

Transformations in Housing

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CONTEXTUALISING HOUSING IN IRELAND

The evolution of housing and the housing market in Ireland reflects the dramatic transformations in economy and demography that have occurred in Ireland in recent years. In 2005, 81,000 housing units were completed, the eleventh year in a row of record house completions in the State. The rate of construction represents one of the highest per capita in the world and is unprecedented for any Western economy in the twenty-first century. Ireland is building at the fastest rate in Europe with 14.7 newly completed dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants in 2002, the highest by far in EU compared with around 3.5 units per 1,000 in the United Kingdom in the same period, for example (Gallent et al., 2003). Despite the growth in housing supply, average house prices rose by 11 per cent in 2004 for new and secondhand homes (DoEHLG, 2005a). The bulk of housing growth and provision has occurred in and around large cities and towns. The most recent census data available indicate that in 2002, just under 60 per cent of the population were located in urban settlements of 1,500 people or more (see Chapters 1 and 4).

Along with the increase in building units, there has been a significant diversification in terms of the types of units now coming onto the market. In the past, it was the convention for people to remain in the same home throughout their lives, to raise their families, and retire there. Now, ideas of flexibility and mobility have become integral to the housing and real-estate markets. Houses are built as 'starter homes', implying that they will be transient and that the owner occupiers will move on once the opportunity allows. Smaller units and higher densities, particularly in and around the city centres, are creating a market for single-person households, one of the fastest growing demographic categories across Europe. Older people are now under pressure to downsize, to release equity in their homes in order to get their children started on the property ladder. Some dwellings are built for investment purposes, allowing purchasers to gain tax benefits from investing in the housing market under tax incentive schemes. And finally, approximately 3 per cent of new-build houses are second homes for existing property holders, with up to 12 per cent often located in the most coveted parts of the Irish countryside.

Many towns and cities throughout Ireland suffered from poor planning in the 1960s and the 1970s. Rapid suburban development contributed to the decline of

the inner-city residential areas, partly because most private and state investment since the 1970s has been channelled into suburban areas. Considerable profits were derived by key individuals from property development in town and city centres and from land speculation and the construction of housing estates in the sprawling suburbs. At the same time, city councils often vigorously pursued a policy of relocating inner-city residents to new social housing schemes on the city's perimeter. As a result, the social fabric and its capacity to form sustainable communities were systematically undermined, particularly in the principal cities. The erosion of inner-city communities through job loss and the disappearance of homes was paralleled by the growth of new ex-urbanised communities on the fringes of these cities, where population growth continues to increase at a dramatic rate.

The 1960s and 1970s also marked a distinctive shift in the territorial pattern of housing growth in rural areas. Until then, rural housing was almost exclusively associated with farming or related activities. Economic changes throughout the State resulted in the development of the idea of the one-off, non-farm dwelling house on a half-acre site accessible to a town. Towns and cities as growth points in the national, as well as local, economies emerged significantly from the 1960s with a shift from agriculture to industry, manufacturing, construction and services. This resulted in increased house building in localities more accessible to expanding towns and cities. Arising out of the general urbanisation of the economy and the strong traditions of owner-occupancy in rural areas, affinities with rural living in a rural 'idyll' have deepened. This has resulted in continued pressure for new houses and second homes in the countryside by ex-urbanites and family members of existing rural households commuting to urban-based employment. Over half of the current rural housing stock in Ireland was built from the 1970s onwards. Paralleling the pattern of urban housing development, the zones of most intense building in the countryside in the 1990s were mainly located in mid-Leinster districts within 50 miles of Dublin and in the commuter hinterlands of provincial centres such as Galway, Cork, Limerick, Sligo, Athlone and Killarney, and around smaller towns and holiday areas such as Mayo, Donegal, Kerry and West Galway (see Figure 18.1).

THE KEY PROCESSES UNDERPINNING HOUSING TRENDS

Urban Regeneration

The evolution of the built environment, whether in the urban core, on the edge of the city, in the suburbs or the open countryside takes place in a political and economic context. The political context is largely provided through the planning regime, which in the Irish case is provided by the local authorities working under the auspices of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (see Chapter 2). According to Byrne (2001) the nominal objectives of planning in relation to the urban core have changed dramatically, particularly over the last 30 years, mirroring transitions that have taken place in capitalism. These changes at the level of the political have, to a great extent,

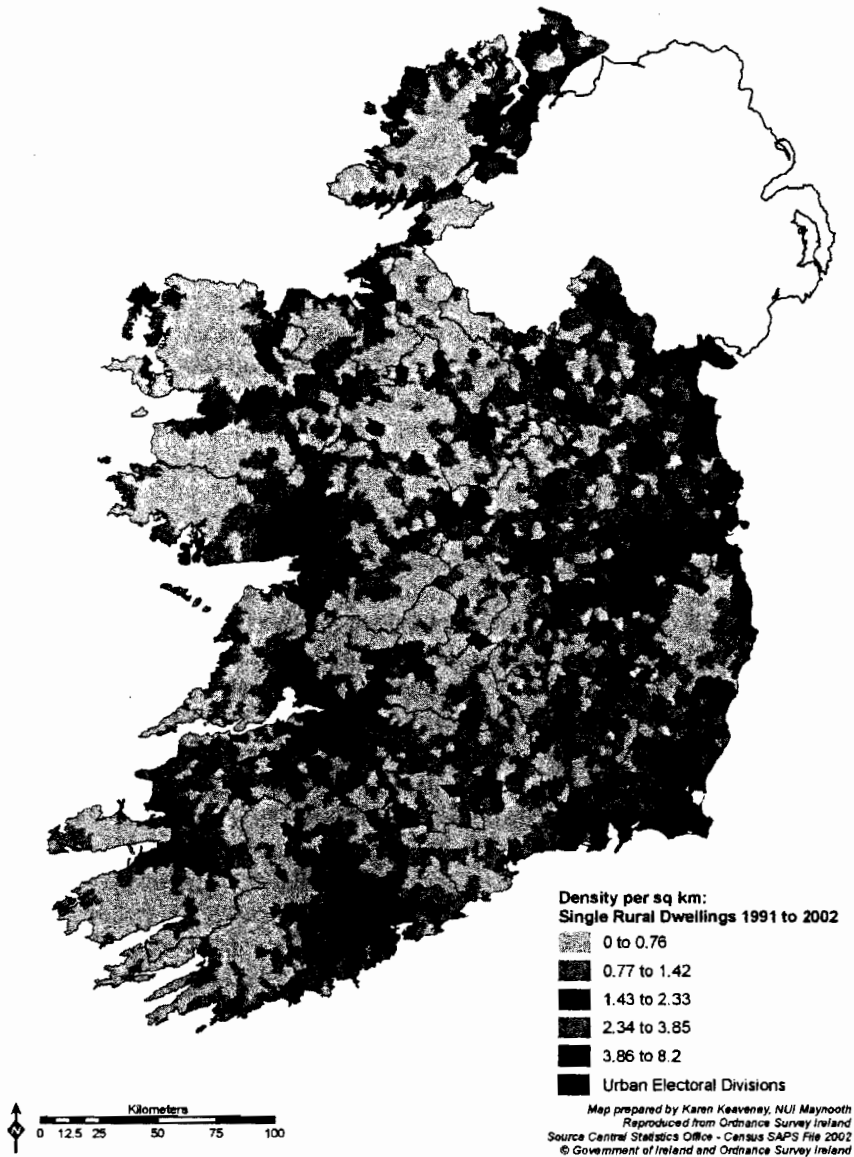


Figure 18.1 Density per sq. km.: Single rural dwellings, 1991–2002

Sources: Central Statistics Office, Census SAPS file, 2002; Ordnance Survey Ireland

been wrought by the impact of economic global forces working themselves out on the urban landscape. In the Irish case, the impetus for change in the housing market in city and town centres was provided by the Urban Renewal Act 1986 which made available a generous package of tax-based incentives to developers, investors and home owners. The urban renewal scheme was designed to promote private investment in the built environment of designated

inner-city areas either through refurbishment of existing buildings or through new developments, (KPMG et al., 1996). In response to these conditions, and given the generally more favourable prevailing economic conditions, Dublin and other Irish cities experienced a building boom in the office, residential and commercial sectors (see Chapter 5). The boom, which commenced in the 1990s, continues today. Between 2002 and 2004, for example, 42,500 flats and apartments were completed, amounting to a fifth of all new housing (*Irish Times*, 5 April 2006). In Dublin, more than 10,000 new private apartments were built in the inner city in that period. In the case of apartments that qualified for tax designation under the Urban Renewal scheme, the State effectively acted as a catalyst for development, and at the same time supported a market for what was built through additional tax incentives for occupancy of commercial buildings and private homes. More than 100,000 households – almost 9 per cent of the total number of households in the State – resided in apartments by 2002 (CSO, 2003a).

Suburbanisation

While urban regeneration is changing the nature of the housing market in the city centres, the suburb has emerged as the dominant urban form in Ireland over the last half-century. Since the foundation of the State, government has provided either direct or indirect subsidies to those purchasing private houses. This has been a key factor in Ireland's internationally high – 77 per cent – rate of home ownership. As the population has expanded, the demand for private housing has accelerated, and new estates have proliferated. The 2002 census demonstrated a pattern of high growth in the immediate hinterlands of all major cities and towns (see Figure 1.4 in Chapter 1).

In recent years suburban estates have spread to quiet rural locations, while peripheral towns and villages have grown from an influx of long-distance commuters, and the process shows no sign of weakening. Indeed, it can be argued that Ireland is becoming increasingly ex-urbanised, as many of these new forms of suburban living appear to be both post-rural and post-urban. They are post-rural in the sense that vast housing estates, shopping malls and leisure complexes are colonising more and more rural regions, threatening the sustainability of a 'rural landscape'. They are post-urban in the sense that the relocation of work, consumption and leisure facilities to the edge of the city and indeed into small and mid-sized towns reorients suburbanites away from the metropolitan core.

A recent study of four new suburban communities in the Dublin commuter belt – Leixlip, County Kildare; Esker (Lucan), County Dublin; Mullingar, County Westmeath and Ratoath, County Meath – found that, generally speaking, respondents 'electively belonged' to their communities – they felt attached to the place where they lived. People still saw the suburbs as good places to raise children. They derived sustenance from close relationship with others, particularly those who were at similar stages of family formation. Finally, the research suggests relatively modest but not negligible levels of social and civic participation (Corcoran et al., 2005). Respondents in all four localities

were consistent in identifying an average of five to six people in their local social network on whom they could rely for help, support and socialising on a regular basis. However, the people who primarily constitute that network – family, neighbours and friends – vary considerably across the localities. In Ratoath, County Meath, for example, people are making a lifestyle choice to move to the countryside and express a strong attachment to place. This is in contrast to suburbanites who have moved into the new estates in Esker (Lucan) out of necessity (the affordability of the house) and who do not express as strong an attachment to place. The research also pointed to a pattern of poly-nucleated conurbation, wherein people access goods and services by commuting to different towns and villages in the hinterland rather than in the metropolitan core (Peillon, 2004). Respondents in all four localities expressed considerable concern about the problems faced locally, ranging from poor infrastructure and services (in Ratoath and Esker) to anti-social behaviour and lack of facilities for children (in Leixlip and Mullingar).

Social Housing

Despite the huge increase in house building in Ireland, almost 50,000 Irish people are currently on waiting lists for social housing. Historically, the model of social housing provision in Ireland was distinguished by three characteristics: it was primarily based on subventions from central government; policy implementation occurred through local authorities; and a standardisation (or stigmatisation) attached to house and estate design (Fahey, 1999). The latter has changed much in recent years, with local authorities pioneering good urban design in the provision of new units. However, the number of actual units built is low and far short of demand. While record numbers of private houses were completed in 2004, the number of social and affordable housing units fell from 13,000 to 12,145 (*Irish Times*, 12 July 2005). Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 was introduced in order to provide housing for people on the social housing list in each local authority area, to allow for the provision of 'affordable housing' (housing that requires a mortgage of approximately 3.5 times an annual salary), and to provide for the integration of all residential types in all developments of four or more dwellings. Social and affordable housing need is outlined in a housing strategy which is incorporated into all local authority development plans. In spite of the intention to make more social and affordable housing units available, figures in the *Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin 2004* show that many developers are transferring land (including serviced sites) or making financial contributions to local authorities in lieu of building houses in their own developments. The stock of social housing has also been adversely affected by the decision of local authorities such as Dublin City Council to sell considerable numbers of units, thus limiting the overall growth of the local authority rental sector. The NESC (2004) has recommended that an expanded stock of housing should be made available at a social rent to ensure an adequate safety net for vulnerable households, along with provision of adequate resources for social and affordable housing for other qualifying groups. The voluntary and co-operative housing sector has expanded considerably in

recent years, providing a range of high-quality housing options in both rural and urban settings.

Given the centrality of the principle of home ownership in Irish society, social housing has generally been viewed by home owners and tenants alike as an inferior option: if private ownership is for the upwardly mobile, then social housing tenancy is for those who are going nowhere. Social housing has in the past been seen as housing for the poor, while owner occupation is now seen as the normal tenure for mainstream households. The challenge remains of how to integrate the poorest, most marginalised groups into the housing system in a problem-free way. In Dublin, as elsewhere, local authorities are seeking new ways of providing housing in the social sector that can overcome some of the problems encountered in the past. One such example is detailed in the case study of Fatima Mansions below.

Rural Housing

In spite of the growing urban population in Ireland and concentration of new housing in urban and suburban locations, demand for privately owned housing in the countryside remains high. The incidence of one-off single rural dwellings (defined as detached dwellings with individual septic tanks) throughout the countryside is a significant feature in many locations. This is overwhelmingly new-build housing which has been the favoured planning approach in Ireland, unlike in the UK where restoration of older housing stock is more strongly encouraged. Although rapid demographic expansion is characteristic of Ireland as a whole, pockets of rural areas continue to experience depopulation and demographic contraction which is reflected in an ageing population and ageing housing stock. Less accessible remoter localities, therefore, continue to experience problems of derelict housing, out-migration and social deprivation. Ironically, while average family size has fallen significantly in recent years (the average number of persons per household in rural areas was 3.72 in 1981, decreasing to 3.09 in 2002), the size of new rural housing units is increasing. Although houses with five rooms accounted for the largest proportion of rural dwellings in 2002 at over a quarter of all housing stock, the number of dwellings with eight rooms or more had the strongest growth over the period 1991 to 2002, accounting for almost a third of all new rural dwellings.

Single rural houses have normally been characterised by road-oriented locational patterns, frequently in 'ribbon developments' which sometimes negatively impact on local landscapes. In many places, the density of houses relying on septic tanks and deep bored wells, allied to the incremental addition of houses over subsequent years, has serious environmental implications for groundwater supplies.

Pressure for increased housing (planning) permissions in the countryside comes from farmers and land owners, the rural housing lobby and many local councillors, all of whom want the rural planning system relaxed to allow more rural housing in order to enhance the economic and social viability of their rural areas. Although housing growth helps to support social structures and local services, new discourses of rurality have highlighted additional, and often

contradictory, aspects of change associated with the transformation of extensive countrysides. Many former landscapes of farmland, for example, now provide settings for a new consumption of landscape by incoming residents, manifested in such things as large houses, manicured lawns, decks, patios and double garages. In the comparatively treeless landscapes of west Mayo, hilltops, skylines and 'views' have been appropriated by new houses – to see and be seen. Visitors from the UK, which experiences rigid planning control in rural areas, frequently comment on the social vitality of Irish rural areas as reflected in new housing. On the other hand, there are interest groups in Ireland (heritage- and urban-focused in the main) harking back to an older eighteenth-century landscape aesthetic which values empty unpeopled views of countrysides, who want more planning controls to protect the rural landscape from being inundated with indiscriminate housing. The Heritage Council claims that inappropriate and poorly planned development is putting much landscape heritage at risk because of ineffective legislation to protect environmental and landscape heritage. The Irish Rural Dwellers' Association (IRDA) claims that legislation is too rigid and that planners (and agencies like An Taisce and the Heritage Council) are inhibiting development (IRDA, 2004). As part of the wider framework provided by the National Spatial Strategy, guidelines requiring a sustainable approach to the planning of rural housing were published in 2005 (DoEHLG, 2005b). However, the criteria for eligibility to build new dwellings in the countryside remain somewhat ambiguous at the local plan-making stage. The planning process to a large extent has kept its traditional focus on regulating planning in towns (town planning) and maintained a less stringent approach in rural areas. Rural planning practice is very heavily influenced by local clientelist politics, which has resulted in one of the most benign rural planning regimes in Europe. The notion of 'local need', for example, is poorly defined in scope and application and is open to continuing pressure from local politicians and lobbies (Gallent et al., 2003).

CASE STUDIES

Fatima Mansions, Dublin

Creation of a Sink Estate

Fatima Mansions was built between 1949 and 1951 by Dublin City Council. The development originally consisted of 15 blocks of four-storey flat units, with an average of 27 units per block. The complex is configured inwardly, which has had the effect of cutting Fatima Mansions off, both physically and symbolically, from the surrounding neighbourhood of Rialto. While there is no doubt that the flats were a vast improvement on the tenements that had preceded them, they were essentially a 'bricks and mortar' solution to the problems faced by the Dublin working class. Little thought was given to the provision of recreational facilities, or to the highly salient issues of housing density and housing allocation policy (Tobin, 1990).

In the 1970s, a confluence of factors propelled the estate into a spiral of decline. The closure and, in some cases, relocation of local industry adversely

affected job opportunities in the area. The impact of unemployment was compounded when tenants were offered incentives by Dublin City Council to purchase local authority houses elsewhere. Such policy initiatives, which promoted home ownership, rewarded tenants who left Fatima Mansions. This gradually produced a residualisation effect, as less reliable tenants frequently replaced those who had moved on, undermining the social fabric that had been the basis of a strong community. Dublin City Council's services to the estate declined during the 1970s, with the removal, for example, of the uniformed caretaker officials who had informally 'policed' the area. It became more difficult for both the remaining tenants and Dublin City Council to exercise moral authority on the estate. A spiral of decline was set in motion and the estate became vulnerable to problems of social disorder – vandalism, joyriding, and later, drugs. Fatima Mansions earned the reputation of being an undesirable place to live.

Mobilisation of the Community

By the late 1990s, daily life in Fatima had become a feat of endurance. The most common motif employed by residents to characterise their daily lives was that of imprisonment. Trapped in an environment over which they had little or no control, they expressed feelings of hopelessness and despair. Their lives were dominated by two factors in particular: first, a breakdown of social order on the estate, which facilitated a drug economy and culture that continues to the present day; second, the inadequate upkeep and maintenance of the public areas of the estate. The two factors are, of course, inter-related; the degraded environment, with dimly lit stairwells and boarded-up flats, provided a safe haven for those seeking to buy and sell drugs without fear of apprehension. Residents had internalised the belief that they were perceived as 'second-class' citizens by the statutory authorities, and that the quality of service provided to them reflected their low status in society.

Alongside the simmering despair at the level of degradation into which the estate had fallen by the end of the 1990s, there was also a strong sense of an enduring social fabric. Residents relied heavily on cohesive social networks to counter the negative effects of living on a 'sink estate'. A survey carried out at the end of the 1990s found that a high proportion of people in Fatima Mansions had lived there for more than 20 years, and in some families, tenancy had passed down through a second and third generation. Social ties with neighbours and extended families were extremely strong. Significant numbers believed there was a good community spirit. Although people spoke about the horrors of daily life and child rearing in Fatima, they nevertheless displayed remarkable resilience and a sense of humour in the face of these difficulties. Clearly, the existence of associational life in the form of interactions, personal relations and institutional practices at the level of locality act as an important bulwark against total social breakdown. This resource has helped not only to sustain the community through troubled times, but has also enabled the community to begin to re-imagine itself.

The 'structural crisis' on the estate – evidenced by high rates of poverty and unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, and increased criminality and drug-related activity – are attributable at least in part to the spatial, social, and economic inequalities that characterise the city of Dublin. A structural crisis on this scale demands a structural solution. Thus, the local community came together with Dublin City Council in the late 1990s to set in motion a process of change. The local community development group, Fatima Groups United (FGU), became the driving force behind the estate's regeneration agenda and remains the key agent in the process of social change. FGU set about conceptualising and developing a set of ideas and initiatives that could be put to the statutory agencies that held a remit in Fatima Mansions. At the end of 2000, FGU produced a manifesto that was the outcome of a creative thinking exercise involving the entire community of Fatima Mansions in articulating their visions and needs for the place in which they lived. Crucially, the impetus for a plan for the regeneration came from the community, who placed themselves firmly in the driver's seat of the proposed regeneration. 'Eleven Acres: Ten Steps' comprised a brief from the community of Fatima Mansions to the planners, developers, and service providers tasked with the regeneration of the housing estate. It set out the community's vision for its future, and invited Dublin City Council to enter into a dialogue on how the area ought to be regenerated.

Development of a Regeneration Plan

In February 2001, Dublin City Council published its own plan for the regeneration, 'Regeneration/Next Generation'. This plan commits to key principles of urban regeneration, including the creation of a socially balanced neighbourhood made up of both social and private housing, with additional purpose-built community facilities. Research in Britain has demonstrated that compared with large deprived estates, socially balanced neighbourhoods are likely to be less stigmatised by outsiders (Goodchild and Cole, 2001). Central to the plan is the re-imagining of the existing housing estate, its relationship to the adjacent neighbourhood and to the wider city of Dublin. This plan seeks to create not just an integrated and sustainable community, but to devise a new template for managing the process of urban regeneration. The new vision for Fatima Mansions is underpinned by the belief that the neighbourhood is the key building block for the city and that it is at this level that democracy, participation, and integration must be achieved. This is very much in keeping with the principles that underpin the Integrated Area Planning (IAP) approach promulgated by central government and pursued by Dublin City Council in the late 1990s (see Chapter 2). Crucially, the regeneration plan maintains a dual commitment to both the physical and social needs of the area. The regeneration is guided by three aims: (1) to deliver new standards in quality of public housing and community facilities; (2) to undertake innovative actions aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty on the estate; and (3) to foster effective social integration and measures that promote and safeguard community participation in developing and sustaining the new Fatima, which will triple in size.

Application of Partnership Principles at Local Level

In tandem with the physical regeneration plan, a social regeneration programme has also been finalised by the Fatima Regeneration Board (Whyte, 2005). The social regeneration plan will be financed by Dublin City Council. The plan is the outcome of work carried out by five different subcommittees set up by the Fatima Regeneration Board and wide consultation within the community. The social regeneration plan prioritises five areas for action: anti-social behaviour, health and well-being, education and training, arts and culture, and economic development. The plan for the social, economic and cultural regeneration of the estate will work in parallel with the physical regeneration plan. The community is determined to develop an international model of 'best practice' for urban regeneration projects in deprived neighbourhoods.

The experience of the residents of Fatima Mansions in generating their estate's renewal raises many salient issues about the process of urban regeneration in Dublin, notably about how social housing should be provided, and how neighbourhoods can cope with the effects of deindustrialisation and marginalisation. In particular, there are several key lessons that can be derived from those experiences:

- If Irish cities are to be liveable and sustainable then attempts will have to be made to counteract tendencies toward social polarisation.
- Social exclusion can be addressed by adapting a principle of equity that ensures that the benefits of urban renewal are more widely distributed across the urban population.
- Urban planners must retain a sensitivity to the significance of a sense of place in the everyday life practices of city dwellers.
- Planning must proceed on the basis of a partnership approach that involves the local community as a co-equal stakeholder.

Through social movements, community development associations, and environmental advocacy groups, the urban citizenry are being engaged in a variety of re-imagining projects that attempt to specify what the nature of place-specific and place-sensitive residential development might be. In Fatima Mansions, the community activists are driving forward an imaginative programme of redevelopment that is requiring a good deal of 'thinking outside the box'. The community is confronting a history of ghettoisation and marginalisation, and envisioning a new kind of urban living that will offer a template for other cities seeking to re-imagine their deprived neighbourhoods. All interested parties, from communities to planners, developers, and politicians, must take up the challenge of identifying forms of development that are consensual across a broader spectrum of the citizenry and that are closer in design, scale, and aesthetic to the city's vernacular. In doing so, it may be possible to find a way that reaches out to the global, while simultaneously respecting the local.

Rural Housing in Clew Bay, County Mayo

The Clew Bay area of County Mayo is a popular tourist destination with attractive coastal and mountainous scenery. Proximity to the growing towns of Westport and Castlebar has driven the demand for housing either by locals or incoming commuters in accessible rural districts in the wider catchments of these towns. The highest level of new development has taken place in Westport and Castlebar towns, with significant concentrations in the accessible rural hinterlands. Just under half of the current housing stock in the Castlebar hinterland, for instance, was built in the period from 1996, with one-fifth in the Westport hinterland area. Many houses have also been built by returned overseas emigrants and up to one-tenth of the rural houses are in the holiday home category. The high-quality coastal landscapes in particular have experienced intense amounts of scattered rural housing (see Figure 18.2). In the Clew Bay area, one-fifth to one-third of the housing stock was constructed in the 1990s (see Figure 18.3). For example, in the Murrisk area of Clew Bay, to the north of Croagh Patrick, over a quarter of the total rural dwellings were built since 1991, and mostly since 1996, in what is arguably one of the most prominent sites in Mayo.

Attitudes of Residents

As in many rural locations in Ireland, there is a tension between the desire to live in the countryside and concern that continuing population growth will

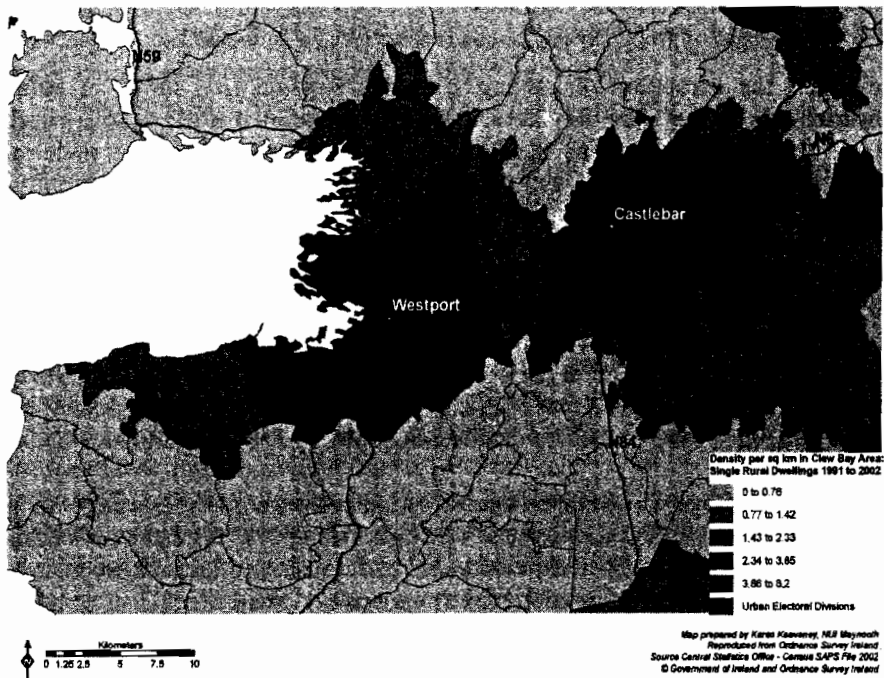


Figure 18.2 Density per sq. km. in Clew Bay Area: single rural dwellings, 1991–2002

Sources: Central Statistics Office, Census SAPS file, 2002; Ordnance Survey Ireland

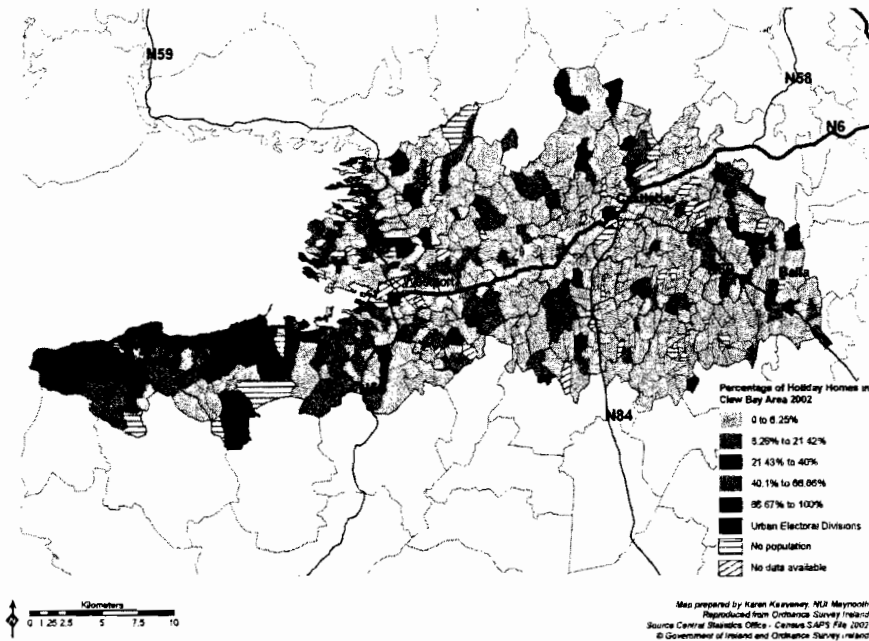


Figure 18.3 Percentage of holiday homes in Clew Bay area, 2002

Data sources: Central Statistics Office, Census SAPS file, 2002; Ordnance Survey Ireland

dissipate the attractions of moving to the countryside. In a survey of rural households in the Clew Bay area, residents articulated notions of a rural idyll when either describing their reasons for moving to the countryside or outlining the attractions of living in the countryside. Notions of community, kinship and privacy were also emphasised by residents who had returned from living in cities. In addition, the feeling of being close to nature and wildlife, being able to fully experience seasons and living in close proximity to the sea and beaches were viewed as positive features by many. The attractiveness of living in the countryside was juxtaposed with the supposed unattractiveness of living in towns. For these respondents, the rural is a peaceful place to live, with its only negative features being 'outside' factors beyond the control of local residents, such as lack of public transport, bad road maintenance and traffic speeding.

Rural landscape is a dominant consideration in assessing new housing trends for the countryside. Social issues tend to rank more highly in discourses of urban and suburban housing. Rural poverty and bad housing conditions are mainly associated with marginal, predominantly agricultural areas where demographic imbalances are linked to low levels of urbanisation and remoteness from services and employment opportunities (Pringle et al., 1999). Thus, for instance, the greatest proportions of houses built before 1919 (one-quarter to one-third) are found in the Sligo, Leitrim, and north Midland areas as well as extensive parts of south and east Munster. In the west (Mayo, Galway and Roscommon), apart

from the past two decades, significant proportions of the rural houses were built between 1919 and 1940. The extensive newly populating rural zones, however, have been selected by middle-income mobile classes who have new consumption preferences (as opposed to the earlier productivist traditions of these areas). The priorities of consumption-oriented residents emphasise landscape commodities like views, nature, tranquillity and freedom from stress, as well as community and local-ness (Kaltenborn and Bjerke, 2002). The very visuality and materiality of these landscapes are particularly important in the debate on rural housing. Housing and garden design, density and location all impinge significantly on the quality of landscape habitat and heritage. The disruption/destruction of what seems an immemorial farming countryside is at issue in many places. And the west of Ireland, particularly its treeless coastal zone, is especially vulnerable to indiscriminate housing development.

However, in all of these representations of rural life, a tension between existing residents' and others' desires to live in the countryside is acknowledged. The prospect of extensive and intensive urbanisation of the countryside is regarded widely as a negative scenario. Indeed, residents' groups seeking to improve their rural areas by introducing 'urban' amenities like street lighting, footpaths and landscaped road verges have been highlighted as an example of this urbanisation or suburbanisation of landscape. There is also evidence of a tension between long-term, full-time residents and newcomers to the area. Thus, references to outsiders getting planning permission before 'locals', and developers and builders getting preference in the planning process, are often indicative of resentments against the planning regime.

Holiday Homes

Internal tensions simmer particularly around the issue of holiday homes. It has been difficult to accurately assess the number of holiday homes in Ireland due to a lack of consistent recording methods by local authorities. The 2002 census contains limited information on second-home house building. The rate of second homes as a percentage of all dwellings in the State is relatively low at 3 per cent. However, counties along the west coast have above average rates, with County Mayo having one of the higher rates at 7 per cent of total dwellings. In general it would seem that the greatest density of holiday home development is along a narrow coastal strip extending southwards from Inishowen in Donegal to west Cork and the south coast to Wexford.¹

In 2002, one-tenth of housing in the Clew Bay study area was recorded as holiday homes, concentrated in particular localities: for example, a third of all dwellings in Louisburgh were recorded as holiday homes, dominated mainly by house clusters which are rented out on a short-term basis. The second highest rate of holiday homes is to be found in the Croagh Patrick electoral division where 27 per cent of all dwellings are holiday homes, in this case mainly one-off, privately owned houses. In the rural survey a number of respondents took issue with houses lying empty and locked up for most of the year, contributing little to the local community.

Rural Planning

Because of the often conflicting expectations of full-time residents, temporary holiday home residents and tourists, the role of the planning authorities in controlling future development in the Clew Bay area is vital. The County Development Plan (CDP) for 2003–09 preceded the national rural housing guidelines issued in 2005 by DoEHLG. CDP policy adopted for both single rural dwellings and holiday homes is brief, focusing mainly on physical planning considerations about minimum basic standards for site size and location. Eligibility criteria for planning permission in the countryside are not addressed. All planning authorities were expected to implement the DoEHLG's rural housing guidelines, which effectively superseded existing local authority policy. In addition to the Mayo CDP, draft housing design guidelines were produced in 2002.² In this policy document the local authority acknowledges the need to preserve both the rural community and the unique natural landscape. While rural house design and its subsequent landscape impacts are an important factor in the growth of new housing, underlying issues of the sustainability of rural housing in many countrysides need to be addressed. The notion that if one 'contributes' to the local rural area (DoEHLG, 2005b) one should be allowed to live there may be simply too flexible and open a policy. The real complexity of rural housing is not addressed in the national rural housing guidelines. The demand from non-farming, and what could be called non-rural dwellers, is without doubt having an impact on many facets of rural housing from basic site costs to community and landscape changes. The changing function of agriculture in Ireland and the growing role of the speculative developer are resulting in changing land values throughout all rural area types from urban hinterlands to scenic areas. There is a clear need to examine the contestation of housing, not as the main rural planning issue or problem, but as a manifestation of rural change in Ireland today.

CONCLUSION

Dramatic economic and demographic transformations in recent years in Ireland have greatly impacted upon the nature of housing in both rural and urban areas, creating complex demands on the housing market for both different tenure and dwelling types. Where people live and how they live are rapidly diversifying in Dublin and other major cities around Ireland. Suburbanisation is spreading and absorbing towns which function as urban centres in their own right, indicating a move toward a more poly-centric pattern of living. New centres have emerged on the edge that increasingly fulfill the functions of the city. At the same time, the metropolitan core is being strengthened in many ways through urban regeneration and gentrification. While new suburbanites express a degree of satisfaction with life in the suburbs, they nevertheless acknowledge that their communities lack basic facilities and infrastructure that are essential to quality of life. Apartment living is a relatively new phenomenon in Irish life. While a 'back to the city' movement is to be welcomed, concerns are increasingly expressed about the long-term sustainability of new apartment complexes,

particularly in relation to issues of maintenance and management. The model of social housing regeneration in Fatima Mansions in Dublin is a 'good news' story and will hopefully serve as a useful template for other local authority estates undergoing regeneration. A more pressing issue however, is the overall decline in local authorities' housing stock at a time when thousands of families are in urgent need of social housing. In a trenchant critique of the housing system, Drudy and Punch (2005) have argued that housing in Ireland has for too long been treated as a commodity for trading and wealth generation rather than a social good. One of the unintended effects of the Celtic Tiger phenomenon has been the generation of both winners and losers in the housing market.

There was a territorial shift of rural house location from the 1960s onwards, with expansion of peri-urban development into the open countryside as urban-based employment became dominant. This accelerated into the 1990s when one-fifth of the current rural dwelling stock was built. In spite of the persistent decline of farming, the rural population in Ireland continues to grow. The enduring *laissez-faire* approach to rural planning marks Ireland out from many of its European neighbours, particularly the UK. Growing dwelling sizes, a lack of consistent design guidelines among local authorities, additional physical infrastructure such as extended street lighting and footpaths are all forces in changing the character of the rural landscape. The risk of deteriorating water quality as a result of the proliferation of septic-tank usage also highlights the need for a stronger policy for housing in the countryside. This has given rise to tension between lobbies for or against housing in the countryside. While popular notions of the rural idyll continue to fuel demand for rural housing provision, there is a growing necessity for more adequate and sustainable management strategies in rural regions. In summary, housing – urban, suburban and rural – provides significant challenges for the future, especially given projected population growth.