SORTING THE CITY

For many Dubliners, the river Liffey forms a significant division, between quality to the south and poverty to the north. For many years, and until early in 2019, a billboard advertising a popular drink on the bridge that took trains across Lower Gardiner Street asked Dubliners passing beneath whether they were a 'North Cider or South Cider?' In 2015, convalescent beds at Mount Carmel community hospital in south Dublin were empty because "of a reluctance of northside patients to cross the Liffey".[1] In fact, the hospital was five kilometres south of the city and at some distance from public transportation, little bother to car-owning folk but an expensive hurdle for others. Provision in the south and hardship in the north; these differences are the result of the way the territory of the city is marked out and managed. There is nothing casual about the social geography of Dublin. It has always been inherently political.

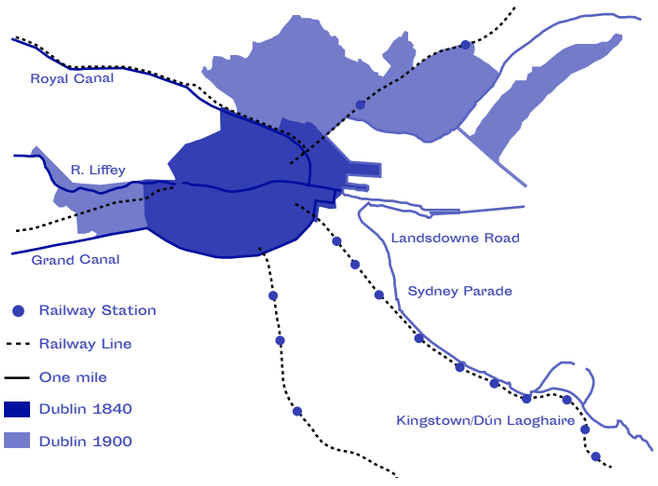
The allocation of responsibilities (for example, for housing or education) and of differing tax-raising capacities to different levels of government (national, regional, local) sets the framework for local government and planning. It also places limits on the extent of revenue-sharing and resource-pooling across local areas. The size and autonomy of these local units is likewise significant. One of the attractions of suburbs has been that the problems of the city are left behind and, with political autonomy, the cost of those problems can also be avoided.

For these reasons, it can seem important to keep the suburbs apart from the city and this is what has been done at various times by the people of the suburbs to the south of Dublin as they have resisted incorporation into the city. Beyond this, they have also been able in the same manner to prevent the march of public housing into their neighbourhoods, directing, by default, the rehousing of the working class from the inner-city slums towards the north and the west.

Sorting the city in this way, the residents of south Dublin note their own distinction and above-average house prices and land values, and insist that certain sorts of neighbours would be toxic to this distinction. Therefore, they campaign against such facilities as housing for Traveller families. Finally, they seek to pass this distinction and advantage to their children through a fragmented education system that allows postcode to determine school entry. With schools serving generally wealthy families, the parents of south Dublin can top up the quality of local education and thereby queue-jump their children into the best third-level courses and colleges.

- **The city and the suburbs**

By the mid-nineteenth century, Dublin had more or less grown into the space between the canals, the Royal to the north and the Grand to the south (see map on following page). From the 1840s, new railways anchored a necklace of suburbs, particularly along the coastline running south



The Extension of the City of Dublin by the Dublin Corporation Act 1900

of the city towards Kingstown (present day Dún Laoghaire). Some, who could afford it, now chose to work in the city but live further out. Each evening, they left a city increasingly notorious for some of the worst slum housing in Europe.[2] As they crossed the Grand Canal they also escaped the fiscal grip of the Corporation of the City of Dublin. The people who journeyed home from Westland Row to Landsdowne Road, Sandymount or Sydney Parade slept in the township of Pembroke to which they paid rates, and similarly for the next few stations, hosted by Blackrock township, and then on to Kingstown township. Likewise, the commuters who left Harcourt Street stepped out of the city into the township of Rathmines and Rathgar once they too had crossed the Grand Canal. This injured the Corporation and in 1899 it petitioned the government of the United Kingdom for the opportunity to annex Pembroke, Blackrock, Kingstown, Rathmines and Rathgar to its south, New Kilmainham to its west, and Clontarf, Drumcondra and Glasnevin to its north.

Speaking to a Select Committee of the House of Lords, counsel for the Corporation said that Dublin "had been made poor by the great exodus of the rich and wealthy classes into the suburbs".[3] Further, the separation of classes allowed the suburbs to charge themselves a local tax at a rate about half of that in the city. Unwilling to share expenses, the ratepayers of the outlying townships petitioned against their annexation. To a Select Committee on Local Government in Ireland, a commissioner for the Pembroke township proposed that the "increase of taxation which would be consequent upon annexation would stop building in the township", while a property owner in Rathmines claimed that it would "send the people off to districts beyond, and [would] ruin the townships".[4] In the event, the Dublin Corporation Act of 1900 annexed the districts to the north and west but did not interfere with those to the south (see map above).[5] Some later annexations, as in 1930, were more even-handed but on each occasion where there was a geographical imbalance in the expansion of the city, the trajectories of least resistance were towards the north and west, while the barricades against incorporation always proved most effective in the south.

The comparative ease with which the city could stretch north and west has meant that this was where it found lands when it was disposed to build social housing.

Official Traveller Accommodation, 2018

Thus, south Dublin has neighbourhoods of private housing, and social housing estates have largely been kept out of these districts.

- **Nimbyism and the right to the city**

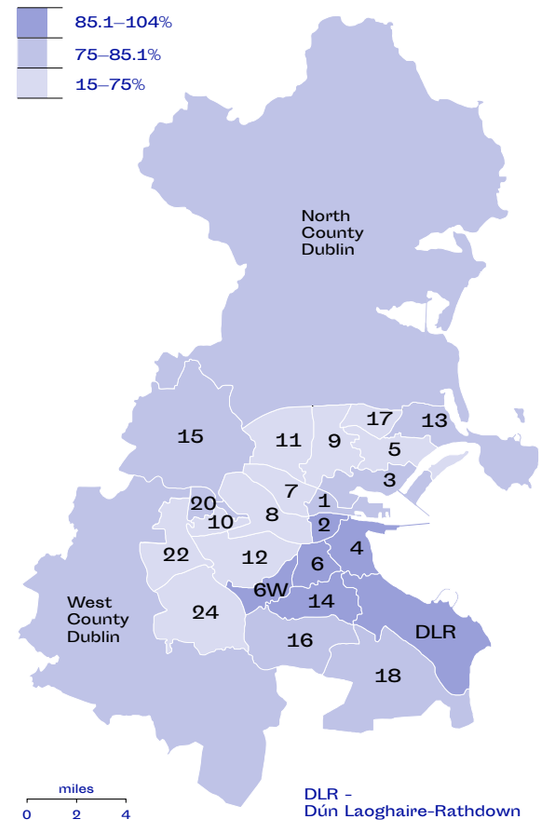
In the 1930s and 1940s, the Corporation of the City of Dublin built over 17,000 homes, some of them in small-scale, four-storey developments near the centre of the city, on land it owned.[6] This allowed for workers to live near their employment, as well as to take easy advantage of the shopping, leisure and recreation possibilities of the city centre. Whereas middle-class people could afford to travel to whatever amenities they desired, these developments gave the least advantaged an equal and effective right to the city.[7] This right is often contested.

For a BBC radio documentary called *The Travelling People*, Ewan MacColl wrote the 'The Moving On Song' (1960), about people who are unwelcome as neighbours. Its chorus is the essence of nimbyism: 'You'd better get born in some place | Move along, get along, move along, get along | Go, move, shift'. In 1975, musician Christy Moore added new verses and in bringing it home to Dublin highlighted the hostility towards Travellers: 'Mary Joyce was living at the side of the road | No halting place and no fixed abode | The vigilantes came to the Darndale site | And they shot her son in the middle of the night'. As conceded by Dublin City Council: "Local opposition to Traveller Accommodation can be significant."[8] In fact, the only sites provided specifically for Travellers to live together are at the very edges of the city (see map above). There can be few more striking images of marginality than this map of official provision for Travellers.[9] When it was proposed in 2018 to close one halting site, Collinstown, so that Dublin Airport might get a new runway, Fingal County Council took the opportunity to propose relocation to the very edge of Fingal, at Coolquay (see same map). One hundred people lived at Coolquay yet Fingal County Council received 600 'observations' objecting to the relocation.[10] The new housing, it was urged, would curtail the flood-plain on which the people of Coolquay depended for their own protection from inundation during storms.

Seeking election to the council of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown in 2014, Josepha Madigan of Fine Gael averred that it would be a "dreadful waste of taxpayers' money" to allocate as a halting site expensive land in wealthy south Dublin.[11] The former council depot at Mount Anville (see previous map) had been proposed as a place for Traveller housing in 1989 and this use was outlined as part of official local authority plans in 2009. Nevertheless, in 2019 the Traveller housing was dropped from the plan.[12] It is as if poor people have no business living on valuable land. The rich ask that the poor live anywhere at all, but 'Not In My Back Yard'.

Time after time, working-class people have been told to go, move, shift. During boom times, developers eye greedily the inner-city sites on which poorer people live. Quite often the existing housing is in poor repair. We see this in Dublin today, with some of the council flats built in the 1930s coming under fire. Although of historical significance, Dublin City Council has started the process to delist both Pearse House and Markievicz House, which lie just south of the river at the heart of the city centre.[13]

This process would allow for their demolition. Of course, residents have been reassured that they will be rehoused in the vicinity but they would be wise to be sceptical. In inner-city north Dublin, social housing from the 1960s was demolished in 2012 but the former residents still await the new social housing units that were promised for the site on Lower Dominick Street. Even when public housing is cleared from a site and rebuilding goes ahead, government policy now dictates that this land be given over primarily for private development with council tenancies to comprise no more than 10% of the units built.[14] Where local authorities demand more than this request, an appeal by the developer to the Minister for Housing should readily secure a more modest request. Dublin City Council are finding this to be exactly the case with the redevelopment of the northside's O'Devaney Gardens, a site that formerly had universal public housing and now has no more than an indication from the developer that it might entertain requests for 30% social housing. Simon Coveney blocked a proposal for the development of the site as 100% social housing in 2016, when he was Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.[15] Given that the law only requires 10% social housing, it will be interesting to see if the 30% commitment is realised. Commercial developers are effectively disqualifying a working-class right to the city. In the neighbourhood near Pearse House, Hibernia Real Estate Investment Trust has renovated a commercial property as One Cumberland Place. Behind this is St Andrew's Court, a block of social housing, and the CEO of Hibernia REIT has asked Dublin City Council that this be demolished as it is a "serious eyesore" which is "dragging down the quality of the street".[16]



Progression to College (%) by Dublin Postcodes

Go, move, shift.

- **Education and the reproduction of privilege**

One of the ways that privilege is passed from one generation to the next is through education. Money can buy books, room for quiet study at home, supplementary grinds and a favourable postcode. As long as schools may recruit by postcode, they will reinforce class-based segregation. This is striking in Dublin.

There is a cone of privilege extending southwards from the city centre. If we map (see left) the proportion of people going from school to college, the districts with the schools most likely to send students to college form a coherent band on the southside (Dublin postal districts 2, 4, 6, 6W and 14, and the part of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown outside the numbered Dublin postcodes).[17] In 2019, 3,360 students in this area sat the Leaving Certificate; of these students, 95% went on to third-level education. The ten districts with the lowest ratio of progression beyond school likewise form a coherent group, a crescent shape to the north and west from Darndale to Tallaght (Dublin postal districts 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 22 and 24). In 2019, 2,162 or 57% of those who took the Leaving Certificate at schools in this area went on to third-level education. In part, this contrast reflects the advantage that wealthier parents buy for their children when they send them to a fee-paying school. In those six southside districts, half the students sitting the Leaving Certificate did so in a fee-paying school. There is not a single fee-paying school in any of the ten low-progression districts flanking the city to its north and west. This is not the full story because, while the progression ratio for fee-paying schools in the privileged southside wedge is 107%, it was 83% for the 22 state-funded schools in the same area, way beyond the 57% for the 62 state schools in the group of less successful districts.[18]

By residence, and then by paying fees, parents confer significant privilege on their children. Being more likely to get to college, their children can expect a healthy

graduate premium. In Ireland, people with an honours degree can expect double the salary of those with nothing beyond the Leaving Certificate.[19] School fees are a top-up to get better-than-average treatment. The people that can afford this are largely in the south of the city and that is why their fee-paying schools are there, and not in the crescent of disadvantage to the north and west. Even without paying fees, geography gifts advantage. By living in the catchment area of the more successful state schools, parents give their children a leg-up. Parents are buying this premium on the cheap. The salaries of teachers in all these schools, both non-fee-paying and fee-paying, both highly successful and less successful, are paid by the state.

- **The sorted city**

The privilege defended by the southern suburbs resisting incorporation in the late-nineteenth century was replicated in the geography of social housing provision from the 1930s onwards, and is now protected by state-funded education and the ability of local communities to keep unwelcome neighbours away through pressure put on the planning system. For the United States, Bill Bishop warns of the dangers of the sorted city.[20] If people live in communities that are relatively homogeneous, they are less likely to support policies that use general funds to benefit groups other than themselves. In fact, they seem more likely to consider others a threat to their well-being and way of life. From Northern Ireland, we know that the minority of schools that are integrated by religion induce greater tolerance of other religions among their pupils.[21] From the United States, we know that children in schools largely segregated by race have fewer friends of another race and more negative attitudes towards other races.[22] From the United Kingdom, we know that, even controlling for class, children in class-segregated private schools believe that the pay of members of the elite should be higher than do children from state schools, and they are also less likely to agree that there is any social injustice in current levels of social inequality.[23] The sorted city undermines social solidarity. Perhaps we need a different sort of Dublin.

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