Library Services for Housing and Planning Publications in Ireland

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Workshop Report

Workshop held: 22nd November 2023

Location: The Housing Agency, 53 Mount Street Upper, Dublin, DO2 KT73.

Attendees:

Anne Murphy	The Housing Agency
Patricia Dowling	The Oireachtas Library & Research Service
Lorraine McLoughlin	Dublin City Archives
Patricia Quigley	edeposit Ireland
Daniel Hoey	Focus Ireland
Sarah Burns	ESRI
Sophie Kelliher	Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR)
Ken Reid	Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH)
Tommy Gavin	Community Action Tenants Union (CATU)
Rob Kitchin	Maynooth University
Carla Kayanan	Maynooth University
Oliver Dawkins	Maynooth University
Sam Mutter	Maynooth University
Mel Galley	Maynooth University

Context and aims

The impetus for the event was a conversation between Anne Murphy (Housing Agency) and Rob Kitchin (Maynooth University), who are both seeking to create a resource to collate and provide access to the plethora of housing and planning literature related to Ireland. Based on their experience of collating material it seemed evident that no organisation in Ireland is systematically producing a centralised resource through which to source published material – reports, policy documents, departmental circulars, legislation, academic papers, books – relating to housing and planning. Moreover, some publications seem to be vanishing from the public record as they are published as digital-only documents on websites with no permanent links or archiving policy. However, some organisations are providing a partial resource, publicly archiving a curated selection of material. What this means is that it can be difficult to source some documents, especially those that lack a permanent, archived site for access. Moreover, analysts, researchers, policy-makers and other audiences are duplicating effort in searching for documents and building their own ad hoc document stores that are not shared with others. The workshop therefore aimed to explore what housing and planning library resources presently exist, their scope and remit, and whether there was a need for a centralised public resource to collate, catalogue and provide access to housing and planning publications as a public good.

Workshop format

The workshop consisted of two sessions. The first session examined the present state-of-play of the archiving and sharing of housing and planning literature in Ireland. The second session explored what might be done to promote existing good practice and address present shortcomings, the need for a centralised repository and what this might consist of, and to map out how these might be achieved.

Overview of Session 1

Each attendee introduced themselves and provided a brief summary of their organisation's or individual approach to housing/planning library resources and approach. From the discussion it was clear that there are two distinct groups of actors and services being produced, though both are partial in terms of providing access to housing and planning documents. The first group are formalised, organised and resourced library and archive services. The second group are informal and ad hoc collections.

Formal and organised services

The Oireachtas Library & Research Service, Patricia Dowling

The library receives and archives publications from Oireachtas committees, government departments, state boards and statutory bodies where there is legal requirement to lay specific documents before the House of the Oireachtas. Documents include annual reports, secondary legislation (Statutory Instruments), Oireachtas committee reports, and the research outputs of internal research services. As such, it is a subset of housing and planning material produced by state bodies and does not include all material produced by those bodies or documents produced by other organisations. The mandate is to provide access to material for members (TDs and senators). It is not a public library but can grant access to approved visitors, such as academics, and historical (back to the 16th century) and contemporary documents are available for viewing via an online portal (https://opac.oireachtas.ie/knowvation/app/consolidatedSearch/).

Dublin City Archives, Lorraine McLoughlin

The Archives preserve and provide access to nine centuries of city records. It is mandated under the Local Government Act to archive the records of the city council, including paper records, such as meeting minutes, reports, plans, financial accounts, planning files, architectural files, as well as born-digital material, from across all local authority departments and area offices. Much of these data relate to housing and planning. https://www.dublincity.ie/dublin-city-library-archive and https://databases.dublincity.ie/ (being migrated to DRI).

edepositIreland, Patricia Quigley

Set up in 2014 as a part of TARA to capture, preserve and share digital publications from government departments and state agencies as part of the mandate of a legal deposit library. Initially set up with a voluntary arrangement for depositing digital documents, but more recently taken the view that all state bodies are mandated to deposit all digitally published material. Have harvested some material, but the onus is on the organisations to deposit the documents and associated metadata. The repository is open by design and default, though embargos on sharing can be put in place for commercial reasons. It presently provides access to over 16,500 documents, including some relating to housing and planning (http://edepositireland.ie/). However, it is a partial collection: there are 43 depositors and many departments and agencies are not depositing any or all of their publications, and the

bulk of the collections are from the last few years. The repository enables full-text index and search of documents, rather than just of the record (metadata and tags).

Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR), Sophie Kelliher
The OPR has created an online library as part of its mandate to deliver education, research and training with respect to planning in Ireland. The library provides public access to pdfs of planning policy guidelines, directives, circulars and research documents (https://www.opr.ie/library/). These documents are searchable by category, author, title, subject, and year of publication. The collection mainly consists of documents produced by government departments, state agencies and reports by university researchers. The earliest available document is 1994, with the majority published after 2014.

ESRI, Sarah Burns
The wider library function of ESRI has transferred to TCD. However, all ESRI publications, and other publications by ESRI researchers, are assigned DOIs and are available on the ESRI website (https://www.esri.ie/publications). They are also available via TCD's TARA library (https://www.tcd.ie/library/riss/tara/) and via REPEC (http://repec.org/).

Informal and ad hoc initiatives
Focus Ireland, Daniel Hoey
Has hosted its own library of material relating to housing and homelessness since its founding, which consists of a few hundred documents. Does not have dedicated funding or staffing and is not well organised or catalogued. The collection is expanded on an ad hoc, rather than systematic basis. It is principally used internally to inform the organisation's research and policy making. Is not online or available to the public.

Irish Council for Social Housing (ICSH), Ken Reid
Does not have a dedicated library resource, either physical or digital, but rather has an informal, non-catalogued library of internal and downloaded reports and other documents (e.g., newsletters, circulars, annual reports, policy documents, legislation, academic papers) related to housing issues stored on a local computer. Paper documents sent to the organisation are kept, but are not catalogued. The collection is expanded on an ad hoc, rather than systematic basis. The materials are not publicly available and are principally used to inform the organisation's research and policy making.

The Housing Agency, Anne Murphy

Does not have a dedicated library resource. An informal digital library using Endnote has been created on an ad hoc basis by one researcher, cataloguing any publication that seems relevant regarding housing in Ireland using basic metadata and a homemade thesaurus. Material includes reports, presentations, journal articles, but not legislation. PDFs are stored within Endnote and The Housing Agency Research Section's Sharepoint site. The Endnote resource is held locally and is not openly accessible to others. It is viewed as being a potentially valuable resource for the research unit and policy and practice unit in the Housing Agency and for fulfilling the agency's remit as a 'centre for housing knowledge'.

Community Action Tenants Union (CATU), Tommy Gavin

Has produced a repository for archiving of documents (e.g., minutes, newsletters) and other materials (e.g., posters, photos, postcards, oral history interviews) relating to CATU activities and earlier examples of housing activism (e.g., rent strikes in the 1970s). The archive is presently not publicly accessible, though CATU's content management system for storing institutional records is to members and the plan is to transfer archive material to this system .

Data Stories project, Maynooth University, Rob Kitchin, Carla Kayanan, Sam Mutter, Olly Dawkins, Mel Galley

Has created a Zotero database of housing and planning publications along with associated metadata and pdf. Material has not yet been systematically tagged. Content consists of a reasonably systematic trawl of journal articles and academic books from the past 15 years, along with government and civil society policy documents and reports. Database has not yet been made open access, but can switch on at any time.

Overview of Session 2

The second session considered the existing landscape of library and archive services with respect to housing and planning, its various shortcomings, and how these might be addressed.

It was noted that housing and planning are inherently diverse and interdisciplinary in nature. Relevant documents are being produced by multiple stakeholders including government departments, state bodies, local authorities, business organisations, civil society organisations, and universities. These documents are being published and made accessible

across dozens of sites, including organisation websites, academic journals, and institutional repositories, but are not being systematically catalogued in a central resource that makes finding them straightforward. Even in cases of statuary obligation – such as the need to lay a document before the Oireachtas or to deposit with the city archives or edepositIreland as a legal deposit library – this is partial as institutions are not always aware of their obligations to deposit or there is insufficient capacity to undertake the function. NGOs, universities and companies have no obligation to deposit their documents, and nor do the existing library services wish to receive it as it does not fall within their mandate and their staffing and funding resources are stretched and necessary technical skills limited.

Based on the experiences of some workshop attendees attempts to source documents (as well as requests from state agencies seeking copies of their own lost documents) it is clear that many born-digital documents have disappeared from their original site of publication given the instability of website addresses/pages and the failure to allocate DOIs to documents and to archive them into repositories with permanent weblinks. In cases where collections of materials have been collated by individual staff members, held on local machines or external hard drives, these are not open or even shared locally and are vulnerable to loss if the person moves on as there's no formalised procedures concerning handover and maintenance. In relation to paper-only documents, due to resource constraints and the shift to digital documents, many organisations have discontinued maintaining their paper libraries (including the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage), and in many cases have disposed of their collection. Unless the document has been deposited in an institutional library there is a danger it will be lost. Paper copy access is restricted to on-site visiting, whereas digitisation would open up the document to wider readership and re-use.

In summary, the full corpus of housing and planning materials related to Ireland are scattered, not easily discoverable, and vulnerable to loss.

What is needed?

The consensus of attendees is the need to create a centralised portal/catalogue to search and locate housing and planning documents. This portal/catalogue would, on the one hand, complement existing library services, enabling search across them and providing links to documents held by them (facilitated by the sharing/harvesting and collation of metadata). On the other hand, the portal/catalogue would capture material not held in these services into a

central point of reference, detailing their metadata, including links to the source, but would also hold pdf copies to preserve access if the source link breaks or document is lost from the original host site. There are four core reasons for creating such a portal:

1) to support housing and planning research and policy-making and inform market activity by making it easy to discover and access relevant material and the analysis and insights they contain.

2) to foster confidence in discovery by enabling search from one location of the entire corpus of housing knowledge and policy.

3) to limit the duplication of effort across agencies, NGOs, academia and business in the searching for and assembling of relevant material.

4) to preserve documents – both born-digital documents and digitised paper documents – for future generations.

What would the next step be?

Given the need for a centralised housing/planning document portal the attendees felt that the next step should be to detail the scope and remit of such a portal, to consider a funding application to undertake this scoping work, and to build a demonstrator portal. This study would need to consist of a number of related tasks.

1) Investigate if there are housing/planning publication repositories in other countries. Examine how are they constituted and their scope and remit, how they are run and sustained, and what lessons can be learned from them.

2) Consult with potential users of the portal/catalogue (e.g., researchers and policy makers) and relevant stakeholders (e.g., those producing documents/metadata likely to be ingested) as to its scope, remit, functionality and all of the following tasks. This task will be on-going throughout the study.

3) Determine the boundaries of what material will be included in the portal/catalogue. Initial discussion suggested that it should be officially published documents only –

official reports, policy documents, academic papers, legislation and circulars. Material such as meeting minutes, newsletters, blogs, webpages, pamphlets, posters, videos and other recorded material should be archived as special collections in existing archives.

4) Determine what materials are presently available in sustainable, stable repositories such as the Oireachtas Library, edepositIreland, Dublin City Archives and OPR library with a view to importing metadata and creating links to their items.

5) Determine all the recurrent publishers of housing/planning documents across state, business, civil society and universities and where publications are hosted. Consider how best to source non-recurrent, occasional publications.

6) Consider the best approach to assembling, cataloguing and making available born-digital documents, including determining a systematic approach for actively harvesting material (rather than simply archiving material offered since those producing documents often do not see themselves as a publisher and do not seek to deposit publications in a repository). The approach will include automated ETL tools, encourage metadata standards and XML tagging on host sites and the use DOIs, and minimise duplication.

7) Consider the best approach to digitising paper-only documents for preservation, including how they are sourced, captured, stored and issues related to intellectual property.

8) Assess the adoption of a metadata standard for cataloguing documents, such as the use of Dublin Core, and how best to ingest metadata from existing library services and record the provenance of material for future generations.

9) Consider options regarding a tagging taxonomy/keywords to aid search and discoverability. This will include assessing existing housing/planning taxonomies, for example as included in the HASSET thesaurus (https://hasset.ukdataservice.ac.uk/hasset/en/page/616272a6-b024-480f-892d-b31378aa0a82), as well as creating a bespoke taxonomy.

10) Assess potential 'finding aids' that will enhance the discoverability and searchability of the portal/catalogue and add value through full-text search, visual search tools and AI tools, as well as a catalogue of acronyms used in housing and planning domain in Ireland.

11) Assess different potential platforms for hosting the archive, such as a bespoke website, an open access Zotero database, or an online library catalogue system (e.g., TinyCat; https://www.librarycat.org/).

12) Consider principles and policies re. archive governance, operational procedures, intellectual property, metadata standards and data thesaurus.

13) Determine the staffing and resourcing needed for the creation and on-going management and maintenance of a housing/planning repository.

14) Consider the most appropriate, long-term, institutional home for the portal/catalogue that will ensure its accessibility and preservation into the future. The initial view of the workshop participants is that the Housing Agency is a suitable site given its role in the housing landscape and its desire to be a central reference point for housing knowledge. This view has not been discussed or examined by the Housing Agency.

How to progress to the next steps?

This scoping work ideally requires support in terms of staffing, which will need financial support. Outside of an institution deciding to provide the necessary resources for such a scoping exercise and to build a demonstrator portal, gaining necessary supports will require an application to a funding scheme. The participants identified three potential schemes to apply for:

1) The Housing Agency (Research Support Programme; max €30K, but needs to fit the advertised theme);
2) Irish Research Council (New Foundations scheme, Strand 1a: Enhancing Civic Society; max €12K);

3) European Research Council (proof of concept to translate Data Stories research into applied use, but must have innovation aspect; max €150K).

The ERC Data Stories project can provide some matching resources through the in-kind funding of two or three student interns to help work on aspects of the scoping study and demonstrator portal.