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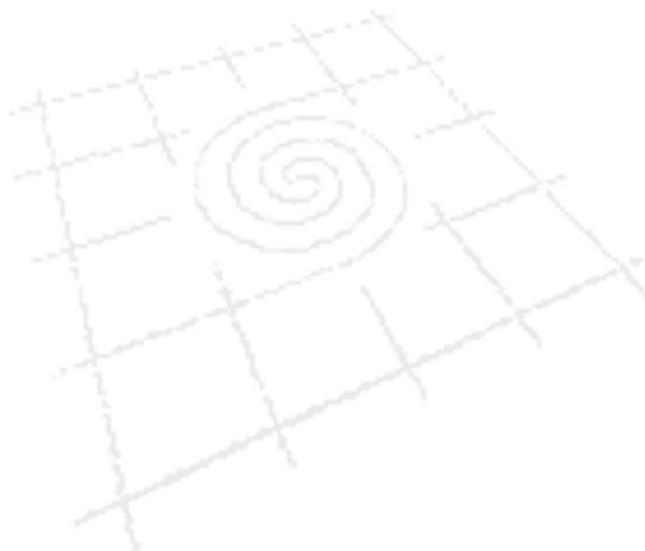
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Territorial Politics and Formal Structures of Governance in Spatial Planning: Insights from the Dublin City-Region

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Territorial Politics and Formal Structures of Governance in Spatial Planning: Insights from the Dublin City-Region

Cormac Walsh¹

Abstract

This paper presents the argument that the contents of spatial plans and the discursive framing of processes of spatial strategy-making are structured by the political geography of the formal institutions of governance through which spatial plans derive their legitimacy. At the same time spatial planning processes and strategies themselves may be active in the social construction of particular spatial (territorial and scalar) configurations. Spatial planning strategies for cities and regions increasingly seek to transcend political and administrative boundaries and embrace functional spaces and fuzzy boundaries. It is argued here however, that the spatial reach of such strategies in practice may be constrained by the formal structures of governance through which they are produced. Recent studies of the contents of spatial planning strategies have found that spatial plans in practice continue to employ territorial rather than relational concepts of space and place. This paper moves towards explaining the territorial character of planning content through an engagement with recent literature in critical regional studies and critiques of state-centric thinking in political geography and related disciplines. The arguments presented are supported by a case study of the Dublin-city-region, drawing on official planning policy documents and qualitative interviews with political decision-makers and planning officials.

1. Introduction

Regional and city-regional scale spatial planning strategies have in recent years come to be viewed as key policy instruments for effective territorial governance (Albrechts et al 2003). In contrast to the limited scope of traditional land-use plans, it is argued that strategic spatial plans can act as frameworks for coordination across policy sectors and institutional arenas (Salet et al 2003, Nadin 2007, Harris and

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Hooper 2004, Vigar, 2009). For some authors, the development of collaborative practices among governance stakeholders including state, semi-state, private sector and civil society stakeholders constitutes a central objective of processes of spatial strategy-making (Healey, 1998, 2006, Innes and Booher 1999, Healey et al. 2002). Indeed, it may be argued that recent debates in planning theory have been characterised by a normative concern for increased public participation, founded on Habermasian communicative rationality and a postmodern distrust of expert or technical knowledge (see Rydin 2007, Brand and Gaffikin 2007, Sager 2009, Versteeg and Hajer 2010). Despite this normative focus on the democratic politics of planning practice, the role of formal institutions and structures of governance in shaping and framing planning practice and planning and development outcomes has received much less critical attention. Albrechts (2003) has persuasively argued that studies of planning practice need to pay greater attention to issues of political decision-making and plan implementation:

‘planning needs a fine-grained analysis of what actually takes place in formal decision-making and implementation, in the transition from plan to formal adoption of the plan and in its actual implementation as opposed to what they [planners] normatively would like to see happen’ (Albrechts 2003, 250).

For some planning theorists, strategic spatial planning is defined in terms of the use of informal strategies and a deliberate shift away from the constraints of formal structures and procedures of governance (Waterhout et al 2009, Allmendinger & Haughton, 2007). Nevertheless spatial planning practice as a state interventionist activity, in the main, continues to be firmly embedded within long established structures of democratic governance and political decision-making. This article explores the influence of the spatiality or political geography of formal structures of governance on the content of spatial plans and the discursive construction of process of spatial planning. The arguments are illustrated and empirically grounded in a case study of regional scale spatial planning in the Greater Dublin Area, a city-region characterised by rapid urban expansion, peri-urban development and related political tensions.

2. City Regions, Spatial Planning and Territorial Development Policy

In recent decades there has been a significant interest in approaches to urban and regional governance that transcend administrative and political boundaries to focus on city-regions and metropolitan areas. Davoudi (2008) writes of a ‘remarkable resurgence’ of the city-region concept in both academic and policy discourse since the 1990s, while noting that its origins can be traced to the famous Chicago Plan

of 1909 and Patrick Geddes' concept of the 'conurbation'. Hall and Pain (2006) in a major study of 'mega city-regions' in Europe point to a general 'mismatch between functional and territorial logics' (p. 178).

At the European scale, research on spatial development trends undertaken by the European Commission in the early 1990s explicitly adopted functional rather than administrative regions as the focus for analysis, in an effort to 'encourage new ways of thinking about spatial prospects which is not limited by national boundaries' (CEC, 1994, 169, see also Dühr et al 2010, 200-201). The *Europe 2000+* report, further stressed that the particular functional regions identified were only one possible division of the European territory and were not intended to provide a basis for future policy action. The intention was not to create new territorial spaces or 'European super regions' but to identify functional linkages across territorial boundaries (CEC, 1994, 169). Subsequent European spatial planning policy initiatives have maintained this focus on functional spaces. The *European Spatial Development Perspective* (CSD 1999) makes strong reference to the concepts of urban-rural relations and polycentric urban regions, both of which emphasise functional relationships across space rather than territorial divisions (see also Albrechts et al. 2003, Davoudi & Stead 2002, Zonneveld & Stead, 2007). Indeed the ESDP sought to introduce a spatial dimension to EU policy which may be viewed as part of a wider process of European integration or Europeanisation, centrally concerned with the dismantling or harmonisation of socio-cultural as well as territorial boundaries (Faludi, 2002, Dühr et al. 2007, 2010). The more recent *Territorial Agenda of the European Union* and associated *Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion* are less concerned with conceptual issues, partly reflecting a shift in EU policy priorities and a more pragmatic orientation towards questions of territorial governance (Territorial Agenda 2007, Territorial State, 2007, see also Faludi, 2007a). The 'evidence-based' *Territorial State and Perspectives* background document prepared contemporaneously with the *Territorial Agenda* is, however, more explicit on the contribution of cross-border and transnational cooperation to the development of 'territorial capital' at both micro (city-regional) and macro (transnational) spatial scales.

For Rodriguez-Pose (2008) the city-region concept itself signals a shift from sectoral to territorial approaches to development (p. 1025). He notes, however, a lack of a common definition of the city-region as a significant limitation in terms of its application as an analytic or policy concept, a concern also shared by other authors (Davoudi 2008, Neuman and Hull 2009). The privileging of the city-regional scale as that most appropriate for policy intervention is also questioned: 'the problems faced by city-regions may not be that different from those operating at other scales' (Rodriguez-Pose, 2008, 1025).

For the purposes of this paper the principal concern is with spatial strategies and other policy initiatives which seek to transcend formal administrative and political boundaries at the urban-regional scale. The empirical delimitation of the functional extent of individual city-regions is thus of lesser importance.

The emergence of the city-region as a normative policy concept is strongly associated with a focus on learning economies and economic competitiveness in city-regions in economic geography, the subject of significant debate in several issues of *Regional Studies* (e.g. Scott & Storper 2003, Kitson et al 2004, Turok, 2004, Etherington & Jones, 2009) and elsewhere (Harvey, 1989, Scott, 1998, Brenner, 2003, 2004, Ward & Jonas 2007). A core proposition in this literature is that city-regions provide the optimal scale for governance in the context of increased economic globalisation and concomitant decline in the economic governance capacity of nation-states (in particular Harvey 1989, Scott & Storper 2003). Brenner (2003, 302) contends, however, that the apparent increase in competition among cities and regions in Europe and a documented proliferation of territorial competitiveness-oriented economic policies may, in fact, be the consequence of the paradigmatic status of a policy discourse centred on increased competition among places in the context of European integration, globalisation and the hyper-mobility of investment capital. More recent academic contributions have also questioned the dominant discourse of city-regions as the engines of economic competitiveness, arguing in particular that city-regional policies may serve to accentuate rather than reduce socio-economic disparities (Etherington & Jones, 2009).

Recent critical contributions have also explored the politics of city-regionalism and the relationship between city-regions and formal structures of democratic politics. Ward and Jonas (2007) identify a problematic tendency to attribute agency to city-regions themselves and argue for a greater emphasis on 'how new territorial forms are constructed politically and reproduced through everyday acts and struggles around consumption and social reproduction' (2007, 170). They further note that city-regional policies which deliberately seek to transcend or circumvent formal structures of government and political accountability raise significant questions with regard to the 'geography of democratic practice' (p. 174), an issue which has arguably been overlooked in recent debates on spatial planning for city-regions. Purcell (2007) focuses more concretely on the implications of privileging a particular scale of governance and argues that scale is a 'fundamental element' of democratic politics central to the 'eternal tension' between particular and common interests (p. 202). Cox (2010) similarly reflects on the significance of scale in the context of metropolitan governance in the US. He notes the importance of the state's 'scale division of labour' with reference to the allocation of competences across scales of

governance which may differ significantly across space and time (p. 217). He further identifies the need for increased attention to questions of horizontal coordination among local and/or metropolitan authorities in the context of jurisdictional fragmentation (see also Healey et al, 2002, Salet et al 2003). The relationship between scales of governance and the question horizontal policy coordination are explored in more detail in later sections of this paper.

3. Territorial and Relational Perspectives on Space and Place

Parallel to the rise of city-regions in policy discourse and practice, the concept of the region is the subject of critical debate across a range of social science disciplines, informed, in particular by the emergence of radical relational approaches to the theorization of sociospatial relations (see Amin 2004, Neuman & Hull 2009, Healey 2009). Recent thinking on space, place and scale has led to a fundamental questioning of the 'traditional and long-established notion of the 'region' as a 'closed', 'bounded' and territorial entity (Pike, 2007, 1144). Indeed, planning theorists have explicitly called for a new mode of planning, informed by a relational understanding of place and space (Friedmann, 1993; Graham & Healey, 1999; Healey, 2004; see also Allmendinger & Haughton, 2007, 2009). For Graham and Healy (1999) 'contemporary urban life' is characterised by the collision and resonance of 'many different notions, experiences and representations of space-time'. They stress the importance of recognising multiple perspectives on space and place, in direct contrast to the singular and unitary representations of cities and regions in traditional spatial plans. They further contend that planning theory must recognise the differential 'power geometry' of cities which determines the capacity of particular actors within a city to 'extend one's actions in time and space' (1999, 627). Amin (2004) calling specifically for a 'relational politics of place', argues that transformations in society associated with globalisation serve to destabilise traditional spatial imaginations composed of nested territorial hierarchies and rigid boundaries:

'the everyday transnational flow of ideas, information, knowledge, money, people and cultural influences; the growth of translocal networks of organisation and influence such transnational corporations, global financial institutions, international governance regimes and transnational cultural networks... add up to a displacement of a world order of nested territorial formations composed of a discernible inside and outside... [where] spatial boundaries are no longer necessarily or purposively territorial or scalar, since the social, economic, political and cultural inside and outside are constituted through the topologies of

actor networks which are becoming increasingly dynamic and varied in spatial constitution' (Amin, 2004, 33)

He argues that dominant conceptualisations of space and space in popular and academic continue to ignore the relational foundation of spatiality, in favour of territorial spatial imaginaries:

'These [relational] spatialities are decisive in the constitution of the local, but they continue to be written out of the hegemonic territorial imaginary of the world' (Amin, 2004, 34).

Paasi (2009) however argues that traditional regional geographers explicitly acknowledged the contingent, open and porous character of regions, despite their employment of the geographic region as a principal unit of analysis. He further suggests that contemporary 'representatives of relational thinking' are distinguished by their engagement in an explicitly political project where the opening of borders is viewed as a 'challenge for progressive social science and politics' (2009, 225). MacLeod and Jones (2007) similarly, argue that the relational-topological approach tends to present a caricatured reading of territorial and scalar approaches as closed and static. They argue for an approach that explicitly acknowledges the socio-political institutionalisation of regions as territorial structures through 'active political struggle and discursive imaginings' (2007, 1186). In attempt to overcome what he sees as an artificial binary division between territorial and relational geographies, Morgan (2007, 33) argues for a more nuanced perspective that acknowledges that 'political space is bounded *and* porous' recognising both the importance of networked relations of connectivity and the territoriality of formal state structures.

Despite their differences, both critical territorial and relational perspectives serve to fundamentally challenge taken-for-granted and everyday understandings of political-geographic (i.e. territorial) boundaries as static, unchanging and immutable. This understanding has significant implications for spatial planning and regional development policy and practice. Davoudi (2009, 242) concluding a comparative study of concepts of space and place in spatial planning strategies in the UK and the Republic of Ireland points to a disjuncture between a predominance of positivist Euclidean concepts of space and place (characterised by 'fixities, certainties and bounded space') in planning practice and a shift to post-structural perspectives in contemporary social science, which emphasise fluid, relational and non-bounded understandings of space (see also Healey, 2004, 2009).

Reflecting the influence of critical perspectives within a political geography disciplinary tradition and a spatial turn in social theory, a number of scholars have more specifically sought to question the

dominant taken-for-granted *meta-geographies* of social science and popular discourse (Taylor, 2000, 2003). In particular, it is argued that mainstream social science has been, implicitly or explicitly, *state-centric* in its geographical assumptions (see Agnew, 1994; Brenner, 1999, 2004, Taylor, 2000; Beck, 2004, Urry, 2000). From a sociological perspective, Giddens (1984) and Urry (2000) note that the concept of society as traditionally deployed, has implied that the boundaries of social relations are spatially congruent with those of the nation-state, while Agnew (1994) similarly contends that in political science the (national) state has been viewed as the container of (national) society. Brenner (2004, 38) identifies three geographical assumptions in mainstream social science, leading to *spatial fetishism*, *methodological territorialism* and *methodological nationalism*, respectively:

1. The concept of space is viewed as a static platform of social action that is not in itself constituted socially –space as external to social relations (see also Massey 1984); *spatial fetishism* views space as timeless, immune to historical change,
2. The assumption that all social relations are organised within territorially self-enclosed spatial containers; *methodological territorialism* implies that territoriality, the principle of spatial enclosure is treated as the necessary form of social relations,
3. The assumption that all social relations are organised at a national scale or are undergoing processes of nationalisation – *methodological nationalism*,

(Adapted from Brenner 2004, 38).

It is evident that state-centrism in social science has led to a focus on place-bounded communities and a privileging of the nation-state as the principal scale at which social relations social relations take place, leading to a significant neglect of relational geographies of flow and networks that in practice transcend the boundaries of nation-states (Castells, 1996; Taylor, 1999, 2004). More generally, a focus on state-centrism in social science indicates the need for an awareness of the implicit geographical assumptions in academic and popular discourses concerning social, cultural, economic and political relations. Perhaps, more significantly, however, a recognition of the influence of state-centrism in social science, indicates the extent to which the political geography of formal institutions and structures of governance (state structures) may serve to the frame the popular, academic and policy discourses of sociospatial relations.

Given a pervasive state-centrism in social science and an apparent continued predominance of Euclidean absolutist concepts of space and place in planning practice, it may be hypothesised that policy-making processes generally contain implicit geographical assumptions of state-centrism that

reflect the political geography of the formal structures of governance within which they are framed. National government social or economic strategies, for example, might be expected to reflect a state-centric assumption of spatial congruence between state, society and economy while local or regional government policies and strategies may be strongly influenced by concepts of local distinctiveness and identity which serve to reinforce taken-for-granted spatial imaginaries of place-bounded communities. The contents of spatial planning strategies, as spatially explicit policy statements, may reveal more explicit geographical assumptions, reflecting particular social constructions of the (bounded) territory or territories (often coterminous with local, regional or national political and administrative boundaries) for which the spatial strategy is produced.

Where systems of political representation and accountability are territorially structured, as in most systems of representative democracy, concepts of the 'public interest' informing public policy debates may assume particular territorial or scalar forms (implicit in discourses of for example, the national interest, local community, balanced regional development and territorial cohesion). Although the validity of both substantive and procedural conceptions of the public interest have been questioned from a number of perspectives, the concept is acknowledged to continue hold particular relevance in planning practice (see Campbell & Marshall, 2002). Where statutory spatial plans are made by locally elected representatives, spatial planning strategies may become sites for the expression of a territorial politics. In summary, it is contended here that the territorial structure of governance may substantially influence the content and governance capacity of spatial strategies. Where the contents of spatial plans are understood to reflect a territorial politics, strategic governance initiatives seeking to improve the horizontal and vertical coordination of the plans of neighbouring sub-national territorial jurisdictions, must be seen as highly political rather than questions of technical coordination.

It may also be argued that spatial planning strategies serve to actively reproduce particular spatial imaginaries through their representations of space of place. For Brenner et al (2003, 7) state spaces are actively constructed as geopolitical entities through 'historically specific social practices that constitute, impose and naturalise particular forms of knowledge – and, therefore, power – over space, scale and territory'. These representational practices serve to simplify a complex reality in favour of 'controllable geopolitical abstractions' (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, 48-9, in; Brenner et al., 2003, 7). Jensen & Richardson (2004, 54-5) in their theorisation of a 'cultural sociology of space' similarly stress the symbolic meanings of representations of space and place in spatial policy and planning. While the

framing of spatial strategies through territorial governance structures may lead to a reproduction of concepts of spatially enclosed territorial communities and nested hierarchies of discrete spatial scales, they may also have the potential to act as a mechanism for reconstruction of spatial imaginaries through explicit attention to the relational character of places and sociospatial relations.

4. The Irish Planning System and the Emergence of Strategic Spatial Planning in the Dublin City-Region

Urban planning legislation was first introduced in Ireland in 1963 with the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act. This legislation introduced a national system of town planning with strong similarities to the post-war British system of planning. Planning functions and powers were allocated to the local authorities (88 in total) while the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) assumed responsibility for national policy making and guidance. In contrast to the British system, the Irish legislation placed considerable emphasis on reinforcing the democratic remit of planning and to some extent the rational/technical aspects of planning were subordinated to the political aspects (Bartley, 2007). The making of Development Plans; the principal planning document at local authority level was designated a reserved function of the elected representatives of each county, city and town council. Despite a number of attempts to develop national and regional scale planning strategies, spatial planning in Ireland remained almost exclusively a feature of local government until the late 1990s. This absence of strategic overview led to a situation of poor spatial coordination across planning authorities and critically weakened the capacity of the planning system to influence or respond to the city-regional scale dynamics of urban decline and suburbanisation (MacLaran & Williams, 2003; Williams & Shiels, 2002; Bartley, 2007).

The Irish planning system was revised substantially, however, with the introduction of new legislation in 2000 and 2010. A new Planning and Development Act placed sustainable development at the centre of planning policy and introduced a formal hierarchy of spatial plans. A National Spatial Strategy was published in 2002, articulating a national level spatial vision based on principles of balanced regional development and polycentricity, significantly influenced by key principles of European spatial planning as outlined in the ESDP (DELG 2002, Davoudi & Wishardt, 2005; Walsh, 2009). Although delays and problems with implementation have been identified, the National Spatial Strategy is recognised as new

departure in Irish spatial planning policy and a leading example of a new generation of national level spatial plans in Europe (Adams et al., 2006; Walsh, 2009; Mathews & Alden, 2006).

The National Spatial Strategy has proved particularly significant in the Irish context in terms of shifting perceptions in relation to spatial planning policy and broadening the scope of spatial planning to provide a framework for policy coordination in an explicitly spatial context. In many respects, however, planning continues to be reactive to development pressures in practice; 'development-led', rather than 'plan led' (MacLaran & Williams, 2003, Williams et al, 2010). Indeed recent critical commentary has pointed to a 'catastrophic failure of the planning system' to effectively manage the spatial distribution and intensity of housing development in the context of a runaway housing boom fuelled by speculative development and weak planning and financial regulation (Kitchin et al 2010).

Within the Dublin city-region, 'Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area' (SPGs) were produced in 1999, outlining a strategic vision for the city and its hinterland (Brady Shipman Martin et al., 1999). The guidelines were published by advisory regional authorities (established in 1994) on behalf of the constituent local authorities (eight city and county councils – see Figure 1). The principal task of the SPGs was to articulate the 'preferred direction for land use and transportation' in the Greater Dublin Area for the period until 2011 (Brady Shipman Martin et al, i). Guided by principles of sustainable development, the SPGs sought to ensure a reduction in the growth in demand for transport and private transport in particular. In addition the strategy sought to reduce 'urban sprawl' and create a clearer distinction between urban and rural areas. The strategy document thus made a distinction between the existing built-up area of Dublin city and its immediate environs, referred to as the Metropolitan Area and a predominantly rural and peri-urban Hinterland Area. It was proposed to concentrate or 'consolidate' urban development inside the Metropolitan Area boundary and within a small number of designated development centres within the Hinterland Area (see Figure 2). Significantly the spatial strategy diagrams of the SPGs are noted for the absence of Local or Regional Authority boundaries. In addition to the articulation of a spatial settlement strategy, the Strategic Planning Guidelines sought to achieve greater coordination between the constituent planning authorities and other public sector bodies involved in infrastructure and service provision within the Greater Dublin Area (see also Walsh, 2010).

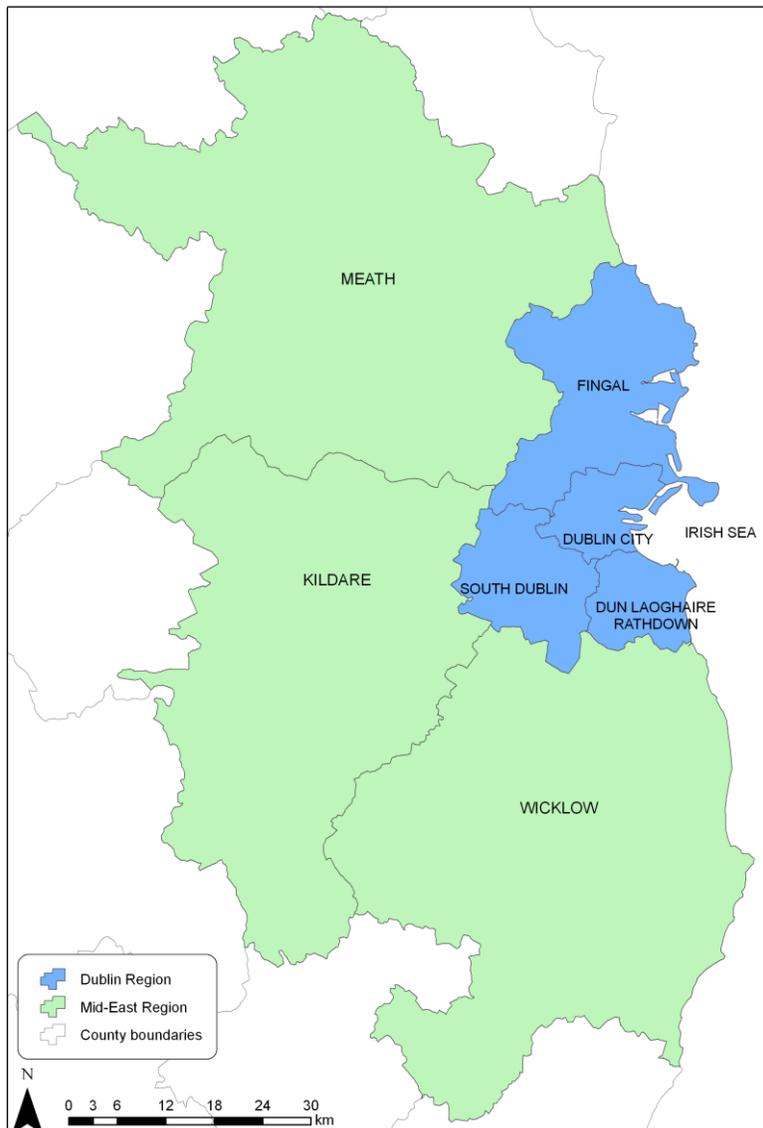


Figure 1: Regions and Counties (Local Authority boundaries) within the Greater Dublin Area

The spatial strategy articulated by the Strategic Planning Guidelines was subsequently reinforced by the publication of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) in 2002. The objectives of the NSS promoting physical consolidation of the Greater Dublin Area, match closely with the vision of the SPGs. Following the adoption of the 2000 Planning and Development Act each of eight Regional Authorities were required to produce Regional Planning Guidelines by 2004. The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area (RPGs, DRA & MERA, 2004) reaffirm the strategy adopted by the SPGs in 1999 with updated

demographic projections and minor boundary revisions. Following a statutory review process, revised RPGs were published in July 2010. The 2010 RPGs maintain the principal components of the settlement strategy first established in the Strategic Planning Guidelines but places significant emphasis on current challenges associated with the changed economic context and pays increased attention to the integration of environmental policies and infrastructure provision strategies within the framework of the Regional Planning Guidelines (DRA & MERA, 2010).

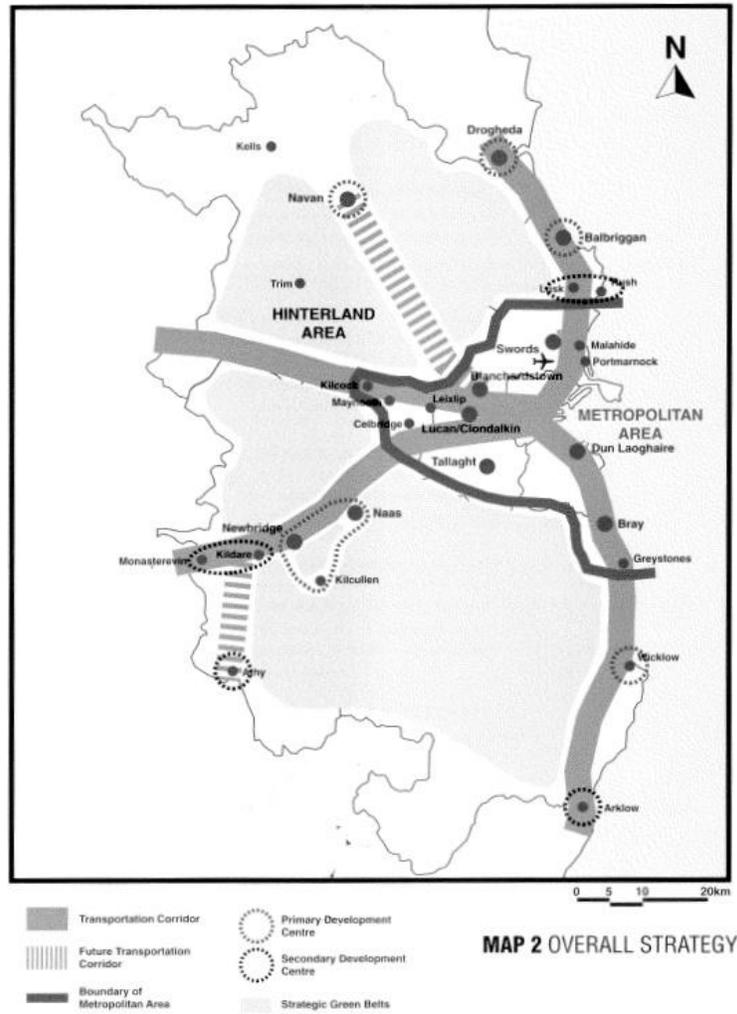


Figure 2: Strategic Planning Guidelines Settlement Strategy (source: Brady Shipman Martin et al, 1999)

5. Territorial Politics in the Urban Growth Management Process

The S/RPGs process, from the preparation of the Strategic Planning Guidelines and their adoption in 1999 to the recent statutory review of the Regional Planning Guidelines in 2009/2010 has been characterised by political tensions and contestation between the two regional authorities and seven local authorities in the Greater Dublin Area². The SPGs were adopted by a committee of local councillors, selected to represent the constituent local and regional authorities within the GDA while the members of the two Regional Authorities are jointly responsible for the review and adoption of the RPGs. This formal input to the S/RPGs by the local politicians representing the local and regional authorities constituted an important element of democratic accountability to the regional strategy-making process. Significantly, it ensured that the S/RPGs would reflect local and regional concerns and priorities regarding the spatial distribution and form of future development rather than solely comprising an instrument of central government policy. The involvement of councillors and members of the Regional Authorities provided the potential for the S/RPGs to act as a framework for political agreement on a shared development strategy for the Greater Dublin Area. The Manager of Dublin City Council at the time of the preparation of the SPGs notes that the adoption of the SPGs by the Dublin and Mid-East Regional Authorities required a significant level of compromise:

We were managing the SPGs for the region, which had to be adopted by two Regional Authorities, the Dublin and Mid-East so it was quite complex getting them adopted and inevitably it involves a level of compromise that might go beyond what you would normally, but that's democracy (L1)³.

The planning officer with principal responsibility for drafting the 2010 review of the RPGs reflected on the extent to which the two regional authorities constitute two separate and distinct political-institutional arenas with very different perspectives in relation to spatial planning. It is argued that the division of the Greater Dublin Area between the two regional authorities limits the potential for the development of a shared perspective in spatial planning matters and effective city-regional governance:

² Anecdotal evidence suggests that the preparation and review of Regional Planning Guidelines in other regions in Ireland has also been characterised by significant urban-rural tensions (personal communication 2010).

³ Interviewees are classified according to an alphanumerical coding system. Letters L, R and C correspond to local authority officials/planners, regional authority officials/planners, and councillors (local elected politicians) respectively. Interviews were conducted during 2009, while the review of the RPGs was in progress.

You have got two regional authorities, two very separate bodies with very separate thinking... they have to work together on planning issues. They have no centralised perspective on what that is. They don't work together as a group. They only come together to discuss planning issues twice a year. (R3).

Significantly it is argued that the institutional structures contribute to the creation of antagonistic or oppositional relations between the two regional authorities. For spatial planning purposes the two regional authorities are required to work together to produce a shared strategy for the Greater Dublin Area as a whole. In practice, however, the two regional authorities have distinct territorial and political identities:

It doesn't make for a good regional authority. They aren't a regional authority. They are two regional authorities. It creates a situation of them and us, automatically, because we are a 'them and us', two different groups. (R3)

A member of Kildare County Council indicates the extent to which the introduction of the S/RPGs has altered the way in which County Development Plans are produced. It is contended that prior to the introduction of the SPGs, CDPs adopted a territorially bounded or 'island' perspective where the relationship between the county and its regional hinterland was not considered. Decisions were made on an individual basis reflecting existing land ownership patterns without regard to regional scale parameters or population projections. It is argued that the S/RPGs placed CDPs within a more rational framework:

Each County Development Plan was done as though each county was an island and everyone with a large garden almost looked to have their land rezoned... It was more to do with who owned the land and things like that than it was about a rational planning system.... The early development plans that I was involved with - they had no upper limit. No population thresholds. It really was chaos. The regional planning guidelines put some order on it (C4).

The approaches adopted by councillors and members of the Regional Authorities to regional policy issues tend to strongly reflect the perspective of the county which they represent. The politics of regional policy debates is consequently framed in markedly territorial terms. A member of Fingal County Council clearly articulates this territorial politics asserting that her role on the Dublin Regional Authority is to promote the interests of Fingal:

As a councillor for Fingal I would see myself as having to ensure that the guidelines allowed for the optimal development of Fingal. I would be trying to ensure that we would get the correct share of industrial, retail development etc (C2).

A member of Wicklow County Council argues that under-provision of housing by Dublin City and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown has forced the dispersal of residential development to the counties of the Mid-East Region. Here housing provision is understood in terms of providing for the 'indigenous population' of individual counties. This narrow territorial perspective ignores the realities of regional scale housing and labour markets and the multiple drivers of inter-county migration and residential mobility. Concern regarding inter-county disparities in housing provision also reflects the fact that residential development leads to increased costs for local authorities and does not provide a source of income in the form of annual rates. The structure of local authority financing and in particular, the dependence on commercial rates and development levies consequently contributes to the framing of regional planning debates in markedly territorial terms.

Dublin City have not provided enough residential for their indigenous population. Dun Laoghaire Rathdown is the worst provider in the country for providing social houses for their indigenous population.... That has forced a lot people in the Dublin area into Meath, Wicklow, and Kildare and further afield and that is where we have the problems throughout the country as well. There would be tension in regard to that... Our particular problem is there are no rates for having residential properties and there is problems in servicing them (C12).

The SPGs preparation process was characterised by contestation between competing spatial discourses. The thinking of the consultants responsible for drafting the strategy and facilitating the preparation process was informed by specific spatial planning principles and concerned in particular with achieving critical mass at selected locations and aligning future urban development along a network of existing and proposed transportation corridors. This perspective viewed Dublin and the wider functional region as an urban system, whose performance could be improved by taking hard decisions, in the interests of the region as a whole:

... to create enough scale to make a transport system work or to provide people with shopping within a short distance of their home... the only way to get Dublin to work really well was to take hard decisions that would mean places were not going to develop, were not going to get their new school, not going to get their new sewerage works (R1).

This particular discourse of spatiality founded on rational principles and informed by broader policy agendas of sustainable development and transport-oriented-development stood in sharp contrast however, to the concepts of space and place associated with the engagement of the elected politicians with the SPG process. The spatial discourses of the elected politicians may be characterised in terms of a 'local agenda', concerned primarily with the social and economic development of particular local

communities and geographical areas from where they drew their electoral support. There was no consensus that the development potential or capacity of individual settlements within the Mid-East Region would or should be affected by the expansion of Dublin:

... Councillors of the outer authorities... were saying why should south Kildare or northwest Meath be actually affected by something that really had to do with building in Dublin... the zoning of land in small villages in Wicklow or Meath was seen as being problematic... seen by the councillors as problematic because we weren't allowing these places to develop (R1).

The current Regional Planning Guidelines officer reflects on the extent to which local politicians continue to be primarily concerned with their own county and more specifically the local electoral constituency from which they derive their political support. It is noted, however, that some councillors do take a broader 'global' perspective in relation to spatial planning issues:

It is very hard to get away from parish pump politics. They are generally only interested in their own area, not even their own county, their council area, as in area committee area... some of them are very good and very with it and to take the global perspective but that issue does tend to come up in debates for some of them. They want to know – well what is the story for my patch... (R3)

Interviews with members of the Mid-East Regional Authority reveal significant areas of disagreement or tension specifically in relation to the spatial distribution of residential, commercial and industrial development between the Dublin and Mid-East Regions. It is argued that although the RPGs included an objective promoting employment creation in the Mid-East Region, development in Kildare, Meath and Wicklow in the period since 2004 has been disproportionately residential while commercial and industrial development has located primarily within the Dublin Region. Commercial and industrial development is viewed as a very significant source of revenue in the form of commercial rates and development levies as well as providing employment within the Mid-East Region. Competition for commercial and industrial development is consequently articulated through a territorial politics, constituted at a range of spatial scales from inter-regional to inter-locality within individual counties.

For a number of councillors, the spatial proximity of the Mid-East Region to Dublin is viewed as a significant disadvantage hindering the capacity of the region to attract investment and development employment leading to a low ratio of jobs to population within the region:

The Mid-East region have been suffering because of their close proximity to Dublin whereas Dublin has being taking the cream, the Mid-East region has being taking a lot of the

problems. The commercial activity has been generally speaking focussed on the Dublin area, whereas the residential has been more or less forced into the ME region and that is something that is going to have to be addressed in this plan. There is going to have to be a much greater emphasis on providing commercial and employment opportunities in the ME region than there has been heretofore... (C12)

I think the biggest problem has been the influence of Dublin. I don't think we, in the Mid-East Region have stood up for ourselves in the proper spreading out of the cake in relation to.... residential vs. commercial development (C8)

A member of Dun Laoghaire Rathdown refers to the reality of competition between counties within the Dublin Region as a major obstacle to coordinated regional governance. It is argued that despite the rhetoric of cooperation in recent regional-scale spatial planning and economic policy documents, in practice each local authority will be competing for the same investment:

There is also tension between the local authorities as well. There is fierce competition between them. One of the deep flaws of the regional structure such as it is, is that no matter what goes on... everybody knows that if there is something up the four local authorities are going to go head over heels to get it for themselves... Fingal have the airport city, Dublin city have their own natural strength... Dun Laoghaire Rathdown is looking at Cherrywood... all these things are competing for more or less the same investment. No matter what they say on the surface that is the reality of what goes on (C1).

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Although initially prepared as a non-statutory statement of policy for the local authorities within the Dublin and Mid-East Regions, the Strategic Planning Guidelines were effectively adopted by the central government and became embedded within a statutory multi-scalar spatial planning policy system. This process of embedding was affirmed with the translation of the SPGs model into Regional Planning Guidelines for each of the Regional Authorities in the state in 2004. The SPGs thus provided the point of departure and reference model for subsequent regional spatial strategies for both the Greater Dublin Area and the other six regions, indicating the generative capacity of the SPGs as a process.

The embedding of the S/RPGs within the statutory spatial planning system occurred in the context of a significant reconfiguration of the relationships between local, regional and national scales of governance in spatial planning in Ireland. The RPGs were prepared in 2004 in the context of implementing the National Spatial Strategy. As a consequence, the emphasis of the SPGs on producing a shared spatial development strategy agreed by the constituent local authorities of the Greater Dublin Area was, at

least partially, replaced by a concern to translate national policy objectives into regional strategies, which in turn would provide strategic guidelines for City/County Development Plans.

During the preparation of the RPGs in 2004, members of the Regional Authorities were in fact, actively discouraged from engaging with the process. The RPGs were viewed as a technical policy exercise, rather than an opportunity for debate on the merits of alternative settlement strategies. Whereas the SPGs strategy-making process was initiated and led by local government, the preparation of the Regional Planning Guidelines in 2003/2004 was part of a wider process steered by central government. The embedding of the S/RPGs within the legislative framework of the 2000 Planning and Development Act and associated spatial planning hierarchy served to institutionalise the strategic spatial planning approach as a central element of the planning system. It may be argued, however, that this institutional embedding also restricted the capacity of the RPGs for the Greater Dublin Area to deliver an agreed shared strategy based on political consensus across the constituent local authorities. The parameters of the process were pre-defined in terms of the settlement strategy already articulated by the Strategic Planning Guidelines and the National Spatial Strategy.

Interviews with planning practitioners, local government officials and political decision-makers further point to the structuring effect of the geography of formal structures of governance on processes of strategic spatial planning at regional and local scales. It is evident that the Dublin and Mid-East regional authorities are characterised by distinct territorial and political identities and an associated 'them and us' politics of opposition, reducing the potential for the development of political agreement on a shared spatial strategy at a city-regional scale. The emergence of a 'them and us' politics of opposition may be attribute to a long-established perception of the relationship between Dublin city and its surrounding rural hinterland as somewhat problematic, whether this relationship is framed in terms of encroaching urban sprawl, a threat to the characteristic identity of predominantly rural counties or an inequitable distribution of economic development and employment opportunities between urban and rural areas.

The development of oppositional politics may also, however, reflect the implications in practice of the operation of two regional authorities and seven local authorities within the Greater Dublin Area, with limited opportunities for debate and discussion between political decision-makers at an inter-regional level. The interviews further point to the framing of spatial development issues and concerns in explicitly territorial terms reflecting a perceived assumption of spatial congruence of society, economy and cultural identity within the boundaries of individual local authorities. This construction of a

territorial spatial imaginary is particularly evident in concerns expressed by public representatives for the provision of housing to provide for the 'indigenous population' of individual county or city areas or the provision of employment opportunities for the residents of a particular county within the geographical borders of that county. While these concerns may reflect specific normative policy objectives in relation to concerns regarding long-distance commuting or an under-supply of housing within particular areas, they also point to a limited awareness of the actual extent to which the 'geographies of everyday life' as represented by commuting flows and housing market dynamics play out at the city-regional scale.

It is further possible to identify three distinct processes through which the spatiality of formal structures of governance influence or structure the development of territorial spatial imaginaries and territorial politics within the Dublin city-region:

1. Processes of spatial strategy-making and in particular the engagement of political decision-makers with such processes are for the most part framed within the context of the territorial boundaries of individual local authorities;
2. The articulation of public interest concerns by public representatives may tend to reflect the boundaries of electoral constituencies or a perception of the spatial extent of a particular 'local community';
3. Competition for investment between local authorities may reflect the extent to which public expenditure at the local level is related to the quantity of commercial and industrial development located within the geographical area of individual local authorities.

The interviews with elected public representatives also indicate an emergent reflexivity as councillors begin to acknowledge and recognise the significance of regional interconnections and the problems associated with traditional territorial perspectives where individual counties were perceived as 'islands', with limited regard for functional relations beyond the boundary of the local authority area. Evidence of reflexivity in relation to the employment of particular spatial imaginaries indicates that the functional geographies of sociospatial relations promoted by the S/RPGs process may have begun to influence the framing and shaping of discourses of space and place among actors in spatial development in the Dublin city-region.

The analysis presented in this paper indicates the need for increased critical attention to the relationship between the contents of spatial planning strategies and associated territorial development policies and the formal structures of governance within which they are institutionally embedded. More specifically it

is evident that the political geography of the internal division of the state can serve to structure processes of spatial strategy-making and political engagement with such processes. A political-institutional approach to the study of spatial planning in practice suggests a conceptualisation of spatial planning and policy systems as institutional frameworks where future development outcomes are negotiated and debated. Such processes of negotiation and debate occur, not in isolation, but in a wider institutional context or 'decision environment', characterised by powerful socio-political discourses of development which in turn are structured by the governance frameworks within which they are produced.

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