The Spatial Planning Crises: Planning (or not) for spatial justice

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Panel

Delighted to be joined by:

- Mr. Ciarán Tracey, Former Senior Planner, Leitrim County Council
- Dr. Brendan O’Keeffe, Lecturer, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick
Presentation

- The Crisis...
- The Irish Planning System
- Planners and Role in Achieving Spatial Justice
- The Celtic Tiger Years...and Boom to Bust
- Legacy Issues
1. The Crisis... The ‘Culprits’

- Two main culprits to the financial / property crisis that has faced the island over past 8 years or so
  - Banking system
  - Planning system
  - Political system

- Role of media in perpetuating

- Many other factors at play...hear over this week

- What we hear little about is personal responsibility!
1. The Crisis... Planning in the 1990s

- Increased prosperity in the 90’s with development of multinational sector
- With increased employment & income, house prices rocketed
- With demand and prices increasing, construction rose in response
- Returning migrants in late 90’s & early 00’s drives demand for houses further
- Multiplier Effect: leading to further construction
- Tax incentive schemes
- ‘Need to get on the property ladder’
- Growth in number of property developers....from all walks of life
2. The Irish Planning System

- Irish Planning System fifty years old
- A spatial political system
- Three core elements:
  - Development Management
  - Forward Planning
  - Enforcement
- Have experienced booms and busts before...but not on this scale
- Core challenge has been the associated debt burden...and scale of development
Development Plans

National Policy and Legislation
NDP 2007-2013
Climate Change
Water Quality Regs
Dept./Agency Capital programmes
Planning Guidelines

Regional Planning Guidelines / RESPS (Forthcoming)

Other Local Level Plans
RBMP’s Various Action Plans
County Development Board strategies / LECPS
LA capital programmes
Housing Strategy

Spatial Strategy / NPF (Forthcoming)

Development Plans

Local Plans

Establishes Policy Context for...

Assessment of and Decisions on Development Proposals

Application to Planning Authority (PA) Bord Pleanala (Strategic Infrastructure) (SI)

PA Decision
SI Decision

Development/Refusal of PP
ABP decision to grant/refuse

Appeal?
3. The Planner

- A professional body…with a weak voice!
- Work closely aligned with local government
- Increasingly working in a global-local setting
- Changing role….development manager, bureaucrat, policy analyst, facilitator/intermediator, social reformer (Healey, 1991)….confusing to the public
- Operates a system of principled negotiation … issues decided on merit (Fisher & Ury, 1991)
- Role of planners a dynamic process
- Meeting the ‘public interest’ / working for the ‘common good’….challenge of how to define!
3. The Planner and ‘Others’

- Who really makes the decisions?
- Many voices in the decision-making process
- Planner makes a ‘recommendation’
- Politicians play a key role….
  - Political class apathetic to long-term spatial planning
  - Short-term considerations win-out over long-term policy planning
- Policies are vague…on purpose
Planning practiced today is a mixture of advocacy, negotiation, discretionary, incremental, political economy and equity planning (Douglass & Friedmann, 1998)

…..whereby planning policy is accomplished through “decentralised bargaining in a free market and a democratic political economy” (MacLeod, 1996:2)
3. Achieving Spatial Justice

- **What is spatial justice?**
  - Linking social justice with space (Harvey, Soja)
  - A framework enabling action
  - Intimately related to concept of life chances

- **How is it achieved?**
  - Efficient and inclusive spatial planning
  - Design and management of spaces & resources

- **what role for planners?**
  - Central role
  - Shapers of innovative relationships…cross-sectoral
  - Designers of sustainable structures
Planning for the Common Good.....
4. The Celtic Tiger – Boom Years

- Key influences - Political System, Banking System and Planning System

Achievements
- Improved Standard of Living
- Improved Roads & Water Services infrastructure
- New and improved residential, commercial, industrial buildings
- Education Attainment
- Employment Levels etc.
4. From Boom to Bust....

- Collapsed economy & development sector
- Surplus partially completed or completed development:
  - Unfinished estates
  - Zombie hotels & golf courses
  - Vacant modern offices / dated offices
  - Derelict historic properties
  - High levels of vacancy in village, town and city centres

- Abundance of Raw Land:
  - Permitted development
  - Zoned land - 44,000 hectares
4...In Planning Terms, A Bleak Story

Failures of the Planning System included:

- Lack of quantitative and qualitative system
- Reckless zoning practices and soft touch regulation
- No reflection or taking stock of what was happening
- Lack of consistency throughout hierarchy of plans
- Conflicting messages/policies across plans – need for a coherent planning framework

What we should have been doing!!

- Analysing and evaluating what we had in terms of existing residential/commercial/industrial stock
- Based on the above, identifying what we actually need over the next plan period
- How & where should the above be provided?
Poor Planning delivers this...
5. Legacy of the Spatial Planning Crisis

- Current crisis is now forcing change in all sectors of our economy...banking, local government, political system, planning
- There is a growing appetite for change in our political system...but progress is slow
  - Cultural shift away from clientalism under RPGS
  - Will ‘Municipal Districts’ result in backward steps?
- Acknowledgement that planning system must change in parallel with political reform
- Planners - as a professional grouping - must position ourselves to positively influence our political masters;

How will history reflect on us as planners?
5. ...Where To for the Planner and Spatial Justice?

- Planning education – core concepts of the common good, community, social/spatial justice and the accommodation of people in place – place-making
- while reform is happening....local government remains too ill-equipped to thoroughly address all aspects of planning
- Politicalisation of planning and the focus rests on short-termism and politics – two pillars of poor planning.
  - Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the recommendations of planners
  - Elected officials – training in planning
  - Management with responsibility for planning should have a background in the planning system
  - Community planning!
5. The Last Word.....

“As I see it, the challenge for us as planners is to redefine ourselves and our profession in ways that will make our work contingent with what I take to be the hallmark of the new political economy, the re-emergence of civil society as a collective actor in the construction of our cities and regions, in search of the good life”

(Cities for Citizens, p.20-21)
Thank you

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