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Policy, planning practice and the lived experience in a changing Ireland: Provoking thoughts for/of change?

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Abstract: Spatial planning in Ireland is challenged by factors unique to the Irish context that have long been in circulation among scholars, such as colonial legacies, anti-urban bias, centralisation and land politics. This paper builds on these historical realities and introduces the additional elements of indigeneity, commons and "more-than-rural" perspectives. Three lines of argumentation structure this paper: 1) Ireland's colonial legacies and mindsets hinder appropriate planning and development; 2) the historically grounded idealisation of the rural flattens lived experiences; and 3) moving beyond post-colonial confines requires a new and variegated politics of the urban and rural commons. This structure on the lines of argumentation emerged from a 2020 panel session on Irish planning at the Conference of Irish Geography in Trinity College Dublin where panellists addressed what an Irish planning system should look like. This paper is deliberately provocative and aims to open a collective dialogue on the contours of a more mature approach to planning practice and policy development that resonates more closely with lived experiences in Ireland.

Keywords *Ireland, spatial planning, policy, lived experience, urban development, rural development*

Introduction

Planning practices and policies directly influence the livelihoods of individuals on the ground. This is true whether the impact arises from local government decision-making or from more intricate global flows and inter-connections. Both as a combination of endogenous and global contextual factors, Ireland remains challenged in many of its planning activities and policies – most notably its recent ability to meet demand for housing, to accommodate growing populations and to achieve climate goals. In this

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provocation we ask: What could or should the future Irish planning system look like? How could it more effectively address some of these apparently intractable challenges? These questions arose from a panel discussion at the 2020 Conference of Irish Geographers in Trinity College Dublin. This paper is part synthesis of key takeaways from the discussion, but is also structured to tease out and contextualise the discussion drawing on more recent research, experience and policy shifts.

As authors who have spent many years researching Irish planning policies and practices, we draw from these experiences to develop a normative perspective on what an idealised Irish planning system should or could be. Through three provocations we challenge: 1) currently existing conceptualisations of planning; 2) the shape of policy; and 3) planning practice in Ireland. Planning is radically changing, socially and culturally, but is also under significant pressure to make dramatic interventions in the service of a just climate transition and sustainable development. To provoke the debate, we highlight certain contextual variables while also recognising that the three provocations that underpin the essay are each worthy of more profound and extensive considerations in papers of their own.

Ireland's historically grounded idealisation of the rural informs a rural-urban dichotomy that presents itself in particular spatial and policy manifestations. Engagement with the ideas raised in this paper might open up a collective dialogue on the contours of a more 'indigenous' approach to planning in Ireland and its potential value. This raises tricky questions including: How do we shift our conceptions of the city away from manicured multiculturalism based on place-marketing and competitiveness to focus on our responsibility to deliver public goods? How do we generate the political change necessary to enable decentralisation, greater subsidiarity and further strengthening of local decision-making and locally-led planning? How can we be more dialogic in our approach, collectively envisioning the future types of environments we want to live in and then work backwards to develop an action plan to get there? How do we use policy to champion and support local innovation and development that may not conform to traditional measures of success such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross Value Added (GVA)? How do we develop variegated, place-sensitive approaches to how we define and implement spatial policy? The task is not an easy one as it requires us to challenge conceptual and lived norms, sometimes unconscious ones, and requires reflection along various lines.

21st Century Ireland

Since the 1960s, there has been an ongoing shift in Ireland from agriculture and light manufacturing to financial services and high technology as the foundations of a predominantly urban-centred economy. These economic structural shifts have manifested themselves in particular ways within the built environment and the economic and social structure of 21st century Ireland. The increasing neoliberalisation of the economy and society since the mid-1980s has resulted in weak regulation, an emphasis on market-led

approaches and reliance on the private sector to deliver core functions resulting in growing inequalities at a range of scales (MacLaran and Kelly, 2014). The property development industry has become a particularly powerful urban actor, delivering infrastructure and services on behalf of the State, but its unfettered activities have also underpinned some of the most challenging social and economic periods in recent history (Kitchin *et al.*, 2012). The post-2008 financial downturn, increased diversification and continued urbanisation of the Irish economy have resulted in significant functional, demographic and cultural impacts on 'rural', 'urban' and 'in-between' places, while the policy infrastructure and environment has lagged behind the lived experience. This 'urbanisation of the economy' is not isolated to Ireland. However, Ireland's historically-grounded idealisation and powerful politics of the rural (Fox-Rogers, 2019; Graham, 1997) informs a rural-urban policy and political dichotomy that has made it particularly challenging for policy and planning practitioners to steer the national development trajectory onto a more sustainable footing. The complexity of institutional structures within the Irish planning system have also played into this over time. This was never more evident than in the development of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) when locally elected councillors nominated to the regional assembly were essentially tasked with developing a regional plan that could potentially constrain their freedom to act locally. The nomination-based nature of the regional assembly, the majority of whose members competences and electoral base is at the local scale, mitigates culturally and electorally against the development of civic capital at the more strategic metropolitan and city-regional scale (Kayanan *et al.*, 2023; Breathnach *et al.*, 2021; Meredith and Van Egeraat, 2013; Ó Riordáin and Egeraat, 2016).

The national planning and policy context

Planning policy, practice and infrastructure provision in Ireland has traditionally been reactive, responding to demographic, economic and social stresses rather than anticipating them. As the limitations of this approach have become more evident over the last two decades, there has been a growing acceptance of the need for a stronger and more pro-active approach to steering and shaping spatial outcomes (see Table 1). This has been spurred in part by persistent and widening inequality between Dublin and the eastern seaboard vis-à-vis the rest of the country. The National Spatial Strategy (NSS), published in 2002, introduced the concept of balanced regional development for Ireland and was the first major attempt by the State and policy system to develop a framework for strategic planning (Lennon et al, 2018) despite there being much debate on this very issue from as early as 1968 with the so-called Buchanan Report (Colin Buchanan and Partners, 1968). Arguably, growing interest at European level through the European Spatial Development Perspective in the role of spatial strategies to support territorial development influenced the NSS (Albrechts *et al.*, 2003; Scott, 2006).

While broadly welcomed within policy and academic circles as a positive step forward, implementation of the NSS was significantly undermined by political decision-making and a reluctance to devolve power and responsibility to support more polycentric

development (Breathnach, 2010, 2014). Challenges to implementation of the NSS included: inappropriate house-building in rural counties where there was no pre-existing or likely demand; intensified sprawl and large-scale commercial development on the edge of cities in a "race for rates" by local authorities; failure to address a pressing housing problem nationally, with particular geographic focus in Dublin; and severe over-production of commercial space (Moore-Cherry and Tomaney, 2016). Politicisation of the strategy by local and national politicians occurred through pitching the designations of 'gateways' and 'hubs' in terms of winners and losers, and repeating a well-rehearsed argument on the discrimination against rural Ireland. This lack of spatial imagination and fierce localism in the political culture resulted in any focus on the urban and/or strategic planning being immediately dismissed as anti-rural (Breathnach, 2013). Eventually, the onset of the 2008 global financial crisis resulted in the effective abandonment of the NSS, although it was not formally set aside until February 2013.

The politics surrounding the failed implementation of the NSS provided the context for the launch of the National Planning Framework (NPF) in 2018; a 22-year strategy alongside a new National Development Plan (NDP) as part of a wider public policy initiative entitled Project Ireland 2040. The State introduced these initiatives under the premise that a 'business as usual' growth and development trajectory was no longer a policy option. The core concepts underpinning the NPF related to optimising investment through concentration in a smaller number of growth centres, achieving compact growth within urban centres and joining spatial planning with capital investment and infrastructure delivery (Moore-Cherry, 2019).

To ensure alignment of the entire planning system, Ireland's three regions (Eastern and Midland; Northern and Western; Southern) were each charged with implementing their respective RSES and aligning revised County Development Plans with regional aspirations. Furthermore, the NPF introduced statutory planning for the five regional cities (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford) coordinated through plans at the new Metropolitan Area scale (MASPs). This approach put in place the groundwork to accommodate, facilitate and accelerate infrastructural and economic development within Ireland's five core cities and has been complemented by the publication of Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 for rural areas, villages and smaller towns. This latter policy recognises the interdependencies between rural and urban and aims to support a vibrant rural Ireland through opportunities for enhanced employment, entrepreneurship potential and a high quality of life.

Table 1: List of the high-level policy documents guiding regional development in Ireland

Title of policy document	Objective	Date of Adoption
European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union (ESDP)	Spatial strategies focused on sustainable and balanced territorial development for the territory of the European Union. Adopted by the Member States of the European Commission.	Adopted May 1999
National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020	Predecessor to National Planning Framework (NPF). First attempt at strategic planning. Introduced the concept of balanced regional development in Ireland. Non-statutory.	Adopted November 2002 Replaced by NPF
Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework (NPF)	Sets out the strategic national planning vision for Ireland up to 2040. Intended as framework for the RSES, MASPs and any local development plans that sit below the MASPs. The NPF is a statutorily backed policy document. Meant to be implemented at the regional scale.	Adopted February 2018
Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES)	Translates the principles of the NPF 2040 at regional level. The Eastern and Midland Region (EMRA), Northern and Western Region (NWRA) and Southern Region (SRA) each have a RSES for their respective regions. Incorporates the MASPs.	EMRA adopted June 2019 NWRA and SRA adopted January 2020
Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs)	Spatial plans for the five metropolitan areas of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford as designated in the NPF. Prepared in tandem with the RSES.	See above. MASPs are included in the RSES publications.
National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 and 2021-2030	Aligned with strategic planning objectives in NPF, which feed into the RSES and MASPs. Sets out level of investment and contains a range of expenditure commitments.	NDP 2018-2027 published February 2018 NDP 2021-2030 published October 2021

Important developments are underway in Ireland and these point to possibilities for positive change (see Table 2). The NPF and NDP are undergoing a statutory First Revision, informed by an Expert Group. If the report produced by the Expert Group is taken into account, the revised NPF will more accurately address growth targets, reassert planning and monitoring of the MASPs and better align NDP spending. The updated Climate Action Plan 2023 continues to push for halving emissions by 2030. The third round of funding for the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, which was launched under the NPF, has moved away from a competitive bid process to facilitate easier access to funds that can address vacancy and dereliction and complement policies such as Housing for All and Town Centre First. Efforts by the Land Development Agency (LDA) to unlock and build on state lands aim to provide more residential accommodation that can reinvigorate Ireland's towns and villages. A series of recent reports by bodies such as the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) on issues including Housing and Urban Development Policy Priorities (2021), Transport Orientated Development (2019) and the Thinktank for Action on Social Change (TASC) Trading Places: TASC report on Land and Housing (2022) point the way to how we might address critical issues in practice. But policy and practice are slow to change, often constrained by financial or institutional structures that thwart innovation.

Removing barriers is key to thinking anew and addressing long-standing issues. One example is the common practice that increases in the value of land being rezoned for housing accrue to landowners rather than to the state. Remedial recommendations to this and other issues were originally proposed fifty years ago in the 1973 Kenny Report. This report advocated for a State-led approach of acquiring and managing landbanks with use of compulsory purchase orders, for which compensation to previous owners was recommended as the existing use land value plus 25%. The proposed measures would control the price of land development in the interests of the common good rather than allowing speculation to occur unabated. In July 2023, the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage Report on the Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Planning and Development (Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones) Bill 2022 (LVS), noted the potential for the strong uplift in land value resulting from rezoning. Rather than controlling land price, the new legislation proposes that from 1 December 2024 any uplift will be shared between the landowner and the state to ensure that social and physical infrastructure could be developed to support further housing. The recommendation to ring-fence the proposed LVS funding could be transformational in the Irish planning system. Local authorities could increase their revenue through land developed by private developers, thus providing them with discretionary funds to build housing and other necessary amenities to attract and retain populations.

Table 2: Recent relevant policy recommendations and Government initiatives

Initiative	Purpose
Climate Action Plan 2023	Update on Climate Action Plan 2019. Implements carbon budgets and emission caps. Aims to shape policies to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net zero by no later than 2050.
Housing and Urban Development Policy Priorities	Report produced in April 2021 by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). Outlines policy options available to meet housing objectives in line with growth targets established in the NPF. Concludes that Ireland's system of urban development, land management and housing provision is dysfunctional and points to key factors underpinning dysfunction. Suggests a co-coordinative and action-oriented approach to system change.
Housing for All – a New Housing Plan for Ireland 2021	Government's housing plan to 2030 containing 213 actions to improve the housing system and deliver more homes for people with different housing needs. Backed by a multi-annual and multi-billion euro plan.
Planning and Development (Land Value Sharing and Urban Development Zones) Bill 2022, 2023	Bill approved by the Government aligned with Housing For All. Allows for the designation of Urban Development Zones by planning authorities or regional assemblies and for local authorities to capture a portion of the increase in land value due to public zoning and designation decisions. Intended to address need for increase in supply of housing, particularly affordable and social housing.
Report of Expert Group for the First Revision of the National Planning Framework, 2023	Report developed by three individuals appointed by the Minister to provide a high-level overview of the NPF. Stresses the continued relevance of the NPF but details the importance of: greater ambition of compact growth targets, clarifying and strengthening the bodies involved in implementation—with a particular focus on the MASPs, improved monitoring of progress and more coordination across government on infrastructure projects.
Town Centre First, 2022	Aligned with NPF. Strives to support a coordinated approach across national stakeholders and the local government sector. Contains 33 actions for local town teams in towns of all sizes (over 500 in Ireland) to develop and fund regeneration plans that will bring vibrancy to their localities. Positions local authorities as key enablers in the process.
Trading Places: TASC report on Land and Housing, 2022	Authored by Robert Sweeney and published by the Thinktank for Action on Social Change (TASC). The report interrogates connections between Ireland's land system and housing challenges. Concludes that land speculation continues to be an underlying factor contributing to delays in housing development and raising prices. Amongst other policy recommendations, calls for active land management, with a particular focus on the Land Development Agency (LDA) in aiding the process.
Transport-Orientated Development: Assessing Opportunity for Ireland Background Case Studies, 2019	Produced by the NESC. Outlines ways the State could meet NPF objectives for compact growth and sustainable mobility by locating high-quality transport services proximate to housing, employment, public services and leisure space.
Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF)	Dedicated fund to regenerate and rejuvenate projects in the five designated metropolitan areas and other large towns. Launched in tandem with the NPF. Allocated 2 billion euro in the NDP 2018-2027, later extended to 2030 in NDP 2021-2030. The URDF is one of four funds set up by the NDP.

With the climate crisis, and pressing international evidence on the negative impact of 'left-behind-places' on social, political and economic wellbeing (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2022; Rodrigues-Pose, 2018), understanding and challenging the kinds of spatial thinking that have undermined previous strategic planning and perpetuated divisive narratives has never been more urgent.

It is within the context outlined above that we introduce three provocations to inform and catalyse debate about how to progress towards a more mature Irish planning system.

Provocation 1: Ireland's colonial legacies and mindsets have hindered appropriate planning and development.

While rural policy in Ireland has evolved over many decades in sophisticated ways, beyond the current NPF's emphasis on metropolitan area planning, there has been no attempt to develop a clear urban policy for Ireland. To date, there has been limited consideration given as to what constitutes an Irish urban identity or place, or how to galvanise an Irish urban policy and empower urban political leadership. In fact, while a Minister for Rural Affairs has been a core member of the Cabinet for decades, there is yet to be a Minister for Urban Affairs appointed. Research by Moore-Cherry and Tomaney (2019) suggests that one of the fundamental issues in relation to sub-optimal planning in Ireland is the presence of a distinct 'metro-phobia' in policy and political circles. The historical absence of urban policy in the Irish policy landscape, coupled with a strong anti-urban sentiment in the political system, demonstrates an ongoing failure to engage with the shape, form and potential of urban centres in our space-economy.

Anti-urbanism is associated with traditional sentiments that Ireland is quintessentially rural, as stereotypically captured in tourism campaigns (Zuelow, 2009), and a perception that the urban is 'a little bit not Irish'. The concept of 'the city' as a tightly clustered contiguous and communal use of space is a superimposed colonial concept from the Vikings, the Anglo Normans and the English. This perception reproduces the settler-native framework of the coloniser, with little attention to the hybridisation that occurred both prior to and after the Cromwellian and Williamite confiscations (Duffy *et al.*, 2001; McAlister, 2019; Smyth, 2007). There is no consideration of whether, in the absence of a colonial context, inter-cultural contact might have produced similar outcomes, or of the extent to which Irish cities and towns have unique vernacular characteristics.

This ignoring of the urban, and lack of effort to develop appropriate policy and development frameworks, has opened the door to a very common practice of 'borrowing from elsewhere' (Watson 2021). Regularly, the media and public discourse reinforce that Ireland, and Dublin in particular, should be replicating other cities' experiences. However, this fails to account for contextual differences. For example, public discussions on the future of Dublin Port call for a replication of the perceived experiences and 'successes' of other cities – "Genoa, Barcelona, Bilbao, Copenhagen, Oslo and Helsinki, not to mention London and Rotterdam" (McWilliams, 2023) without considering the

actual redevelopment experience and city-regional frameworks in those other places. Furthermore, more recent practice has demonstrated active 'cherry-picking' and customising of practices from elsewhere such as tax incentive models in the Docklands (Bartley, 2007; Moore, 2008), the 'European City' ideal based on reproducing the milieu of Europe's living heritage streetscapes (Lawton and Punch, 2014), the new town model exemplified in the development of Adamstown (Lawton, 2018) and the modern superblock. In some ways while this looks like the 'easy option', it may in part be due to the under-resourcing and under-staffing of many public planning offices, with constant turn-over in these institutions depleting key knowledge and the ability to think more creatively over the longer-term.

The examples above are largely exceptions to an emerging pattern of suburbanised peri-urban spaces around Irish cities and larger towns, set within a backdrop of rural stagnation comprising semi-vacant villages and small towns, and low density linear and dispersed development in their hinterlands. A decreasing patronage of small town squares, village greens and medieval lanes, which are common features of hamlets, villages and towns in Ireland, reflects an absence of constituted engagement with urban collectivism and commonage. This lack of engagement is replicated in the political and governance structures around the urban in Ireland, exemplified in the removal of town councils (Ryan, 2016) and the increasing deficit of resources available to county planners to cover their functions (Scott *et al.* 2022). Calls for greater levels of State-led development, whether through active land-management via the LDA (FitzGerald *et al.*, 2021), or through better resourced forward planning to create masterplan-led developments in lower tier settlements, are limited by state capacity (Sweeney, 2022).

Funding programmes and policy initiatives such as the Heritage Council's Historic Towns Initiative and the added resources from Town Centre First have enabled greater re-engagement with the vernacular village and town and rediscovered the need to form appropriate policies and networks to revitalise and maintain the socio-political tissue of urban space (DRCD, 2021, 2022; Harvey, 2020; Heaphy and Scott, 2021; Scott and Heaphy, 2021). Where neglect and lack of engagement has perpetuated the status quo, entropy has furthered a new normal of discrete residential estates, large-scale retail parks, disparate social infrastructure and a distinct absence of public goods. Ireland's postcolonial land syndrome (i.e. the reification of private land ownership to the extent of giving it constitutional protection) is holding it back from envisioning collective urban spaces, commonage and constraining the possibilities of building a collective urban identity.

Tellingly, architectural renditions and master planned developments might draw on the examples of large-scale urban regeneration projects in European cities as best practices to be modelled. However, these ambitions come into tension with the dynamics of Ireland's political economy of land tenure. The Anglo-Saxon approach to land ownership and development (i.e. valuing property homeownership, viewing housing as an asset and prioritising the privatisation of land) continues to pave the way for a developer-led model of urban development (Lawton and Kayanan, 2023). The consequence of

this is the growth of cities without the adequate and appropriate social infrastructure to make them liveable and attractive. During the Covid-19 pandemic this absence was particularly evident in attitudes to the urban public commons and in discourses around our inadequate public spaces, with lack of rubbish bins, seating, public toilets, and green and blue spaces for leisure and play becoming particularly evident (Kayanan et al, 2021).

Unlike other post-colonial contexts that used the cultural landscape of the city as a core plank of nation-building and the creation of post-colonial identities, such as in Singapore or the construction of a new capital city in Pakistan, in Ireland a strong identification with the 'rural as Irish' became the spatial manifestation of independence. Dooley's (2004) work on the land question in independent Ireland is instructive, highlighting the cultural attachment to acquiring more and more land even when economically irrational in the rural context. He quotes Kevin O'Shiel, one of the authors of the post-independence Constitution, as stating that "land is the most combustible subject in Ireland" (*The Irish Times*, 11 November 1966). Arguably, this historic and cultural attachment to land and private ownership is deep in the Irish psyche and now plays out as much in the urban as it has done in the rural context for decades. As Dooley notes (2004), this is a legacy of centuries of dispossession and of the resultant agrarian revolutionary politics that shaped the mandate of the Land Commission as well as the pre-independence Congested Districts Board. The unique power of the Land Commission to restructure rural society meant it was maintained aloof from party political affiliations but was highly political in its focus on the question of land ownership and redistribution.

Provocation 2: Idealised understandings of the rural flatten lived experiences.

The contradictions noted above, particularly those associated with a rural bias, reverberate with a long- entrenched binary that exists in Ireland and influences planning practice and policy, as well as politics more broadly: the urban-rural dichotomy. However, the lived experience demonstrates much more fluid understandings of this relationship.

This raises the question: what are the implications of an historic idealisation and construction of 'the rural'? Here we might imagine urban settlements as no more than oases within a larger agrarian state. In many ways the built form and heritage of more rural towns seems to lend credence to this assertion. In recent years, rural policy has attempted to harness the potential of the urban with the idea that innovation and technology, enabled by digital transition and remote working, will be a key tool in rebalancing regional development. Yet, this flattening of the geographies of innovation and the idea of technology as rural liberator is potentially hugely problematic. Concentrating innovation and technology within specific places and denying spatial distinctiveness can exacerbate pre-existing inequalities both between urban and rural places, but also within them.

Rather than denounce the binary, might the maintenance of an urban-rural dichotomy prove discursively productive? Can distinguishing rural economies and livelihoods become a political project to encourage discussions and empower particular forms of economy

and economic activity 'from below'? Might Ireland follow the example of the Netherlands in institutionalising urban-rural tensions through new political movements in a context of required drastic and rapid restrictions on agricultural greenhouse gas emissions? Abstinence from advancing a spatial planning model that prioritises thinking at the city-regional scale has its correlate in using the rural sphere and the rural voice as a site of contestation. Just as emigration served as an escape valve in the 20th century and during the 2008-15 recession, now the rural might serve as a protest against the articulation of urban policy and urban futures. Questioning what might become an indigenous urban theory implies that the Irish have struggled to define themselves outside of an imposed EuroAmerican experience (Roy 2009). However, could the pernickety presence of an urban-rural interface, one that constantly rears its head during a wide-range of Irish debates, point to a meaningful rural land perspective and struggle that helps clarify the unique position and contribution of the Irish case? Construed this way, is it possible (or even desirable) to move away from an urban-rural dichotomy, and, importantly, how does the persistence of this dichotomy hinder – and sharpen – our understanding of land use development, privatisation and the commons more generally in Ireland?

Census data on workplaces, working from home, and commuting activity (Keaveney, 2021; Kelly *et al.*, 2022) suggest a greater blending of both identity and lived experience and a complexity of the rural that goes way beyond traditional agrarian conceptualisations. At their core, recent debates around farming, climate action and just transitions have an imagined divide between rural and urban areas rather than an integrated regional-scale understanding of city and country that can buttress urban centres to the benefit of farming and other rural economic activity (Clavin and Kayanan, 2022). In fact, it may be that in their perpetuation of a narrow version of the 'rural', policymakers and politicians are in search of a rural idyll that is not just lost but gone. Until the messy reality of the Irish lived experience is publicly and politically acknowledged, the traditional urban-rural binary in politics and lobbying will remain a stumbling block to more effective spatial planning and higher levels of subjective wellbeing. Irish planning policy and related systems need to engage with the lived experience in Ireland more effectively and learn from decades of bottom-up projects and development initiatives to support community wealth-building.

Provocation 3: Moving beyond post-colonial confines requires a new and variegated politics of the urban and rural commons.

Recognising the challenges of development within the urban sphere (first provocation) and the rural sphere (second provocation), how might we inspire a new politics of the commons to create a more collective vision to underpin our planning frameworks and systems? We suggest that decolonising mindsets around the urban in Ireland begins not with pitting Dublin against the rest of the country, or outside of what is 'Irish', but rather with managing its growth and building up city-regions as envisaged through the NPF to diminish the extreme primate structure (i.e. core versus periphery, inner versus outer,

central versus peripheral) that characterises the Irish urban system, and is a common feature of colonial urbanisation in other contexts.

In relation to land and scale, Benjamin's (2008) 'occupy urbanism' framework, which emerged in South Asia, may be a useful lens to consider alternative futures. Benjamin argues for a focus on the local economy and practices at a much smaller scale (plot, workplace, neighbourhood) rather than flattened understandings of 'the urban' or 'the rural'. He problematises the politics of developmentalism—particularly urban economic policy and master planning—and breaks with the teleology of economic growth. Related to housing, in 2016 the Apollo House Occupation gave global prominence to Dublin's housing crisis and demonstrated a refusal to view property only for its exchange value and to instead demonstrate the importance of its use value. Though temporary, this movement among others punctuated how we think about land and place and played an important role in challenging 'given' notions of what constitutes value in our society. Similarly, the 'place-based' turn (Beer *et al.*, 2020, Moore-Cherry *et al.*, 2022) in academic research and some policy domains draws attention to the diverse conceptualisations of value that are embedded in senses of belonging and meaning-making in place. Valuing the lived experience, through acknowledging past traumas and collectively and meaningfully envisioning alternative futures, is becoming critical to the realisation of more sustainable and just urban and rural places (Clavin *et al.*, 2021; Moore-Cherry et al, under review). This 'indigenisation' of planning practice and inclusion of local, tacit and embodied knowledges within the policy development and implementation cycle provides new opportunities to reimagine the scale, processes and outcomes of spatial planning in Ireland.

Though Ireland's history might find purchase within theories of and from the Global South, against what benchmarks should Ireland compare itself in Europe? Irish planning's dependency on British training and accreditation models, not least because of Britain's pioneering development of town and country planning, has perhaps stymied independent conceptual development (Gkartzios and Remoundou, 2018). By comparison, architecture, as a related discipline, is undergoing a strong turn towards the integration of the vernacular. Planning and urbanism have yet to see similar advances. Arguably, this can be attributed to the central role that land and its use play in urban planning practice and politics. Yet, this does not negate the need for fresh thinking in Ireland around land governance and may perhaps be an avenue of research for the LDA.

Conclusion: Charting a pathway forward

Since the 2020 panel discussion at the Conference of Irish Geographers, much has changed. In some ways the Covid-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus some of the limitations of planning in Ireland, but it also highlighted the capacity for the Irish people and policy system to both develop and implement radical changes and practices through a reliance on collectivism as exemplified in the hashtag #inittogether.

As planning and land use ideas were imported from the UK, the trajectory of Irish history has without doubt moulded the shape of the planning system and shaped particularities, such as the perceived sanctity of private property and a postcolonial identification of the new State with traditional rural values and ideals. Asking questions about the potential impacts of a more empowered and forward-looking Ireland-centred approach to planning aligns with wider cultural and aesthetic shifts, for example in the characterisation and celebration of Irish architectural heritage and urban landscapes (Lappin, 2009; Mulvin, 2021; Shaffrey and Shaffrey, 1984). The success of Irish-based architects internationally provides a model for rethinking urban planning around present innovations in architecture and design. Similarly in the Arts, such as with traditional music, although so much is shared with our Scottish, Welsh and English cousins, there is sufficient interest in Irish music to define it in such terms. (Dowling, 2016; hAllmhuráin, 2016) The same construction could apply to categorising Irish Architecture on its own terms.

Ultimately, Irish planning and policy-making is strongly influenced by a colonial legacy with regard to land ownership and property structures that conceptually and practically influence and constrain spheres of action, policy and planning outcomes. However, rather than perpetuating the kinds of binaries that have hindered creative and innovative problem-solving or pitted people and places against one another, this provocation aims to articulate points of debate that might help us develop a more forward looking and contextually responsive approach to developing our places of the future. In the context of the intensifying social and spatial challenges we face, it is a task from which we cannot shy away.

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