
PAPERS FROM PRACTICE

Planning Dublin: Goals Achieved and Opportunities Lost

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Introduction

The title suggests that this paper might produce a form of balance sheet with a list of 'Goals Achieved' on one side and 'Opportunities Lost' on the other and the summing up of both lists would indicate whether the operation of the planning system over the last forty years could be judged a 'Success' or a 'Failure'. However, such an assessment is inherently more complex. There has been constant change in the social, cultural, economic and demographic sphere – sometimes massive and sometimes going in contrary directions, as well as administration changes, change in values, slumps and booms, stop and go, even climate change. Accordingly, the exciting task of identifying and agreeing on a wide range of meaningful goals or opportunities and the evaluation of whether these are either goals achieved or opportunities lost would require a lengthier examination. What I aim to do, therefore, is to try and identify what the Government at the time hoped to achieve with the 'Physical Planning System' that was to be established and underpinned by the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1963. What were their Goals in this new endeavour? As to whether these Goals were achieved or not, I hope to offer some personal thoughts. In looking at, and seeking to evaluate, the Goals identified, I believe it is also necessary to try and get some understanding of the life and times in Ireland in the fifties and early sixties as they are so vastly different from those that followed and from those of today's – post-Celtic Tiger – Ireland.

Signs of the times – the 1950s and 1960s

National Population suffered constant decline from the foundation of the State until the early 60s while Dublin's population showed constantly increasing but relatively modest growth until the 60s. Even to accommodate that growth, funding for services was problematic. Large areas of dereliction were to be found in all cities and towns and in Dublin there were many areas of former Georgian houses in multiple occupation – at densities of up to 500 persons per acre. There were 3,000 empty houses/flats in the Corporation's housing stock in 1958. The population of the inner city area north and south of the Liffey was in decline. It could be said that, for many of the citizens, they lived lives of quiet desperation. There were no powers for local authorities to acquire and redevelop underused/derelict land except for housing purposes – provided a need could be shown and the general environment was suitable for housing. Commercial redevelopment by the Corporation was not possible. Attempts at compulsory acquisition primarily to clear two areas at George's Quay and off Parnell Street – Moore Street/Denmark Street – failed due to the development proposed for the sites not being primarily for housing or the site was not deemed suitable for housing. The first attempt at redeveloping the Moore St/Denmark St area was in 1938 where, following appeal to the courts, the confirmation of the CPO was quashed in 1942. A further attempt was made in 1950 and this too was quashed some years later.

Charles Abrams (1961), a United Nations American Consultant, in his Report of 1961, recommended that new powers were essential to deal with these problems. This resulted in increased powers for land acquisition and development/redevelopment being included in the 1963 Planning Act which was being drafted at that time. A Town and Regional Planning Act passed in 1934 – modelled on a recent Act in the UK – was amended in 1939. The Act set no time scale for the passing of a resolution to adopt the planning legislation or for the production of associated development plans. Only Dublin Corporation, Dublin County and Cork Corporation passed the necessary resolutions. However, no plan was forthcoming from Dublin Corporation or County. The fact that in the 1939 Act Dublin Corporation was given powers of Regional Planning over the whole of Dublin, Meath, Wicklow and Kildare, did not go down well and effectively no action was taken by the Corporation to exercise the powers.

While the Abercrombie, Kelly and Robinson plan of 1941 certainly inspired the circular ring-road pattern found in Collins Avenue and Griffith Avenue on the north side of the city and a more broken ‘ring’ of the present R112 on the South, much of its other ideals proved unattainable (Abercrombie et al., 1941). The real foundation of planning for Dublin could be said to lie in the 1956 *Draft Dublin Planning Scheme*, which was prepared for the Dublin Corporation area following a court order. It was never formally approved by the State. Detailed zonings were allocated and various standards set out. As I understand it, the broad intention was that if a proposed development complied with the plan, it could be developed, but if in doubt or if something different was envisaged, then a planning application should be made. Road improvements were designated along a number of radial routes, the ring roads of Collins Ave and Griffith Ave were included and in the inner city a ring route was envisaged, mainly through a swathe of run-down areas on the north and west. Very long delays in implementation of most of these designations added further to the problems of these areas. Traffic congestion was growing and in 1958 German Traffic Consultants were appointed to prepare a Traffic Plan for Dublin Corporation.

What might be termed the Dublin Metropolitan Area was administered by three local authorities: Dublin Corporation in the core, with Dun Laoghaire Co. Borough to the South East and Dublin Co. Council surrounding both, on the South, West and North. The three counties of Wicklow, Kildare and Meath were beginning to experience pressure from the growth on the area. The Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 1963 came into being. In many ways, at that time, the concepts and consequences of physical planning were far beyond the appreciation of the public and the Council members and officials who found themselves given a new and strange role of ‘planning authority’. Perhaps the split roles of County Council / Corporation and Planning Authority inevitably placed the importance and potential of planning into a secondary ‘service role’ rather than the powerful tool for the administration of local areas. Planners were few, so a crash course had to be organised for interested engineers and architects in the local authorities. County Engineers outside of Dublin and Cork – most of whom knew little or nothing about planning – were allocated the role of providing Planning Services. A travelling ‘Road Show’ of Senior Department of Local Government Officials and UK consultants toured the Country to brief and sell planning to the elected members.

A first attempt at ensuring a degree of coordination in the Dublin area was the combining of the role of the City Manager with that of Dublin County Manager and

Manager of Dun Laoghaire Co. Borough in the early 60s. Both the City Engineer/Surveyor and the County Engineer who were responsible for Roads and Traffic and Sanitary Services in their areas did a pirouette and became specialists with one taking charge of Roads and Traffic for the City and County, with the other taking charge of Sanitary services for City and County. There was no County Planning Officer, so the Dublin Planning Officer was now responsible for planning in both areas. All three officers therefore oversaw the running of two separate offices and reported to two separate Councils. A precarious balancing act was necessary at times. Dun Laoghaire Borough remained separate with the Borough Surveyor having all three functions.

Planning Practice and Theory had to be imported – mostly from the UK. There, a major shift away from the form of detailed development plans to a form of two-tier plan was being promoted following a report by the Planning Advisory Group. This approach envisaged a simplified outline or Structure Plan formulating general policies for the wider area, with detail being fitted in as needed, in the lower tier District Plans. The process, which seemed a good concept, had not been tested over time. It is interesting to see a variant of that approach has been enshrined in the Planning and Development Act 2000.

This twin approach was proposed for the first Dublin Plan for *both* Dublin City and County, which was, in effect, a joint comprehensive outline plan. While this overall plan was conceptually logical and innovative, it did not take account of the strength of the mutual suspicion and independence of the Corporation and County Council. They wanted their own clearly defined independent plan with little or no reference to what happened over their boundaries. The lack of local detail and particularly the linking of the plans into one document, was roundly rejected by the Councillors in both authorities. It was back to the drawing board with a reversion towards the more detailed format, as separate plans were undertaken with assistance from Local Government Planning Inspectors seconded to the County Council whose staff was particularly thin on the ground.

The UK New Towns developments seemed to offer a form of successful integrated planning and development which sought to provide for social/community formation in new development areas. The 'Myles Wright Plan' proposed this form for the expansion of the City into the County area. The Neighbourhood Theory, also used in the New Towns, underpinned the planning and development of Tallaght, Lucan/Clondalkin – briefly known as Ronanstown – and Blanchardstown. In inner cities in the UK, 'Comprehensive Redevelopment' was seen as the most efficient way of meeting the new requirements of servicing and pedestrianisation. A massive comprehensive redevelopment was proposed for 86 acres west at Henry Street/Moore Street. The ILAC was just the first phase. Architectural Theory and Practice in Ireland was heavily influenced by what was happening in Europe and America as well as in Britain – glass boxes from Mies Van Der Roe; concrete mega-structures from Le Corbusier or the Town Centre of Cumbernauld; geodesic domes as promoted by Buckminster Fuller; Spanish villas/prairie ranches with great picture windows replaced thatched farmsteads; large unit prefabrication as seen in Ballymun; high rise and freestanding buildings – even in traditional streetscapes – a diverse bunch of 'foreigners' were urgently promoted. Concrete – cast in situ, post-tensioned and pre-cast – was 'in', split block replaced brick while plastic – formica – and glass came in ever larger sheets. Each

design idiom had its devout and dogmatic disciples. Even Solomon might have balked at taking a job in Development Control in such an environment.

If there was an Irish idiom, it was 'Eclecticism' and its bible was the big glossy architectural magazine showing how things were being done around the world. Even the protests from the stalwart Irish Builder magazine made little impact. What was new was good, or so it seemed until it was built for some time and its flaws could be assessed. There was no consensus. But so much was unsympathetic to the Dublin character that 'Pastiche' joined the design idioms. It was a terrible time for architecture. The now characteristic cyclical nature of Irish development and the building industry emerged and caused great opportunities but also great problems and hardship, making ongoing forward planning difficult to implement. In boom times development pressures tended to overwhelm the planning system and in recession it was difficult to initiate desirable development.

Catalysts for Change

There were several key catalysts for change. A first catalyst in bringing about change in the state and in the Dublin area was the First Economic Programme in the late 1950s (Whitaker, 1958). This new initiative saw the Government embarked on comprehensive economic planning at national level. Targets were to be set for large-scale expansion of industry and tourism together with intensified investment in building and construction. Growth in traffic and commerce focused attention on need for better communications. Increasing urban obsolescence was to be tackled and the inadequate means to deal with it comprehensively were to be addressed. The need for more services for building land – public and private – was recognised. In rural areas tourism was bringing economic opportunity and planning problems. There was a need for a planning system that would resolve conflicting needs of development and conservation and which would enable development decisions – public and private – to be correlated and the most effective use made of limited resources. This Economic Plan caught the imagination and generated a much more focused concentration on the role of industrial and tourism development as a dynamic engine for economic growth. The legislation for the new planning system was being drafted. This programme built on the success of the First Programme. While it was in formulation, the Local Government Planning and Development Act 1963 was passed with a commencement date of 1st October 1964. This Programme included a strong statement on Physical Planning Policy.

Three objectives were emphasised: Identification of centres of economic and social growth; Renewal and redevelopment of towns and cities; and Preservation and development of amenities. All to be carried out within a comprehensive physical planning framework. While no development plans had as yet been completed, nevertheless, the Second Programme envisaged that the development plans would be a complete statement of the physical planning measures envisaged to advance the local economy; that Planning was to operate at national, regional and local level; and that if planning authorities were to operate effectively in promotion of economic and social development, there must be communication and interaction between local and national plans.

The fatal flaw in this 'national programme' concept was that the planning legislation was, essentially, only local in scope and the three-tier approach would involve shifts in power between local and central government. The local development plans were to be

used in connection with estimates of national capital expenditure. They would be vital in drawing up priorities for investment in infrastructure. It would seem it was envisaged that regular feedback from the five-year review of development plans would provide ongoing comprehensive information to be used in the following National Programme. In the event, this would fail – if only due to the over-long, processes that bogged down the making and reviewing of plans (particularly the Dublin plans), so that when they were finally ‘made’, they were already well out of date. Local plan projections were to be consistent overall, with the employment/population in the national projections and with the projections of capital funding. Regional Planning was an important element in the Programme. The task of Regional Planning is to provide the means whereby local plans can be geared to national and regional objectives. National Planning, in the future, should include a regional orientation. There should be feedback to the national level of information on regional conditions. Regional planners were to advise on the exploitation of opportunities and on the overcoming of obstacles.

Identification of Centres of Economic and Social Growth

In 1965 a Government policy statement favoured the development of Development Centres with industrial estates as a means of promoting further expansion of economic activity (Buchanan and Partners, 1969). Regional Planning was to have an important function in this task. However, in another flaw, while regional bodies were set up, the only legislative provision for regional planning was the weak reference in Section 22 of the 1963 Act, which allowed the Minister to ‘require that the development plans of two or more planning authorities to be co-ordinated in respect of matters and in a manner set out by him’. These powers were never used. In essence regional planning was toothless being really only advisory.

Professor Myles Wright was commissioned in April 1964 by the Government to prepare an ‘Advisory Regional Plan and Report for the Dublin Region’ – generally taken as an area within 30 miles of Dublin (Wright, 1967). It was presented in June 1967. The Plan was never adopted or commented on by the Government. The subsequent Dublin City and County Plans were, therefore, prepared on the assumption that the Myles Wright Plan should not be ignored but had no official status! A joint planning team was drawn from both Dublin Corporation and Co. Council and led by the Consultants advising on the drafting of the Development Plans – Nathaniel Lichfield and Walter Bor of Lewellian Davies, Forester, Walker and Bor. While accepting the general westward direction of development, the planning team largely rejected the grid pattern and upheld the Schaechterlie Traffic Plan with its wholesale inner city road widenings and opted for three development areas rather than four. Myles Wright had incorporated a key warning in his final Report concerning the difficulties of implementation of regional plans as was being experienced in Britain and in Europe. He commented, with some foresight:

‘The successful carrying out of a Dublin Regional Plan will require guidance by a body specifically charged with that duty. Without such continued guidance a Regional Plan is likely to have little lasting influence. This has been proved many times in other countries.’

No such Agency was appointed. Perhaps, given the powers it would need and would have to wield, this would be too much to ask of the political and administrative establishments at national and local level. Essential coordination between the later Transportation Plans for the Dublin region and the land-use pattern that generates the

traffic was identified in the Dublin Transportation Study as necessary, has been largely ignored. It seems to me that Myles Wright's concerns, if not his solution, are as relevant today as they were back in 1967. Ann McEwan of Colin Buchanan and Partners, reporting on their study of seven of the nine regions, raised a planning problem which may yet beset today's National Spatial Strategy: 'Which patterns of urban concentration, or combination of patterns, best meets the economic growth of rural development and emigration aims of the Second Economic Programme? This is the essence of the planning problem.' She noted that the reasons for migration and emigration are very complex and the availability of information makes it difficult to establish relationships. This cautionary note was indeed justified by the lack of government enthusiasm for actual action following the final publication of the Regional Plans. A Government policy statement in 1972 listed population figures for major urban areas in the State and as regards Dublin: 'the strategy which the Government envisaged should be pursued over the next 20 years should be such as to accommodate natural increase of its existing population.'

Successive Dublin Development Plans noted the policy, but inevitably, were forced to make provision to accommodate the increasing pressures of in-migration – the out-migration of the late '70s came and went with unexpected suddenness. Regional Planning Organisations were set up but really only performed advisory functions until they were abruptly abolished without warning in 1987 only to emerge yet again, albeit in a different format, in 1994. Then eight new regional authorities were established under powers included in the Local Government Act 1991 – effectively to deal with EC Structural Fund Programmes. Urbanisation and 're-urbanisation' has continued apace, both in the Dublin area and in the state. Whether the current National Spatial Plan will meet the same fate as previous similar ideas remains to be seen. It also seems, from the sidelines, that it is questionable if the latest Regional bodies are succeeding in actually co-ordinating/controlling/promoting development in the Dublin and other Regions. On balance, in the national context, it would seem that the Goal of 'Identification of centres of economic and social growth' is more an 'Opportunity Lost' than a 'Goal Achieved'. In the Dublin context, the importance of achieving a balance between the development of the new town centres and the role of protecting the traditional Dublin City Centre was of concern over the years. It would seem that such a balance is now reasonably assured. This would rate as a 'Goal achieved'.

Renewal and Redevelopment of Towns and Cities

The emphasis in the title of the 1963 Planning and Development Act was a deliberate attempt to promote a positive development role for Development Plans and for planning authorities. Where the private sector was inhibited in renewing areas of cities and towns the local authority was to step in. In old and new areas, planning authorities could provide commercial facilities, again in default of or in competition with the private sector. Again, no source of additional funding for these enterprises was identified. It seemed that 'profits' from one scheme were expected to fund others. In addition, the problem of any such profits being absorbed into the general local authority funds was not addressed. Furthermore, there were good economic reasons why the private sector was reluctant to undertake most of the forms of development that the planning authorities were expected to carry out. While some major commercial initiatives were carried out, such as the ILAC Centre and the first phase of Tallaght Town Centre and a number local centres, the redevelopment of the 28 areas identified in the 1971 City Development Plan as Obsolete Areas (as defined in the 1963 Act) as being in need of

redevelopment took many years and were mostly redeveloped as part of the Housing Programme. Perhaps the most controversial redevelopment was of course the Civic Offices. Pre-1963 there were virtually no development companies, as such. Of eleven office redevelopments pre-1963, ten were carried out by owner-occupiers of which seven were insurance companies. From these slow beginnings the speculative office development became a flood – which came and went in waves – and was a dominant factor in shaping the inner city.

Office development concentrated in the wedge between Harcourt Street and Mount Street/Ballsbridge and St Stephen's Green. No office – or private residential – development took place in the inner city outside that wedge, certainly not in the north inner city. In general, 'planning concessions' were unable to attract developers elsewhere. Where risk was least – opportunity was best. Efforts to secure a mix of residential with the offices were not successful until major economic, environmental and demographic changes saw a changed pattern of demand. An exception and indeed for many years the only mixed-use redevelopment north of the Liffey was the Irish Life Centre where its own headquarters was the economic anchor. The retail element has struggled to survive and the residential element has not expanded. In 1974 there were some 203,700 m² (50 acres) of vacant or derelict land in the inner city, while in 1978 some 311 sites classified were derelict. When an application was received for permission for a petrol filling station on Ushers Quay in, as I recall, the mid 70s, this was the first application for anything there for over fifteen years. Developers strongly resisted attempts to refurbish. As was said at the time, 'The Irish are a nation of re-builders not restorers.' The Powerscourt Centre was one of the first developments to be designed on the basis of the refurbishment of buildings round a courtyard and the roofing of the courtyard for a Retail redevelopment close to the apex of the magic development kingdom at Grafton Street/St Stephens Green and it only took place in 1981.

Tax Concessions

The planning department among others advised in the early 1980s that, unless some form of financial incentives was introduced, the Development Plan policies for refurbishment and redevelopment in existing run-down or obsolescent areas would fail. This need was recognised in the 1986 Urban Renewal Act enabling financial incentives to be applied to designated areas. The designation process was primarily driven by the Department of the Environment, with some input from the planning authority and, as I recall, not involving the elected members. No funding was then envisaged to upgrade the public environment of these areas and progress was slow. The Society of Chartered Surveyors in a 1986 report *Towards an Inner City Policy for Dublin* noted that 'There was a potential demand for private housing close to the inner city, but the inner City cannot compete with the inner/outer suburbs on environmental/security grounds'. Eventually funding for environmental works became available and with that the process of renewal, but little or no refurbishment took off. Funds were made available to the Corporation to acquire properties for renewal/refurbishment. Proceeds from the sale of the properties were to be put back into the fund so it could be used again on a cyclical basis. Unfortunately, as the sales almost always involved a loss, the fund was more of a downward spiral than a revolving fund. It served a purpose for some time. Interestingly, the Development Brief for Tallaght Town Centre was published in 1997 but despite ongoing negotiations with a prospective developer, it was not until the area was granted tax concessions over ten years later that the project commenced. While the

redevelopment of many of the inner city areas was welcome there is concern that the internal layout, sizes and mix of units will not meet the higher quality and space that may be demanded in the future as the occupier's standards increase. These drawbacks will be difficult to rectify as the necessary comprehensive refurbishment/improvement will prove difficult due to the multiple non-occupier ownership of the blocks as well as owner/occupiers. We must wait and see. Outside the city, the Brief for the Tallaght Town Centre was prepared in 1979, but the centre only got moving nearly ten years later with financial incentives being made available in the Urban Renewal Act 1986 / Finance Act 1987.

The Social Dimension

One major area of crucial concern in all the attention given to encouraging growth and development and 'amenities' was rarely given more than minimal attention – the social implications of the development. Too often the planning process, where it saw potential social needs, was unable to ensure their provision. In the rush to provide social housing, while the Action plans provided locations and space for new roads, shops, schools, clinics, recreational facilities and cycleways, development of the housing areas surged ahead with no positive responsibility or understanding of the need for the provision of the essential 'ancillary supporting development'. Mixed development was aspired to but if the housing programme was to be met, social mix was abandoned, as in parts of west Tallaght and elsewhere. One exception was the stalwart efforts made by the Church authorities and the Department of Education with the Planning Department to ensure that, in general, places were actually available for children in a short time scale in all rapidly developing areas. Later special teams were created to try and deal with 'disadvantaged' areas. These had mixed success. Perhaps some, at least, of the potential problems might have been headed off if greater responsibility and power was available to securing the social needs of new communities awareness had been integrated with the planning process? In terms of securing the renewal and redevelopment of Dublin city and some of its suburban centres, the Physical Planning Objectives of the Second Economic Programme would probably be regarded as having been 'spatially' achieved. But the time frames were much longer than originally envisaged and only with additional powers and financial incentives. In general, in recent times there is also a greater consistency and quality of architectural design. The question remains as to why the associated social aspects seem to have been largely ignored.

Preservation and Improvement of Amenities

'Amenities', that ragbag term beloved of planners, has taken a long time to become of real interest to the public. Individuals have always been concerned to guard what they see as their personal 'amenities', particularly as evidenced by the NIMBY syndrome. While the tourism industry, even in the 1950s, was aware of the economic value of scenic amenities, general public awareness of the environment and heritage was and to some extent still is, though not always, seen as important. However, increasingly, awareness of the value of public amenities and the preservation/conservation of the environment have come to the fore. Again the planning acts needed to be supported by later additional legislation. In terms of the landscape and archaeological and architectural heritage there was a very shaky start. Indeed it is salutary to note how little progress has been made in relation to the matters that made up Part V of the 1963 Act. Areas of Special Amenity; Removal or alteration of hedges; Tree preservation Orders; Conservation Orders; Areas of Special Conservation / Natural Heritage Areas all are the exception rather than the rule. The use of Sections 47 and 48, supposed to be used for the creation by agreement or by compulsory

powers of Public Rights of Way, seems to be a failure. Planting of trees and shrubs has been a success but it is interesting to note that powers to finance such work was later eliminated. Noise and vibration are provisions availed of by the public. In the area of the 'built heritage' there was real weakness.

In spite of the list of 'Amenities' above, the Act was virtually silent on architectural conservation only being mentioned in the Third Schedule Part IV, where 'Preservation of buildings of artistic, architectural or historical interest' was listed. It was not mandatory to take action in this area. There was confusion as to the role of the National Monuments Acts. No provision was made for independent national listing. No provision was made for the preservation of interiors – only certain features and fixtures. The shadow of compensation possibilities perhaps rendered the planning authority over cautious, in taking a strong line on preservation. Nevertheless, in Dublin, a major study primarily of the inner city area under the Guidance of Llewellyn Davies, Forester, Walker and Bor identified a large number of buildings of importance. These were divided into three lists: those to be preserved; those to be 'protected' whose possible preservation would be considered in more depth when an application for permission to alter/demolish was made; and those buildings which would have been listed for preservation but being owned by the State or public bodies were deemed to be outside the control process. Later the list was expanded and the County Council also set out a similar listing. No addition could be made to the listing without going through a variation of the development plan – a period of many years. The degree to which the preservation/conservation of the heritage of buildings in Dublin was a success – given the circumstances – or a disaster would need a whole seminar to resolve. Perhaps, there have been some successes and some failures – a case of 'Goals Achieved and Opportunities Lost'. It will be interesting to see how the very strong provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 will work out.

Conclusion

In general, I believe there have been more 'achievements' than 'losses' which, I suppose, is an achievement in itself. I have not touched on the fact that, given its secondary service role and the perennial lack of staffing resources, planning has somehow achieved much in the general control and direction of development. Lack of power has made coordination and provision of social and other services in an appropriate time scale a real problem. A difficulty with most planning systems, it seems to me, is the tendency for individual planning decisions to become almost quasi-judicial with greater attention being given to semantics and unnecessary detail. Given the financial implications of all planning decisions this is probably inevitable but it does severely damage the image of planning as seen by those directly affected and the public at large. Mystique makes for poor public understanding. Attempts to resolve the often conflicting interests of the public/community, developers, the planning Authorities and the State in policy making and implementation remain to be resolved – even with the advent of Agenda 21. Finally, there is one area where the unwritten hopes and intentions of those involved in the start up of the today's planning system come within the category of 'Opportunities Lost'. We have never achieved a 'user friendly', flexible planning system, one which has earned full public acceptability. Perhaps it is in the nature of the beast that this can never be? I really hope that long before the end of the next forty years 'planning' will re-form and its worth will be recognised and appreciated by the public.

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