in planning and developing Ireland over the next decade.

The NDP is an important document in that it acts as the foregrounding of all sub-national planning documents. At the regional level, these are the recently published Regional Spatial Economic Strategies (RSES), under the auspices of the Regional Assemblies in Ireland. The recent Local Government Act gives more power to regional assemblies, who can use the RSES as a way to better define the future direction of the region.

The North West Regional Assembly sits in Ballaghdereen and acts as a coordinator between national and local plans. County Development Plans and associated Local Area Plans (for places with populations over 1,500) are authored by county councils (local authorities). Section 9 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) requires local authorities to make development plans for its area every six years. These plans should be consistent with the National Development Plan and the regional spatial and economic strategies at the time in question. On the face of it, this can be seen as the kind of planning coherence witnessed in countries like Denmark and the Netherlands (see Knapp *et al*., 2014), however, such is the weak level of governance at the sub-national level in Ireland, it can only be seen as increased centralisation.

While still in its infancy, the NDP must consider two existant realities in Ireland; the first is the overriding economic/ neoliberal logic in Ireland, the second is that historically all spatial planning in Ireland has been undone by a lack of any meaningful representation at the sub-national regional level. According to Breathnach (2013) The Regional Authorities in Ireland (set up in 1994) have neither the power nor the status that is necessary for the policentric approach of spatial planning. At the more local level, local authorities have neither the money nor the expertise required as active agents of developmental change. Ultimately, the centralised nature of the Irish state meant that the structures were never in place for it to be anything other than a highly centralised state. Planning in Ireland is conducted at a remove. Local Area Plans, the work of the Local Authorities in Ireland are inaccessible documents laden with exclusionary language. At its most local level, planning in Ireland needs to change.

What this review of spatial policy in Ireland has attempted to make clear is its hierarchical nature. While a critical take, acknowledgement must be given to some attempts to lead development from the bottom-up. Notable here is the work of Lynch 2008 and Murray 2010, who highlighted a participative approach, often aided through numerous iterations of the LEADER programme. Similarly, village plan experiments such as that in Cloughjordan eco village (see Kirby, 2017) and community-led initiatives across the country (including the Heritage Council's Village Design Statement) are evidence of an activated local level that is under-served by the national government. The review also sets the scene for the following case study. A study of a village, that attempted to imagine its own future through collaborative means. The following section will explore the methods used before an analysis of the results.

4. MOYCULLEN

The village of Moycullen is home to 1,704 (2016 census) and sits 12 kilometres to the Northwest of Galway city, in the shadow of the world-renowned Connemara landscape. It is a young village, over two-thirds of the population are less than 44. As a village it is also young in terms of built environment, CSO figures show a 10-fold increase in the housing stock since 1970. It is also a diverse village, and relatively unique for settlements of its size in Ireland with over one in five residents being born outside of the state. Moycullen matches the national trend in that its most recent expansion (between 2000 and 2010) coincided with the construction boom across Ireland. Yet, in terms of its residents, and relative to other villages of a similar size, Moycullen differs from national trends. The demographic profile is matched by a socio-economic one that describes the vil-

lage as home to middle and upper-income earners. Unemployment is below the national average with close to two-thirds of those at work in either 'professional or managerial/ technical' roles. Educational attainment figures match these trends with above average attainment at all levels and the village's proximity to the National University of Ireland, Galway can help explain the unusually large concentration of PhD graduates there.

The Moycullen local area plan is reflected on as part of the work. Complied in 2012, it was adopted by Galway County Council in March 2013, becoming effective for six years. A Local Area Plan is statutorily required to be consistent with the objectives of the County Development Plan and consists of a written statement and plans, which may include objectives for the zoning of land in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The legislation also requires the provision of detail on community facilities, amenities and detail on the standards for the design of developments and structures. Prior to 2014, all settlements with a population in excess of 1,500 were eligible for a local area plan. Such being their nature, these documents tend to focus on the zoning of land. They are statistical exercises in that they answer to the county-level plan and owing to the nature of local government finances in Ireland, they do little in the way of dictating future development beyond zoning. Further views on the planning process are expressed below, but they do not enjoy a broad subscription from the general population owing to what is perceived as an exclusionary process allied with exclusionary language.

5. METHODS

Scott (2006) has maintained that spatial planning in Ireland is partly due recognition to the role of community-based initiatives such as the EU LEADER programme, and that the application of urban ideas of success could never fully translate to predominantly rural regions. The Moycullen Village Plan was funded by the Irish Research Council and was led by a team of geographers based at NUI Galway. The Plan was funded by the council on the basis that it acted as an opportunity for "third level expertise to engage with local communities." The project itself was intended to "test the demand for place authorship at the local level in and country where local planning is all but nonexistent." One overriding ethos of the project was deference to the new National Development Plan and its aspirations, and a concern regarding the environmental imperative. Ireland's poor track record in carbon emissions was coming under greater scrutiny. Ecological concerns were becoming a political issue in a way they never had previously. The drive for environmental sustainability helped make a more coherent case for local development practices (see Ferber *et al.*, 2013).

This village plan acts as the broadest and deepest consultation ever conducted in the village of Moycullen. Between June and December of 2019, over 800 people had engaged with the initiative. With close to half the population of the village actively contributing to the plan it can be said with confidence that the project reflects the collective wishes and wants of the village. This project acts as an opportunity for active engagement, one in which the residents of the village can be part of envisioning a future for that village in an open and inclusive way.

Desk-based research in the form of a comprehensive historical and socioeconomic analysis of the village of Moycullen provided a solid grounding to commence consultation. Use was made of local associations such as the Moycullen Community Development Association (MCDA) and Galway County Council representatives to identify key stakeholders in the village. Some interview candidates were made obvious based on their role in the village, owners of larger businesses were targeted, as well as local political representatives. Others were less obvious, including small scale entrepreneurs, community members, and artists. The method was open and use was made of the snowballing technique, i.e. the identification of interviewees by other interviewees (Noy, 2008). In identifying interviewees a conscious effort was made at all times to ensure the broadest possible representation of the village.

Interviews were semi-structured and followed the same format with each participant. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. (In the interest of fairness, interviewees were offered anonymity). Themes and identification of key topics helped guide further consultations, namely the focus groups and surveys.

Focus group work brings together individuals with a shared interest to contribute to discussions on the key issues under investigation. Focus groups are a staple of social science research. They are used to challenge ideas and better filter consensus (Cameron, 2005). Focus groups were arranged by broad themes identified in the first phase of the consultation. Invites were sent directly to representatives of those themes. The groups were themed as follows:

– School groups,
– Local business,
– Sport,
– Community 1,
– Community 2,
– Senior citizens,
– Parents of the young,
– Planning,
– City-based workers.

Best practice international research informed the structured approach applied to the focus groups. Use was made of a variety of exercises, some individual , but the majority was group based. This helped ensure that all voices were heard equally. Mapping exercises, one supported by the village Development App and the other an individual

mapping task were important in how they informed the group and positioned it to contribute to the third exercise, a SWOT analysis of the village. Inspired, in no small part, by the work of Healey (1997) the broad approach here was collaborative. Key in this was the preparation of participants and the establishment of ground rules with regards to the process. These rules defined how individuals and groups could contribute in a fair and open fashion. Scale was important here also. A small village bears many of the traits of a neighbourhood, perhaps with a stronger tie to history and a deeper identity. At this scale, the negotiating power and self interest among and between participants is more achievable than at the larger scale of cities or regions (see Bradley, 2015).

The results of the anonymous survey have served to solidify the concerns and aspirations of the village. Ensuring a scientifically rigorous representation, members of the team conducted over 90 of these face to face with respondents. A first-round analysis was conducted on face-to-face surveys. A comparison of that to the final analysis, which included responses gathered online, has shown no difference of statistical significance. This lends more confidence for the process undertaken. Demography and gender of respondents reflected that of national accounting (CSO), while time resident, correlated with demography, tells the story of recent waves of settlement in Moycullen.

Finally, the collective mapping exercise constitutes a novel approach to community planning in the Irish context (Sieber, 2006). It is guided by the principle of grounding the aspirations of respondents and encouraging the spatial manifestation of the collective wishes of a village. Respondents were encouraged to think beyond the current and to develop the village according to their aspirations without constraints. The issues of land ownership and planning were deliberately avoided to best encapsulate the ideas and ideals of residents. All methods together helped "fire the geographic imaginary of participants" and enable a much more straightforward engagement in place-making (Gregory, 1994).

5.1. Firing the Geographical Imaginary

Beyond the national level of change regarding planning and sustainable development, the project timing was apt because of more local changes. Under the national transport plan, a bypass of the village was, prior to COVID, scheduled to commence in 2020 and a greenway to connect the village to Galway city was also due. Under national education plans, the village is due a new primary school, while the national plan 'Rebuilding Ireland' has helped secure planning applications for a further 300 housing units in the village (an increase of 65% in the housing stock). As with many areas in Ireland, and for reasons already alluded to, the change at the local level has been decided on at the national level. The village plan was intended to contest that and give some voice to citizens who could express their desires on the kind of change they wanted at the local level.

Indeed, the results from the interview process have made it clear that residents were eager to affect change. For the residents of Moycullen, the overriding reflection on the place they lived and worked in was positive. Many cited the surrounding natural environment as key, while bemoaning the lack of access to it. But two issues were made clear from the very start of the consultation process: the depth of community spirit and the lack of leadership at the local level.

This has been reflected in focus group work and the results of the SWOT analysis that are represented in Fig. 1. Again, community features strongly and is highly ranked as a distinct strength of village in all focus groups. Interestingly, when participants were asked to project forward and envisage what were the broad threats in future development, they also highlighted community as susceptible in future growth scenarios. The Irish language, as well as the demographic composition of the village, were highlighted as strengths. The young, diverse and well-educated residents of the village were seen as important factors to build on as it grows.

Fig. 1. SWOT Analysis
Source: own work.

The lack of leadership as a key weakness for the village chimes with reflections from individual interviews. While broad in its application, references were made to leadership at all levels from the local community level to national gov-

ernment and governance. This inspired interesting conversations on new forms of governance in the village that ranged from the formation (against national policy) of a village council to a more nimble radical action group that would deal with individual issues. The lack of bus connectivity and provisions for cycling and walking were discussed with the contention that there existed an untapped demand for both that could not be judged on current supply. Environmental concerns were highlighted as respondents pointed to the car dependent nature of living in an underserviced village.

Connectivity and coordination of development conversations fed directly into all groups identifying the lack of coherence in the built village as a major weakness. Participants felt that the lack of a village centre or analogous public realm was one of the major weaknesses that would leave the village exposed in its future development. Many members of various focus groups expressed the fear that the lack of an identifiable centre would lead directly to the suburbanisation of the village should population growth continue as planned. Here, issues of identity and distinction were expressed as being tantamount in the future development of the village.

Primary amongst the perceived threats to the future development of the village was that of bad planning. All groups expressed serious concern as to unchecked development leading to the building of more housing estates before any of the weaknesses evident in the village were addressed. Few participants referenced the formal planning process of Local Area Plans and those that did were either part of the planning sector or worked in local development. There was general agreement that the formal planning process was exclusionary in its complexity and neither visible nor transparent. The development of a community-led masterplan for the village was seen as timely and beneficial for a village undergoing change.

The survey of over 400 residents provided a greater depth of understanding. Generally perceived as a safe place to live (relating to the levels of contentment) residents were less inclined to define it as a 'traditional' or 'cultural' place. References were made to the work of the Moycullen Heritage Society which is warmly reflected on by respondents. Again, tradition and culture require further attention to be better understood. The results are not out of sync with those of international work (Arnett, 2002). Tradition and culture are difficult to maintain as places grow through rapid expansion. Many efforts have been made by the residents of Moycullen to protect against this but without sustained support, it will be a struggle that has been faced by many other small settlements.

This last point is relevant in considering the current provision of amenities in the village. Current amenities do not provide adequately for the demand to celebrate culture or creativity in the region. Many cited the lack of a basketball court for the Moycullen team as negative, but the good work of the GAA could be seen in the positive reflection on sporting amenities. Commercial amenities both in term of services (pubs, restaurants) and retail (shops) were seen as adequate according to the respondents.

Most telling in terms of under-provision of key areas reflected above is the latent or untapped demand for access and connectivity. This was also reflected in more open questions relating to access to the environment. Residents felt disconnected from the valuable resource on their doorstep. Again the greenway featured highly in the minds of residents. Many respondents bemoaned the lack of progress as well as reflected on the multitude of benefits that its construction would reap for the community. Bus and alternative transport options were in high demand for the village, a level of untapped demand that was set to grow.

Figure 2 summarises repsondents views on future development. Rather than specifics in terms of infrastructure, this question urged residents to consider the broader values that they would like to have associated with their village in the future. Here again, community was to the fore. This reflected not only the current depth of community ties but the desire to ensure that depth into the future. Environmental sensitivity refered not only to sustainable building practices but also to climate-resilient buildings. Relating this to broader comments reflects a desire that a future village is better planned. A well-planned village ensures a smaller carbon footprint by lessening the need for carbon generating pursuits such as an over-reliance on private cars. Inclusivity refers also to village design, through an expressed desire for more open and accessible places (public buildings such as libraries, community centres, as well as to the environment). Inclusivity also refers to housing types and the recognised need to address the current housing crisis by a mixed approach to housing development. Issues of identity come to the fore in the expressed wish from respondents that Moycullen does not evolve into a suburb of Galway city. Ensuring against this requires more attention to that which makes the place unique. Here respondents cited cultural, creative, and traditional values as being important for the kind of development they wished to see in the village. The complementary nature of these values speaks to a general coherence in the future visioning of the village.

Figure 3 ranks amenities according to their importance for the future development of the village. The broader point in reflecting on the patterns shown here is a set of respondents that have ranked community as an important value for the future of the village. Connectivity was judged as important for the development of community. An increased bus service, the completion of the greenway and bricks and mortar (community centre) to enable social connections were all seen as the most vital amenities for the future development of the village. Residents also recognised that the current primary school in the village was beyond capacity and in need of investment. Such as the level of current and future enrolment, this too is a priority for the development of the village. Other factors such as youth facilities and co-working spaces speak to the demography of a village that had seen the wave of new residents in the early 2000s, moving beyond the playground to something more appropriate. The interest in co-working spaces was reflective of the change in modern work practices.
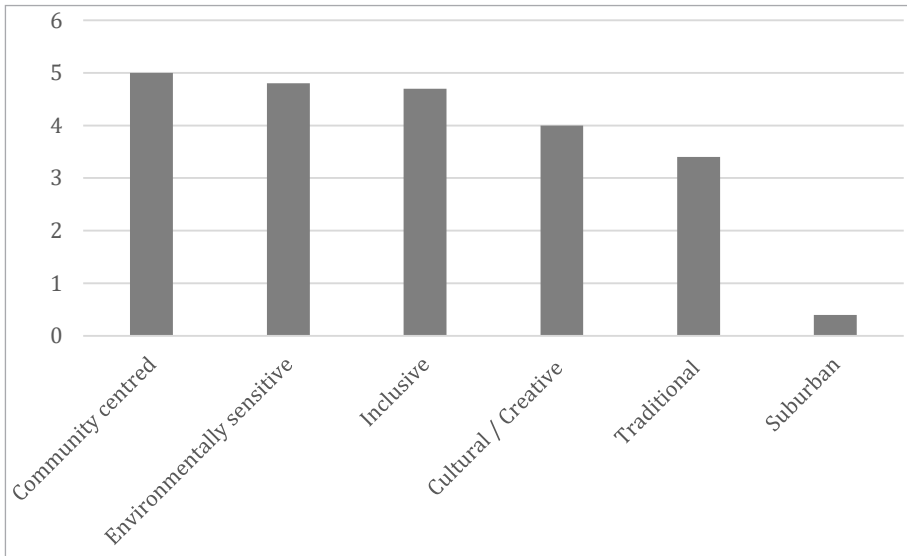
Fig. 2. Ranked future values for the village
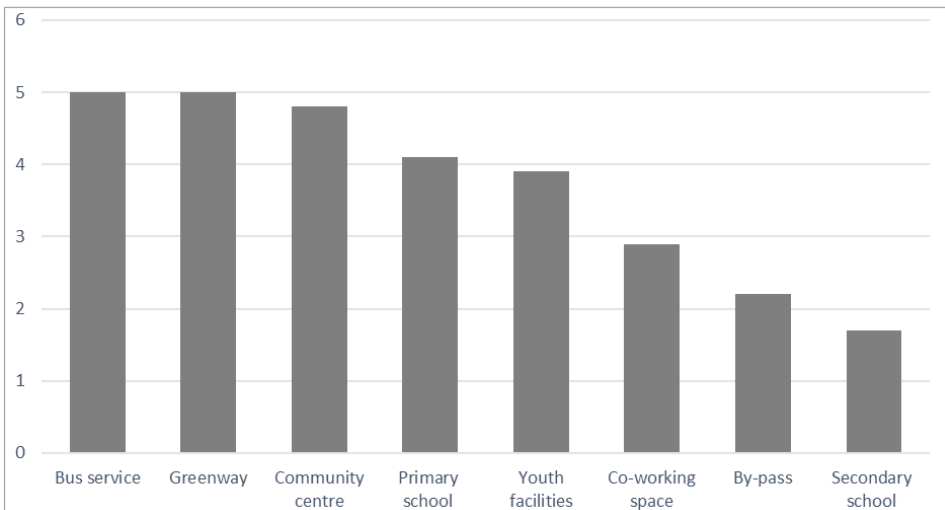Source: own work.

Fig. 3. Ranking in terms of importance for future development
Source: own work.

5.2. Mapping

The collective mapping exercise constitutes a novel approach to community planning. It is guided by the principle of grounding the aspirations of respondents and encouraging the spatial manifestation of the collective wishes of the village. Respondents were encouraged to think beyond the current and to develop the village according to their aspirations without constraints. The issues of land ownership and planning were deliberately avoided in an effort to best encapsulate the ideas and ideals of residents. The collective mapping exercise relied on the contributions of 100 residents. Again, efforts were made to ensure representation. The results of the exercise are presented below.

Housing is distinguished by type. All respondents were guided as to the possible level of future growth for the village and their visions as to what type of housing and where that housing was situated is shown here. High density housing (the most often chosen type of housing) was generally sited in the village centre on vacant lands. The density of housing lowers as we move away from the village centre. Note the inclusion of social/ community/ care housing which is also situated in proximity to the village centre. In general, as with other elements of this exercise, there is some evidence of the wisdom of crowds, the above patterns tantamount to a well planned housing development for the village.

Fig. 4. Collective mapping

Source: own work.

In terms of community infrastructure the results are quite resounding. There is a general collective imagining of the future community needs (in the form of a village centre, library, public park and youth facilities) being delivered on publicly owned lands in the village centre. This piece of land too sees the siting of connectivity offered by bus infrastructure. It also better aligns with a more compact approach to development, the siting of a key piece of village infrastructure closer to its centre. The depiction of this collective imagination is set out in Fig. 4; in its simplest form it is a collation of individual desires and through this process of collective mapping it has set out to avoid some of the issues encountered by the collaborative planning process (Tweder-Jones and Thomas, 1998). The exercise was supervised by researchers who encouraged the participants to simply reflect on what it was that they felt their community needed by marking the functions on a map.

6. DISCUSSION

This village plan project served two purposes. The first was the provision of a plan that was built on the collaborative principles of bottom-up development. The second was to shine a light on place authorship. The village plan project was intended to test what place development at the local level could look like in a country that is widely recognised as one of Europe's most centralised. Centralisation of this type has been particularly unique to Ireland. Contributing factors are weak local/regional governance structures, the implementation of regional structures by Europe, and a political system where localism and clientelism are rife (Collins and Cradden, 1997).

What makes the Irish experience all the more unique is how its approach to spatialisation ran counter to the approaches adopted in most developed countries. The top-down approach currently seen in Ireland has its roots in the systems analysis approach which, in turn, was inspired by the quantitative revolution in geo-spatial science in the 1950s/60s. At that time, Keeble (1952) was describing planning as the science of ordering the use of land in order to secure the maximum economic/ convenience outcome.

The technocratic approach still rests well with the Irish political system. While the procedural approach enjoyed broad subscription internationally through the 1960s and into the 1970s, criticisms saw some countries move towards a more humanist approach. Theorists such as Healey (1997) had been at the forefront of the new planning paradigm. What distinguished it from that which went before was the inclusion of citizens as part of the planning process. Spatial science more generally was not beginning to see the sub-national, regional scale as the most

appropriate for affecting change (see new regionalism, cf. Tomaney and Ward, 2000). Internationally, one can now recognise that stakeholder consultation lies at the heart of contemporary public policy formation. While many planning documents in Ireland make reference to public participation, the planning process itself undermines it.

It is this highly centralised (see Breathnach, 2010) and technocratic approach to planning in Ireland that has discouraged broader involvement. Since the 1960s, policy in Ireland (be it regional or industrial) has been driven by economic and financial concerns rather than social or political ones. In the absence of any real policy for sub-national development, it was assumed that the industrialisation by invitation model would trickle down to the regions. When Ireland was a competitive location for low-end manufacturing, this did hold true, but as the model advanced towards more technological and technical expertise, FDI investments served only to increase the divide between the urban and the rural. The lack of the social as well as the spatial all run through a hierarchical top-down approach to development served to undo any link between citizens and the future planning of their place.

In her work on local governance and planning in Ireland, Grist (2014) has pointed to the fact that the local governance structure established at the end of the 19th century, when Ireland was under British colonial rule, has remained largely unchanged. She highlighted the 2010 Planning Act as further curtailing autonomy at the local level in Ireland, this action seen as an ill-placed response to the corruption in local governance that was highlighted by the Moriarty tribunal. Fox-Rogers *et al.* (2002) in their critique of planning legislation highlighted three key issues. The first related to the pursuit of neoliberal policies (depicted as the pursuit of foreign direct investment, most recently seen as the invitation of international investment funds into the Irish property market). The second, concerned the enforced entrepreneurialism in planning approaches. Local authorities compete against each other for national funding (see Collins, 2019) one example being the Urban Regeneration Funding introduced in the National Planning Framework. The final issue related to the reduction of democracy in the planning process. Grist (2014) has brought this final point further by highlighting the role that the Irish electoral system (proportional representation) plays in this. The combination of clientelism and evidence of informal planning practices (see Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2011) serve to further remove the citizen from the future development discourse. This provides the context for the establishing of a collaborative process to engage citizens in the future of their place. The application of such revealed not only the latent demand for it, but also the untapped wisdom in the people of a place, and their knowledge about a path towards the successful and sustainable development of that place.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to contribute to the literature on spatial planning in Ireland. In line with others (Collins and Cradden, 1997; Breathnach, 2002, 2010, 2012; Healey, 1997, 2004; Laffan, 1996; MacFeeley, 2016; Kitchin *et al*., 2012; Fox-Rogers *et al*., 2002; Grist, 2014) it describes a system that is highly centralised, technocratic, bureaucratic, and linear in its approach. It highlighted some attempts to change these approaches, but made clear that without some legislative changes and an augmentation of the infrastructure of the state, no real change can happen. The paper than made clear the apparatuses that were necessary to solicit bottom-up, collaborative and local-led authorship of place development. While not being naive and understanding that the results and recommendations of the village plan will not also fall foul of the current planning framework, the hope is that it can offer an incentive for changing it.

Planning at the (micro) local level appears to bring about "the constitution of collective identities around clearly differentiated positions" (Mouffe, 1993, p. 4) and might, therefore, be considered as offering the potential for a new democratic politics of localism (see Bradley, 2015). That Ireland remains subject to a governance system established to satiate a colonised country on the cusp of a strike for independence translates into a planning system that is no longer fit for purpose. The Moycullen Village Plan not only intended to demonstrate some of the methods necessary for introducing a more democratic process, but its end result highlighted the collective wisdom of a people with respect to their place. As Ireland moves into its second century as an independent state, it must now begin to trust in the people of a place to author the destiny of that place.

In this paper, I have set the linearity of the planning approach in Ireland up against that which involved a broad consultative and collaborative process. The difference between the two is stark. Linearity, inspired by the economistic viewpoint sits almost directly against liveability and people authored places. National Plans have declared the building of roads, the village plan calls for an improved public realm. National policy has set in train the doubling of the housing stock, a village plan makes clear the opportunity offered by mixed-use housing. National climate action policy talks about targets to be achieved 20 years hence, a village plan talks about immediate action to connect with the environment and explore simple ways to change our reliance of emission emitting technologies. There is an opportunity offered by planning from the bottom up. It is a form of democracy that is becoming too rare in today's populist climate. A simple broad consultative process helps to unlock the knowledge of lived experience in and of a place, the filtering of those voices as achieved through the village plan project demonstrates the old adage that there is 'wisdom in the crowds.'

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