

instances, the labour conditions for low-cost preparation of food have proved to be problematic (Sawicki 2005).

CONCLUSION

Teasing out the nature and consequences of new forms of consumption on the island of Ireland presents a dynamic and challenging set of research questions, which this brief chapter could only touch upon. At issue is the schizophrenic manner in which these forms of consumption have been greeted, which in turn reflects upon the problems encountered with modernisation. It may be that new found wealth and the new terrain of consumption have unravelled what Giddens has termed 'ontological security': 'the confidence most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action' (Giddens, 1990, p. 92). However, whilst moralising about consumption reveals a great deal about questions of cultural identity, attention needs to be given to the social, economic and spatial contexts in which changes in lifestyle and consumption have occurred. Shifts in patterns of consumption in Ireland are not a result of fecklessness but rather reflect the social and geographical changes, the transformation of contours of Irish identity and expectations, together with the creation of new sources of demand. It is likely that new forms of consumption and lifestyles will continue to undermine older dualities, of urban and rural, of past and present, of North and South. In this sense, the transformation of patterns of consumption in contemporary Ireland is very profound and reflects on many levels 'the way we live today'.

Ireland Now and in the Future

Rob Kitchin and Brendan Bartley

As the chapters in this book reveal, Ireland is a country in flux, successfully sustaining a growing economy whilst trying to cope with old and new, social, political and environmental issues. By undertaking a spatial analysis, the contributors have highlighted the complex ways that different facets of Irish life operate across space and scale, and are not uniform and homogenous. Where people live and do business, and the places in which they interact, make a difference because they are embedded in structures and policies that operate across scales – local, regional, national and international – and are affected by processes that have profound spatial implications.

Arguing that spatial analysis adds value to our understanding of Irish life might seem like an obvious point, but many analyses tend to discuss national-level trends without disaggregating them to smaller spatial scales, or discuss particular examples as if they are a representative sample for the entire nation. Examining the unemployment rate, or average house prices, or number of immigrants, or growth in the economy, or any of the other issues the contributors have examined, in such general terms masks the huge variations that exist between different locales. For example, given that the economy varies as a function of the types of employment available in different areas it is no surprise that the unemployment rate and relative prosperity follow this pattern (along with lots of other things like the demand for housing, improved infrastructure, and so on). In some places the economy is growing faster than in others, and in some agricultural areas the economy is relatively stagnant and declining.

In reviewing trends and possible trajectories we have not been confined to considering only substantive changes in relation to the economy and associated sectoral issues. The governance and policy frameworks that are supposed to guide and regulate Irish life have themselves been transformed. The period under review has witnessed a move away from a reactive-style management of the economy and other policy domains to a more proactive approach that emphasises results and, more recently, integration. Conscious efforts are now being made by Irish policy makers to navigate Ireland's future in a more rigorous way. Policy has moved away from approaches that left Ireland drifting along in the slipstream of prevailing trends with all the attended dangers of being buffeted by unexpected crises.

In addition, the spatial (planning) dimension has been allocated a key role in managing the co-ordination process. Planning for Ireland's future and following

through on efforts to achieve integrated planning programmes are moving to a higher place on the agenda of politicians, public servants, the business community and other sectors of Irish society. Thus, following a protracted period of focused but ad hoc project-based development policies that began in the mid-1980s, concerted efforts are under way to move away from this piecemeal approach to a more coherent approach based on an integrated planning approach that seeks to unify and co-ordinate activities both vertically (i.e., between scales/levels) and horizontally (at the same scale/level) across all spaces and sectors. The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and the subordinate Regional Planning Guidelines are a clear first attempt to achieve such integration insofar as they have provided the operating levels needed for a unified and comprehensive multilevel approach to planning and policy. Their introduction has filled the gap that prevented integrated co-ordination between central government strategies and those at local level. The provision of this vertical framework for decision making can now better serve to facilitate greater co-operation and co-ordination on the horizontal scales of policy and action. In particular, local authorities are now expected to produce joined-up planning at local level (the horizontal scale) rather than go their own way regardless of cost as happened frequently in the past. In short, they are in a better position to ensure that the vertical consistency of their spatial plans with the aims of the regional and national strategies is complemented by more effective horizontal integration with those of other local authorities.

The new approach places a strong emphasis on informed anticipation and evidence-based decision making. Documenting and explaining the variations, and how they should be tackled, requires geographical analysis. Some analysis involves mapping out the differences between locales and how the conditions on the ground and policy implemented on different scales intersect in complex ways to produce particular outcomes. It requires policy interventions and capital investment such as the National Development Plan, and more specific sector-based policies, to build space and scale more rigorously into strategies and actions. This needs to be more than the rhetorical gesture of stating that balanced regional development is desirable. It requires serious engagement with spatial variation and a commitment to policies that are enacted on the ground. The current National Development Plan ends in 2006 and the next will cover the period 2007–13. The latter period is also the period of the next EU Budget and Community Support Framework (CSF). There is both scope and need to review and enhance Irish policies and governance practices for this post-2006 period with evidence drawn from research and GIS sources. In an era of 'glocalisation' – the simultaneous multilevel interactions that link global and local actions in a seamless web of mutual influences – informed and evidence-based research that spans the various spatial scales is indispensable. In Ireland the immediately obvious scales of relevance range across the local through the city/county and regional levels to national and EU scales and beyond.

This is why the National Spatial Strategy was, to us at least, an important policy statement that needs to be taken seriously and its recommendations to be acted upon. And it is also why the Irish Spatial Data Infrastructure (ISDI)

initiative needs to gain momentum and support within the political system. The ISDI aims to improve the quality and quantity of spatial data (and nearly all government data are spatial – that is, they have locational information), and to ensure that data generated across different government departments and agencies can be used in mutual conjunction. At present, the majority of Irish data are poorly geo-referenced (usually to ED or county level), and it is difficult to cross-reference data (usually because they do not share a common spatial unit). This problem can be illustrated by the fact that it is almost impossible to produce all-island maps with regard to any of the issues discussed in this book. This is because data in the North and South are collected using different questions and/or different units, and/or different scales. Undertaking spatial analysis is by no means impossible, but it is not made as easy as it should be. And, as the chapters have revealed, such analysis allows us rich insights.

In the opening chapter we posed two questions: (1) what can other countries, and indeed the Irish themselves, learn from the transformations that have occurred? (2) where is Ireland heading in the future?

WHAT DOES THE IRISH EXPERIENCE TEACH US?

Ireland has captured the attention and imagination of analysts and policy makers in other countries because it seemingly holds valuable lessons that can be transferred and applied in their own settings. These analysts are particularly interested in the economy, how it is structured, and the policies that kick-started the Celtic Tiger phenomenon. To them the Irish experience demonstrates that, within a European context, a stagnant economy can be radically transformed in a very short time to one that is booming (the Asian tiger economies provided such examples earlier on). Moreover, at the same time significant progress can be made with regard to political conflict. The challenge for these analysts is to determine what factors stimulated and sustained the changes that have occurred.

This view is one we share. The Irish experience does provide valuable evidence that can be of use in understanding how economies and societies can be radically transformed. A lot can be learnt from how the State has promoted Ireland, fostered inward investment and indigenous industries, and let the free market develop; and useful lessons can be drawn from the peace process in Northern Ireland and Ireland's role in that process. The danger, however, is that we only consider those things that are seemingly successful. The Celtic Tiger, as many of the contributors have discussed, has a dark side. The review of Irish trends and many of the associated growth statistics is impressive on first reading, but closer scrutiny and critical analysis suggest that the Irish experience has been at best a qualified success. The extent to which the legacy of the Celtic Tiger has been a positive one is an open question. After more than a decade of vigorous economic growth and prosperity, Ireland has been left with some severe problems. So, while much of the transformation has been positive, it has been accompanied by a widening gap between rich and poor; rising crime rates; increased environmental pollution; a large infrastructure deficit; a housing market that excludes many; a huge growth in long-distance commuting; health

and welfare systems creaking under pressure; a weakening rural economy with a decline in agricultural incomes; the continued marginalisation of Travellers; and in Northern Ireland sectarianism is still rife. All of these issues are themselves, as noted above, uneven and unequal in their manifestation and consequences across Ireland.

What is needed then are balanced assessments of what has happened in Ireland, recognising that the positive changes are nearly always accompanied by negative impacts, and that these trends vary spatially. While the government might say that all boats rise on a common tide, some rise higher and are more stable, others show only marginal lift, and others capsize. Moreover, the tide itself does not rise evenly everywhere (the tide in Dublin has been a lot higher than the tide in Donegal). There is no doubt that some of the problems faced in the new century are preferable to the deep depression of the 1980s; nonetheless, they are still significant issues for many people and they demand attention. In other words, analysts and policy makers from other countries need to do more than simply study the economy and the factors that stimulated its rapid growth. They need to examine the varied consequences of economic transformation and take heed of the negative issues and how these might develop, and in turn be tackled, within their own context. Hopefully this book has provided such a balanced assessment.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR IRELAND?

It is always a dangerous undertaking to speculate on what the future holds as any predictions are likely to come back to haunt the soothsayer. This does not seem to stop many analysts being drawn on the issue, and many agencies do try to suggest what will happen in the future for all kinds of reasons (e.g., planning and investment purposes). Two reports published in early 2006 provide useful examples in this regard. NCB Stockbrokers (2006) predicted that by 2020 the population will have grown by almost a third to reach 5.3 million; that over a million people living in Ireland will be immigrants; the number of cars will double to over 3 million; 700,000 new houses will be built, and that the economy will grow on average by over 5 per cent per year (effectively doubling over the period). In other words, the transformation of the last 15 years will continue over the next 15. The Rural Ireland 2025 Foresight Perspectives Working Group report (2006) predicts that while the economy as a whole will continue to grow, this growth will not be balanced either geographically or across sectors. The report suggests that rural areas, particularly in the Northwest and North Midlands, will lag behind other areas; there will continue to be widespread decline in the agricultural sector with many farmers going out of business; a large proportion of foreign-owned manufacturing will move to lower-cost economies; and new types of employment will not benefit rural communities outside of commuting zones.

The second report clearly suggests that if the first report's predictions are right, and the economy continues to boom, then not everyone in Ireland will be 'winners'. In fact many people in rural areas might lose out. In addition, it is likely

that most of the growth is going to occur selectively in a few 'favoured' places, notably Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick. In other words, the kinds of spatial disparities and disadvantages that presently exist might well become exacerbated. This clearly has significant implications as regards issues of sustainability and quality of life in some areas, particularly those most highly dependent on the rural economy. If these processes are not checked through policies designed to ensure balanced regional development then there is a real danger that these disparities will become more pronounced and the spiral of decline will accelerate. The result would be large parts of the country outside of the commuting areas becoming economically stagnant and unviable. The extent to which the predictions in the two reports come to pass will become evident in time. The future may even produce a combination of different prediction outcomes.

Our predictions are much more modest. Our sense is that Ireland's economy will continue to grow in the short term, and that many of the problems we documented in the first chapter will continue, if not worsen. The dominant factor shaping both the growth and the problems is, we believe, that the government's laissez-faire policies and an unwillingness to implement strong interventionist policies with regard to most problem issues will continue for the foreseeable future. Ireland is one of the most liberal countries in the world, economically and politically, meaning that the free market is allowed to run relatively unchecked; corporate and individual tax rates are low compared to other developed countries, and state provision of services is minimised. This is clearly attractive for business, but means that social issues tend to be downgraded by being left to families, community groups, the voluntary sector and the marketplace to deal with. It is difficult to say how sustainable this trend will be in the coming years.

As for the long term, this is more difficult to predict. Ireland's economy is one that is highly dependent on foreign direct investment and is strongly connected into the global economy. As such, it is tied to the health and vibrancy of external trends and patterns. If there is a world-wide recession triggered, for example, by an oil crisis, or an economic depression in the USA, or a dramatic interest rate hikes in Europe, then Ireland's economy will be put under severe pressure and is likely to suffer, at least in line with other countries. Moreover, Ireland's success has been predicated on staying 'ahead of the curve' – moving from manufacturing to services, then up the service chain – to keep ahead of competing destinations for investment capital. If it wants to retain its leading edge position it needs to stay ahead of other countries that can offer similar services but have lower wage and infrastructure costs (such as India), to offer what they are not in position to deliver. To do that, Ireland needs to move beyond being a knowledge economy (which trades in services and information) to an innovation economy (which uses research and ideas to generate new products and services). Initiatives such as the establishment of Science Foundation Ireland are meant to help stimulate such a transfer by investing in research in areas such as bio-technology and information and communication technologies, and encouraging partnerships between the universities and industry. Time will tell whether this initiative pays dividends.

What we do feel relatively comfortable predicting is an increasing emphasis being placed, by the administrations in both jurisdictions, on cross-border co-operation and joint initiatives between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. It is increasingly recognised that both jurisdictions will benefit from the development of an all-island economy and from trying to address common issues collaboratively. It is already clear that there are significant amounts of cross-border flows of workers and products. Working together will increase economic efficiency, further open up each other's markets, and encourage competition that will stimulate each other's economies. What this requires is an alignment of policies around the planning of infrastructure and economic development. The substantive content of the NSS also creates new opportunities for counties in the border areas. The NSS commitments to regional balance and its identification of cross-border road linkages with the equivalent strategy for Northern Ireland, the Regional Development Strategy (RDS), provide for the first time an opportunity to significantly advance cross-border and all-island infrastructure investment projects. The scope and requirements for capitalising upon the potential and savings that can accrue to both jurisdictions through cross-border planning were set out in a recent report (*InterTradeIreland*, 2006). The recommendations of this report for the establishment of a collaborative planning framework for the island of Ireland were adopted in both jurisdictions as the key preliminary step towards the provision of all-island infrastructure through joined-up planning. The other main opportunity for addressing the infrastructure deficits in the border regions stems from the Irish government's commitment to promoting the peace process in Northern Ireland through increased cross-border co-operation and activity. This will provide further leverage for advocacy of new transport infrastructure in the region, based on comprehensive and viable planning proposals that have clear merit and support. Such proposals must be in a position to demonstrate a collective ability and willingness in all affected counties to pursue and deliver upon the project. This solidarity will not be evident unless there is clear evidence of integration across their respective development plans for the relevant projects.

Whatever the outcomes of the predictions presented by us, or others, one thing is certain – Ireland will continue to change and new transformations will occur. Even if the economy slows, developments in train and the new processes at play will continue to reshape the social, economic, political and environmental landscape. Whether the changes that occur will be as dramatic as those witnessed over the past 15 years remains to be seen, but hopefully the sustained growth enjoyed over this period will not be turned off as quickly as it seems to have started. Whatever the developments, we believe that Ireland will continue to provide an interesting case study for other countries, yielding information and lessons that will have relevance for countries that want to emulate its success.

IN SUMMARY

For us, and our contributors, Ireland is a fascinating place to study – a unique laboratory through which to examine a range of economic, social, political and

environmental issues. It is a country that has undergone an enormous transformation in a relatively short timespan, and in many ways is still coming to terms with the changes that have taken place and their effects. And there is no doubt that Ireland does provide a number of pointers for countries that want to be the next tiger economy, but importantly it also has some other salutary lessons that need to be heeded.

From an Irish perspective, it seems to us that the most pressing questions for policy makers are, on the one hand, how to consolidate and sustain the growth experienced from the 1990s onwards, whilst on the other, how to address effectively long-standing issues and new problems that arise with rapid transformation. Tangled up in these concerns are Northern Ireland, the peace process, and the challenges of developing co-operation and creating an all-island economy. Given the political stalemate in the North and the antipathy towards the Republic from some sections of Northern Ireland society, the process of developing working relations and trust will no doubt take time.

These questions will not be easy to address and require informed, evidence-based policy responses. As the chapters in this book have illustrated, spatial analysis provides a powerful way to investigate Irish society and economy, giving rich insights into the processes at play. However, what is clear to us after editing this book is that although there is much research completed and more under way, there is a great need for a more systematic programme of work in order to provide greater breadth and depth of analysis that will allow us to more fully understand the processes at work, and the different geographies they create. In some ways this situation is inevitable given the relatively small number of researchers employed within the universities and other institutions that take space and scale seriously. But hopefully the establishment of groups post-2000 such as the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, Urban Institute Ireland, the National Centre for Geocomputation, and the International Centre for Local and Regional Development will over the long term help in this regard.¹ We invite you to join the researchers at these centres, and the others who have written for this book, to reflect upon Ireland in the twenty-first century, to document and think through how Ireland is developing, and how it should develop in the future.