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Geography in Ireland

Jim Hourihane and Margaret Keane

- 1 There are certain critical periods of time when various aspects of development come into alignment. Now is such a time in Ireland and more, perhaps, than any other discipline or perspective, geography and geographers are well-placed to help make sense of what is happening in the island of Ireland – politically, economically, culturally and environmentally.
- 2 The island of Ireland constitutes two political entities – The Republic of Ireland comprising the bulk of the landmass and 3.9 million people, and Northern Ireland, which, with a population of just under 1.7 million people, forms part of the United Kingdom. Inevitably there are differences within these political units and this paper, examining the state of geography in Ireland, will look at both. There are also shared enterprises that are trans-border in nature. Some of these are the result of efforts to combat and eradicate mis-perceptions and mal-perceptions that have existed since the separation of the two territories in 1922. Others are a logical product of inhabiting a common island landmass that possesses qualities of environment, climate and location that transcend culture and politics.

The Republic of Ireland

Geography in civil society in the Republic of Ireland

- 3 Ireland has changed much over the last few decades. Peripherality and marginality, as well as a lack of capital and entrepreneurship, were long seen as reasons why economic development was very concentrated on the agricultural sector with a resulting lack of industrialisation. Rural-urban migration followed the patterns evident throughout much of Europe during the twentieth century but in the case of Ireland most of the towns and cities to which migrants went were not in Ireland. They were, instead, in other countries. The loss of so many young vibrant emigrants resulted in Irish society being very conservative, inward looking and resistant to change. It is only over the last few decades

that this pattern has been reversed and the process of movement from underemployment on unprofitable agricultural landholdings to cleaner and more attractive employment in industry and services has been achieved. Accompanying inward-migration, especially from other European and African countries, has triggered a rapid transition from a mono-cultural society to a poly-cultural milieu. With such developments should come a questioning of traditional values and the growth of inter-cultural understanding and adaptation that should become the norm.

- 4 The extent to which Ireland has embraced the process of global shrinkage and the development of its Information and Communications Technology (ICT) industries has led in substantial part to the economy of the Republic of Ireland being designated as the “Celtic Tiger” during the 1990s. Inevitably and inextricably bound to the Western global economy, the last few years have identified the downside of being so much a part of a globalised economy in times of recession.
- 5 Geography has become an essential component of how people in Ireland view their world. This “world” can exist at many scales. For a very small minority of people it is still relatively locality-bound wherein their lives are quite often fully lived in the places where they were born and grew up. For the vast majority of Irish people, however, their concept of the world has changed and that is due, in no small part, to the global shrinkage mentioned earlier and to the adaptability and flexibility of Irish people – especially the younger generations. The geographical isolation of the island that fed, as Michael Cronin remarks, “many myths about the country but few mouths” underwent a significant change from the 1970s onwards. It led to Ireland’s physical periphery transforming itself into a “virtual centre” in areas such as hi-tech manufacturing, international financial services, software translation, teleservices and pharmaceuticals. Cronin adroitly describes this from an Irish perspective as “really no longer a question of ourselves alone but ourselves online” (Cronin, 2004).
- 6 Profound changes have been wrought in Irish society in recent decades and Irish geographers as well as commentators from other disciplines have been central to the debate. The headlong rush towards a culture of consumption and the creation of a world of “instantaneous time” has been accompanied by a certain longing for another type of time – durational time – a time that lasts. Family history and the heritage industry have been exploited within the tourist industry as examples of this time. Yvonne Whelan’s work on the interpretation of symbolic landscapes, especially urban ones, has been part of an ongoing growth in cultural geography in which the cultural landscape is viewed as a depository of symbolic space and time (Whelan, 2003).
- 7 Irish people have always had a fascination with the past – both in terms of the cultural landscape itself as well as the historic events that have been played out on it. We have generally been very “placeful” people. The increasing similarity that exists between “home” in Ireland and “home” in many other parts of the world, especially Europe, has led to the suggestion that our sense of belonging and attachment to places such as the national territory has been sundered. Joseph Brady has suggested that we may well be developing new attachments to places, and though we are becoming more global we may also be becoming more local since a sense of place involves complex interactions operating at a number of spatial scales (Brady, 2003).
- 8 Another Irish geographer, Patrick Duffy, postulates that a sort of “landscape amnesia” prevails in suburban landscapes where rapid changes have taken place, where there is no

connection with the landscape by the inhabitants, and that these places have little meaning, memories, no name even. He argues, however, that interest in local landscapes is emerging almost as an antidote to the placeless-ness of global culture and that local cultural differences that are grounded in local experiences are now increasingly prized. He sees local cultures taking what they find useful in the outside world (like modern technology) and using it, while it seemingly reduces the local, to also nurture and reinforce it (Duffy, 2003).

- 9 Mary Cawley argues that the concept of a rural idyll is enjoying a renaissance in contemporary Ireland, following a trend that is present more widely at an international level (Cawley, 2003). She identifies four ways in which the idyll finds expression :
 - The attention that is being given to the protection of the environment and the rural landscape more generally
 - The re-emergence of small-scale food and handcraft production in response to growing markets for non-industrialised products
 - A residential movement, on either a full- or part-time basis, to the countryside in quest of a refuge from an increasingly pressurised life in towns and cities
 - The use of rural imagery in the international promotion of Ireland and particular local landscapes as tourist destinations.
- 10 Side-by-side with the quest for the rural idyll is the trend that has developed particularly over the last decade : counter-urbanisation. In part due to the escalating land and home costs, about one in four of the new homes being built in Ireland is being built in the rural countryside. This will undoubtedly change the nature of the landscape. It will increase traffic flows in previously quieter areas but obviously has the attractiveness of bringing youth and vibrancy to areas that suffered from rural depopulation over the previous decades.
- 11 For many of Ireland's people – now approaching 70% of the total population – urban living may be a dream or a nightmare. The problem of Dublin's primacy needs to be viewed together with the growth of its urban region. Many commuters are travelling what are, by previous Irish standards, unthinkable distances of up to 250kms per daily journey in order to work in Dublin. Geographers have paid attention to the need to establish a more balanced and equitable regional distribution of population and resource investment within the Republic of Ireland. The *National Spatial Strategy* clearly has its philosophic base rooted in geography as much as it is in political aspirations (McCafferty, 2003).
- 12 Geography occupies a significant place in Irish civil society. Entering the condition of post modernity one is reminded of David Harvey's description of it as an "acceleration in time and space compression" (Harvey, 1989). Living in Ireland at the beginning of the twenty-first century there is clearly an element of virtual space impacting on all of our lives. The global forces that impact upon us may well have been seen in a premonitory way by James Joyce (Joyce, 1999) in his work *Finnegan's Wake* when he wrote :

"Where are we at all ? and whenabouts in the name of space ?
I don't understand. I fail to say.
I dearsee you too".
- 13 Geography in Ireland today can help to pose and then to resolve such provocative and precipitative questions.

Geography in the educational system of the Republic of Ireland

- 14 Geography at primary (also referred to as national) school level (ages 4 to 12 approximately) during the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries was characterised by what is generally termed “the Capes and Bays” approach. Children were expected to memorise vast quantities of such material – often without understanding what they were learning. Fahy states that when in 1872 a “Payment by Results System” was introduced in national schools it resulted in even greater emphasis on memorisation in geography teaching. It was so badly taught that in 1900 it was abandoned as a separate and compulsory subject and reached its lowest ebb in the period 1900-1921. It was reinstated as a subject (studied with history) in 1921 and from 1926 it was taught as a separate subject, independent of history. The programme introduced in 1926 remained virtually unchanged until 1971. It was almost entirely physical geography and human geography was largely ignored (Fahy, 1981).
- 15 In 1971 a new curriculum was introduced into primary schools. Just in advance of this a survey by Dillon in 1969 (Dillon, 1977) examined geography teaching and found that :
- Geography was generally taught once per week. The time allocation varied from 30 to 60 minutes – the longer time being more common at the senior levels of fifth and sixth classes (10 to 12 years of age)
 - The programme of primary instruction introduced in 1926 and largely unchanged subsequently was used a general guide by 76% of teachers
 - A remarkable degree of uniformity existed in information content and methodology in national school geography teaching
 - A considerable amount of goodwill towards geography was shared by teachers.
- 16 Curriculum change in all subjects, including geography, was introduced in the draft programme published by the Government’s Department of Education in 1969 and in the final programme that was published in 1971 (Government of Ireland, 1971). For the next 30 years this was known as the “New Curriculum” and it marked a departure from a subject-centred approach to a child-centred one. It advocated discovery methods and had a strong local geography component. In junior classes (from 4 to 8/9 years of age) geography did not formally exist. Rather it fell under the umbrella of social and environmental studies. From 8/9 years of age up to 12 it gained its own identity but it was suggested that it should not be seen in isolation from other subjects ; rather it should be integrated with them whenever and wherever appropriate.
- 17 While the 1971 curriculum laid out examples of syllabi for different age levels, it also presumed that teachers would adapt the syllabi to suit the needs of individual schools and pupils. In the case of junior pupils, simple local studies that were drawn from social and environmental studies were to be the vehicle for the later study of geography. In middle classes geography was introduced and the emphasis again was placed on the child’s own neighbourhood as well as the home county and Ireland in a very general way. People in other lands were introduced through the study of various ways of life. In senior classes the syllabus developed the studies that had previously been introduced while broadening out its areal concerns to a global base. In essence, the 1971 geography curriculum had the following philosophies underpinning it :
- A concentric approach that was firmly anchored in the child’s immediate environment
 - An approach that was integrated with the other areas of the curriculum

- Discovery methods that included first-hand investigative and project work
 - An emphasis on the teachers being highly selective when devising their schemes of work
 - The introduction of a greater air of reality and variety into primary school geography.
- 18 In the late 1980s the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), as part of an overall curriculum revision in primary schools established a curriculum committee for Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) that was charged with establishing a new curriculum in the three components of SESE i.e. geography, history and science (Government of Ireland, 1999). The three central planks of SESE would be knowledge, skills and attitudes. Geographical education had as its concern “developing the child’s understanding and appreciation of the world in which he/she lives”. It would involve an active exploration and learning process about natural and human environments while simultaneously developing an awareness of spatial patterns and using a range of investigative and communicative skills.
- 19 The content of the geography curriculum is now presented in three strands :
- Natural environments
 - Human environments
 - Environmental awareness and care
- 20 A skills and concepts development section precedes the content units which in turn are divided into four bands based on the ages and classes (i.e. the levels within the school) of the children. Geography is now introduced for the first time ever within the Republic of Ireland at infant level and the first band begins with the two junior levels (4/6 years of age). The fourth and final band concludes with fifth and sixth classes when the children on average are 10 to 12 years of age. The skills and concepts that are presented as underpinning the teaching of the primary school geography curriculum are :
- Developing a sense of place and space
 - Using maps, globes and graphical skills
 - Using geographical investigation skills e.g.
 - Questioning
 - Observing
 - Predicting
 - Investigating and experimenting
 - Estimating and measuring
 - Analysing
 - Recording and communicating
- 21 The curriculum recognises that geographical education makes a contribution to the child’s development that is critical, that literacy is enriched by geographical education and that geography also has a language of its own. Information and communication technologies are strongly advocated as providing opportunities for the development and application of skills within geography. The geography curriculum is based on a spiral approach in which some geographical topics are explored in increasing detail at a number of age levels. The local environment is again looked on as an ideal setting within which pupils can explore and investigate the environment systematically and thoroughly. As with the 1971 curriculum, integration within SESE and with the other appropriate curricular areas is strongly advocated. The curriculum is not viewed as a set and prescriptive one, however. Rather it is envisaged as a menu within which teachers and schools are free to select from the content, objectives and exemplars that are provided.

This, therefore, is the geography curriculum that is currently being taught in primary schools and it is likely to be in place for a number of years before it is reviewed.

- 22 The Intermediate Education Act of 1878 had far-reaching consequences for geographical education in second-level schools. For examination purposes geography was combined with history and formed part of the English paper. On initial reading, it would appear that geography was equivalent to one third of a subject. The reality was different since students at Preparatory Grade were required to answer two questions in history and only one in geography. The examiners' reports of the early twentieth century referred constantly to the poor standard of geographical education. Rote-memory work, lack of visual aids and over-reliance on textbooks that emphasised place and fact geography were all identified as contributing to this poor standard. In 1924 the Intermediate Education (Amendment) Act came into force. Geography was recognised as a distinct subject at Leaving Certificate level (generally taken at 17/18 years of age) but in the examination taken at around 15 years of age – The Intermediate Certificate – geography and history were regarded as one subject, although they were examined on different papers! Fahy states that "the period 1924-60 was one of stagnation and stunted growth in second-level geographical education" (Fahy, 1981).
- 23 Changes in the teaching of geography at second level began in the 1960s and these were in no small part due to the teachers of geography. The formation of the Association of Geography Teachers of Ireland (AGTI) in 1962 energised the approaches being adopted and promulgated by enterprising teachers to make geography less bookish and more interesting and relevant. The first inspector of geography was appointed in 1967 and this in turn gave further impetus to the teaching of geography in second-level schools. A new Leaving Certificate syllabus was introduced in the same year. This emphasised practical work such as Ordnance Survey maps, photographs, weather study, statistics and the development of fieldwork. Systematic geography was encouraged and the emphasis on regional geography was reduced. Grants were also introduced in 1967 for geography rooms and equipment.
- 24 The early 1970s, according to Holland, marked the emergence of what became known as the "new geography" in second-level schools in the Republic of Ireland (Holland, 1981). Sadly, syllabus changes in 1973 for the Intermediate Certificate and in 1975 for the Leaving Certificate did not encourage the methodological changes that might have been timely. The "new geography" did represent changes at a number of levels, however. Most notably, a movement took place from a factual-based to a concept-based mode of study; systematic geography replaced regional geography in emphasis; interdisciplinary study was advocated and a value-base for geography was emphasised.
- 25 Skills and concepts were certainly advocated from the late 1970s onwards but significantly a diminishing proportion of students chose to study geography to Leaving Certificate level from the mid-1970s. This concern was addressed by the AGTI and by both the National Commission for the Teaching of Geography and the National Committee for Geography between the years 1978 and 1980. Gillmor, in an analysis of possible causes for the decline in the popularity of geography, stated that it was not possible to suggest simple explanations and that a complex multifactor situation existed. Junior cycle enrolment, changes in schools and students, the broadening of the curriculum, subject grouping, vocational considerations, third-level entry requirements, examination grades, the syllabus and its teaching, and the image and status of geography as a subject were all felt to be possible causes of the decline in geography's popularity (Gillmor, 1982).

- 26 Since the early 1990s geography has grown in popularity as a second-level subject, most notably perhaps at Leaving Certificate level. Just as in Gillmor's earlier assessment of the possible reasons for the decline in geography, it is impossible to identify any single factor as to why its popularity has grown over the last decade. The introduction of new syllabi, conscious and ongoing efforts to award students grades that are in line with other subjects, and levels of teaching that engage students with the latest methodological and technological advances in geographical education have, in all probability, contributed. Additionally, the relevance of the subject itself contributes to its popularity in students' minds – it is seen as having value in a modern and multicultural society that both engages and is engaged by the wider world. In 2003 just under 60,000 students sat the Leaving Certificate examination. Nearly 29,000 of these took geography while just under 12,000 students took history, the subject with which geography is often seen to compete for student choice.
- 27 A revised Leaving Certificate syllabus is being introduced in September 2004, for first examination in June 2006. It aims to develop in students an understanding of the inter-relationships in the human and physical environments at both a national and international level. It focuses on global interdependence and the need for sustainable management of the earth's resources. It cites cultural sensitivity, the development of vocational skills, active citizenship and the use of information and communication technology as being of primary importance. Its objectives are knowledge and understanding, concepts development, the development of skills and the formation of positive attitudes.
- 28 Very significantly, it builds on the experience of students at the Junior Cycle of second-level education. As importantly, it introduces a core area of study for all Leaving Certificate students – The Geographical Investigation – that will allow them to experience the practical application of the core geographical skills that are central to all units of the new syllabus (Government of Ireland, 2003). It will serve to contextualise the syllabus within the students' own immediate environments and encourage them to develop positive attitudes by experiencing and questioning relationships and issues in their own environments (Fleming, 2003).
- 29 While geography was taught at both first and second levels since the early twentieth century, its arrival in third level was relatively late and more recent. Trinity College Dublin had a chair of geology since 1844 but it was only in 1930 that the Diploma in Geography was established. Subsequently, a degree level course in geography was made available – the first pass degree students graduated in 1935 and honours level students graduated in 1941. The first full-time geographer was appointed in 1936 but it was a full thirty years before a chair of geography was established in 1966 in the Republic of Ireland's oldest university.
- 30 The Universities of Cork and Galway, along with Belfast, were collectively known as the Queen's Colleges. In all three, geology was a recognised subject from 1849. University College Cork made a geography-geology course available in 1909 and then only as a first-year subject. This course was offered at degree level from 1932. Geography was studied in the first and third years while geology was studied in the second year. Finally, in 1949 geography was introduced at degree level as a subject in its own right and a chair of geography was created in 1958 – the first holder being Professor C.S. O'Connell. In Galway the Professor of Geology was statutorily bound to lecture in physical geography. A lectureship in geography was created within the Geology Department and students taking

geography to degree level graduated in 1965. B.S. Mac Aodha was appointed as the first Professor of Geography in 1968.

- 31 University College Dublin offered physical geography at first-year level by members of the Geology Department and a first-year course in economic geography was taught by the Economics Department. Geography became a recognised subject at degree level in 1950 but an honours degree level had to wait a further ten years when Professor T. Jones Hughes was appointed to the first chair of geography in 1960.
- 32 In 1971 geography was introduced as a recognised subject in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth – The Republic of Ireland's second oldest third-level institution. Professor W.J. Smyth held the first chair of geography. Geography is also taught to degree level in the Republic's two largest colleges of education. St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra is a recognised college of Dublin City University while Mary Immaculate College is a recognised college of The University of Limerick. In both colleges geography became a degree subject in 1974 – previous to that it had been taught to diploma level – and the first students graduated in 1977.
- 33 The lack of geography as a stand-alone subject in universities for a large part of the twentieth century had significant negative repercussions, especially in its teaching since second-level teachers had very little exposure to the subject that they were then expected to teach. The discipline also suffered in its own lack of development because of its very late introduction and it was really only from the 1950s onwards that this negative situation was redressed. Fahy is extremely critical of the various universities for what he describes as the “retarded growth of geography and geographical education in the first half of the twentieth century in the Republic of Ireland”. He suggests that “geography was regarded as a parasitic subject rooted to geology and having undefined links with economics, history, astronomy and politics” (Fahy, 1981).
- 34 Over the last forty or so years geography has grown in popularity in third-level institutions. This is reflected in all of the university departments enjoying substantial increases in the numbers of staff employed to teach geography and in the number of students studying the discipline. Geography has in fact become so popular as a third-level subject that considerable strain has been placed on the teaching, administrative and other resources such as lecture hall spaces. This popularity shows no sign of waning. Some of the university departments have up to a thousand students following geography courses under various modular systems while the average for the “smaller” departments is around six hundred students – a sizable number by any standards.
- 35 The courses that are on offer in the various third-level institutions reflect the best of current practice both in terms of content and pedagogical approaches. Analysis of both natural and human-created environments at a variety of scales and in a variety of locations, along with patterns of distribution, spatial structures, processes and interrelations inform geography courses today at third level. Indeed, the working definition for geography in the new Primary Curriculum shows the degree of relationship that now guides the relationship and sequencing of thought from first level through to third level; “Geography is the study of the Earth, its inhabitants and the interrelationships between them in the context of place, space and environment. It is concerned with the nature, distribution and interaction of human and natural features over the Earth's surface, the processes which create, sustain or change these features, and the contributions they make to the distinctive character of places ” (Government of Ireland, 1999).

- 36 Teaching of third-level courses is by means of lectures, tutorials, practicals and field classes. Students undertake practical work in cartography, computing, laboratory work and data handling techniques, as well as developing critical appreciations of geographical research problems and research presentations. The skills and values bases that underpin geography in third-level institutions help to make geography graduates attractive to a variety of professions and the range of technical skills they possess along with an adaptable and flexible mind-set contribute in no small way to their success in the employment market.
- 37 If one considers the ideological roles devoted to geography and geographical education from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day, there are clearly discernable patterns attached to particular periods of time. The values that underpin any society are, or should be, reflected in decision-making and curriculum formulation policy. Geography, at different times and for different reasons, has been used as an *instrumentum regni*, as a vehicular subject (Fahy, 1981). At the beginning of the twentieth century all of Ireland was still part of the British Empire. The textbooks used to teach geography reflected this situation – any possible values in Irish nationalism were studiously avoided and the benefits of continued links with Britain were strongly advocated. In 1922 the Irish State was formed and immediately a strong ground and mind-shift occurred. Loyalty to the new state was encouraged and those nationalist ideals were clearly present in the textbooks that were developed.
- 38 From 1930 to 1960 certain characteristics marked Irish society : a relative stagnation in education and society at large. The haemorrhaging effect of emigration removed so much vibrancy from the younger cohorts of the population and the conservative Catholic Church influenced thinking throughout society. Little economic development was occurring – the economy was characterised by an over-reliance on a virtually pre-industrial agricultural system wherein too many people produced too little at too high a cost.
- 39 From the late 1950s onwards matters began to change. Industrialisation was actively promoted, the urban base of the population began to grow, the economic base of the Republic was widened and the educational system underwent radical overhauls. In 1973 Ireland entered the then EEC and this engagement of both a broader economic sphere and a cultural diversity brought with it much change in geographical thinking and education. Ireland and Irish people began to look outwards far more assuredly than they had previously done and membership of the EEC also had impacts in terms of infrastructural and economic investment and development. These laid down the basis for much of Ireland’s subsequent economic success in the 1990s (Hourihane, 2004).
- 40 The input of geography into the success of the Irish educational system in recent years cannot, clearly, be measured with any exactness. However, one can make several well-premised suggestions that indicate current thinking. Geography’s dynamic nature has allowed it enjoy an unchallenged ability to respond to issues at all levels of education – perhaps most significantly at third level. The high skills base of geography students, and this applies, I would suggest, from first through to third level, has helped to create a much more sophisticated “output” in the nature of well-informed, globally-oriented and multicultural-embracing cohorts of students.
- 41 The future of geographical education seems very bright and assured in the Republic of Ireland. New syllabi for both first and second levels of education have just come on

stream and their make-up allows for the treatment of issues and concerns as they emerge in future years. They are not as straightjacketed as matters were back in the early twentieth century and this flexibility augurs well for the future. This is not to suggest that there are not challenges ahead. Teachers will obviously have to consider new approaches to classroom methodology that will require that students be even more actively engaged in their own learning. Much more collaborative planning will be required in the implementation of the new syllabi. Similarly, a dynamic interaction between students and teachers enabling the discussion, analysis and evaluation of topics and issues arising from the new syllabi will be fundamental to their successful introduction and implementation.

Geography and the media

- 42 The “Capes and Bays” approach mentioned earlier in the discussion of geography in the Republic of Ireland still characterises much of the attitude towards geography held by the generation of people over forty years of age. For them it represents much of the exposure they had to geography – particularly in first and second-level schools. Intriguingly, up to about fifteen years ago, little use was made of graphic presentation of such geographical information in the Irish media. Many global events were reported in an apatial way whereby no maps were provided to contextualise such happenings. Fortunately, that situation has changed. Now, in part because of the immediate availability of maps at many scales in digital format, maps are used to provide a spatial setting for the news items that accompany most newsworthy stories, both global and local. It is one of the ironies of life that as geography moves further and further away from “place geography” its existence is being perpetuated, perhaps even being reinforced by such media developments. In adverting to such an irony one has to be aware of its potential advantage. People are enabled to have mental maps of where things happen and it does raise the profile of geography, even if it is a very partial and incomplete one.
- 43 Geographers, and one is speaking of individuals as opposed to the collective grouping, have had and continue to have very positive relations with the media in the Republic of Ireland. The perceived immediacy and relevance of the discipline may be identified as the principal reasons for this. As already discussed, the Republic has undergone profound changes, especially over the past decade, in areas such as its economy, regional imbalance with an over-dominance of the capital, Dublin and its urban region, changing patterns of urbanisation and counter-urbanisation, environmental concerns and issues, change from a monocultural to a polycultural society, emplacement of the country within the shrinking space of the globalised milieu. All of these issues and more have been commented on, written about and broadcast by geographers within Ireland. The individualisation of contributions may be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, geography in Ireland has been playing “catch-up”. Its retarded growth, as cited earlier to Fahy, meant that it lacked the developmental base from which it could move forward with the assuredness of historically established precedent. Secondly, the perception of geography by the media militated against its greater embrace as a source of informed knowledge. The media were not untypical of Irish society at large in that they identified geography as possessing far greater knowledge about the world’s places than about the processes and patterns approach that underpins virtually all sub-disciplines within Irish geography. Geographers in Ireland have become more assertive in promoting their views

and opinions in the more accessible public realm of newspapers and broadcast media and there is little reason to doubt that this will continue. Every cohort of pupils at first level and students at second and third levels will have a contagious impact on their parents and peers. Geography will be seen for what it is – a modern and relevant discipline with so much to say for itself.

Relations between geography and the economical sphere/policy makers

- 44 Individual geographers have, especially over the last three decades, contributed through their research, publications and submissions to policy-forming groups. Such contributions have become more common in recent years and the broadening of the publishing base from journals that are not always easily accessed by the public to more widely-available and wide-ranging books has aided this changing perception of the contribution of Irish geography. A particularly good example of one such book is that edited by Aalen, Whelan and Stout (1997) – *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* – which is regarded as a marvellous resource base by geographers, the general public and policy-makers in environmental areas. A similar venture is currently being prepared as an atlas of Cork (The Republic's second largest city) to coincide with its status as European City of Culture in 2005. Again, it will both inform and act as a resource base for future issue-based concerns and developments.
- 45 These developments have been accompanied by the involvement of geographers in preparing both commissioned and personally conceptualised reports and papers on specific issues of concern. Dominant among these in the last few years are topics pertaining to the environment – in the broadest sense of the word – at scales varying from the local, through the regional, and the national on to the global.
- 46 As exciting and as important these individual and multi-authored research reports are, an even more potentially significant development is the establishment of a number of research institutes that are attached to or are associated with geography departments throughout the Republic of Ireland. Dr. Tony Parker in University College Dublin's Geography Department established the first of these in 1987. The Centre for Retail Studies continues to do much valuable work, and, given new changes in the nature and location of retailing developments, is likely to be even more centrally involved in informing policy in the coming years. It is supported by a variety of retail, development, investment, financial and local government organisations for which the Centre provides research reports.
- 47 The Centre for Urban and Regional Studies was established in Trinity College, Dublin in 1990 in response to the need for an expanded research and teaching programme relating to urban and regional development issues. The aim of the Centre is to bring together a range of interdisciplinary expertise in order to better address the wide spectrum of economic, social and environmental problems facing decision-makers in the public and private sectors alike. Staff in the Geography and Economics Departments at Trinity College jointly direct the Centre. The Coastal and Marine Resources Centre (CMRC) was established in University College, Cork in 1994. It represents a multidisciplinary group within the University – including geographers – that has arisen from a strong tradition in academic research, education, training and consultancy.

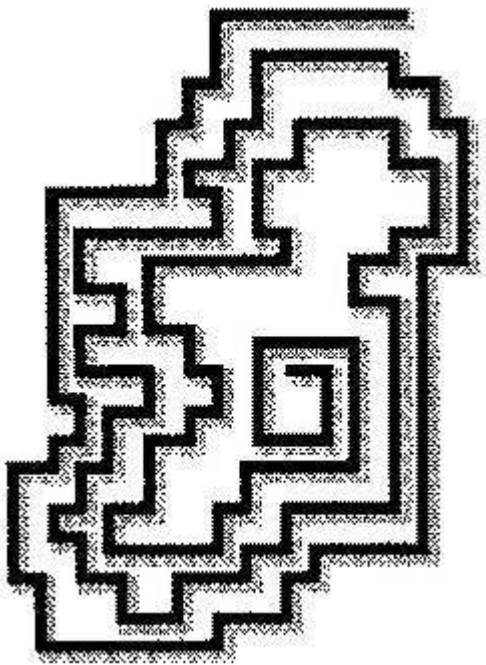
- 48 In 1998 the NASC (a Gaelic word for connection or link) Spatial Information Unit was established in National University of Ireland, Galway and is located in the Department of Geography. An initial 50% of funding was received from the European Union's Terra Division and this was matched by the provision of local support in the form of personnel and other resources. Monies received from individual projects supply current funding. The Unit carries out work in the fields of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and spatial modelling, applied to regional planning. The unit involves a partnership between University College Galway, Galway Corporation, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the County Councils of Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Cork and Meath. These counties contain regions of the Gaeltacht (Gaelic-speaking areas) of Ireland.
- 49 In 2000, Urban Institute Ireland commenced operation. It occupies a custom-built facility in University College, Dublin and is funded by the HEA (The Higher Education Authority is a statutorily-established authority) under the PRTL (Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions) scheme. Its aims are to provide detailed independent analysis of social and economic structure and change in urban areas, as well as a critical evaluation of policy in relation to planning, urban renewal, housing, employment, transport and the environment. When fully operational, URBIS, the Institute's urban information system, will be Ireland's main repository of comprehensive spatial datasets from Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Central Statistics Office and the Environmental Protection Agency. The Institute is inter-disciplinary, inter-faculty, inter-institutional, cross-border and collaborative in nature. Geographers are among both the researchers attached to the Institute and also its Board and Scientific Council.
- 50 NIRSA, the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, was established as a University Institute at National University of Ireland, Maynooth, in 2001. Again, its funding comes from the PRTL programme as part of the National Development Plan 2002-2006. NIRSA's remit is to undertake interdisciplinary and comparative analysis of global processes as they impact on regional and spatial development in Ireland. The Institute is a collaborative project between scholars from a number of social science disciplines, located in five partner institutions : NUI, Maynooth ; Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology ; Mary Immaculate College, Limerick ; Institute of Technology, Sligo and Waterford Institute of Technology.
- 51 It is clear, therefore, that geography in the Republic of Ireland makes an important contribution to policy-making in a number of spheres and does so at both a personal (either individual or group) level as well as at an institute level. Finally, it is a comment on the relevance of geography that one of the most significant national planning papers of recent years is titled *The National Spatial Strategy* (2002) in which the Government commits itself to a "twenty-year planning framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between regions". Geographers contributed to both the research phase and the committee phase of this strategic document.

Conclusion

- 52 An in-depth treatment of the impact of Estyn Evans on Irish geography will be provided in the next unit of this paper. While Evans was undoubtedly identified and identifiable with geography in Northern Ireland, his work was also seminal in the development of

geography throughout the whole island of Ireland. “I took a course of history”, Evans wrote, “at the University College of Wales nearly half a century ago but found it so myopic in its insular view of the world ... that it was a relief to turn to geography” (Durcan, 1992). That reflection is somewhat ironic in that part of what made Evans so profound in his contribution was his multi-disciplinary approach – including history – to geography. He recognised the continuity and presence of past and present on the Irish landscape. Furthermore, he recognised that the most intractable of political issues – the lack of peace and the absence of trust between the Unionist and Nationalist communities in Northern Ireland could also be a potential source of enrichment through cross-border fertilisation, both in Ulster and in all Ireland. That breadth of vision and an ability to see potential solutions to troubling problems and issues is serving the geography community well today as a productive working philosophy in the emerging multiculturalism and globalism that are likely to mark the future of the Republic of Ireland. However, it is important that the status and very individual perspectives of geography are not greatly diluted under the laudable movement towards multi-disciplinarianism that marks the development of the research institutes outlined earlier in the paper.

The Geographical Society of Ireland



The organisation of the geography society in the republic of ireland

An English “tourist” visiting and writing about Ireland in the eighteenth century remarked that “if you go down into hell and open an Irishman’s heart, the only thing written across it is land”. Such a connection, even a preoccupation with land and its ownership endured for much of Ireland’s population up to the middle of the twentieth century. Indeed, it may be argued that Irish people are among the most “earthy” of European peoples since most of the population may only be a generation removed from the land – in spite of nearly 70% of the population of the Republic of

Ireland now being urban dwellers. Stored ancestral information informs people on a non-cognitive, limbic-intuitive level of environmental perception and its cultural roots are very deep in Ireland (Hourihane, 2003). The Irish population is therefore, in many senses, a most geographical society. It has views and attitudes towards the old and the new, towards the pace and direction of development, towards Ireland's sense of self and its place in the broader world. It is also among the most literate of societies, engaging as it does in debates and arguments that are explored in books – on issues pertaining to matters geographical – both old and new. Geography serves such a society well and it is pleasing to see new information and communication technologies sitting comfortably beside the more traditional text as ways of communicating with the broader Irish geographical society. The sad days of the past when the only way for many Irish people to engage the wider world was through permanent, never-to-return emigration have virtually gone. Irish people have left behind their sense of marginality and peripherality and replaced them with an assured sense of themselves and their place in a globalised world.

In addition to this informal geographical society that permeates Irish culture, there are also structured geographical societies in Ireland. Professor Anne Buttimer of the Geography Department, University College Dublin, is current President of the International Geographical Union (IGU) – a singular honour for both Anne and the country she comes from, which is not large by international standards. The Geographical Society of Ireland (GSI), The Association of Geography Teachers of Ireland (AGTI), The National Committee for Geography and the National Commission for the Teaching of Geography all help to further the aims and objectives of the Irish geographical society.

The Geographical Society of Ireland was founded in 1934 to promote geographical studies in Ireland and welcomes as members all persons who are interested in the subject. In the autumn of 1934 a circular entitled “Proposed Geographical Club” and inviting “teachers of geography and others interested in different aspects of this wide subject” was launched in Dublin (Herries Davies, 1984). Fifteen people lent their names to the proposed new body but Herries Davies suggests that three of them were the prime movers in the venture : Edward William O’Flaherty Lynam, who was Superintendent of the Map Room in the British Museum ; Robert Lloyd Praeger, Ireland’s most distinguished field-botanist and Anthony Farrington, Resident Secretary and Librarian of the Royal Irish Academy. Of these three, Lynam is probably most entitled to the title of founder of the Geographical Society of Ireland. In November 1934 he wrote of the benefits that might accrue from such an organisation. It would, he said :

“...encourage the study of the physical, human and regional geography of Ireland, subjects which so far have received little attention, but it would be of great assistance to everyone interested in the history, political divisions, economics, geology, cartography, botany, topography and place-names of Ireland. On the historical side there is abundant material to hand in the memoirs, tours and maps published since the time of Giraldus Cambrensis ; while almost every Irish county calls for a regional study with special reference to industries and agriculture”. (Herries Davies, 1984).

Some ninety people attended the first meeting convened in Academy House, Dublin in November 1934. Praeger was elected as the first President of the GSI. In 1944 the Society published its first journal, titled *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of Ireland*. Within three years this was restyled as *Irish Geography* – a title it holds to the present day and is published twice a year. In addition to this significant contribution in promoting a greater understanding and awareness of the geography of Ireland on both a national and international basis, the Society also provides a number of public meetings annually at which invited speakers present talks and it co-hosts a special colloquium on Leaving Certificate geography for students with the Association of Geography Teachers of Ireland.

The Association of Geography Teachers of Ireland was founded in 1962. It developed first in Dublin and subsequently branches were established in other parts of the country (Armitage, 1981). The driving force behind its foundation was a New Zealander, Mrs. Gwenda Hurst, who came to Ireland in 1958. Recognising the need for an association of geography teachers that would be primarily concerned with the teaching of geography, she drew together “a nucleus of able teachers, fully representative of the schools and colleges, to act as a possible standing committee for the teaching of geography” (Armitage, 1981). Among the activities that reflect its broad aims encompassing the better teaching of geography are : the provision of lectures, workshops and field excursions ; liaison with the Department of Education and Science about syllabi and examinations ; consultation with and representation of organisations such as the Ordnance Survey, the National Committee for Geography and the National Commission for the Teaching of Geography ; and the publication of *Geographical Viewpoint* – a journal principally dedicated to geographical education issues.

The National Committee for Geography is a committee of the Royal Irish Academy. It has the functions of being both the liaison between the International Geographical Union and geographers in Ireland and also a forum for discussion of matters relating to the internal affairs of the Irish geographical community (Gillmor, 1976). Brief reports on its activities are published annually by the Royal Irish Academy. The National Commission for the Teaching of Geography was established by the National Committee for Geography in 1969 and, although it was not given specific terms of reference, its role was taken to encompass all matters pertaining to geographical education in Ireland (Gillmor, 1976). Over the years it has enjoyed a widely based membership, having representatives from all levels of education, and has brought a wide diversity of interests and viewpoints to bear on topics. It will cease to exist at the end of June, 2004.

Northern Ireland

Geography in civil society in Northern Ireland

- 53 When Emyr Estyn Evans sailed up Belfast Lough in September 1928 to take up a lectureship at Queen’s University, he could hardly have foreseen that he was about to put modern geography on the island of Ireland on a solid footing. Evans inaugurated the first Department of Geography in Ireland in Queen’s University Belfast, even though it was a

struggle to establish the discipline against shortages of space, money and psychological resistance. Many believed that geography should not exist at all in a university but, if it did, it should be as an appendage to geology (Evans, 1996). It was to be almost two decades before a Chair in Geography was created in 1945 and before a single honours school was allowed in 1947. After 40 years of teaching and research devoted to interpreting the life and landscapes of Ireland, Estyn Evans became the first Director of the new Queen's Institute of Irish Studies where he stamped the imprint of geography, although when he helped to set up the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra in 1958, he had already left its mark in a material way for future generations (Campbell, 1996). Just before he retired, a second chair of geography in Northern Ireland was created in 1967 when a Geography Department was established in the new University of Ulster at Coleraine (absorbing the existing Department at Magee College in Derry). In the same year, a four-year geography course received degree status in the two Colleges of Education, St Mary's and Stranmillis, which were later to become university colleges of Queen's University. Geography was securely embedded in Northern Ireland education and society.

- 54 To Evans, geography was of the people and for the people and he anchored it within civic life. Geographers today make their contributions in many spheres: education at every level, social and physical planning, housing, economic development, transport, tourism and the development of heritage and environmental centres. They are also called upon to advise on, for example, social and environmental problems. It is worth noting, too, that Belfast City Council has recently funded the Royal Irish Academy's forthcoming book on twentieth century Belfast, *Enduring City: Belfast 1901-2001*, which is both edited by and the work of geographers (Boal and Royle, forthcoming). It will be distributed to all schools and libraries in the city.

Geography in the educational system of Northern Ireland

- 55 Geography in education in Northern Ireland extends back beyond the nineteenth century when the daily routine in schools included the acquisition of locational knowledge by rote learning. The facts and figures learned from the textbooks supplied by government, the Christian Brothers and other educationalists in the national schools of the second half of the late nineteenth century involved no explanations. The main visual aid for this "Capes and Bays" geography was the map of Ireland which hung in most classrooms. By 1920s, secondary schools followed a syllabus which ensured that they knew about mapping and other data on Britain and the Empire, but interpretation was not required. It was popular in the years before Evans arrived and in his new department, therefore, he had an immediate supply of enthusiastic students for whom he designed a course in which relationships of human groups to their special environments were emphasised. Students learned to appreciate their immediate locale in its historic context at a time when the majority of them were rural dwellers, and to recognise that their area was a valuable part of the wider world. He was interdisciplinary in his method of enquiry and his preferred teaching method was field-based, observing and talking to people, a direct contrast to the university tradition (Fleure, 1971). His example soon filtered to the teacher training colleges where geography was a core subject.
- 56 Geography retained its high profile at all levels of education and by century's end, it had undergone several changes of perspective and pedagogy. In this century, building a more

inclusive Northern Ireland and preparation for living and working in an “interdependent global” society are now seen as central to education policy and practice (Keane, 2004). In that light, the current status of geography in Northern Ireland will be examined and the challenges and opportunities ahead will be considered.

- 57 Geography is thriving in Northern Ireland’s schools and is securely embedded in the statutory Northern Ireland Curriculum for 4-16 year olds. It provides the framework for developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes for understanding the local Northern Ireland community and its place in the wider world and, in most schools, geography is also home to environmental education, development education and education for sustainable development. The geographical education of children begins as soon as they start school at 4, but geography is only compulsory until the end of the third year of secondary education around the age of 14. Such are the numbers choosing to continue geography after the age of 14, however, that it has one of the highest entries for any of the optional subjects in the public school examinations at 16, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). In Summer 2003, there were almost 10,000 candidates, well ahead of history, the subject with which geography is traditionally compared. GCE Advanced Level (A-level) trends have also been very healthy. The examination entries for Summer 2003 mirrored previous years in that geography had more candidates than any other subject.
- 58 The attractiveness of geography at A-level may be connected to the strong local profile of geography in higher education. Courses are offered in the two universities and two university colleges and demand for places remains solid (Royle, 2003). Entry to undergraduate teacher education courses in geography in the university colleges is particularly competitive. Unsurprisingly, the quality of entrants to teacher education is reflected in well-qualified and knowledgeable teachers of geography in primary and secondary classrooms where their positive role has been commented on in a number of inspectorate reports (ETI, 2001 ; ETI, 2003). Indeed, the popularity of geography after age 14 is largely attributed to an enthusiastic, specialist teaching force, and a recent survey of student teachers connects their decision to choose geography as an A-level subject with their experience of interesting and enjoyable teaching during their GCSE years (Keane, 2004).
- 59 Even if inspectorate reports show that most primary school children love geography and that secondary students are keen on it too, their enthusiasm does not mean that they have the capacity to understand the issues facing different peoples, places and environments. In this regard, several themes are worthy of comment.
- 60 There has been growing concern that the subject is being marginalized in primary schools as the curriculum has tilted more towards English, Maths and Science, so as to prepare pupils for the selection tests for transfer to secondary school at age 11. Recent initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy have aggravated this imbalance. It is heartening to note in the 2003 Inspectorate report, however, that about an hour a week is being devoted to geography in most schools and more heartening still that pupils are asking for additional time. Good quality teaching contributes to this and reflects the interest and commitment of the majority of teachers, some of whom are well-qualified subject specialists. The Evans legacy is seen in that many schools use local environments, fieldwork and visits effectively. Up-to-date materials, maps and ICT equipment support their work. However, while teachers are encouraged to focus on the local community, the development of knowledge and understanding of living in a divided, if increasingly

multiethnic and multicultural, Northern Ireland is a challenge that needs to be addressed and links beyond the immediate area should be encouraged (ETI, 2003).

- 61 The strength of geography in secondary schools is that well-qualified subject specialists, who have the knowledge and the confidence to handle controversial subjects, mainly teach it. The most recent inspectorate report comments that the topicality of issues and themes and the range of places studied helps to avoid stereotypical portrayals of people and places. An increasing number of local, European and global school links are being developed, especially using ICT. However, great potential remains through geography-related activities for building on these local cross-community links to enhance mutual understanding. The interrelated nature of issues at every level also needs to be more strongly underlined and more emphasis needs to be placed on building students' capacity for independent learning.
- 62 However, it is easy to become complacent when geography appears to be flourishing. Close scrutiny of examination entries shows that, while the 2003 GCSE entries from grammar schools remain steady, those from non-selective schools have dropped, possibly because of the increasing popularity of cognate areas, such as social and environmental studies and travel and tourism courses which are perceived to be either easier options or more career-relevant. Competition, mainly at A-level, from newer subjects, such as Psychology and Sociology is growing. However, so far, A-level geography is still flourishing in the grammar schools, the source of 80% of candidates, while history has declined sharply. Ensuring progression between 11-14 may be timely advice from the inspectorate, since the future of geography will be dependent on ensuring that more students embark on GCSE courses. After that, continuing efforts will have to be made to persuade students to continue geography for their last two years at school so that there is a pool of potential students to study geography at university.
- 63 There are still sufficient applicants to fill the available places in third-level geography departments. The two universities and the university colleges offer courses which address issues of contemporary social, political and economic concern, locally, nationally and internationally. Although systematic courses on biogeography, climatology and so on are still taught, an applied environmental approach is more popular. However, Northern Ireland universities are alert to the downturn in applicants in Great Britain. In the new competitive climate, Geography now has to market itself as a subject which promotes the attainment and practice of intellectual, practical and other skills essential not just for academic study but also for the future workplace. The former teacher education colleges, now university colleges, have diversified. No longer do they offer, solely, four years of geography with education for a BEd degree. For example, St Mary's popular BA (Liberal Arts) degree has a format of three years of Geography with European Studies and Human Development Studies. University departments are showing creativity; in the University of Ulster, Geography is paired with a range of alternatives, among which are Media Studies, Languages and European Studies. All departments are strengthening their mutually supportive links with schools. The marketing of geography as being of value in the workplace has been crucial to its success to date.
- 64 At this point, the future of school geography, in particular, is difficult to predict. What is certain is that its future has ramifications for the whole system. Any discussion must be set against the backdrop of ongoing curriculum review that will affect pupils from age 3-16. A transformed curriculum is proposed which represents a logical continuum for 3-16 year olds and which has the objective of preparing young people to develop as

individuals and as contributors to society, the economy and the environment. It places the focus on learning for life and work and developing related skills. It is structured around statutory curriculum areas in both primary and secondary schools, geography being included as a subject strand of one of these curriculum areas, rather than as a freestanding subject. After age 14 it will disappear as a subject from the statutory curriculum. The challenge, in these new circumstances, is to ensure that young people are enabled to continue with geography for GCSE (taken at 16) and then to persuade them to retain it for the two succeeding years.

- 65 However, the cross-curricular collaboration envisaged in secondary teaching could have a significant bearing on GCSE uptake. The curriculum review proposes flexibility in arrangements for teaching and partly to encourage cross-curricular collaboration. While integrated learning is not new in primary schools, geography teachers in the secondary sector have reacted strongly against any erosion of subject-based teaching. This subject model, which has been shown to be effective and which has the support of a well-qualified pool of subject specialists, may well prove hard to break.
- 66 It is further proposed to insert citizenship as part of the curriculum and this is causing nervousness among some second-level geography teachers. This goes to the very heart of the proposals for a curriculum which aims to build a more inclusive Northern Ireland and to prepare young people for living and working in an interdependent “global” society. However, “Local and Global Citizenship” is seen as competition. It has prompted a heated reaction, especially as the curriculum review proposes that geography will not be available for study after age 14, whilst citizenship will remain compulsory. In primary schools, geography themes will make a citizenship contribution through the “Mutual Understanding in the Local and Wider Community”.
- 67 Are geographers now faced with the dilemma of being trapped within their subject boundaries? This may be far from the case. Few academic subjects touch issues of citizenship so closely. Citizenship’s embodying concepts mirror and enhance geographical themes of interdependence, identity, inclusion, diversity, equality, social justice, rights and responsibilities, sustainability and globalisation. These themes have long been at the heart of geography teaching in Northern Ireland and help explain why GCSE geography specifications map easily onto those of local and global citizenship. The curriculum has also included controversial issues dealing with Northern Ireland’s divided circumstances (Keane, 2004). It is no surprise, then, that geography teachers are leading the way in the pilot of the citizenship programme. However, the geography community may need to continue to promote a twenty-first century image or be ousted from the citizenship slot on the timetable after age 14.
- 68 In the wake of curriculum change in 1989, inspectorate reports showed that the geography teaching force embraced change confidently at both primary and secondary levels. That confidence to face change lay, and will continue to lie, in strong subject specialists. Far from being trapped by the new proposals, the prospect of fresh opportunities to reflect the rapidly changing world is invigorating for geography. It is a chance to lead the way, in both primary and secondary sectors, by crossing boundaries, curricular and cultural, whilst maintaining the cohesiveness of a strong and evolving subject that deals with real people and real concerns. These new times are exciting and challenging for school geography in Northern Ireland education.
- 69 There will be a spill over effect, however, for higher education and that may need to be planned for with regard to numbers, curricula and modes of learning. Initiatives to

support the integration of employability policies and strategies into geography and other university subjects are underway but need to be developed at the departmental level in the immediate future. As much as anything, those in higher education need to join with the rest of the geography community to plan and implement a coherent image-building strategy.

Geography and the media

- 70 Evans recognised early on the advantages of using the media to persuade people of the benefits of an education in geography. From 1934 onwards he made systematic use first of local radio so as to reach a large audience. He also appeared on the early days of television where his charisma won further support for geography. The popularising of geographical concerns through the use of a public museum was another success (Evans, 1996). More recently, geographers have made contributions as consultants or as interviewees on local radio and television programmes on social, political and economic, cultural and environmental affairs. However, they are less likely to be credited as geographers *per se* than are historians, psychologists, economists or political scientists. Television producers interviewed for this paper suggest that this arises because geographers are employed because of their expertise on specific issues rather than because of their discipline. To them, geography was defined as being about “mountains and rivers” or “countries and capitals”. We geographers may still underestimate the gap between our conception of our discipline and the image that the general public still holds. As for the main local newspapers and magazines, a trawl indicated that only a very occasional article written by local geographers appeared in a single year.
- 71 On the other hand, over the years, the media in Northern Ireland has been a great friend to geography education. Local BBC Radio and, later, local schools television have produced a geography output which brought the world of Northern Ireland into the classroom and, later still, Britain and Ireland along with other parts of Europe arrived by the same route. From time to time special newspaper features with local resources, written by teachers for teaching geography, have appeared and the Belfast Telegraph’s *Newspapers in Education Geography/ Literacy Project* is a recent example. Overall, there is every sign that public consciousness of geography in the twenty-first century could be raised to neutralize a public image which is many years out of date. It is up to geographers to sell their achievements more effectively as geography, not just within the geography community but to a wider audience. Evans used the media successfully and it remains for geographers of the new century to include its use as part of a coherent image-building strategy.

Relations between geography and the economical sphere/policy makers

- 72 It is no surprise that the research of geographers, working and living in recent years in Northern Ireland, has a strong concern for local political, cultural and socio-economic circumstances. That is not to say that international relationships are ignored and the European and North American dimensions, especially, have become more prominent. The European Union has a very strong influence on political, social and economic life and North American connections are both historical and contemporary.

- 73 Evans laid the foundations on which others have built. However, the work of F.W. Boal has been seminal in the many areas that human geographers have provided insights. Light shed by geographers on the dynamics of residential segregation, on ethno-national conflict and on landscapes of defence continue to inform planning at both micro and macro levels (see, for example, Boal, 1969; Boal and Douglas, 1982; Boal, 1990; Keane, 1990; Boal, 1994; Poole and Doherty, 1996; Boal, 1999; Murtagh, 2002). Government has shown interest, too, in studies on the spatial aspects of violence, the nature and expression of contested nationalisms and national conflict resolution (see Poole, 1983; Johnson, 1999; Shirlow, 2000; Anderson and Shuttleworth, 1998; Anderson and O'Dowd, 1999). As part of this concern with the North's "Troubles", the long-standing tradition of Irish historical geography has developed an Irish culture and identity "turn" and historical geographers and others have attempted to shed light on local identities (Graham, 1997; Boal, Keane and Livingstone, 1997; Graham 1998; Livingstone, Keane and Boal, 1998; Shirlow and Mc Govern, 1997). Geographers are contributing, too, to conserving landscape and identifying heritage potential and its implications for tourism. Even the weathering research group of QUB is engaged in attending to the decay of cultural heritage, though its work for private companies and a range of government departments locally and internationally has a more directly environmental stamp (see Smith and Warke, 1997; O'Neill, 2003; Gillespie and Royle, 2003).
- 74 The other aspect of geographical research addresses local socio-economic circumstances. For nearly thirty years, geographers have had an influence on policy as a result of insights provided. Current research, for example, on health-related matters is of government interest and even climate change researchers have got involved (Boal, Doherty and Pringle, 1974); Moore, Cook and Guyer, 1998; Cook, Poole, Pringle and Moore, 2000). There has continued to be a particular focus on unemployment and geographers are currently making an impact on unravelling the process of employment creation. Understanding the bigger picture has opened up recent research on global economies (Mc Kinstry and Shuttleworth, 1999; Nutley, 1999; Shuttleworth, Power and Mc Kinstry, 2000).

Conclusion

- 75 More than half a century ago, Evans felt that the geographer must first know the local instance (Glassie, 1996). To be sure, at any time geography will be imbued with the values, experiences and perceptions of the geographers' environment, how they evaluate it and how they hope to live in the future. Geographers working in Northern Ireland are reminded daily of their immediate world and it is no surprise that most remain solidly anchored in that context. Yet, it is a twenty-first century focus that is not exclusively focussed on the local society but is one which is also informed by broader perspectives.

The Geographical Association (GA)



The organisation of the geography society in Northern Ireland

The geography community is rather fragmented, insofar as each segment has its own preoccupations. Nonetheless, there are individuals and groups who interweave throughout the system and link the parts together.

There is a strong system of support for geography in schools that harnesses new technologies in communicating information and providing much of the advice. Advisors provide area-based curriculum support and in-service training and they coordinate province-wide courses and organise a major annual conference. These arrangements have created a common bond among secondary teachers of geography, in particular. Teachers welcome, too, the NI Support Unit Geography Panel as an opportunity for discussion when needed.

For some teachers and their sixth form students, The Geographical Association (GA) is an informal forum to meet with education advisors, members of the Northern Ireland curriculum organisation, the geography inspectorate and higher education colleagues, all gathered with a common interest. Shortly after Evans arrived in Belfast in 1928, he started a Belfast Branch of The Geographical Association as an organisation to get teachers together to learn from one another (Evans, 1996). It stimulated local interest and contributed to strengthening geography's input into education. The Geographical Association continues to meet in QUB's Geography Department. In the new century the GA still follows early traditions ; it sponsors evening lectures each month and still holds an annual field excursion and weekend refresher courses. A-level teachers and students, especially, appreciate its work and the Worldwide Quiz is a highlight.

There are structures, too, for geographers to work together on an all-island basis. The National Committee for Geography, with a home in the Royal Irish Academy, has very strong links with the International Geographical Union (IGU). Membership includes geographers from Ireland's universities, North and South, as well as geographers working in planning, the Ordnance Survey, agriculture and the environment. Professor Buttimer, President of IGU 2000-2004, is a member of the Committee. Its work has included, over the years, the production of an Atlas of Ireland, which it plans to update, and an Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape. The current Committee has reached an agreement with the Department of Foreign

Affairs to support geographers from developing countries in having a voice in international organisations such as the IGU.

For thirty five years The National Commission for the Teaching of Geography, a subgroup of the National Committee, has promoted and enhanced geographical education through influencing decision-making on new initiatives, both north and south of the border, especially on curriculum matters. The Commission, which maintains strong links with the IGU, has also provided contemporary insights over the years to geography educators from all parts of Ireland ; recent conferences and workshops have highlighted learning outside the classroom, the European dimension and intercultural education. At a time when crossing borders and reaching out into a wider world is so important for geographers and geography educators, it is a great regret that a decision has been taken to disband the National Commission after June 2004.



URBAN SUSTAINABILITY ? BOG MEADOWS CONSERVATION AREA, BELFAST



COMMUNITIES IN CONFLICT : PROCLAIMING THE MESSAGE IN A BELFAST STREET

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