Spatial Planning Frameworks and Housing

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Introduction

The concept of planning is open to many interpretations and may validly be applied to any action which involves the formulation of a detailed method by which something is to be done – any type of thought-out procedure or action. In this broadest sense there are many types of planning including military planning, company planning, economic planning and what is currently referred to as ‘spatial planning’. The term ‘spatial planning’ has been brought into use by the EU Commission to embrace the different nuances inherent in the concepts of *amenagement du territoire* in France, ‘town and country planning’ in Britain and *raumordnung* in Germany (European Commission, 1997: 23). As defined, spatial planning loosely corresponds to what is meant by ‘physical planning’, ‘land use planning’, the Irish concepts of ‘regional and urban planning’ or the legal title of ‘planning and development’, as in the Irish legislation.

The specific title used in a country is often less important than the nature of the aims and the scope afforded to planning by a society and its government. Thus, physical or aesthetic aims tend to dominate under absolutist or authoritarian regimes. Typically such ‘plans were predominantly concerned with form and arrangement and relate to the art of planning as often propagated by some in the architectural profession. Modern town planning emerged as a comprehensive response to the housing, health and atrocious environmental conditions created by the industrial revolution’ (Cherry, 1995). Modern town planning embraces a balanced mix of aesthetic, economic, social and public aims, much as the EU’s *European Spatial Development Perspective* is constructed on the balancing of economy, society and environment (European Commission, 1999a: 10).

The extent to which an administration can implement such aims depends upon the scope afforded to underpin planning. In turn the scope of planning in a given society at a point in time is determined by four key criteria. First, the...
nature of government, whether dictatorship, oligarchy, totalitarian or democracy, affects the remit given to planning and its duration. Even in the case of an established democracy, such as in Britain, any examination of post-war governments can clearly see definite cycles in the commitment to planning. Second, the extent of the legal powers underpinning the system is significant, whether permissive or mandatory and whether they have been revised, updated or whether they embrace the modifications required by recent case law. Third, importance must be placed on the resources available to administer a planning system and to ensure the implementation of plans, be they financial, technical, land or personnel. Fourth, the nature of the implementing administration also affects the effective scope of planning: Are local administrations up to the tasks? Do they have the expertise? Are they in sympathy with the broad aims of planning and do they have a true understanding of these? (Campbell and Fainstein, 1996). Only when a system is able to meet these criteria can it be meaningfully described as a planning system or framework. In that context, this chapter traces the evolution and development of the Irish planning system, placing particular emphasis on more recent developments since the introduction of the Planning and Development Act, 2000. The chapter highlights the potential for these recent changes in planning to make a positive contribution to achieving sustainable development, but the chapter also points to some of the factors which may inhibit the proper working of the planning system.

The Pre-2000 Irish Planning Context

Prior to 1963, Irish planning operated under the permissive Town and Regional planning acts of 1934 and 1939, with minimal resources, little public interest and even more limited results. The Local Government (Planning and Development) Act, 1963 established planning on a statutory basis across the country; it established local authorities as planning authorities, required the making and implementation of development plans and put in place development control procedures, and an appeals mechanism. The 1963 Act and the eight subsequent amending acts did much to establish a coherent planning framework and to bring a degree of order and management to Irish development in the thirty-five years from 1965 up to 2000 (European Commission 1999b; Government of Ireland, 2000a). Successes were achieved in the face of many obstacles. These obstacles included a serious under-funding of the planning system and insufficient guidance by the lead Department (which is currently the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government). In turn, these were compounded by the failure to establish regional planning frameworks (Buchanan and Partners, 1969). There was also a significant lack of qualified staff and an almost complete absence of any concept of land management, often bordering on outright hostility. In addition, Ireland had to grapple with the almost unique problem, by European