
Francis Walsh

The Growth Centre Concept in Irish Regional Policy¹

INTRODUCTION

Proposals for the development of depressed regions within national economies have in recent years increasingly incorporated the growth centre concept as a dominant element. This has been reflected in a burgeoning growth-centre literature,² although there is still a rather disturbing level of ambiguity and imprecision surrounding the concept.³ Nevertheless, given certain conditions, the logic of growth centre theorists seems inexorable: economic development in the past has invariably displayed a tendency towards spatial concentration, both in earlier industrialisation and latter tertiarisation phases. Given this propensity towards agglomeration (examined further below), it is argued that economic activity which is being deliberately channelled into depressed regions should also be concentrated into a limited number of centres. The creation of a milieu which has been conducive to economic growth in the past, it is believed, will increase the likelihood that such economic activity will generate a momentum towards self-sustained expansion. Thus the need for direct government intervention (in influencing location and creating infrastructure), crucial in the early stages, will eventually be phased out.

The advantages of concentrated centres of economic activity have been well documented:⁴ most frequently cited are direct economies of

1. I wish to thank Dr. W. J. Smyth for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

2. For a general review, see Moseley, M. J. *Growth Centres and Spatial Planning*, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1974. For selections of leading essays, see Kuklinski, A. (editor) *Growth Poles and Growth Centres in Regional Planning*, Paris, Mouton, 1972; Kuklinski, A. and Petrella, R. (editors) *Growth Poles and Regional Policies*, The Hague, Mouton, 1972; Hansen, N. (editor) *Growth Centres in Regional Economic Development*, New York, The Free Press, 1972.

3. See Hansen, N. 'Development Pole Theory in a Regional Context' in *Kyklos*, vol. 20, 1967, pp. 723-4.

4. See Moseley, *op. cit.*

localisation (ready access to suppliers of inputs and purchasers of outputs) and external economies of agglomeration (e.g. availability of labour pool, educational and training facilities, firefighting and police forces). Less frequently mentioned is simple entrepreneurial confidence in a tried and trusted location, which creates inertia among existing firms in centres of economic activity and attracts new firms to these centres, notwithstanding growing diseconomies of agglomeration (traffic congestion, pollution, alienation of suburban life). Further cited advantages of growth centres include the ability to spread the cost of those infrastructural items (water and power supply, health and recreation facilities, transport) supported by scarce public funds over a larger number of users, and, in the typical case where the regional problem is centred round the migration of young people from rural and small town areas (as in Ireland) to metropolitan centres, the prospect of deflecting these migrants to local growth centres, thereby achieving a more even spatial distribution of the national population.⁵

One frequently mentioned prospective advantage of growth centres suggested by many of the concept's proponents is the possibility that these centres will transmit economic growth to their hinterlands (purchases from the hinterland, diffusion of subsidiary activity, employment for workers living in the hinterland). However, evidence in favour of such a process is decidedly sparse, and whatever such 'spread' effects have been identified have been quite confined in spatial extent (e.g. commuting workers).

The validity of the growth centre concept has, of course, been subjected to severe questioning. For example, it is suggested that recent advances in transport and communications have, at least technically, attenuated many of the traditional advantages of concentration; that the essentially private benefits of concentration may not outweigh the social costs (e.g. dereliction of rural areas, in terms of both population and its associated infrastructure); and that the implementation of growth centre policies involves problematic political considerations.

The purpose of this essay is to outline the course of government involvement with the growth centre idea in Irish regional policy. This outline will be primarily concerned with identifying some of the *operational* difficulties associated with the implementation of a growth centre policy, and, hopefully, will therefore offer some guidelines for future policy not only in Ireland, but elsewhere as well.

5. This has always been a central plank underlying Irish regional policy.

THE ORIGINS OF REGIONAL POLICY IN IRELAND

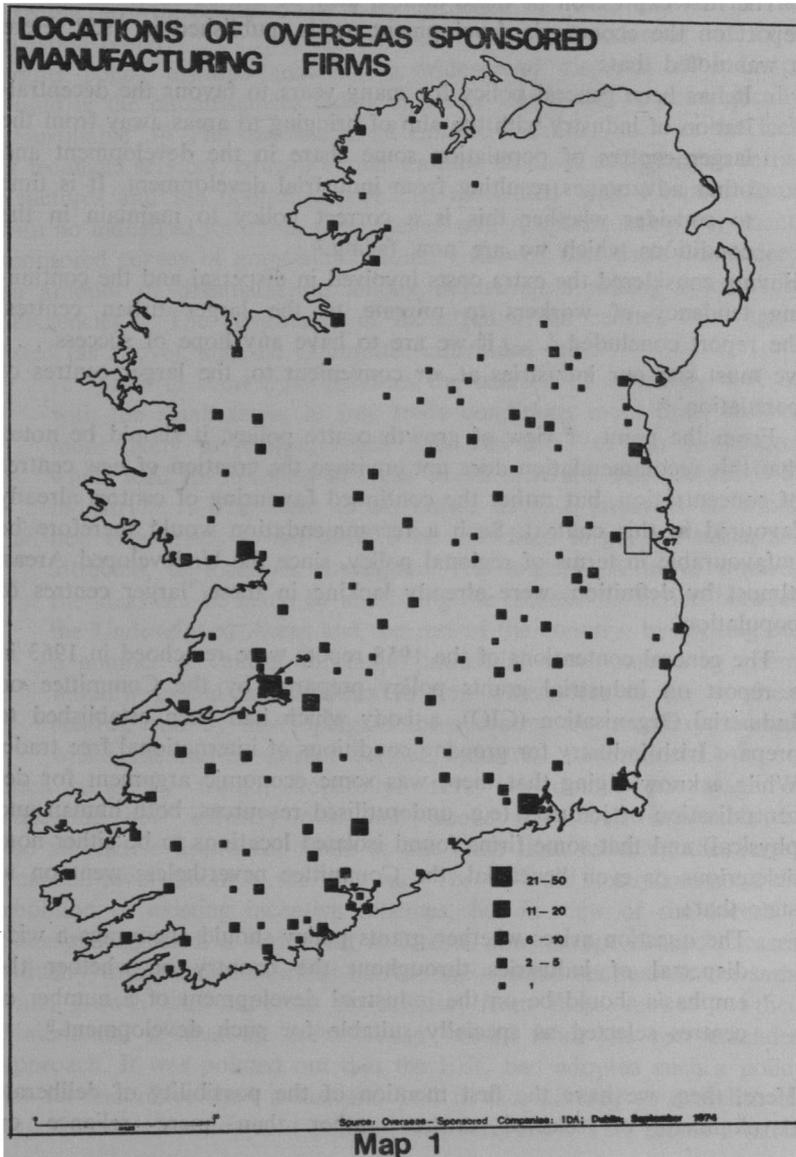
Formal regional policy in Ireland dates from the 1952 Undeveloped Areas Act, which scheduled roughly one-half of the area of the country, principally in the West, as 'undeveloped' and provided funds to operate a variety of financial incentives designed to encourage the establishment of manufacturing industry in that part of the country. A special agency, An Foras Tionscail, was created to execute the scheme. Subsequently, in the interest of national economic development, incentive schemes have been applied to the whole country, although always with differentials in favour of the Undeveloped – now 'Designated' – Areas.

Since the First Programme for Economic Expansion, launched in 1959, official policy has been to base economic development nationally on the attraction to Ireland of manufacturing plants sponsored by foreign companies.⁶ Within Ireland, the location of these plants has been subject to a policy of maximum dispersal, in order that as many communities as possible can provide industrial employment locally. The resultant pattern has been of the form represented in Map 1. There would seem to have been a degree of success in getting industry to locate in relatively isolated areas. This is not to negative the suggestions concerning the advantages of concentration outlined above, but merely indicates that for the companies concerned the generous incentives offered, including, principally, large capital grants and tax relief on profits derived from exports, have been deemed sufficient to overcome the disadvantages experienced due to isolated locations (to be considered below).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GROWTH CENTRE POLICY

Virtually from the beginning, doubts were expressed concerning the efficacy of a regional policy based on the dispersal of industrial activity. These doubts centred round the 'opportunity cost' of such a policy, i.e. it was felt that by encouraging a wide spatial spread of industry, the government was deterring an unwarranted amount of potential new industry which would favour concentrated locations. On the other hand, were a policy of concentration to be followed, the country might succeed in attracting a far larger volume of industry than would otherwise be the case. With proper selection of centres of concentration, the overall national policy of maximum industrialisation could be made coincident with the need for balanced economic growth at the regional level.

6. Previously, under the Control of Manufacturers Act, 1933, severe restrictions had been placed on foreign investment in manufacturing industry in Ireland.



The first expression of these doubts may be attributed to an official report on the economy's development needs, published in 1958. Here it was noted that:

It has been general policy for many years to favour the decentralisation of industry with the aim of bringing to areas away from the larger centres of population some share in the development and other advantages resulting from industrial development. It is time to consider whether this is a correct policy to maintain in the conditions which we are now facing.⁷

Having considered the extra costs involved in dispersal and the continuing tendency of workers to migrate to the larger urban centres, the report concluded '... if we are to have any hope of success ... we must site our industries at, or convenient to, the larger centres of population'.⁸

From the point of view of growth centre policy, it should be noted that this recommendation does not envisage the creation of *new* centres of concentration, but rather the continued favouring of centres already favoured in this context. Such a recommendation would therefore be unfavourable in terms of regional policy, since the Undeveloped Areas, almost by definition, were already lacking in these 'larger centres of population'.

The general contentions of the 1958 report were re-echoed in 1963 in a report on industrial grants policy prepared by the Committee on Industrial Organisation (CIO), a body which had been established to prepare Irish industry for growing conditions of international free trade. While acknowledging that there was some economic argument for decentralisation of industry (e.g. underutilised resources, both human and physical) and that some firms found isolated locations to be either non-deleterious or even beneficial, the Committee nevertheless went on to state that:

The question arises whether grants policy should encourage a wide dispersal of industries throughout the country or whether the emphasis should be on the industrial development of a number of centres selected as specially suitable for such development.⁹

Here, then, we have the first mention of the possibility of deliberate development of selected centres rather than mere reliance on

7. *Economic Development*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, 1958, p. 139.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

9. Committee on Industrial Organisation, *Fourth Interim Report: Industrial Grants*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, 1963, par. 18, p. 9.

existing growth centres. The CIO provided its own answer to the question posed: "... we are satisfied... that direction of industrial grants policy towards achieving a widespread dispersal of industry would in the circumstances facing us under free trade, be economically unjustifiable".¹⁰ The deficiencies of isolated locations such as the lack of technical services, education and training facilities and of other infrastructures and the operating problems associated with a labour force with no industrial tradition, were spelled out. A subsequent government-sponsored survey of grant-aided industry showed that there was indeed an amount of dissatisfaction among industrialists arising from these deficiencies.¹¹ The advantages of industrial urban centres were again listed (as above), and the Committee concluded that:

... while in some circumstances the balance of advantage will be with the small town, in free trade conditions most firms will be more likely to prosper when they can avail of the advantages which tend to be found in areas where there are concentrations of industry. ... The ideal to be aimed at is a situation in which new enterprises do not have to be subsidised to go, but rather are attracted, to locations throughout the country. A move towards the ideal can be made by abolishing the present distinction between the Undeveloped Areas and the rest of the country, by picking out a number of centres for major industrial development, by giving initially special inducements to new enterprises to go to these centres, and by developing in these centres the ancillary services which themselves attract further industrial undertakings.¹²

Such a policy would, hopefully, have the double advantage of attracting new industry over and above the levels attainable by the alternative approach, while at the same time reducing the State's financial involvement in the long run. The CIO did not recommend the abolition of existing incentive schemes, but in view of the incentive package suggested, it is difficult to foresee how, except in special cases, industry would locate in areas outside the selected centres. At the same time, growth was expected to 'radiate' from these centres to their hinterlands, so that *all* areas would benefit from the recommended approach. It was pointed out that the EEC had adopted such a policy for its underdeveloped areas, and had in fact decided to establish an experimental 'development pole' in Southern Italy. This seems a parti-

10. *Ibid.*, par. 21, p. 10.

11. *Survey of Grant-Aided Industry*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, 1967, par. 1.6, p. 12.

12. Committee on Industrial Organisation, *op. cit.*, pars. 30-1, p. 12.

cularly unfortunate example, for the Italian experiment has involved a scale, type, and line of action totally different from anything considered hitherto or envisaged for Ireland.¹³ At any rate, the CIO went on:

If this process were repeated in Ireland, then the choice of a number of major centres, far from depriving the smaller towns and villages near them of their population and prospects of development, would create the most favourable conditions for economic growth in the surrounding areas. We have no doubt that this is the right general policy in our circumstances.¹⁴

THE COMMITTEE ON DEVELOPMENT CENTRES AND INDUSTRIAL ESTATES

The immediate reaction of the government to the CIO report was to set up a committee to consider the matter. This absorbed an existing Working Party which had been investigating the possibility of establishing elsewhere in the country further industrial estates on the lines of that at Shannon, and hence was entitled 'The Committee on Development Centres and Industrial Estates'. Its report was presented in 1965.¹⁵ Having considered development centre¹⁶ policies in the various countries in Western Europe, the Committee concluded that such policies were of little relevance to the Irish situation. For its own purposes, it insisted that any definition of 'development' or 'growth' centre should relate not only to economic, but also social, growth (an aspiration which is not, unfortunately, adhered to subsequently in the report).

Following a review of the various cost factors which might enter into the industrial location decision-making process — site, building, and labour costs; training of workers; transport and communications; fuel and power; external economies and industrial linkages; social amenities — the Committee granted that development centres would have special attractions to offer: 'They would widen the range of facilities which Ireland is able to offer to external industrialists and could be expected to result in the establishment in Ireland of projects which would not otherwise be established here'. In addition: 'Development centres would also encourage the growth of existing firms in that they could

13. See Newcombe, V.Z., 'Creating an Industrial Development Pole in Southern Italy' in *Jour. Town Planning Inst.*, vol. 55, 1969, pp. 157-61.

14. Committee on Industrial Organisation, *op. cit.*, par 33, p. 13.

15. *Report of Committee on Development Centres and Industrial Estates*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, 1965.

16. Quite a number of different terms have been used interchangeably to denote what this author prefers to call 'growth centre' — not always without conceptual ambiguity. See note 2 above.

avail of the facilities provided in the centres and would benefit from the general growth in business activity'.¹⁷

The Committee also concurred with the spread effect thesis: '... development centres would act as a stimulus to regional growth because towns in the neighbourhood of development centres would benefit from the growth in business activity in the centres'.¹⁸ The precise mechanisms of the proposed spread effects are not, however, elaborated upon. The Committee recommended the creation of industrial estates with factories to rent as an effective means of attracting new industries which would not otherwise come to Ireland. Such estates would only be built in the development centres, and this, plus the provision of infrastructure, was considered as sufficient attraction for the successful establishment of development centres. Thus, the special financial inducements advocated by the CIO were considered unnecessary. The criteria to be taken into account in selecting development centres were to be: size of town, labour availability, infrastructural facilities, availability of land, communications, and existing industrial base. On this basis, the Committee, in accordance with its terms of reference, proposed Waterford City as a suitable development centre.

The government then asked its advisory body, the National Industrial and Economic Council (NIEC) – forerunner of the present National Economic and Social Council (NESC) – for its comments on the report. Whilst advocating special treatment for the poorer north-western counties, the Council had 'no doubt that in the rest of the country the selection of a small number of centres for major development can make a greater contribution to regional and national expansion than any alternative policy'.¹⁹ Observing that the survey which would be required in order to arrive at a nation-wide system of development centres would take some years, the Council advised the designation of both Waterford and Galway as growth centres forthwith, since it considered that these would be so designated in any case.

The simultaneous recommendation of Waterford and Galway as growth centres suggests an ambivalence in Irish regional policy which begins to appear around this time. Waterford, unlike Galway, is not in the Undeveloped Areas — or Designated Areas as they were re-named in the 1969 Industrial Development Act — and is located in a region

17. *Report of Committee on Development Centres and Industrial Estates*, par. 72, p. 23.

18. *Ibid.*, par. 80, p. 24.

19. National Industrial Economic Council, *Comments on Report of Committee on Development Centres and Industrial Estates*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, 1965, par. 3, p. 6.

which would have low priority in the regional development effort. Its designation as a growth centre may be regarded as reflecting a regional approach whose primary objective is to restrict the growing concentration of economic activity in the Dublin Metropolitan area, and to disperse it to centres around the country generally. The designation of Galway, on the other hand, could be construed as a gesture to the particular needs of the western areas vis-a-vis the remainder of the country. The lack of clarity resulting from the failure to distinguish clearly between these two perspectives has not helped the regional policy debate in Ireland. It may be noted that the largely non-urbanised Designated Areas were unlikely to do well from the criteria for development centre selection laid down by the Committee on Development Centres (above).

The official statement of government policy on the Report of the Committee on Development Centres and Industrial Estates, issued in August 1965²⁰ gave the growth centre concept a rather lukewarm reception. While accepting that such centres could be 'an effective means of promoting the further expansion of economic activity', and that 'secondary centres will benefit from growth at the primary centres', and while agreeing to proceed on an experimental basis with the construction of industrial estates at Waterford and Galway, the government nevertheless considered that 'the dispersal of industrial activity throughout the country, where this is economically feasible, yields important social advantages', and intended to continue pursuing such a policy. The function of the industrial estates was 'to attract thereto industries which might not be located in Ireland at all but for the facilities offered at these estates'.

This was clearly a fundamental departure from the objective of the growth centre proponents, who sought to have the great bulk of *all* new industry channelled into these centres; it was the consequent development of external economies at the centres which was to attract those industries which would not otherwise come to Ireland, rather than the largely internal economies provided by the industrial estates (e.g. ready built factory buildings and serviced sites). The subsequent development of the two estates at Galway and Waterford, established under the Industrial Grants (Amendment) Act, 1966, indicates the extent to which official government policy differs from the growth centre ideal. Total employment on the two estates on December 31, 1975 amounted to 2,768. For comparative purposes, employment at the

20. Reprinted in National Economic and Social Council, *Regional Policy in Ireland: A Review*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, 1974, pp. 77-8.

Shannon estate on the same date was 3,844.²¹ The increase in employment on the two estates from March 1970 to December 1975 — 1,818 — represented a mere 2.5% of the 73,000 new industrial jobs established under the Industrial Development Authority grants scheme during the same period.²² No other industrial estates have been established, itself an indication of the official attitude to the 1965 report.

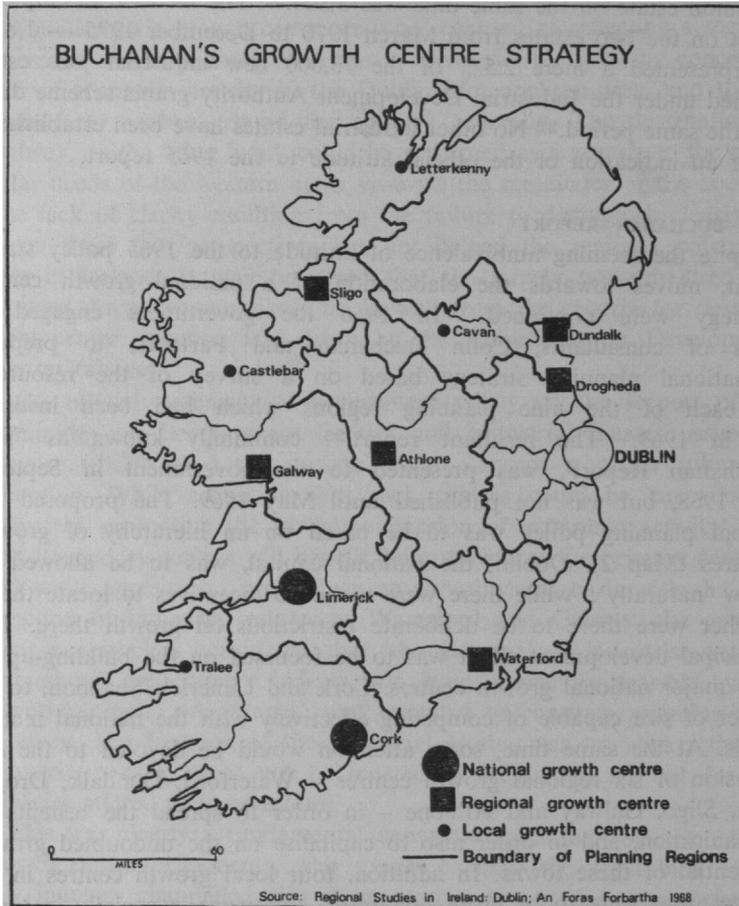
THE BUCHANAN REPORT

Despite the seeming ambivalence of attitude to the 1965 policy statement, moves towards the elaboration of a national growth centre strategy were continued. In 1966 the government engaged a firm of consultants, Colin Buchanan and Partners, to prepare a national planning strategy based on a survey of the resources of each of the nine planning regions which had been instituted in 1963. The resultant report,²³ commonly known as 'The Buchanan Report', was presented to the government in September 1968, but was not published until May 1969. The proposed regional planning policy was to be based on an hierarchy of growth centres (Map 2). Dublin, the national capital, was to be allowed to grow 'naturally': while there were to be no incentives to locate there, neither were there to be deliberate restrictions on growth there. The principal development effort was to be focussed on the building-up of two major national growth centres, Cork and Limerick/Shannon, to an order of size capable of competing effectively with the national metropolis. At the same time, some attention would be devoted to the expansion of six regional growth centres — Waterford, Dundalk, Drogheda, Sligo, Galway and Athlone — in order to spread the benefits of urbanisation, and in order also to capitalise on the undoubted growth potential of these towns. In addition, four local growth centres in remote areas were to be given favourable treatment, especially in terms of the location of tertiary functions; these were to be Tralee, Castlebar, Letterkenny and Cavan. The report costed the infrastructural requirements of such a development strategy, which was regarded as the most likely, of a set of considered alternatives, to achieve both national and

21. Information supplied by Industrial Development Authority and Shannon Free Airport Development Company.

22. Employment on estates at March 1970 given in Industrial Development Authority, *Annual Report 1969-1970*, Dublin, 1970. Figure for new industrial jobs derived from *IDA NEWS*, vol. 2, no. 7, March 1976 and from report in *The Irish Times*, 3/4/1976.

23. *Regional Studies in Ireland*, Dublin, An Foras Forbartha, 1968.

**Map 2**

regional developmental objectives. The report also emphasised that if its policy objectives were to be achieved, implementation should begin immediately.

The increased level of economic activity which would follow from the proposed growth centre policy, would, by reducing emigration, lead to a greater rate of national population growth. Thus, the projected 1986 population total, at 3.498 m., would be 141,000 greater than that projected from a continuation of existing policies. At the same time, internal migration would continue, and it was a basic objective

of the report to direct this to the recommended growth centres. All of the national and regional growth centres, with the exception of Athlone, were to have their natural population increases boosted by immigration from elsewhere in the country, with Cork and Limerick/Shannon to be the recipients of 77.1% of the total projected migratory flow of 219,000. Population growth in Dublin, therefore, was to be derived entirely from natural increase. This would still leave Dublin with 32.2% of the total population in 1986, compared with 18.7% for the combined national and regional growth centres and 49.1% for the remainder of the country. The respective figures for 1966 were 27.6%, 10.3%, and 62.1%. More significant, perhaps, was the rather slight extent to which the projected 1986 populations were to differ from those which would result from a continuation of existing policies, i.e. 32.0%, 15.6%, and 52.4% respectively.

For a report which is based on a growth centre strategy, there is surprisingly little theoretical or empirical justification of such a strategy. Of a total of 605 paragraphs, only 16 are devoted to a general discussion of the advantages of growth centres. The principal arguments proposed are as follows: Firstly, a set of regional growth centres would minimise the spatial dislocation caused by rural depopulation, the continuation of which was regarded as inevitable. It may be noted here that the proposed principal centres of in-migration, Cork and Limerick/Shannon are quite removed from the principal area of rural depopulation, i.e. the north-west. Secondly, the creation of growth centres would induce spread effects in surrounding areas, in the form of 'offshoot' industries and employment opportunities for commuting labour. Thirdly, growth centres, by improving the level and range of service provision in the regions, would increase the degree of social satisfaction locally and reduce the level of regional out-migration. Fourthly, growth centres would have the effect of attracting to Ireland industries which might not otherwise locate here. In the proposed strategy, it was envisaged that the expansion of Cork, Limerick/Shannon, Waterford, Dundalk and Drogheda would be based primarily on manufacturing employment; that of Galway on a mixture of manufacturing employment, tourism, and regional services; and that of Athlone, Sligo and the four local centres on regional services.

Implementation of the recommended development strategy was to be carried out under the aegis of regional planning authorities with statutory powers, one for each of eight proposed regional planning sectors. However, because of the special developmental needs of the two national growth centres, separate Development Corporations were pro-

posed for each to oversee their expansion. Provision was also made for the possibility of establishing such corporations with respect to the regional centres as well, if deemed necessary. The report also proposed that the national centres be included in the Undeveloped (now Designated) Areas, which would give them a definite advantage in terms of the financial incentives they could offer to manufacturing industry. The development of the regional centres was to be facilitated by giving the Industrial Development Authority greater flexibility in relation to the grants available to industry.

The government issued a policy statement simultaneously with the publication of the Buchanan Report.²⁴ Despite the plea in the report for immediate implementation of its proposals and despite two further assertions by the NIEC, one in 1968²⁵ and another in its comments on the Buchanan Report²⁶ concerning the urgency of a growth centre policy, the government decided against taking any immediate action on the matter. While accepting 'in principle, that growth centres can be a valuable element in a regional programme', it nevertheless considered that:

A growth centre programme on the lines recommended by the consultants would have far-reaching implications in regard to physical expansion on development prospects in other areas . . . It has been decided, therefore, that the consultants' growth-centre recommendations should be further considered in the context of proposals for regional development generally.

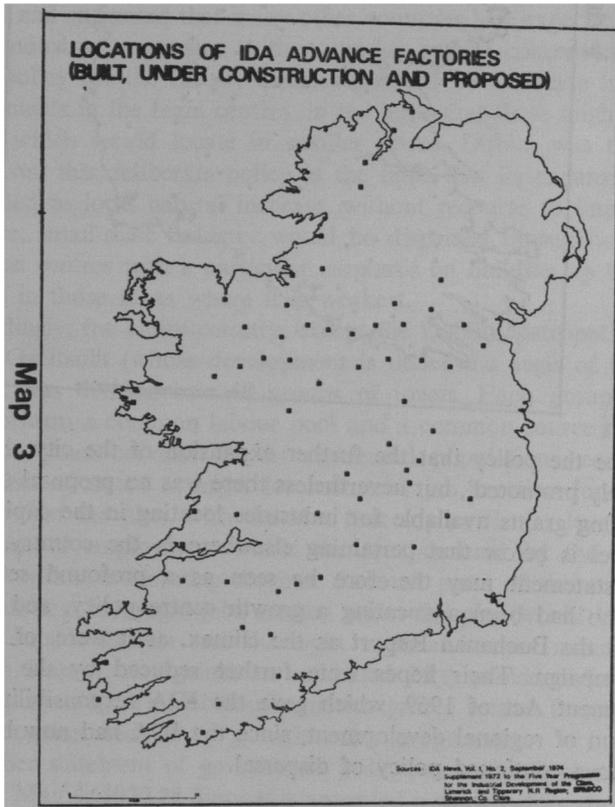
It is clear, however, from the remainder of the government statement, that the existing policy of dispersal was to be continued. Although Regional Development Organisations were to be set up in the Planning Regions (as, indeed, they were during the following two years) to co-ordinate regional development programmes, these were to have no statutory powers, and responsibility for all planning activities was to remain in the hands of local planning authorities, viz., county and county borough councils and urban district councils, thus effectively ensuring a continuation of decentralised policy implementation. The Small Industries Programme of the IDA, hitherto designed to aid small towns and rural communities in the Designated Areas, was to be extended to the remainder of the country; and the IDA was to undertake

24. Reprinted in National Economic and Social Council, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-83.

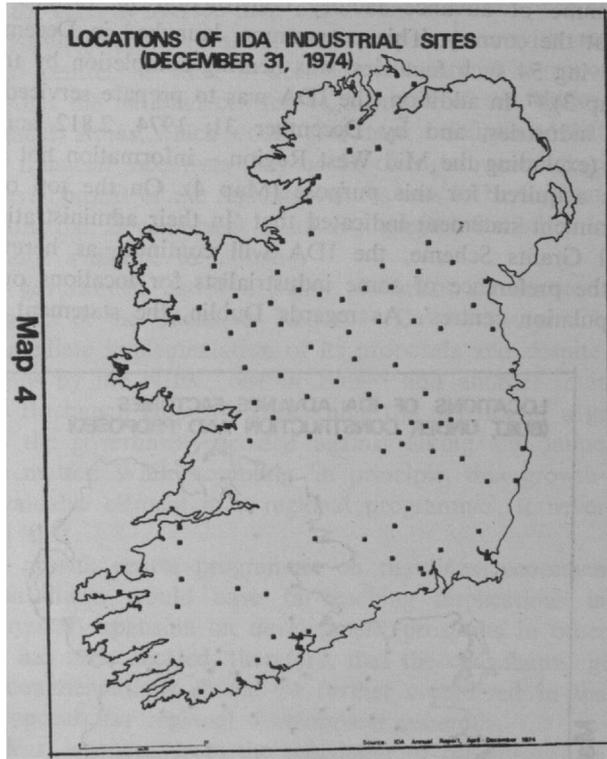
25. National Industrial Economic Council, *Report on Industrial Adaptation and Development*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, 1968.

26. National Industrial Economic Council, *Report on Physical Planning*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, 1969.

a programme of advance factory construction in various locations throughout the country. This programme, launched in December 1971 and involving 54 such factories, was nearing completion by the end of 1975 (Map 3).²⁷ In addition, the IDA was to prepare serviced sites for potential industries, and by December 31, 1974, 2,812 acres at 78 locations (excluding the Mid West Region – information not available) had been acquired for this purpose (Map 4). On the top of all this the government statement indicated that 'In their administration of the Industrial Grants Scheme, the IDA will continue, as heretofore, to support the preference of some industrialists for locations outside the main population centres'. As regards Dublin, the statement said that



27. Map 3 also shows the locations of advance factories, outside of Limerick/Shannon, to be built under the Shannon Free Airport Development Company (SFADCO) Advance Factory Programme for the Mid West Region, 1972-77.



'it will be the policy that the further expansion of the city should not be actively promoted', but nevertheless there was no proposal to remove the existing grants available for industries locating in the capital, albeit their level is below that pertaining elsewhere in the country.

This statement may therefore be seen as a profound setback for those who had been advocating a growth centre policy, and who had regarded the Buchanan Report as the climax, as it were, of their ten-year campaign. Their hopes were further reduced by the Industrial Development Act of 1969, which gave the IDA responsibility for the promotion of regional development, since the IDA had now been committed to a continued policy of dispersal.

THE IDA REGIONAL INDUSTRIAL PLANS, 1973-1977

Having considered reports on the development needs of each of the Planning Regions prepared under the aegis of the newly-established Regional Development Organisations, the IDA in June, 1972, published

its proposals for the provision of new industrial jobs in the period 1973-1977.²⁸ In compiling its proposals, the Authority deemed that the Buchanan Report had been unduly pessimistic about the possibility of getting industry to locate outside the main growth centres. It was pointed out that the weakest regions from the point of view of urban structure, Donegal, North-West, West, and Midlands, had captured 20.4% of new manufacturing jobs in the period 1966-71, compared with 8.6% in 1961-66. As a result, population performance in these regions during the 1966-71 intercensal period had been much better than expected. On the general question of growth centres, the Authority felt that many of the factors inducing concentration in the past were now technologically obsolescent due to developments in communications facilities, and suggested that many other countries had experienced satisfactory industrial expansion without undue spatial concentration. The general policy for the future, therefore, would be to locate large-sized establishments in the main centres, in the hope that these might develop linkages which would locate in smaller towns. Dublin was to be excluded from this deliberate policy in the hope that its expansion could be confined to local natural increase, without recourse to immigration. Otherwise, small-scale industry would be dispersed throughout smaller population centres with a particular emphasis on building up the urban structure in those areas where it is weakest.

Accordingly, the entire country, except the Dublin Metropolitan Area and the Gaeltacht (whose development is under the aegis of Gaeltarra Éireann), was divided into 48 groups of towns. Each group was intended to form a common labour pool and a common source of recreational and other services for its residential population: each group was in turn allocated a target for industrial job creation for the five-year period of the plan, with the idea that any particular location of a new source of employment within the area covered by the grouping would be within commuting distance from all parts of the area. Some 48% of all new industrial jobs created under the plan would be located in areas outside Dublin and the eight regional centres named in the Buchanan Report, as against an estimated 25% provided for in that Report up to 1986. This obviously marks quite a retreat from the level of concentration desired by growth-centre proponents.

A further statement of government policy on regional planning was issued on May 4, 1972.²⁹ Since this appeared a week before the referen-

28. Industrial Development Authority, *Regional Industrial Plans, 1973-1977*, Dublin, 1972.

29. Reprinted in National Economic and Social Council, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-6.

dum on E.E.C. entry and emphasised the potential benefits for Ireland of E.E.C. regional development aids; since it coincided with the publication by the IDA of a preliminary statement on its regional industrial plans scarcely a month before the publication in full of these plans – a statement which also emphasised E.E.C. membership as a prerequisite for the achievement of the plans' objectives (although the plans nevertheless did not take possible E.E.C. aids into account); and since the statement was presented as the precursor of a more detailed document which did not, in fact, subsequently materialise, this government statement is rather vulnerable to criticism as merely a piece of electioneering. It is indeed difficult not to be sceptical of the statement. It calls for an overall regional strategy which 'should not merely seek the attainment of required national growth rates but should also provide for the maximum spread of development, through all regions, giving an increased and wider range of economic and social opportunities and so minimising population dislocation through internal migration'. Accordingly, specific provision was made for restricting the growth of Dublin to the level required to accommodate natural population increase; expansion of the eight regional centres identified in the Buchanan Report; and 'development of county or other large towns of strategic importance in each region, including relatively large expansion of towns in areas remote from existing towns'. Population projections for the state as a whole, for Dublin, and for the eight regional centres for the year 1991 were provided, while the combined population of all other towns was expected to grow by 65.70% in the period 1966-1991. This growth was not to be confined to the county and 'other larger towns of strategic importance' mentioned above; in fact, it was 'made clear that the smaller urban areas will also share in this expansion process'.

It appears to have been envisaged that virtually all urban areas would benefit from the natural population increase and continued rural depopulation. This would suggest a lesser degree of concentration of growth than desired by the growth centre proponents. It is here that a striking anomaly seems to emerge, because the government statement envisages an even greater degree of concentration of population in the eight major regional centres than that proposed in the Buchanan Report (Table 1).

The government therefore proposed that a greater proportion of the national population be located in Dublin and the eight growth centres than that advocated by the Buchanan Report. Yet, whereas the latter report proposed that 75% of all new industrial jobs be located in these

TABLE I
PROPOSED DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION

<i>Area</i>	<i>1966</i> <i>(Actual)</i>	<i>1986</i> <i>(Buchanan)</i>	<i>1991</i> <i>(Government)</i>
Dublin	27.6%	32.2%	31.4%
Growth Centres	10.03%	18.7%	20.2%
Other Areas	62.1%	49.1%	48.4%
<i>Total Population</i>	2,884m.	3,498m.	3,700m.

Note: The government statement gave a population range for Dublin and the eight growth centres for 1991; this table is based on the mid-points of these ranges.

nine urban centres in order to realise the proposed degree of concentration, the IDA proposed to assign only 52% of its jobs to these centres up to 1977. Nevertheless, in the statement it is said that 'The Government endorse the approach adopted by the IDA which is consistent with the longer-term regional strategy outlined above'. There is clearly an anomaly here which has never been adverted to by either the government or the IDA.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since the change of government in early 1973, there has been no further statement on official regional policy. At the same time, the government executive agency, the IDA, has continued to operate a programme of dispersal, as indicated by the aforementioned developments with respect to industrial estates, advance factories, and industrial sites. The allocation of Ireland's 1975 quota from the E.E.C. Regional Fund would suggest that this policy has at least unofficial government support, in that 105 different projects, spread throughout all twenty-six counties, were beneficiaries.³⁰ Nevertheless, the continued absence of a clear and comprehensive overall regional policy has been criticised by a recent report by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), successor to the NIEC.³¹

It has become increasingly clear in recent years that population growth and redundancies in traditional industries are outstripping the rate of job-creation under existing policies. Although an upswing from the current economic recession would no doubt increase the rate of job-creation, it would still seem inadequate in the face of growing require-

30. See reports in *The Irish Times*, 18/10/1975 and 19/12/1975.

31. National Economic and Social Council, *op. cit.*

ments.³² There would still appear to be room, therefore, for making the original argument in favour of growth centres, viz. that industries which might otherwise have come to Ireland are being deterred by the prevailing dispersal policy. This assumes, of course, that industries which are at the moment accepting relatively isolated locations would continue to come under a concentration policy, an assumption which may not be readily justified.³³ In any case, recent criticisms of the current industrial policy have moved away from the locational question, and have been concerned more with questions of the labour-intensity of incoming industry,³⁴ and even whether we should be as reliant as we have been on foreign industry for employment creation.³⁵

Perhaps the major lesson to be learned from the failure of a succession of influential advocates to gain acceptance of a growth centre policy in Ireland, is that economic argument, no matter how powerful, must ultimately give way to political consideration. The political implications of a policy based on spatial selectivity in the provision of new employment opportunities are obvious. This is perhaps best reflected in the following extract from the editorial columns of an influential western weekly newspaper:

Just what does a Western community have to do to get industry? Compare the record of local endeavour and initiative in Castlebar with what is happening in Galway; Castlebar and indeed other Mayo towns too, have done all in their power to meet the requirements Ministers and planners have demanded of them. There has been no failure of local community involvement here.

But Castlebar and Mayo still await industry ... in the meantime industry has been packed into Galway on an artificial industrial estate by direct official directive. How much more practical it would be, in view of the social and economic needs of

32. See National Economic and Social Council, *Population and Employment Projections: 1971-1986*, Dublin, The Stationery Office, 1975; and Kennedy, K. A. and Bruton, R. *The Irish Economy*, Dublin, The Commission of the European Communities, 1975.

33. See Walsh, F. 'The Multinational Corporation and Manufacturing Industry in the Irish Republic', paper read to the Annual Conference of the Canadian Association of Geographers, Vancouver, June 1975.

34. See Kennedy and Bruton, *op. cit.*; also Geary, P. T., Walsh, B. M. and Copeland, J. 'The Cost of Capital to Irish Industry', in *Ec. and Soc. Review*, vol. 6, no. 3.

35. Kennedy and Bruton, *op. cit.*; Cooper, C. and Whelan, N. *Science Technology and Industry in Ireland*, Dublin, National Science Council (1973); Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development *Reviews of National Science Policy: Ireland*, Paris, 1974; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development *Manpower in Ireland*, Paris, 1974.

Western areas, to provide ready-made factories in rural towns, well spaced enough to avoid competition in labour and each unit acting as a stabiliser of the local population and economy. The huge cost of developing the infra-structure of such artificial islands like Galway and Waterford would thus be avoided and policy, instead of becoming an agency of depression, would be an agency of promotion for our neglected areas.³⁶

It does seem now that, despite the initial flirtation with a growth centre policy indicated by the establishment of industrial estates at Galway and Waterford in 1966, the government has since been attempting to comply with the sentiments expressed here. It remains to be demonstrated that the path chosen is the best one in terms of both national and regional development needs.

Department of Geography,
St. Patrick's College,
Maynooth.

FRANCIS WALSH, M.A.
Lecturer.

36. From *The Western People*, as quoted in *The Irish Times*, 30/3/1970.