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Community Planning and Spatial Planning in the Irish Border Region

Shaping the relationship between
people and place

Gavan Rafferty / Greg Lloyd





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Abbreviations

CPG	Corporate Policy Group
DoECLG	Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government
DoE	Department of the Environment
DRD	Department for Regional Development
DSD	Department for Social Development
ICLRD	International Centre for Local and Regional Development
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LDP	Local Development Plan
NPF	National Planning Framework
NSS	National Spatial Strategy
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
PPN	Public Participation Network
RDS	Regional Development Strategy
RPA	Review of Public Administration
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies
SPC	Strategic Policy Committee
SPPS	Strategic Planning Policy Statement

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide some thought on the impetus and essence of different contexts to community planning on the island of Ireland. In addition, a core dimension of this study is to discuss how expressions of community planning are being considered alongside the changing application of spatial planning systems in both jurisdictions. For that purpose, this report sets out the findings and conclusions of a study about the modernisation of local government on the island of Ireland. The research addresses how the reforms underway may improve the delivery of services for citizens and how such models relate to spatial planning, with a particular orientation towards the Irish border region.

The research aim was to explore the potential for a pooled sovereignty in the Irish border region with respect to integrated working for economic, social and environmental responsibilities (i) in each jurisdiction and (ii) between the jurisdictions with respect to the land-use planning and community planning interface. The study explores the interfaces between land-use planning (reforms) and community planning (innovation) in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the specific context of the Irish border region. There are vertical, horizontal and lateral dimensions to this potential interface and the context is febrile with questions around culture, capacity and competence in executing the new governance arrangements on an integrated basis.

1.1 Methodology

The research utilised on a number of different methods to capture understanding of contemporary applications of community planning and spatial planning on the island of Ireland. These were conducted over the winter months of 2014/2015. The evidence informing this report has been gathered through a combination of:

- Academic research and review of existing scholarly literature relating to community planning, spatial planning, local government modernisation and cross-border collaboration across Europe;
- Analyses of policy documents, guidance, strategies and reports on community planning and local government reorganisation across the island of Ireland; and
- Empirical research collected through semi-structured interviews with Chief Executives from Councils in the Irish border region.

Taken together, the activities have provided material to develop an understanding of how community planning and spatial planning are progressing in each jurisdiction, and the potential for greater collaboration between these evolving governance structures.

1.2 Setting the context

The past couple of decades has brought with it substantial change to public administration across the island of Ireland. In governance terms, the current period of local government reorganisation in both the Republic of Ireland (heretofore referred to as 'Ireland') and Northern Ireland appear to be converging somewhat. Both governments have identified the need for vibrant local government systems. At the heart of the reforms in both jurisdictions is the objective of re-positioning local government to become the democratically accountable leader for economic, social and environmental sustainability. This new central role in the lives of communities throughout both jurisdictions should allow local government to lead and promote coherent and coordinated approaches for social and economic development.

In Northern Ireland, the scale and extent of reform is encapsulated by the on-going Review of Public Administration (RPA). Initiated in 2002 by the Northern Ireland Executive, the reform set out to review the arrangements for the accountability, development, administration and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland. In Ireland, the past decade or more has witnessed several reports that have called for improvements to local service delivery and the importance of the local democratic process to any re-configuration process.

1.3 (Dis)entangling definitions and themes

On the face of it, terms like community planning and land-use planning appear to be relatively simple concepts. However, sometimes they are misunderstood. At the outset it would be helpful to disentangle the different understandings of *planning* which currently have currency in governance arrangements across Ireland and the devolved nations of the UK. These suggest the need for caution in debating the spirit and purpose of community planning, which is commonly expressed as integrated service delivery in the devolved nations of the UK.

First, *land-use planning* is commonly understood as the statutory arrangements for the regulation and forward

management of land and property development in the broader public interest. Therefore, the planning system aims to create better places for people to live, work and play. At its core, land-use planning is about striking a balance between allowing development of land and buildings to support economic development, and providing the things we as a society need (like homes, jobs, shops and transport). In the case of Ireland, this is the responsibility of local government working within strategic policy guidance set by central government, but in Northern Ireland centralised arrangements prevail. However, through local government reform in Northern Ireland, land-use planning powers will be transferred from central government to local government in April 2015. Land-use planning reflects local civil, political and administrative experience. Land-use planning tends to be what most people recognise as planning – it is highly contested and politicised. In general, land use planning tends to be site specific with a focus on individual development schemes although each decision has to take account of wider material and policy considerations.

The concept of *strategic planning* is important as a maturation of land-use planning. Strategic planning involves the territorial management of land-use and development in the public interest. This has taken various forms – the emphasis on regional planning, for example, promotes a more comprehensive perspective on land and property development and infrastructure provision. Across the island there is a tradition of strategic planning to address complex spatial change, in the form of the *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS) in Ireland and the *Regional Development Strategy* (RDS) in Northern Ireland.

Drawing on an established European tradition, *spatial planning* also goes further than land-use planning to embrace sectoral planning, regeneration and the spatial components of local service delivery. It promotes connectivity across geographies and seeks to integrate health, welfare, education as well as economic and environmental agendas that involve a spatial dimension. Therefore, *spatial planning* can be considered an integrative tool to shape land (use) and (the social use of) space.

In more recent times *community planning* has been devised to promote the social, economic and environmental well-being of an area through identifying long-term objectives for achieving sustainable development. It is a council-led activity, working in partnership with other service providers and

communities to improve service delivery, integration, transparency and performance management. Its origins may be traced to regeneration initiatives, allied to local community partnership working and integrated delivery. There is a powerful democratic thread to community planning.

The significance of these definitions is important – they are not static or passive activities but they exhibit a dynamic and changing morphology with respect to their individual processes and in terms of their relationships with one another.

For Northern Ireland the relationship between land-use planning and community planning is all important as these are bound up with the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland, and to some extent with the reform in Ireland. Although it is expressed differently in Ireland, local government reorganisation captures the essence of community planning, as described above, through its introduction of the new responsibility for local economic and community development.



2. Reform of Local Government in Northern Ireland

The machinery of governance in Northern Ireland is going through the final stages of the most radical reconfiguration since the 1970s. A core part of the modernisation agenda is Local Government Reform (LGR) and can be considered the final pillar of the wider Review of Public Administration (RPA) process. RPA was launched by the Northern Ireland Executive in June 2002 with the remit of reviewing the arrangements for the accountability, development, administration and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland.

The structure of public administration in Northern Ireland has evolved in a piecemeal fashion since the *Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 1972*. The current governance arrangements in Northern Ireland dates back to 1999, following the devolution of power

to the Northern Ireland Assembly as a result of the 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. Essentially, the Agreement formed a consociational power-sharing arrangement, an institutional infrastructure that was “designed to address the patterns of relationships which constituted the conflict” (Farrington, 2008: 1). Since May 2007, following the St. Andrews Agreement, the political institutions have been experiencing their ‘first consistent period of devolved administrative stability’ (Knox, 2011: 548).

At the heart of this review is the reorganisation of local government, reducing the number of councils from 26 to 11 (Figure 1.1). The ambition is to create strong democratic institutions for the basis of sustained economic growth and social development. This agenda is bound up, in part, with devolution in Northern Ireland, associated with wider constitutional reform in the UK, which has also seen powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, and the future possibility of English regional assemblies, following Scotland’s independence referendum in 2014.

Figure 1.1 – New local council boundaries post April 2015.



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(Source: DoE, 2014a)

The creation of efficient and effective public administration is essential to the social, economic and environmental well-being of Northern Ireland. Integral to this restructuring is the renewal and reform of public services to ensure that: (1) policymaking is more strategic, better aligned, and ultimately joined up; (2) public services are high quality and efficient; (3) public service users, not providers, are the focus of new governance activities; and (4) extensive and diverse input by citizens into the decision-making process at local government level. In essence, the aims of the current reform are to:

- Establish new governance arrangements for councils to ensure fair and transparent decision-making;
- Develop a council-led community planning process;
- Transfer functions¹ from central to local government;
- Develop appropriate performance management systems for councils

2.1 Community Planning

The *Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014* will place a statutory duty on all new local authorities ('District Council') to enable integrated service delivery through 'community plans' for promoting the social, economic and environmental well-being of their area. The process of community planning will come into effect in April 2015. This new function is chiefly concerned with collaborative working between service providers that seeks to integrate the delivery of services within local government from a variety of delivery bodies. Community Planning offers an innovative way to consider how public services are planned and delivered. The outputs of the community planning process in Northern Ireland will be a co-produced community plan, which provides long-term objectives for achieving sustainable development. Like Wales and Scotland, this new integrative model of community planning appears to mainstream the principles of sustainable development into the core operations of local governance (Williams, 2002).

The duty of Community Planning, operating at district council level in Northern Ireland, creating a Community Planning Partnership, introduces a new sub-regional approach to governance. This strategic partnership board will lead the community planning process in a district council area. It offers the potential to improve the strategic approach to intra-authority and inter-

organisational activities, making efficient use of scarce resources through civic and community leadership, identifying clear roles and responsibilities, and innovative and genuine citizen engagement (DoE, 2009). A previous Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Jeff Rooker, clearly articulated the vision and role for community planning:

"I want Councils to have the central role in delivering joined-up services. That will be achieved through a new system of community planning with a statutory duty on Councils to develop and coordinate the delivery of a plan to address the requirement of their communities. ...Complementary with community planning will go a power of well-being, giving Councils the statutory cover to work innovatively for the good of their communities and fill in the gaps between public sector organisations."
(DoE, 2006: 3)

At its heart, community planning will be a new opportunity at local level to develop inter-sectoral working and implement a shared vision for promoting the well-being of areas. It will operate in a two-tier model of public administration, which hopes to clarify responsibility and accountability for the delivery of public services. In a way, community planning seeks to consolidate, or reverse, the process of institutional fragmentation. Policy proposals indicate that this ambition will be achieved by ensuring that the ownership of community planning is secured vertically and horizontally within public agencies, service providers and with local communities. The process aims to improve connection between regional, local and neighbourhood levels through partnership working and more integrated use of resources.

Another strong theme of this new model of local government is the establishment of a new civic infrastructure and culture that promotes active democratic engagement and consensus-building, through such techniques as visioning, so as to ensure a greater sensitivity to people and place. The aims of community planning require collaborative working amongst different organisations and stakeholder groups to design objectives more responsive to local communities and user groups. The strong emphasis on community re-engagement in the community planning process allows for strengthening community

¹ A number of functions which are currently delivered by Northern Ireland Executive Departments will be carried out by local councils from April 2015. These include (but are not limited to): local planning functions; off-street parking; local economic development; community development (from April 2016); and urban regeneration (from April 2016).

involvement in the shaping, planning and delivery of local visions and services. Considering communities of place, identity and interest, in their broadest conceptualisation, will provide a wider constituency of influence over service delivery arrangements.

In appreciating how this new function aligns with the main aspirations of the *Programme for Government*, community planning should be considered in relation to: the wider programme of local government modernisation; articulating a new arena within which to stimulate active citizenship; and, empowering local communities to become more active in decision-making processes. However, guidance on how communities will engage with the community planning process still remains unclear.

Bearing in mind Northern Ireland's recent troubled past, a significant addition to the initial Terms of Reference, established by the Local Government Taskforce Community Planning Sub-Group, was clear articulation of the need to foster good community relations and to promote and protect shared space and shared services in local communities (DoE, 2006). There is evidence that aspects of equality, good relations and social inclusion, which were enshrined in the *Northern Ireland Act 1998*, and important to the 'normalisation' of Northern Ireland, are to be embedded into all stages of the community planning process.

Policy alignment like this, and the introduction of the General Power of Competence², embeds innovation into the community planning process to enable councils to promote or improve the well-being of their district. This potentially allows councils to be the 'glue' that meshes together interventions to address multifaceted problems. Such synergistic thinking and application, which traditionally has been so difficult for government departments, operating in a 'silo' mentality, may create opportunities for aligning strategic public policy goals with local community action.

The challenges for community planning in Northern Ireland relate to its context (Review of Public Administration, new local authorities, new structures and new responsibilities). Therefore, how community planning positions itself within the governance arrangements will be crucial to its success. The transfer of functions from central government departments, and new powers to be introduced as part of local

government reorganisation, is premised on the ideas of promoting greater collaborative gain through more efficient partnership working, as well as the creation of shared spaces and services, to deliver significant social change, chiefly under the strategic objectives of building a stronger and shared society (Programme for Government, 2012). The introductory years of community planning will optimise information and expertise from existing partnerships structures, knitting together existing networks into a more coherent, integrated framework to help deliver community plans. However, reconfigured thematic partnerships may emerge as community planning operations evolve.

To summarise, community planning provisions are a new apparatus for co-operative models of partnership working in local governance to inform the design and implementation of quality local services. It offers a conduit in which to consider the ethics and operation of a new civic culture by: modernising the state and the machinery of government (through the Review of Public Administration); embarking upon a course of democratic renewal and civic renaissance (through Local Government reorganisation and planning reform); and, offering opportunities for developing social learning (through community action and community-based learning to influence decision-making and service delivery).

2.2 Spatial Planning

The recent *Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011* provides the legislative basis for the comprehensive restructuring of forward planning to improve efficiency and effectiveness, facilitate earlier community engagement and consultation, with communities taking a stronger role in influencing development in their local areas. The Act proposes a new two-tier planning system and will introduce a two stage approach to plan production, comprising:

- "A Plan strategy, which must be prepared for the council area and must set out the council's objectives in relation to the development and use of land in its district; its strategic policies for the implementation of those objectives; and other relevant matters; and
- A Local Policies Plan which must be prepared, after the plan strategy has been adopted, and must set out the council's local policies consistent with the council's plan strategy." (Source: DoE, 2014b: 22)

² While there is considerable debate about the legislative meaning and interpretation of this statement, what this means for councils, in broad terms, will be having the ability to act with a similar freedom to an individual, unless there is a law to prevent it from doing so. It would provide a council with the ability to act in its own interest and to develop innovative approaches to addressing issues in its area.

The planning policy context is changing alongside the transfer of planning powers to local government. Whereas the existing system has a suite of planning policies to guide decision making, the aim is to have a Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) (DoE, 2014b) that will act as a single document to inform the operations of planning in the new council environment. The draft SPPS was published in February 2014 and sets out the Department of the Environment's regional planning policies for securing sustainable development under a reformed two-tier local planning system.

While considerable discussion has emerged about the consolidation of planning policy into this new strategic document, what is significant for the operationalisation of planning is the inclusion of planning's role in creating and enhancing shared space. In Section 3, Core Planning Principles, the Statement refers to the Executive's "Together: Building a United Community" strategy (OFMDFM, 2013), stating that

"Shared spaces are places where there is a sense of belonging for everyone, where relationships between people from different backgrounds are most likely to be positive, and where differences are valued and respected" (DoE, 2014b: 14). The acknowledgment that the planning system has a supporting role in assisting this social policy is an important first step on a learning journey. The policy speaks to aspects of the type, location and design of developments that may "facilitate interaction between members of the community who might not otherwise come into contact with each other" (DoE, 2014b: 14-15).

The emphasis is on the new local planning authorities, in the reformed local government system, making use of their forward planning, regeneration and development management powers "to contribute to the creation of an environment that is: accessible to all communities; socially and religiously mixed; has a high standard of connectivity, and supports shared use of public realm" (DoE, 2014b: 15). The combination of the Plan Strategy and the Local Policies Plan, collectively known as the Local Development Plan (LDP), will have to "take account of any 'good relations' policies set out within a local Community Plan by considering the criteria of equality of opportunity, reconciliation, mobility and connectivity in their formulation" (DoE, 2014b: 15). This is commendable. However, the operationalisation of this objective by planners and council officials will be challenging for several reasons. Firstly, the post-2015 local government context is likely to be fraught

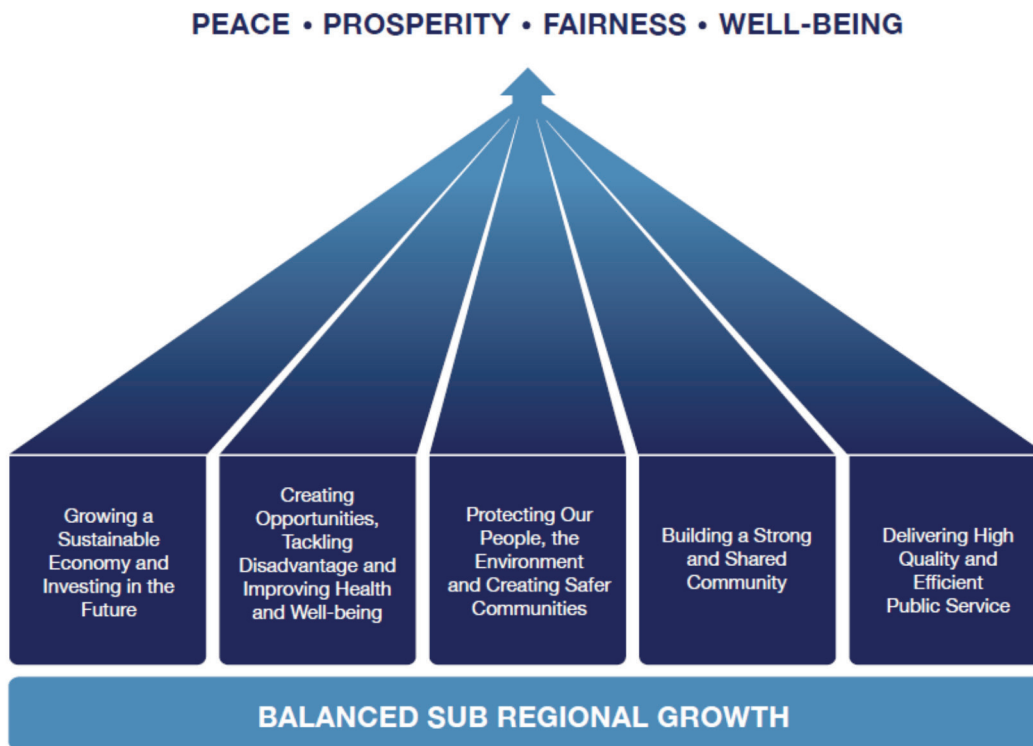
with the capacity to absorb the wide range of powers transferring to the councils. Secondly, many new councils may not have community plans developed that articulate good relation elements, as specified in the draft SPPS. Thirdly, little attention has been given to the interface between the new spatial planning system and community planning functions to date.

The responsibility for strategic planning will remain with central government. The recently revised *Regional Development Strategy 2035, Building a Better Future* (DRD, 2012), provides an appropriate regional spatial planning framework for the new local councils. The strategy clearly establishes the practical regional context for development planning by local authorities and also informs development management processes. The ambition is to create balanced sub-regional growth through several objectives (see Figure 2.1).

As context is important, the strategy also appears to strengthen the strategic ambition of community cohesion, articulating the need to build shared and safer communities. Reference in strategic guidelines (SG20: Strengthen community cohesion) to developing integrated services and facilities, and community participation puts an onus on the planning enterprises (spatial planning and community planning) that shape places. It draws attention to the relationship between people and place. This relationship will be significant for nurturing a symbiotic relationship between community planning and spatial planning (Figure 2.2).

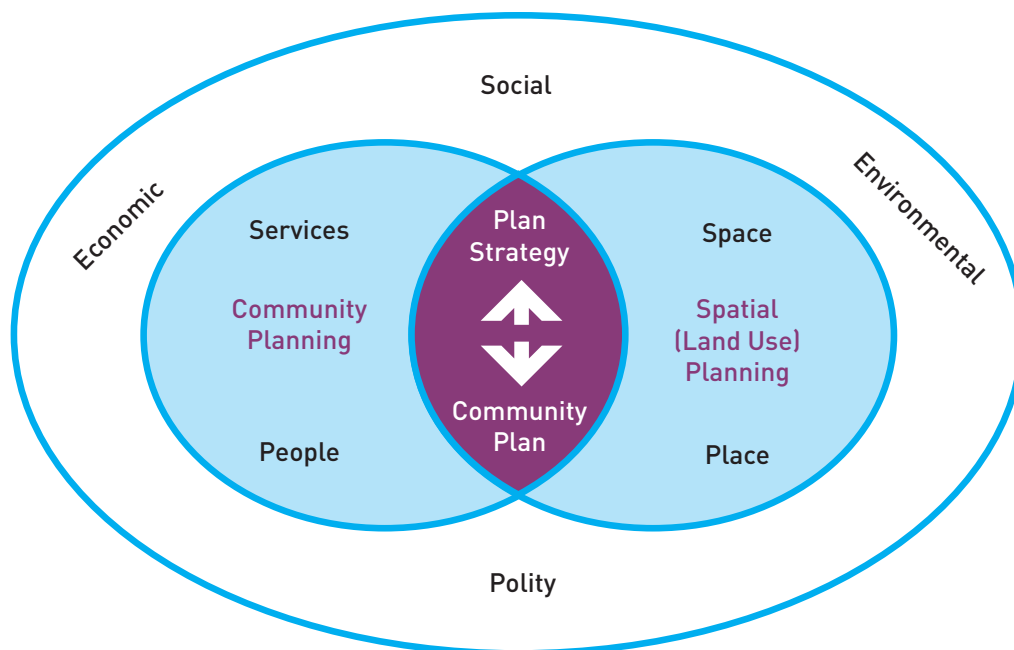
The recent community planning guidance for Councils (DoE, 2013) promotes the integration of community planning, spatial planning and regeneration to recouple these functions at the new spatial scale of local government. The significance of this realignment will be to afford councils the ability to align land-use/physical development with quality public services to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being. Like Scotland, the idea is to have regeneration mainstreamed into the local authority, alongside community planning and spatial planning, as tools to manage change in a much more co-ordinated way than was previously undertaken through inter-departmental operationalisation. This offers a significant departure from the previous model of splintered institutional operations, which has been subject to criticism for delivering a very fragmented approach to shaping place. The ambition through the current period of reform is to enable the new councils to take a more strategic, local authority-led approach that involves citizens in place-shaping to deliver sustainable change.

Figure 2.1 – Strategy principles towards achieving balanced sub-regional growth



(Source: DRD, 2012)

Figure 2.2 – illustration of the relationship between community planning and spatial planning



(Source: Authors own)

3. Reform of Local Government in Ireland

The Irish Government's 'Putting People First' - Action Programme for Effective Local Government, launched by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, in October 2012, represented a significant policy change in relation to local government. The vision captured in this new programme seeks to place local government as:

"the main vehicle of governance and public service at local level – leading economic, social and community development, delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably." (DoECLG, 2012: 21)

The principal element of the proposal is to give local government a more central coordinating role in local economic and community development. Allied to this is the outcome of achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in local and community development programming, and improving the delivery of services for citizens and communities.

An interesting feature to this reform was the wider reorganisation of the governance landscape. In practice, this represents a rationalisation, integrating town and county governance with integrated authorities organised on the basis of municipal districts within counties. After the recent change, the local and regional landscape now consists of:

- County/city level (26 County Councils, 3 City Councils, 2 City and County Councils);
- Municipal district level (95 municipal districts); and
- Regional level (3 regional assemblies).

The legal provision for the reform is articulated in the *Local Government Reform Act 2014*, which was enacted on 27 January 2014. The Act provides the legislative framework for a modernised and streamlined system of local administration, which enhances the electoral mandate, through a restructured committee system, consisting of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs), Corporate Policy Groups (CPGs) and the introduction of a new committee provision, known as the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC). Consequently, this shift necessitates the dissolution of County and City Development Boards. However, the

new arrangements, coupled with a stronger role for local authorities in enterprise support and economic development, will mean that local and community development activities will be the responsibility of the LCDC, while the economic aspects will be integrated within the SPC for economic development and enterprise of the new local authority committee structure (as stipulated by the insertion in section 41(a) of the *Local Government Reform Act 2014*).

3.1 Corporate Policy Groups (CPGs)

The role of the CPG is very much strategic in nature, linking and coordinating the work of the different SPCs of the council. It is to be chaired by the Cathaoirleach of an authority, in conjunction with the chairs of each of the SPCs. In effect, the CPG provides a forum for discussing policy issues, at the strategic level, which transcend the remit of individual SPCs and municipal districts to develop synergies across a diverse range of local authority operations and to nurture greater policy alignment. In doing so, the CPG is charged to advise and assist the council, particularly in relation to the following matters:

- Play a key role in preparing the budget;
- Provide input to the full council on any matter of general concern to the council;
- Determine responsibility for discharge of reserved functions as between the municipal district level (or a specific municipal district) and the local authority, where the question consistency or avoidance of unnecessary duplication is referred to it by the Chief Executive;
- Monitor the overall performance of a local authority;
- Deal with overall issues in relation to service delivery plans, customer service, value for money, etc.;
- Co-ordinate the work of the SPCs and monitor their work programmes;
- Request SPCs to consider particular policy issues where appropriate; and
- Provide feedback to the SPCs on council policy and views in areas relevant to the SPCs.

3.2 Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)

The SPCs are tasked with assisting councils with their formulation, development and review of policy. They are multi-thematic in nature, given the range of statutory responsibilities, functions and services of a local authority. The SPC system is intended to bring together elected members and sectoral representatives (working in social, economic, cultural and environmental bodies)

to develop and review policies, and establish priorities for particular services. A major advantage of the SPCs composition is the fact that it represents local sectoral interests, including the trade union, farming, environmental and community/voluntary sectors, along with the business community, which will constitute at least one third of the membership of SPCs. Being strategic in nature, SPCs are required to have regard to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies proposed by the Regional Assembly.

3.3 Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)

The establishment of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) in local councils in Ireland represent a significant departure from what existed before. Their purposes are to develop, coordinate and implement a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development, similar in a way to community planning in Northern Ireland. The LCDC, like the CPG and SPCs, is a committee of the local authority. However, unlike the CPG and SPCs, the LCDC exhibits independence, in terms of the performance of its functions – it is not a creature, as such, of the local authority.

The composition of LCDCs will consist of local authority members and officials, state agency representatives and stakeholders actively working with local development, community development and economic, cultural and environmental organisations. Having this configuration brings better integration, allowing for a more joined-up approach to the coordination and implementation of local and community development programmes/interventions.

The essence of LCDCs is articulated in the following points, drawn from the DoECLG's (2014: 9-10) *Guidelines for the Establishment of Local Community Development Committees*:

- To prepare the community elements of a 6-year Local Economic and Community Plan (the Plan);
- To implement, or arrange for the implementation of, the community elements of the Plan;
- To review the community elements of the Plan at least once within the period of 6 calendar years and, if necessary, to amend the community elements of the Plan;
- To monitor on an on-going basis the implementation of the community elements of the Plan and, if appropriate, to revise the actions and strategies set

to achieve the objectives of the community elements of the Plan;

- To coordinate, manage and oversee the implementation of local and community development programmes that have been approved either by the relevant local authority or by agreement between the LCDC and a relevant public authority (e.g. government department, State agency etc.);
- To improve the coordination of public-funded local and community development programmes and reduce duplication, in addition to public-funded programmes, to coordinate generally the local and community development programmes within the operational area of the LCDC;
- To consider a draft of the economic elements of the Plan and adopt a statement for consideration of the Council in this regard;
- To prepare an annual report on the performance of its functions;
- Drive meaningful citizen and community engagement in the scoping, planning, delivery and evaluation of local and community development programmes;
- Pursue a more cost efficient administration of local and community development programmes and delivery structures, the matching of resources to priorities and better value-for-money in the management and delivery of programmes; and
- Focus on learning and feedback, enhancing the links between service delivery and policy development.

3.4 Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)

As stated above, the purpose of the LECP is to set out, for a six-year period, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of the relevant local authority area. Therefore, local economic and community plans comprise two elements: (1) an economic element to be prepared by the local authority and (2) a community element prepared by the LCDC. The two elements will be prepared separately but in parallel.

The LECP will consist of high level goals on the respective economic and community streams for the integrated Local Economic and Community Plan. In many ways, the plan is thematic in nature, similar to the emerging community plans that will be produced after April 2015 in Northern Ireland. Like its northern equivalent, the Local Economic and Community Plan must be consistent with regional planning policy, however, they also have to align with subsequent Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs),

prepared by the Regional Assemblies, and the forthcoming National Planning Framework (NPF), which will replace the current *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS). Furthermore, the Local Economic and Community Plan should be consistent with the statutory City/County Development Plan. Sequencing becomes significant, whether it is the development (land-use) plan that informs the Local Economic and Community Plan, or whether it is the other way round. As it is currently expressed, in policy guidance, it would appear that the development plan should inform the Local Economic and Community Plan. However, as each evolves, there may be the opportunity for them to develop through a more reciprocal relationship, or were they would be jointly produced, perhaps.

There is evidence that the economic and community elements of the new integrated plans in Ireland, and the land-use planning functions, are mutually supportive for delivering robust place-shaping mechanisms to build sustainable communities and nurture economic growth. This clearly demonstrates institutional capacity, or 'thickness' as Healey (1997; 1998) would describe, in which collective learning capacity is developed through networks to improve service delivery and spatial planning.

Both types of integrated plans, in Ireland and Northern Ireland, will be positioned at a strategic context, operating at the local council level. Like the community plans proposed for Northern Ireland, the Local Economic and Community Plans in Ireland will consist of four broad phases: (1) preparation; (2) public engagement; (3) development and refinement of objectives, and joint working; and, (4) moving into delivery, action, and monitoring of the plan.

3.5 Public Participation Network (PPN)

A significant contribution to the Irish context is the proposed new framework for public engagement and participation, to be called the *Public Participation Network* (PPN). This new network will be developed within each local authority area to enable the public to take an active, formal role in policy-making and oversight.

There is recognition by the Irish government that local government's role in the area of community and enterprise, in particular, has evolved well beyond that of a service provider to an enabler of local community and economic development. The PPN provides an advancement of this approach, providing strong

provision of bottom-up capacity and input to Local Economic and Community Plans.

3.6 Spatial Planning

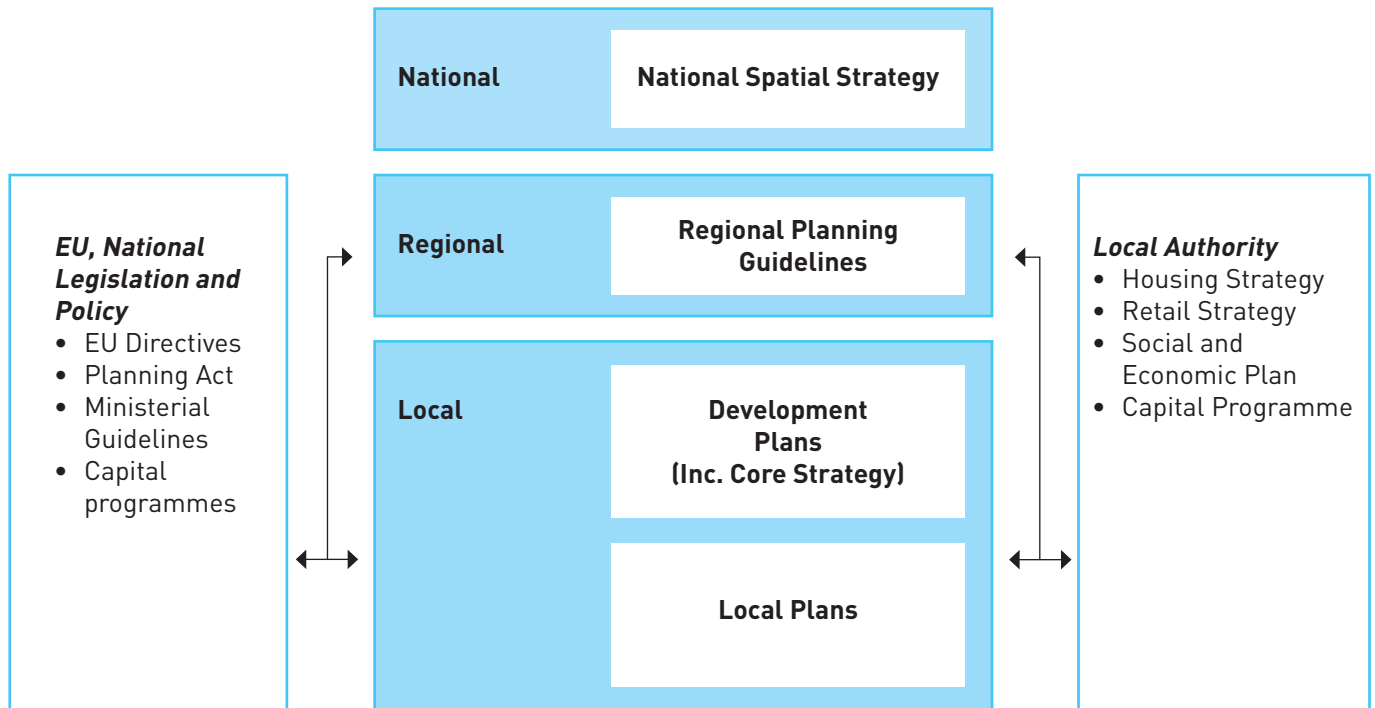
In Ireland, as with other countries in Europe, it can be argued that planning systems have been shifting towards a broader and more strategic approach to spatial planning, over a traditional focus on purely physical or land-use development. Like Northern Ireland, Ireland has an established national spatial planning framework, the *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS), to guide strategic direction and manage spatial change. Unlike Northern Ireland, the local authority has had a much longer responsibility for operationalising the planning system (in preparing development plans and development management). Figure 3.1 illustrates the hierarchy of planning in Ireland.

Given that spatial planning functions have been operating in local government for several decades, alongside other functions, such as housing, transportation, recreation and environmental matters, there is a strong argument to assume that greater integration is occurring.

The recent *Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010* extends and amends the Planning Acts of 2000 – 2009. The principal aim of this Act is to support economic renewal and sustainable development. As part of the Act, Development Plans and Local Area Plans should have a closer alignment with the *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS) and Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs).

While legislation in Ireland does not provide a statutory link between spatial planning and community planning processes, like it does in Northern Ireland, there is evidence emerging that councils in Ireland appreciate the need to link development plans with the new LECPs.

Figure 3.1 - Hierarchy of planning in Ireland



(Source: adapted from Cussen, 2014)

4. The Context for Convergence

The European Union's focus on territorial cohesion has increased the importance of cross-border cooperation. In particular, contemporary governance arrangements challenge how authorities and stakeholders consider ways to nurture harmonious development and innovative integrated approaches that address spatial and sectoral issues (Knippschild, 2011). At the same time, tentative arguments are emerging to support the notion that with the modernisation of government and governance systems across European member states, spatial planning systems are reforming with a degree of convergence around *policy goals*, e.g. achieving sustainable development, building sustainable and resilient communities, addressing demographic change (Stead, 2013). The same could be said for new structures in local government, such as community planning in Northern Ireland and local economic and community plans in Ireland. However, Stead (2013) also found, there is little evidence for convergence of both *policy outcomes*, such as development patterns and sharing services, and *policy instruments*, such as impact assessment techniques, targets and indicators, and public participation techniques in, chiefly, spatial planning practice. What is significant from the body of literature in this area is the need for further research around how current periods of reform to both spatial planning approaches and wider governance arrangements offer scope to pool resources and expertise to address shared policy goals across borders.

Set against this backdrop, the *Framework for Cooperation – Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland* was published by the Department for Regional Development (Northern Ireland) and Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (Republic of Ireland). The 2013 framework “is a non-statutory approach to providing advice and guidance at relevant spatial or geographical scales. It seeks to encourage policy-makers in the public sector to take account of the wider impact of their work, to recognise and exploit opportunities for a wider perspective and to avoid ‘back to back’ planning” (DRD and DoECLG, 2013: 2).

The significance of this inter-jurisdictional strategic planning framework is that it highlights the operational realities of facilitating cross-border planning and governance between Ireland and Northern Ireland. It

asserts a joint commitment to securing a cooperative approach between the two states through a non-statutory document. This is a specific approach which rests on agreement and cooperative working. On the one hand, the *Framework for Cooperation* does not present a formal, material spatial planning framework which seeks compliance and deliberate actions to common ends by both states. On the other hand, it does raise questions about the ‘fit’ between various operations – *policy instruments* – in the cross border space. Thus, whilst the rules of the game have been changed by this informal arrangement, its implementation rests on the various organisations – local authorities and planning agencies – involved in that particular geographical area.

At one level, the intellectual and practical development of the *Framework for Cooperation* forms part of a concerted effort to promote more effective joint working between the two territories. This is part of the political and diplomatic momentum initiated by the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. In practical terms, both the UK (Northern Ireland) and Ireland have sought to promote greater cohesion and connectivity across a number of practical functions, including the provision of energy infrastructure and transport linkages between the two states.

At another level, there are recognised working relations between the established strategic and local planning arrangements on the island of Ireland. These are not stable, however, as both territories are undergoing a period of flux in their respective arrangements. In Ireland, a *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS), sits alongside a *National Development Plan* (NDP) and a local zoning-based land use planning system. The NSS – and its forthcoming successor, the National Planning Framework (NPF) – asserts a national strategy for planning and development and set out how Ireland can be spatially structured and developed over the next twenty years. The Strategy sets out to achieve coordinated development between various localities and, in particular, to achieve more balanced regional development, while still recognising the importance of Dublin as an economic centre. This asserts one strategic framework which is relatively integrated, with a clear hierarchical structure and set of cascading policies.

In contrast, Northern Ireland comprises a more fragmented governance framework with a separate *Regional Development Strategy* (RDS), with discretionary application to the regulatory land-use

planning system. The RDS is not limited to land-use matters, however, but seeks to present a more integrated strategic decision-making framework which reflects the inter-relationships between physical development, and economic, social and environmental matters in Northern Ireland. It recognises the uncertainties arising as a consequence of prevailing economic and financial conditions and it asserts strategic principles to consider infrastructure investment and key projects. Particular attention is paid to external and internal communications; renewable energy; waste management; and climate change projects.

Whilst both strategic policy frameworks are very different in design and process, both are also the subject of reform and modernisation. This is not then a level playing field for strategic cooperation and this is particularly evident in the border region. However, the development of the *Framework for Cooperation* provides momentum to improve interaction between civic, political and institutional actors that better addresses the socio-spatial challenges of place-making in the border region.

At local government level, there are ongoing challenges for the delivery of public services. Increased fragmentation, the splitting apart of local government functions and the proliferation of partnerships are common arguments that hinder the development of a joined-up approach. Separate proposals, as outlined above, are emerging in local government reorganisation in both jurisdictions to address these challenges. In Northern Ireland, the proposal to introduce community planning will herald the reorganisation of local government, together with the transfer of statutory land use planning functions from the centre to the new local authorities. Moreover, with there being a statutory link between these two planning enterprises, as articulated in both their respective pieces of legislation, there is the prospect of creating greater alignment between service delivery and land use planning. This should cultivate a better approach to spatial planning within council areas in Northern Ireland, similar to what has been developing in Ireland. With similar capacities and competencies emerging on either side of the border, there could be the possibility of executing a more mature style of spatial planning on the island of Ireland.

Building on this train of thought, the growth in what has been described as 'community planning' has coincided with the shift towards spatial planning, which claims to be "a new kind of planning that goes 'beyond'

what is described as 'traditional land use' planning" (Taylor, 2010: 195). Allmendinger and Haughton (2009: 632) posit a new dimension to the notion of spatial planning, indicating that much of the "real work of planning takes place outside the formal system for planning, but necessarily with strong linkages to it." Instead of viewing the function of planning in its narrow, regulatory mechanics, spatial planning offers a *modus operandi* that tries to integrate and co-ordinate wider influences within places, focusing on the qualities and management of both space and place. It must, therefore, relate to the wider institutional and social resources through which such frameworks are implemented, challenged and transformed (Davoudi, Crawford and Mehmood, 2009). This presents an argument for stronger integration between spatial planning and wider functions of local government, which takes common *policy goals* to design more efficient *policy instruments* and deliver effective *policy outcomes* that straddle the Irish border region.

4.1 Emerging opportunities and challenges

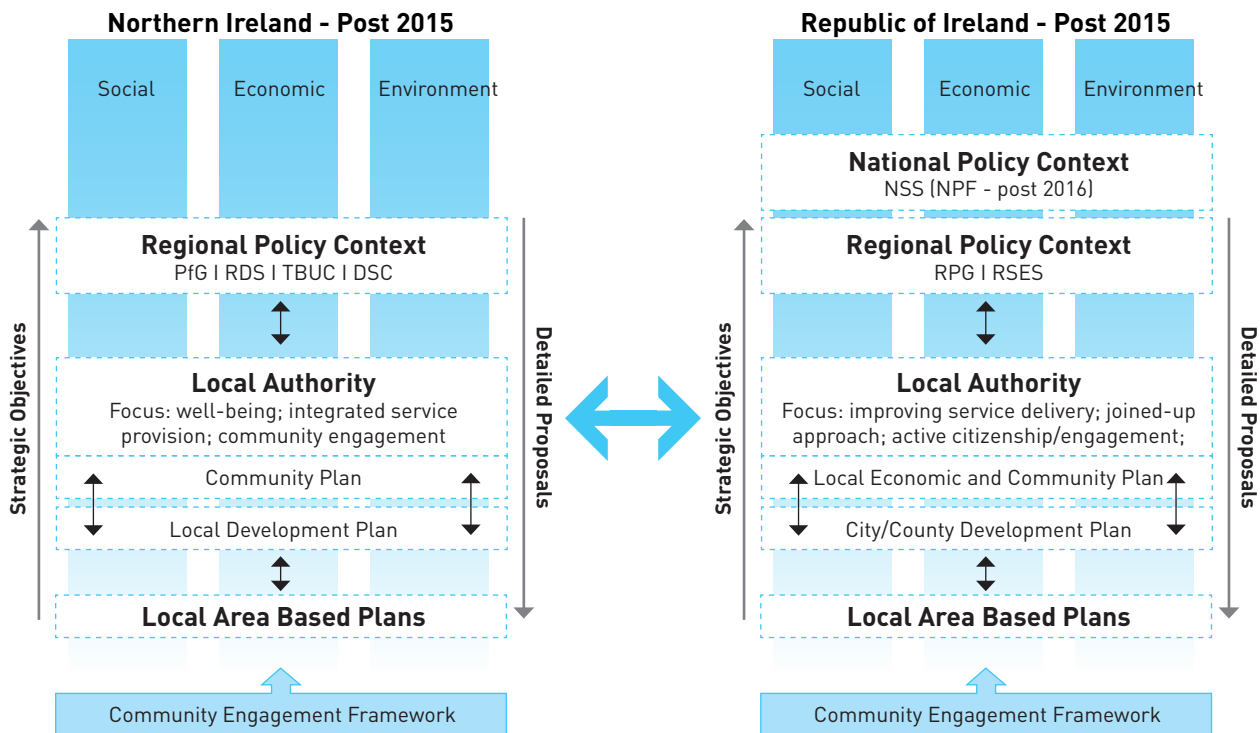
The research findings illustrate that there are a number of opportunities and challenges emerging through the reforms in Ireland and Northern Ireland. These are discussed below under lateral, vertical and horizontal dimensions.

However, first, it is important to note the emergent alignment of operations occurring between both jurisdictions due to recent reforms. The new governance landscape for Ireland and Northern Ireland is illustrated in Figure 4.1. As local authorities in both jurisdictions will have similar responsibilities, *policy instruments*, in terms of local development (land use) plans and integrated service delivery plans, and *policy goals*, such as creating sustainable communities and improving quality of life, this would potentially allow for much better strategic coordination of policies and projects along border councils to improve *policy outcomes*.

4.2 Lateral dimension

The place-based leadership dimension, intertwined between spatial planning and community planning of local government in both jurisdictions, is growing in interest during the current period of change. The evidence suggests that the leadership role of local government, the role of citizen involvement and the appreciation of linking sectoral policy decisions ('community planning') and spatial planning are continuously under review and re-articulation. This is

Figure 4.1 – Policy and governance context between both jurisdictions.



(Source: Authors own)

not unique to the island of Ireland. Morphet (2008: 7) affirms that “local government in Great Britain is still seen as part of the national machinery of government.” Elsewhere, more emphasis has been placed on the role of local government leadership, rather than on the role of local authorities as sole service providers. Furthermore, Morphet asserts the recent imposition of a duty on authorities, primarily across the UK, to promote the economic, environmental and social well-being of communities, through what is commonly described as ‘community planning’, has provided “power for local authorities to enter more easily into partnership working and... take any action in support of their community” (Morphet, 2008: 40). This way of thinking is positively playing out in the models emerging in Ireland and Northern Ireland. However, there is certainly an appetite to harness the benefits of how greater inter-jurisdictional working, couched in a place-based leadership perspective, between the two planning enterprises, can enhance service delivery and manage spatial change in the Irish border region.

Opportunities for improving collaboration currently exist in relation to: (1) the 2013 *Framework for Cooperation*, as it provides an overarching construct on which to nurture stronger collaborative inter-jurisdictional

working; (2) convergence of *policy goals*, e.g. economic and environmental aspects that are common concerns for local authorities in the Irish border region; (3) similar governance architecture and *policy instruments* emerging from the reforms in both jurisdictions, such as new Community Plans in Northern Ireland and Local Economic and Community Plans in Ireland; (4) focus on linking development (land-use) planning and public service provision (community planning) appears to be a core transformation in both reform processes; and (5) ad hoc inter-jurisdictional collaborative operations between local authorities in the Irish border region are happening and are building strong working relationships.

Some of the challenges across the lateral dimension relate to: (1) political perception, or misperception, of cross-border working to improve spatial development and service delivery to citizens across jurisdictions; (2) high level conversations that focus on big issues, such as tourism and physical infrastructure, and not around local citizen needs or public services they engage with on a day-to-day basis; (3) the absence of a cross-border statutory body on spatial and economic planning that can influence the operations between neighbouring local authorities in the cross-border zone; (4) having



no ‘pooled sovereignty’ – that is shared institutions for decision making on shared matters of concern; (5) developing a cross-border development zone that takes a more strategic approach to spatial development and service provision.

progress and highlight areas of improvement; and (3) effective partnership working between the various agencies involved to work together to improve service provision and stimulate new and innovative ways of delivering services in the future.

4.3 Vertical dimension

Opportunities currently exist in relation to: (1) a well established formal and rigid set of communication channels between central and local government in Ireland have developed over a number of years; (2) clearly defining, or expanding, the function of the Partnership Panel³ in Northern Ireland to provide scope for enhancing vertical communication between central government and local government, particularly around the evolving relationship between community planning and land-use planning.

Some of the challenges across the vertical dimension relate to: (1) local authority partnerships missing some ‘big players’, such as national utility companies and private sector organisations in both the Community Planning Partnerships⁴ in Northern Ireland and the Local Community Development Committees in Ireland, which oversee the development of Local Economic and Community Plans; (2) a lack of high level priorities, at the regional scale in Northern Ireland, to provide an overarching framework to inform community planning outcomes and to help align community planning activities with strategic objectives.

4.4 Horizontal dimension

Opportunities currently exist in relation to: (1) merging development (forward) planning and economic functions under one directorate in local authorities in Ireland that take a more holistic approach to stimulating economic growth within a spatial perspective; (2) the possible merging of development (forward) planning and community planning functions under one directorate in the new local authorities in Northern Ireland to better align service provision with spatial development.

Some of the challenges across the horizontal dimension relate to: (1) institutional insularity, e.g. council, which can limit its ability to look beyond its geographical boundaries; (2) the need for a robust performance management framework to measure outcomes, track

3 The Partnership Panel, as initiated through the *Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014*, is intended to promote joint working and cooperation between the Northern Ireland Executive and local government.

4 Based on the draft *Local Government (Community Planning Partners) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015* currently out for consultation.

5. Conclusion

In each jurisdiction, similar types of community planning processes are emerging, which are essentially responses to addressing a fragmented institutional landscape that have developed over many years. The above discussions indicate that there is a case for more assertive longer term strategic thinking about land-use and service delivery planning – in a *new* governance context – for managing spatial change in the Irish border region.

For Northern Ireland, the relationship between spatial planning and community planning is all important as these are bound up with the Review of Public Administration and Local Government Reform. The recent articulations in the *Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011* and the *Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014* propose a fresh interface between land-use planning and new community planning powers for reformed local government in Northern Ireland. There is an associated need to critically reflect and deliberate on how these two planning enterprises could contribute beneficially to a situation of integrating service delivery and spatial development across differentiated scales to support the creation of shared space and shared services. This provides a further argument to nurture how a symbiotic relationship concerning these important local government planning enterprises can improve our understanding of the evolving relationship between *people* and *place*.

The learning from other jurisdictions indicates the need to align functions around a holistic approach to *people* and *place*. Northern Ireland is at a unique moment in history, given the extensive reform, to develop an institutional and spatial 'fix' to address the barriers that exist in linking the conduit for service delivery (Community Planning) with spatial management (Spatial Planning). In Ireland, there is an opportunity emerging to better align the operations of LECPs with spatial planning functions, which appears to be materialising as local authorities are restructuring.

Community planning, as articulated in both jurisdictions, tends to be predicated on two key principles. First, it is intended to provide the over-arching policy and priority framework in a given jurisdiction based on the co-ordination of initiatives and partnerships. This seeks to promote horizontal integration. Second, community planning has a vertical dimension since it is also intended to improve the

connections between national priorities and more local governance arrangements. Securing both vertical and horizontal integration in each jurisdiction represents one challenge – to secure a 'pooled sovereignty' in local planning and governance. Then seeking to integrate across the Irish border represents another operational challenge. The processes of change in train provide an opportunity to develop better joint working.

There is yet another dimension. Community planning will be a new responsibility of local government in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. It will demand new competencies and capacities for action involving civil engagement, agency coordination and the deliberate need to integrate land-use planning and community planning functions not just in each jurisdiction, but across jurisdictions. It is perhaps here that the greatest challenges are present to creating a pooled sovereignty in local governance in the Irish border region.

While acknowledging that there are sensitive issues regarding the political context and joint working between councils, North and South of the border, there is the need to foster a shared understanding of capacity and culture that shapes the functions of service delivery and spatial change. In considering how greater collaboration could be conceptualised, and incrementally advanced, the following framework may help in nurturing interlacing threads of practice across jurisdictional boundaries. The framework can be articulated through 5 'p's, and may offer the prospect of mapping the potential for joint working to address some of the socio-spatial challenges that exist in the Irish border region. The 5 'p's are:

- *Planning* – the coordination of activities to achieve sustainable development in areas through integrated, shared and negotiated strategic visioning for, and the implementation of, plan and strategic at differentiated scales in the Irish border region. These may be partnership strategies, spatial plans, strategic plans, land-use plans, and/or community (service delivery) plans. At the heart of planning is the embedded knowledge that exists in a place that is unique to its locality, heritage and sense of identity.
- *Partnerships* – the ability to work across sectoral, professional, institutional and jurisdictional boundaries in governance networks, through co-operative models, to negotiate how to design and implement visions, strategies, plans and interventions that improve people's quality of life

and provide quality public services in localities. Core attributes of partnerships are performance management, sharing responsibility, power and resources.

- *Policy Coupling* – the integrative nature of community planning processes, and the shift towards spatial planning, replaces the prevailing tendency towards a ‘silo’ sectoral approach in public policy to one that ‘meshes’ local needs with strategic priorities across thematic policy interests. This approach could also be applied to intra-council and inter-jurisdictional working to enhance greater alignment between *policy instruments*, *policy goals* and *policy outcomes*.
- *Participation* – creating opportunities that move beyond just seeking the opinions of stakeholders and citizens, to a more meaningful engagement process that ensures community planning partners, and local communities, feel empowered to actively shape the development of quality local services in their locality, regardless of its territorial boundaries and geographical positioning.
- *Performance* – having a set of indicators to monitor and evaluate public service delivery and land-use planning decisions that help measure joint collaborative operations across the Irish border. These should help improve accountability and transparency, and open up processes to critique and challenge to help grow public confidence and improve the delivery of future programmes, projects and planning.

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7. Useful websites

Community Places (Northern Ireland): <http://www.communityplaces.info/>

Community Planning Toolkit: <http://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/>

Cooperation Ireland - "Local Government Shaping the Future of Our Communities": Local Government – Taking the Lead in Community Planning in Northern Ireland and Local & Community Development in Ireland: <http://www.cooperationireland.org/files/Seminar%20Report.pdf>

Department of the Environment – Local Government Reform: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/local_government/local_government_reform.htm

Draft Statutory Guidance for the Operation of community (Consultation Document): http://www.doeni.gov.uk/do1_14_529691_annex_a_-_public_consultation_document_-_draft_statutory_guidance_for_the_operation_of_community_planning_2015_2_.pdf

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government: <http://www.environ.ie/en/>

Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Local Community Development Committees: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/LocalGovernment/Administration/FileDownload,38547,en.pdf>



