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**ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND
CULTURAL SITUATION OF COUNTY MEATH**

Prepared for

MEATH COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD

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NIRSA



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad



NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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We hope that the report will be of assistance to all organisations and individuals with an interest in the future development of county Meath.

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County Meath Profile

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide an assessment of the current situation in County Meath in relation to economic, social and cultural development in order to assist the County Development Board in the preparation of its strategy for the next ten years. The content of the report takes account of the Department of the Environment and Local Government Guidelines document, *A Shared Vision for County/City Development Boards*. Comparative data for neighbouring counties are provided where appropriate and detailed mapping has been undertaken to illustrate patterns within the county wherever data has been available. Much of the mapping is based on data from the 1996 Census of Population, which is undoubtedly a limitation. However, there are no more recent data available at sub-county level for most indicators. Where appropriate, county level data for more recent years have been used; otherwise comments have been inserted on the most likely direction of change since 1996.

County Meath occupies an area of 234, 490 hectares with an estimated population of 130,000 at present. The geographical position of the county is an important contextual factor in any assessment of recent development trends and future prospects. The county is, on the one hand, part of the Greater Dublin Area and, on the other hand, much of its boundary is shared with counties that are part of the Objective One Border Midland West (BMW) region. Development in the east and south of the county is very much influenced by the opportunities and pressures emanating from the Dublin metropolitan area while much of the west and north is more rural and essentially constitutes an inner periphery in the east Midlands. Following the creation of two NUTS 11 regions and the adoption by the government and the main enterprise agencies of a more vigorous approach to achieving balanced regional development the challenge of promoting development in the north and west of the county is much greater.

The county has a diverse lowlying topography that includes extensive rich pastures throughout the Boyne and Blackwater river valleys, some drumlin hills in the north, tracts of peatland and raised bog in the southwest and a short coastline of 12 kilometers in the east (**Map 1**). The landscape contains an extremely rich heritage of national monuments, including the internationally renowned passage tombs at Newgrange, Knowth, Dowth and Lough Crew. In addition the landscape includes five Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), - the prime wildlife conservation areas in Ireland, one Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA) – the Boyne Estuary - as well as 22 proposed Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs).

Recent patterns of development within the county are very much influenced by the location of key items of infrastructure and the settlement pattern that has evolved over centuries. Three National Primary Roads, the N1, N2 and N3 extend northwards from Dublin through the county to Dundalk and Belfast (N1), through Slane to Monaghan (N2) and via Navan to Cavan (N3) while the N4 extends westwards through the south of the county to the Northwest and West (**Map 2**). Two National Secondary roads (N51 and N52) extend across the county in a SW-NE direction through Navan and Kells respectively. Major upgrades are planned for the N3, N4, part of the N2 and the N52 over

the next five years. Several regional roads will also be upgraded including the R150 (Navan to Laytown) and the R154 & R158 (Athboy-Trim-Dunboyne, and Trim-Kilcock). The Dublin-Belfast rail line extends along the east coast.

The principal towns and villages are also shown on Map 1. What is most notable is that Navan is the only centre with more than 10,000 inhabitants and that most of the settlements are small, apart from those that have experienced growth over recent years associated with the influx of commuters from Dublin.

The provision of supports for different aspects of the economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions of development is undertaken by a very large number of agencies. While many of these operate either across the entire county or in certain parts of it there are a number of services that are organized on a regional basis. These include supports for enterprise development, tourism, labour force training, health care, waste management, security, etc. Unfortunately, the boundaries used by the different service providers do not always coincide resulting in Meath being included with different groupings of counties for different services (**Maps 3a, b, - 6a, b**). This administrative situation is not particularly well suited to facilitating the development of a coordinated approach to the delivery of public services.

Within County Meath there are five electoral areas – Dunshaughlin, Kells, Navan, Slane and Trim with urban councils in both Trim and Kells, **Map 7**. An important challenge for the County Development Board is to secure support for a county-wide strategy that will have the support of the representatives of each of the electoral area plus the members of the urban councils.

Before proceeding to the more detailed analysis it is useful to establish the relative position of Meath in relation to economic development and living standards. Table 1 provides some comparative data for Meath and the other counties in the Greater Dublin Area.

County Meath occupies 3.3% of the total area of the state and contains 3.0% of the population (1996). The CSO estimate of Gross Value Added (GVA) shows that in 1995 the economy of Meath contributed only 2.1% of the total GVA for the State. Compared to the other counties under the immediate influence of the Dublin metropolitan area the performance in Meath was particularly low, at only 68% of the average for the State, compared with 80 for Wicklow and 111 for Kildare. The reasons for this disparity will be examined later. However, the extent of disparities in relation to per capita disposable income are not as wide, but Meath is still significantly less than Kildare, **Figures 1 & 2**.

Another index of the level of household incomes is the percentage of the population covered by medical cards, which was only 27.8% in September 2000 compared with an overall figure of 30.6% for all counties.

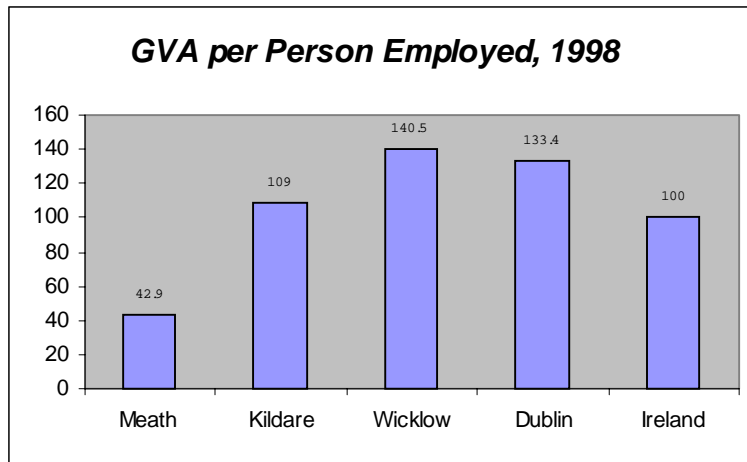


Figure 1: GVA per Person Employed, 1998

Figure 2: Disposable Income per Capita, 1998

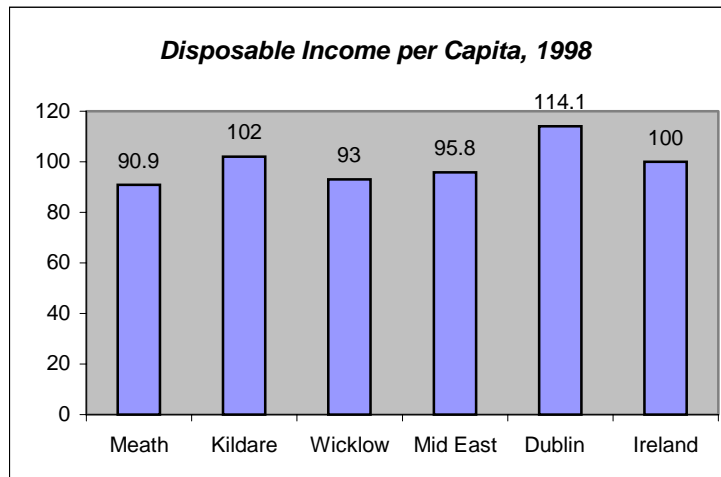


Table 1: Output and Income indices

	GVA* per capita 1995	Disposable Income Per capita 1997	Percent of population covered by medical cards, September 2000
Meath	68	90.9	27.8
Kildare	111	102.0	26.4
Wicklow	80	93.0	32.3
Mid East	88	95.8	N/A
Dublin	127	114.1	25.6
Ireland	100	100.0	30.6

* Gross Value Added, GVA, is a measure of the value of the goods and services produced in the region priced at the value which the producers received minus any taxes payable and plus any subsidies receivable as a consequence of their production or sale.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows. Recent trends in demography and the labour force will be considered in the next two sections, after which there is a more detailed analysis of the economy. The following section examines the social context for development in Meath. Section 6 covers a number of topics under the general heading of Quality of Life. This is followed by a discussion of the current situation in relation to a number of different forms of supporting infrastructure. Section 8 provides a synthesis by way of a summary rural typology map, which situates the analysis in a wider reference frame that has been prepared for the National Spatial Strategy. Finally, a number of emerging issues are identified and suggestions are provided for a framework that might assist in devising the CDB strategy. The analysis of most topics is accompanied by maps compiled at the level of District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) which are shown on **Map 8**.

2. DEMOGRAPHY

The total county population in 1996 was almost 109732 persons, of which only thirty four percent resided in urban areas. **Density** levels vary considerably (**Map 9**) from the very rural areas in the northwest and west (less than 25 persons per square kilometre in 36 of the 92 DEDs) to more than 50 in the districts containing the main urban centers (Navan, Trim, Kells), the environs of Drogheda, and four DEDs in the southeast containing Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin and Ashbourne. The overall density is only 47 persons per square kilometre compared to 52 for the state, reflecting the rural nature of much of the county.

Almost all (98.8%) of the population resided in private households for which the average size was 3.41 persons compared with an average of 3.14 for the State. While in general the **average household size** for rural areas is larger than in urban areas the pattern across the DEDs is more complex (**Map 10**). The largest households are mostly in the rural areas in the southeast but the greatest concentrations of smaller households are also in rural areas in the northwest especially around Oldcastle, possibly in response to high levels of out-migration in the past.

Between 1991-96 the total **population increased** by 4,362 (4.1%) compared to an increase of 2.8% for the State. Over half of the increase was concentrated in the southeast (around Dunshaughlin, Ashbourne, Dunboyne and Ratoath) in response to the influx of commuters in search of housing at lower prices than in Dublin (**Map 11**). Significant growth occurred around Navan, Trim and Kells as well as in the DEDs in the environs of Drogheda. In the southwest a relatively large increase occurred around Enfield. By contrast population decline occurred in almost one-third of the DEDs especially in the northwest, but also in many of the eastern districts in the hinterland of Slane.

Forecasting population growth at county level is extremely hazardous due to the level of uncertainty surrounding some of the key variables. For Meath a major influence on population growth is the extent of in-migration associated with commuting to Dublin. This variable is particularly difficult to forecast, as it is dependent on factors such as the supply and cost of housing, competing supply patterns in neighbouring counties, the impact of the Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area, and the National Spatial Strategy.

Recently prepared projections for the County Development Plan suggest that substantial increases are likely. Assuming no net migration the projections indicate that the population of the county will grow to approximately 113,000 in 2001, 116,000 in 2006 and 119,000 in 2011¹. However, when account is taken of the implications of economic growth the projections are much higher with an estimate of 120,000 for 2001, rising to 133,000 in 2006 and 154,000 by 2011. This would amount to an increase of 40% over the 1996 total. Due to changing patterns of household formation the number of households is projected to increase by 78% over the period. The prospect of such a high level of population growth has major implications for physical planning in the county.

The populations of the principal towns and the extent of change since 1986 are summarized in Table 2. Navan is the only town with more than 10,000 inhabitants, followed by Ashbourne, Trim, Laytown-Bettystown, Kells and Dunboyne. The small size and dormitory nature of some of these settlements is a limitation that affects the volume of commercial and retail activity in the county. In this respect Meath is very different to Kildare. Many of the smaller centers, especially in the more rural parts of the county experienced some decline in the early 1990s.

Recent analysis of the towns with more than 5,000 population, undertaken by NUI Maynooth and Brady Shipman Martin Consultants for the National Spatial Strategy has shown that while Navan was the 22nd largest centre in the State its functional rank was lower at 30. This result was the outcome of an analysis based on ten sets of indicators. Navan like a number of other county towns scores well on indices related to retailing, business services, education and transport services but it scores much lower than its population rank on indices for employment, tourism/leisure activities and agricultural services.

Net migration movements are a major influence on the distribution of population change. Net changes in the size of selected age cohorts over the decade after 1986 are summarized on **Maps 12 and 13**. They provide acceptable estimates of the extent of net migration, as mortality rates for these groups are particularly low. The cohort aged 10-19 years in 1986 declined in almost every DED, the only exceptions being the districts containing Summerhill and Dunshaughlin. The largest declines were recorded for the most rural DEDs. By contrast, Map 14 demonstrates the impact of in-migration in the southeast and throughout the rural DEDs that are adjacent to the Navan Road (N3) where there were substantial increases in the size of 1986 cohort aged 20-29 years. Some rural areas in the west experienced a decline through net out-migration.

The impacts of such population movements over a long period are reflected in the **age profile** of the population (**Figure 3, Table 3 and Maps 14-18**). The main contrasts are between, on the one hand, the DEDs around the main urban centers and in the southeast which have above average concentrations in the principal family formation age groups (25-24 years) and the related share of children aged under 14 years in the total population and, on the other hand, the weaker and more remote rural parts which have larger proportions aged over 45 and especially over 65 years.

¹ Meath County Council Draft County Development Plan 2000

The effect of these contrasts in age profiles is more clearly demonstrated on the **dependency ratio** maps (**Maps 19 and 20**). The youth dependency ratios are as expected highest in the areas of most recent growth while the elderly dependency ratio displays a very pronounced contrast between the southeast and northwest of the county. Finally, looking to the future **Map 21** provides a measure of demographic vitality (persons aged 20-39 years in 1996 as a ratio of number of persons aged over 60), which clearly demonstrates the urban/rural and northwest/southeast contrast.

Table 2 Population of principal towns and changes since 1986

	Total 1996	Change 1986-91	Change 1991-96	Change 1986-96
<i>Navan + environs</i>	12810	-223	1104	881
Ashbourne	4999	856	588	1444
Trim + environs	4405	61	220	281
Laytown-Bettystown	3678	39	318	357
Ceannanus Mor + environs	3542	-154	3	-151
Dunboyne	3080	403	688	1091
Dunshaughlin	2139	397	864	1261
Duleek	1731	39	13	52
Athboy	1172	28	89	117
Ratoath	1061	42	468	510
Oldcastle	826	-22	-21	-43
Slane	688	10	-11	-1
Enfield	566	68	130	198
Summerhill	502	111	134	245
Gormanstown	435	-51	-384	-435
Stamullen	427	24	31	55
Julianstown	424	48	-26	22
Ballivor	383	5	42	47
Drumconrath	351	11	6	17
Kilcloon	345	-6	-6	-12
Kinstown	324	3	-9	-6
Donore	293	38	16	54
Balreask	265	30	-16	14
Nobber	242	50	-11	39
Kilmessan	230	36	-12	24
Rathmoylon	206	-23	-5	-28
Longwood	186	0	186	186
Kildalkey	149	0	149	149

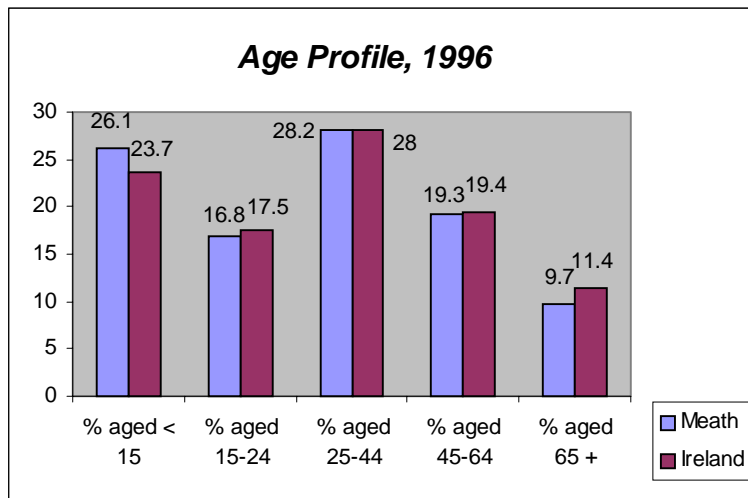


Figure 3: Age Profile, 1996

Table 3 Age profile and Dependency ratios, 1996

	Meath	Kildare	Wicklow	Dublin	Ireland
% aged < 15	26.1	26.5	24.9	22.0	23.7
% aged 15-24	16.8	18.1	16.5	18.6	17.5
% aged 25-44	28.2	30.6	28.6	30.3	28.0
% aged 45-64	19.3	17.6	19.8	19.1	19.4
% aged 65 +	9.7	7.2	10.1	9.9	11.4
Youth dependency	40.6	39.9	38.4	32.3	36.5
Elderly dependency	15.1	10.8	15.6	14.6	17.6
Vitality ratio	286.6	438.4	283.4	337.1	258.3

Data Source: CSO Census 96, Vol. 2

The implications for sustainable development of the social and environmental patterns outlined above for the mid 1990s, and which have continued up to the present have been addressed in the recently adopted County Development Plan. A strategy has been set out that will cater for the economic and social development of the county to its maximum potential. This will entail utilising the county's strategic location in the Greater Dublin Area (as set out in the GDA Strategic Planning Guidelines), while conserving its identity, environment and heritage in a sustainable manner. A central component of the strategy which has major implications for the future social and economic geography of the county are the proposals for a settlement structure based on a hierarchy of four levels.

Navan will become the county growth centre in accordance with the roles suggested for it in the Strategic Planning Guidelines. It is envisaged that it will become a self-sustaining town rather than become a large dormitory centre for Dublin. Its population is projected to grow to 40,000 by 2011 and 60,000 by 2020, equivalent to the current population of Galway city. It is envisaged that the new city will be connected to Dublin by improved road and rail links.

Trim, Kells and Ashbourne plus the environs of Drogheda are designated to become “major urban centres” with a wide range of commercial, industrial and community functions for significantly increased populations (for example Trim is projected to increase to 10,000 population by 2011 from an estimated 6,000 in 1999, Kells to grow from 4,500 to 8,000 over the same period and Ashbourne to increase from approximately 6,900 to 12,000).

Another eleven centres strategically located throughout the county (Ballivor, Summerhill, Athboy, Nobber, Oldcastle, Clonee, Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin, Duleek and Slane) are identified as “major service centres” that will combine primarily residential roles with a strong industrial and commercial presence.

The higher levels of the hierarchy as well as the rural areas will be supported by a fourth tier of local centres intended as nodes for distinctive quality driven residential development and essential local commercial and community services. In order to capitalise on the potential of these small centres, known as Graigs, very careful consideration will be given to sustainability criteria in their selection so that they do not become overburdened by metropolitan or urban overspill. The County Development Plan identifies 38 potential Graigs.

In order to implement the settlement proposals outlined it will be necessary to have a coordinated strategy for the delivery and upgrading of key infrastructures as well as taking cognisance of the opportunities that may be available to private investors at locations beyond the county boundary. The future pattern of development around Navan will be a major influence on the type of development that is likely to occur throughout most of the rest of county which will in turn shape the future socio-economic geography of Meath.

3. THE LABOUR FORCE

The labour force consists of the total at work, the number of unemployed persons and the number of first time job seekers. In 1996 the total labour force in Meath was 45,966, of whom 88% were classified as “at work”. It is estimated that the total number at work increased from 46,000 in 1996 to approximately 54,750 in 2000. Changes in the size of the labour force are influenced by demographic trends and participation rates. In a county such as Meath where there is a high level of in-migration of adults in the working age groups most of the growth in the labour force is related to demographic trends. This is reflected in the pattern shown on **Map 22**. In addition, there has been an upward trend in female participation rates over the period since the early 1980s. This is due to a combination of factors such as improved educational levels, removal of barriers preventing married women from working in some sectors, a lower marriage rate and declining average family size. In addition for many younger couples there is an economic necessity for both partners to be at work in order to pay the costs of privately owned housing.

3.1 Participation rates

In Meath the overall participation rate is 56.7% compared with 55.4% for the State reflecting the age profile of the county (a larger proportion of those aged over 16 are in

the working age groups) and greater opportunities for employment. The overall rate is the outcome of combining an above average male participation and a female rate that is less than for the State (**Figure 4 and Table 4**).

Table 4 Labour force participation rates, 1996

	Dublin	Kildare	Meath	Wicklow	Ireland
Male participation rate	72	74.1	73.8	72.2	70.7
Female participation rate	46.7	42.3	39.5	39.1	40.7
Total participation rate	58.6	58.2	56.7	55.3	55.4

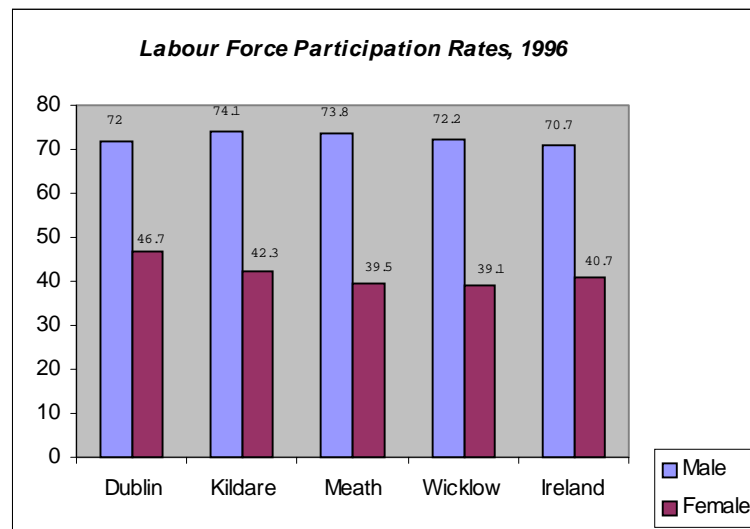


Figure 4: Labour Force Participation Rates, 1996

Variations in the total participation rate (**Map 23**) are very much influenced by the variation in female rates (**Map 24**). The highest overall rates and the largest numbers of participants are in the southeast districts containing large numbers of commuters and also around Navan where in addition to the normal influences there is also a very large male employer at Tara mines. The lowest rates are mainly in rural areas in the northwest, principally due to lower female rates in these districts. The highest female rates are principally in the districts adjacent to the main towns or the commuter routes to Dublin. The high values in the southwest around Ballivor are probably associated with the presence of a large electronics company with a mostly female workforce. The tendency for the highest female participation rates to be in the districts with high accessibility has implications for future patterns as most of the overall gains in participation will come from higher female rates.

3.2 Sectoral employment patterns

The sectoral distribution of **employment** is presented in Table 5. Agriculture, forestry and fishing accounted for 12.7% of the total at work in the county compared with 10.2% for the State in 1996. The much greater relative importance of the sector in the north and west is shown on **Map 25**. In most of these areas the very high reliance on agriculture (over 30% in 15 DEDs) is simply a reflection of the limited range of alternative employment opportunities, unlike the southeast or near the main urban centres where

the shares of the workforce in this sector are very low due to large numbers working in other sectors. Of course, for many their employment is not located in these areas, rather they are enumerated in the census as residents of the districts.

Manufacturing industries account for 20% of the total at work, a little over the share of 19.1% in the national workforce. However, the total number of manufacturing employees in Meath declined by 31% (2209) between 1991-96. The most notable feature of **Map 26** is the extent to which the share of the workforce employed in manufacturing is highest in mostly rural areas or smaller centres in the north and west. This may again reflect the more limited range of opportunities in these areas. Most of the manufacturing employment in the northwest is in Irish owned companies, and mostly in traditional industrial sectors. Unlike neighbouring county Kildare there are very few firms in the advanced sectors so that only about one-sixth of the industrial workforce are employed in these sectors compared with almost three fifths in Kildare and 45% for the State.

The total service sector accounts for about 56% of the workforce, and it is also the most rapidly growing sector with gains particularly strong among those employed in commerce (including retail), insurance and finance and also in the number employed in professional services. It is also in these two sectors that the largest increases in female employment have occurred with females accounting for 80% of the increase in the number in the professional services sector. Again it needs to be stressed that not all of this employment is located in the county.

While the total numbers employed in commerce, insurance, finance and business services (7,833) is almost as many as the number employed in manufacturing (8,091) the geographical distributions are very different. The commerce, insurance and finance activities are very much linked to urban centres, a trend which is further amplified by the high proportion of female employment (42.7%) in these sectors. Thus the distribution on **Map 27** reflects the influence of Dublin based employment opportunities for many residents in the southeast commuter towns, along with the local opportunities in Navan and Drogheda. The distribution of workers in the professional services sector (**Map 28**) is even more focused around the main urban centres, including possibly opportunities in Blanchardstown in the Regional hospital.

Table 5 Number of persons at work classified by broad industrial sectors, Meath, 1996

	Males	Females	Total	Males Change	Females Change	Total Change
	1996	1996	1996	1991-96	1991-96	1991-96
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	4550	596	5146	-680	3	-677
Mining, quarrying, turf production	743	52	795	-44	0	-44
Manufacturing	5958	2133	8091	1380	-3589	-2209
Electricity, gas and water supplies	207	39	246	41	15	56
Building and construction	3489	147	3636	872	26	898
Commerce, insurance, finance	4486	3347	7833	427	895	1322
Transport, communication, etc	1722	544	2266	104	163	267
Public administration and defence	1350	788	2138	-78	197	119
Professional services	2160	4596	6756	399	1565	1964
Others	1501	2067	3568	451	735	1186
Total	26166	14309	40475	2872	3974	6846

Data Sources: CSO, Census 1996 – Principal Economic Status and Industries Tables: 13a, 13b, 13c.
Census 1991 – Industries Tables 8a, 8b, 8c.

3.3 Unemployment

In 1996 there were 4,762 unemployed persons and 729 first time job seekers in the county amounting to 12.0% of the labour force. However, there were very large differences in unemployment rates between the rapidly growing districts in the southeast most of the rest of the county with rates exceeding 14.5% in 19 DEDs (*Map 29*). The highest rates and largest numbers of unemployed persons were in Navan and Slane along with the districts in the east of the county which are dependent to some extent on employment trends in Drogheda, which had a traditional industrial base.

Of course, since 1996 there has been a very large reduction in the unemployment rate to about 4% throughout the state. While there has also been a significant decline in Meath, which is partly reflected in a decline of 30% between 1996-99 in the number of persons on the Live Register, it is likely that the fundamental contrast between the southeast and most of the rest of the county has not altered very much.

The economic dependency ratio (*Map 30*) which relates the number of persons not at work to the number that are working succinctly summarises the demographic and labour force patterns throughout the county.

4. THE ECONOMY

This section provides an overview of the current position in relation to the three main sectors: agriculture, manufacturing and internationally traded services, and other services including tourism.

4.1 Agriculture

County Meath is renowned for its rich pasturelands which are capable of supporting a wide variety of farming types as only 12% of the agricultural is considered to be marginal. There are approximately 5,000 herdowners in the county. Table 6 provides a summary overview of the structure agriculture in the county. Compared to the rest of Ireland the Meath profile is very favourable, **Figure 5a, b.**

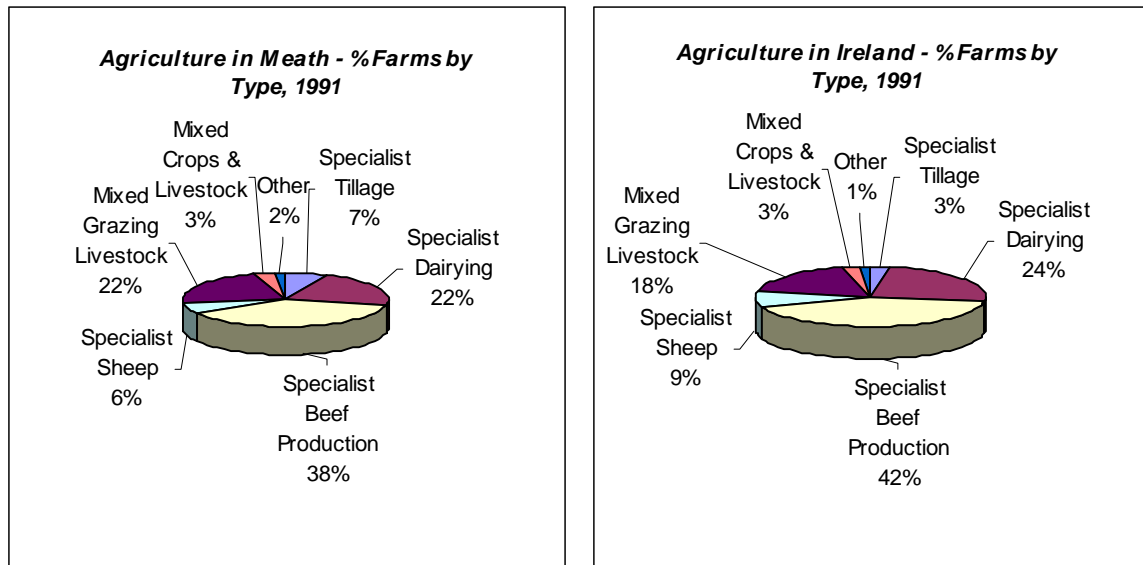


Figure 5 a) Agriculture in Meath and b) Agriculture in Ireland.

The availability of small area data on agriculture is very limited as the published data relates to the 1991 Census of Agriculture. The average farm size (measured in both hectares and output levels) is well above the national average throughout most of the county and especially in the east. Smaller farms are mostly concentrated in the north and northwest (**Maps 31 and 32**) where a number of DEDs are designated as eligible for income supports under the EU Less Favoured Areas programme.

Table 6 Principal characteristics of agriculture in Mid-East counties, 1991

	Meath	Kildare	Wicklow	Dublin*	Ireland
Avg. farm size (ha.)	33.9	37.8	38.1	32.6	26.0
Avg, farm size (ESUs)*	16.8	15.3	17.1	19.2	11.6
% farmers aged >65	20.8	20.5	20.1	20.2	22.8
% farmers part-time	33.0	31.6	24.7	34.5	26.6
Marginal land % of total	12	32	47	11	49
Specialist tillage %	6.7	11.8	5.3	26.9	2.9
Specialist dairying %	21.5	11.4	14.1	7.4	24.4
Specialist beef production %	38.3	31.9	17.9	21.0	42.1
Specialist sheep %	6.4	10.9	27.9	7.9	8.8
Mixed grazing livestock %	22.1	24.6	28.4	20.7	17.9
Mixed crops & livestock %	3.4	7.4	4.4	5.0	2.5

* One ESU = 1,200 Euros

The extent of local specialization in farm types is summarized on **Maps 33–36**. Specialist beef cattle rearing is the most common type of farming and is particularly strongly represented in the northwest and southeast. Intensive dairying is the second most common type of farming, involving approximately 1,000 milk suppliers, and is associated with some of the best pastures especially in the east, Map 33, and also around Athboy. Specialist sheep rearing is more restricted both in terms of the number of farms and also in its geographical distribution. Its relative importance is greatest in the south of the county. Intensive tillage farming is very specialized and mostly concentrated on larger farms mainly in the centre and east of the county. The distribution of farm types in each DED is summarized on **Map 37**.

There have undoubtedly been many changes since then following the reforms of the CAP. The direction of agricultural policy is away from direct price supports and more towards direct payments to producers. The likelihood is that there will be a large increase in part-time farming especially among those rearing beef cattle. Greater emphasis will be placed on more environmentally sustainable agriculture and it is also envisaged that more farmers will participate in the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS). It is also expected that more farmers will seek off-farm employment to supplement their incomes. There will be an on-going need for the professional advice on all aspects of farming provided by Teagasc and for the diverse range of supports for rural development facilitated by Meath LEADER Company See Audit Report for further details of these agencies).

4.2 Manufacturing and Internationally Traded Services

The profile of the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector in Meath is very different from those in the two other counties in the Mid East region. The database compiled by Forfas provided details in relation to employment actually located in the county. In 1999 just over half of the total employment in manufacturing and traded services was in traditional sectors such as food, drink, textiles, wood processing and printing. Only three percent were employed in internationally traded services, compared with 17% in Wicklow. The high tech electrical, electronics and optical equipment sub sectors accounted for only 13% of the employment compared with 40% in Kildare.

An analysis of the industrial profile is summarized in **Table 7**, which also contains comparative data. Meath has significantly smaller numbers employed in these sectors than either Kildare or Wicklow and furthermore, the rate of increase in employment in Meath is much lower than in the other counties. The foreign owned sector consisting of 14 companies in 1999 accounted for only 25% of all employment compared with 69% in Kildare and 41% in Wicklow and 48% in Louth. Total employment in the foreign owned firms actually declined between 1995-99, a trend that was more generally associated with the Border and Midland counties. The low proportion of total employment in the advanced sectors, **Figure 6**, is reflected in the very low levels of productivity measured by GVA per person employed, the index for Meath is less than half the national average, **Figure 7**. An index of low competitiveness is the very high proportion of net output that is spent on wages and salaries. Finally, the last row in Table 10 indicates the greater reliance on traditional skills, which are more likely to be substituted by automated processes.

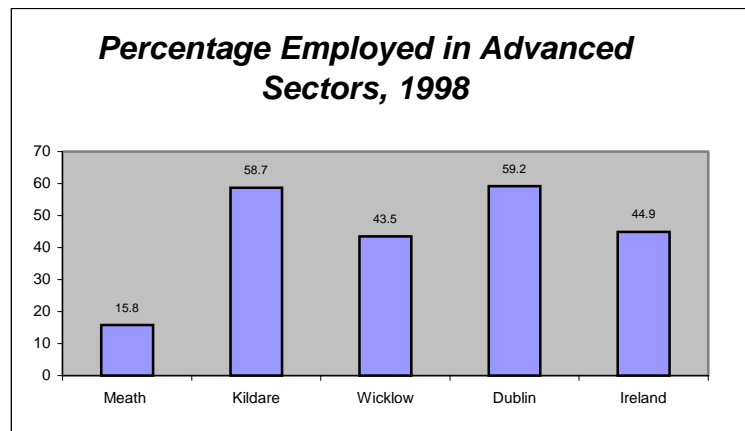


Figure 6: % Employed in advanced Sectors, 1998

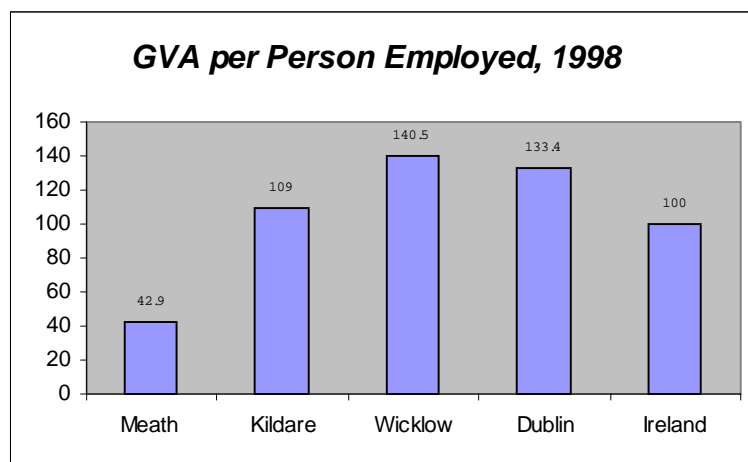


Figure 7: GVA per person Employed, 1998

The 14 foreign owned firms that have been assisted by IDA Ireland are involved in producing a very diverse range of products including envelopes, floppy disks, clay bricks, corrugated packaging medical diagnostic equipment and electric accessories. Two international service operations have been established in the Navan Business Park. The distribution of foreign owned firms is influenced by many factors including the availability of suitable sites at accessible locations and the likelihood of being able to recruit and maintain a labour force with the requisite range of skills. Four of the companies are located in Navan, another four in the southeast in Ashbourne (3) and Dunshaughlin with two each in Trim, Ballivor and Kingscourt (*Map 38*).

Table 7 Industrial indicators for Dublin and Mid-East counties

	Meath	Kildare	Wicklow	Dublin	Ireland
No. of Industrial plants 1999	138	141	135	1716	5474
Total employment in mfg. and intl. traded services 1999	5931	14393	8091	102558	324422
Net employment gain 1995-99 All firms	531	3274	1609	32637	62524
Net employment gain 1995-99 Foreign-owned	- 118	2307	964	22781	39453
Net employment gain 1995-99 Irish-owned	649	967	645	9656	23071
% employed in advanced sectors	15.8	58.7	43.5	59.2	44.9
Share of employment in five Largest firms	21	49	29	7	N/A
GVA per person employed 1998 (Ireland = 100)	42.9	109.0	140.5	133.4	100.0
Wages and salaries as % of net output	42.6	16.7	13.4	25.9	16.9
Ratio of industrial to admin/ Technical workers	6.3	2.6	4.5	3.9	4.5

Source: Forfas database and CSO Census of Industrial Production, 1998

Further expansion of the foreign owned sector will be influenced by the availability of key infrastructures (transport, telecommunications, environmental and social) and labour forces with appropriate skills at strategic locations in Meath. These will be in competition

with strategic locations in neighbouring counties, including Louth, Monaghan, Cavan and Westmeath all of which are in the Objective One region to which there is a government policy commitment in relation to achieving balanced regional development. IDA Ireland is actively seeking to promote more industrial development in the BMW region. For Meath it will be important to ensure that the assets of locations such as Navan are vigorously promoted, in order to establish a new industrial base that will attract highly skilled and highly paid workers and thereby contribute to increasing the county's share of the wealth created by Ireland's new economy.

The Irish owned manufacturing sector is extensive with almost approximately 160 companies assisted by Enterprise Ireland, there may be others that have not received assistance and are, therefore, not include in the Enterprise Ireland database. The vast majority of the companies are classified as either micro (1-10 workers) or small (11-50 workers). In 1999 out of the total of 157 there were 65 micro companies and 70 in the "small" category. Only 12 were in the "medium 2" size (101-250 workers). The size distribution is important to the extent that it influences the possibility of achieving economies of scale and also the potential for developing a strong base of internationally competitive enterprises.

The geographical distribution of Enterprise Ireland supported companies is, as expected more dispersed than the pattern for foreign owned companies. **Map 39** displays the number of companies by DED while further details are contained in Table 8. The largest concentration is in Navan with 40 companies, though 15 of these are micro level ones. Ashbourne has 20 followed by 16 in Oldcastle and 10 in Trim. The higher densities throughout the southeast is again noticeable. The strength of the industrial tradition in Oldcastle is confirmed by Table 11 which shows that it is the location of five of the 22 medium size firms, second after Navan with seven. It has the third highest number of small firms, after Navan and Ashbourne, but it has only three micro firms.

Enterprise Ireland is the principal agency supporting locally controlled manufacturing and internationally traded service industries. It has a government mandate to contribute to driving the growth of regional enterprise. Within the Mid East region its task is to ensure that the towns within the extended commuting distance of Dublin are developed with a good quality of life and a mixed economy so that they will attract new industries to the area. The EI strategy for developing locally controlled enterprises is based on four pillars:

1. Developing and sustaining existing businesses,
2. Enhancing the environment for business,
3. Identifying and encouraging new start-up companies with strong growth potential,
4. Identifying new opportunities for economic development, including investments by Dublin based companies who may wish to expand.

Table 8 Distribution of Enterprise Ireland assisted companies, Meath 2000

Town	Size				Total
	Medium 1	Medium 2	Small	Micro	
Ashbourne	1	1	11	7	20
Athboy	0	0	2	2	4
Ballivor	0	0	1	0	1
Castletown	0	0	0	1	1
Clonard	0	0	0	2	2
Clonee	1	1	1	2	5
Drogheda	0	0	1	3	4
Drumconrath	0	0	1	1	2
Duleek	1	2	0	0	3
Dunboyne	0	0	3	2	5
Dunshaughlin	0	0	5	4	9
Enfield	0	0	1	2	3
Kells	1	0	3	3	7
Kilcloon	0	0	1	2	3
Laytown	0	0	0	1	1
Maynooth	0	0	0	1	1
Mountnugent	0	0	0	1	1
Navan	4	3	18	15	40
Nobber	0	0	1	0	1
Oldcastle	3	2	8	3	16
Rathmoylan	0	0	0	1	1
Rathoath	0	0	1	3	4
Robinstown	0	0	0	1	1
Slane	0	1	5	2	8
Stamullen	0	0	0	1	1
Summerhill	0	0	3	0	3
Trim	1	0	4	5	10

Micro = 1-10 workers; small = 11-50; medium 1 = 51-100; medium 2 = 101-250 workers

Developing strong links with Third level colleges is a key component of the strategy. For Meath this means establishing links with the Institutes of Technology in Dublin and Dundalk as well as NUI Maynooth and possibly establishing an outreach centre at Navan.

Responsibility for fostering and sustaining micro enterprises rests with Meath County Enterprise Board. Its mission is “to assist and support small sustainable growth orientated and start-up businesses who will then create employment, expand and sustain existing jobs”. The Board provides a range of services that include;

1. Developing an enterprise culture,
2. Providing business counseling/advice and mentoring,
3. Management training and development
4. Financial assistance.

In accordance with government policy the Enterprise Board has responsibility for the development and support of micro enterprises. Where appropriate particular aspects of micro enterprise support can be delivered by agreement through agencies such as Meath LEADER, which already has experience in this area of activity. A notable feature of the projects assisted by local development agencies is that they are widely dispersed away from the main urban centres (**Maps 40 and 41**). Thus they have a distinctive role in fostering small scale rural based enterprises. (See Meath County Development Board Audit of Services Report for further details of these agencies).

The geographical distribution of industries in the future will be influenced to a large degree by the availability of serviced industrial land. In December 1998 there were almost 300 hectares of undeveloped industrial land in the county with 35% of the total located in Navan, 31% in the environs of Drogheda and 21% in Laytown. Therefore, Navan and East Meath are the areas where new industrial development is most likely to occur. Smaller land banks have been assembled at Trim and Kells, but the current supply of water in these towns is not sufficient to support an industry that would require large volumes of water. In the short term there may also be restrictions associated with the current supply of electricity.

4.3 Services

The service sector accounts for over 56% of the total workforce and it is also the most rapidly growing sector. It is also the sector in which most females are employed. As already shown the distribution of service workers is very much influenced by access to urban centres as most services (retailing, business services, personal services and professional services) are provided from nodal centres. Future expansion of the sector will depend on a number of factors such as local demand for locally traded services. For internationally traded services there are different requirements such as the availability of a workforce with appropriate skills plus key infrastructure (especially for ICT based services) and attractive work environments at accessible locations. Meath has not been very successful to date in developing an international services sector. Progress will depend on the provision of a bundle of factors that will enhance the attractiveness of one of more strategic locations.

In addition to urban based services tourism is also a major service industry which can bring significant economic and social benefits to rural villages and small towns. County Meath has a large number of visitor attractions, the most famous being the Bru na Boinne Visitor Centre which incorporates the internationally recognized megalithic tombs and passage graves at Newgrange, Dowth, Knowth and Loughcrew. The Centre is extremely popular with day visitors attracting over 235,000 visitors in 2000. Trim Castle had 36,000 visitors in 2000 while the third largest heritage attraction was Tara with almost 24,000 visitors. Until recently the second most popular visitor attraction in Meath was Mosney Holiday Camp (c.160,000 visitors per annum).

Apart from the Boyne valley there are a number of high quality visitor attractions in Trim and Kells (**Map 42**). Visitors attracted by outdoor pursuits are catered for by equestrian facilities (16), golf courses (11), the Boyne towpath for walking (8 km), the signposted 'Trim tourist trail' and angling on the Boyne and its tributaries, the Grand Canal and

Lough Sheelin. In addition there are sixteen annual festivals at a number of locations throughout the county (*Map 43*). The number of overseas tourists to Meath in 1999 is estimated at 109,000 which is rather low when compared to other counties in the Midlands East tourism region. For example, Louth attracted 120,000 tourists, Westmeath 140,000 and Kildare 163,000.

There is a considerable amount of untapped potential in relation to tourism development in the county, which has been the subject of a Tourism Development Strategy commissioned by Meath County Council and Meath LEADER. The strategy for sustainable tourism development contains detailed proposals in relation to tourism product development and marketing. While large scale product development and marketing are supported by Bord Failte and the regional tourism organisation there are also supports for small scale rural tourism initiatives provided by Meath LEADER which has assisted projects, especially in the south and northwest of the county (*Map 44*).

5. THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

This part examines the structure of society in Meath. It commences with an overview of levels of educational attainment in the population as education is widely regarded as a critical agent in both social and economic transformation. This will be followed by an outline of the links between education and status in the labour force, and the geography of social stratification in the county. This will lead to a consideration of a number of aspects of social exclusion.

5.1 Education

The central role of education in social and economic transformation of Ireland over the past decade is well documented. Formal education is provided in Meath through 30 primary schools that had a total enrollment in May 2000 of 15,626 pupils and secondary schools at 11 locations that had a combined enrollment of 9,157 (*Map 45*). The education participation rate for the cohort aged 15-24 years in 1996 was 54%, which is similar to the rate for the State.

While Meath does not have a Third Level College there are a number of institutions in neighbouring counties providing a wide range of programmes extending from certificate and diploma level to postgraduate degree level. The institutions that are most accessible to the majority of the population in Meath are the Dublin Institute of Technology, Dundalk Institute of Technology, NUI Maynooth, Blanchardstown Institute of Technology and the Dublin based universities. In anticipation of increased demand for access to Third Level education a submission for an Outreach College in Navan has recently been prepared by Navan Chamber of Commerce.

The census of population provides information on the highest level of formal education attained by all persons aged over 15 years. The distribution of the population according to **educational attainment levels** is summarized in Table 9 which also contains comparative data for the other counties in the Greater Dublin Area. The most striking feature is that the overall profile for Meath compares somewhat unfavourably with the other counties – 49% of the Meath population aged over 15 had only primary or lower secondary level education compared to 45% in Kildare or 42% in Dublin. At the other end

of the spectrum there was a smaller proportion with third level qualifications in Meath, **Figure 8**.

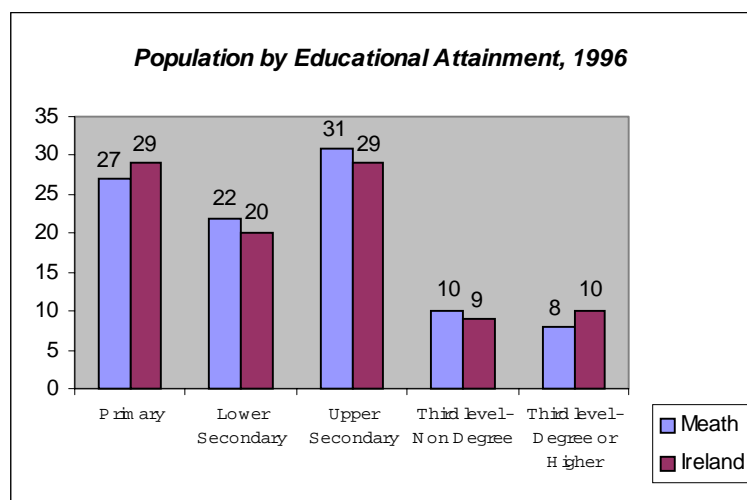


Figure 8: Population by Educational Attainment, 1996

The geographical distribution of persons with different levels of education is clearly influenced by many of the other variables that have been examined. The contrast between the more youthful population in the more accessible parts of the county and the rural parts in the west and northwest is clearly illustrated on **Maps 46 and 47**.

Table 9 Percentage distribution of population aged 15 years and over by highest level of education completed 1996

	Dublin	Kildare	Meath	Wicklow	Ireland
Primary	24	24	27	26	29
Lower Secondary	18	21	22	20	20
Upper Secondary	29	32	31	30	29
Third level - non degree	10	11	10	11	9
Third level - degree or higher	14	10	8	10	10
Not Stated	4	2	2	3	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100

5.2 Social Classes

Educational attainment levels have a strong influence on occupational choices, which together with information on status in the labour force (employed vs unemployed), largely determines the **social class** to which individuals are assigned by the Central Statistics Office.

In Meath 22% of the population are classified as belonging to either social classes 5 (semi-skilled) or 6 (unskilled workers) compared with 21% for the total population of Ireland. These social groups are very strongly represented in the rural parts of the county especially in the north and southwest (**Map 48**). Social class 4 comprised of skilled manual workers is more strongly represented in Meath than in the other counties, probably due to the nature of the industrial sectors and also the impact of Tara mines.

Table 10 Percentage distribution of population by social classes, 1996

	Dublin	Kildare	Meath	Wicklow	Ireland
1. Professional workers	7	5	5	6	5
2. Managerial and technical	24	24	23	24	22
3. Non-manual workers	20	21	17	17	18
4. Skilled manual Workers	18	20	23	21	20
5. Semi-skilled manual Workers	12	11	12	12	13
6. Unskilled Workers	6	9	10	9	9
7. Others	13	10	9	10	12
8. Total	100	100	100	100	100

The distribution of social classes 1 and 2 (professional and managerial/ technical workers) is almost the reverse of that for classes 5 and 6 (**Map 49**) with the highest concentrations in the more urbanized districts. Over one-third of the population belongs to these classes in 13 districts. Taken together Maps 48 and 49 suggest a high level of spatial segregation of social classes between different parts of the county, which is more than the traditional rural-urban divide. The broad divisions identified here correspond closely with the distribution of the Haase deprivation/ affluence scores. At a micro geographical scale it is very likely that urban residential development patterns have also contributed to social class based spatial segregation. Section V of the Planning Act 2000 seeks to overcome the process by which residential segregation occurs.

5.3 Social Inclusion

The promotion of a more inclusive society is a key objective of development strategies for the future. It is an “essential aspect” of the vision underpinning the report by the National Economic and Social Council on “*Opportunities, Challenges and Capacities for Choice*” (1999). Social inclusion is defined as being essentially about full participation in society. Such participation is possible only with access to core, taken-for-granted rights and the fulfillment of the associated obligations that characterize full membership of society. The National Development Plan 2000-2006 also identifies social inclusion as a core objective.

While there is broad agreement on the objective there are difficulties when it comes to measuring the extent of social exclusion. Due to the very significant data limitations it is necessary to rely on a number of proxy variables to identify the distributions of groups that may be at risk of experiencing some form of social exclusion. It is important to note that all persons described by a particular proxy variable may not be experiencing exclusion.

5.3.1 Long-term unemployment

One measure that may help to identify districts where some persons may be at a high risk of social exclusion is the distribution of long-term unemployed persons. While there are undoubtedly concentrations of the incidence of long-term unemployment within most of the urban centres, which are masked by the ratios calculated for entire districts, **Map**

50 also identifies a number of rural areas, especially in the northeast where between 8% and 12% of the labour force were out of work for more than one year. Relatively high rates are also apparent in the southwest. The total number of persons on the Live Register has declined significantly over recent years. However, at the end of February 2001 there were still 2,082 persons on the Live Register in Meath.

5.3.2 Elderly persons living alone

The number of elderly persons living alone is another proxy measure that is frequently used in studies of potential social exclusion. In 1996 there were just over 2,500 persons aged over 65 living alone, one-quarter of the total aged over 65 years. Females in this category outnumber by males by two to one. The distribution of over 65s living alone as a percentage of the total population reflects to some extent the overall age profile with the highest rates in the most rural areas, especially around Oldcastle (**Map 51**).

5.3.4 Lone parent families with young children

Another group that have been established to be at a high risk of experiencing some forms of social disadvantage are lone parent families with all children aged under 15 years. These parents may experience difficulties in relation to obtaining housing and also in regard to participation in the labour force. **Map 52** shows that there is a very marked distinction between the very rural areas and the rapidly growing urban areas in relation to the incidence of lone parent families. According to data from the Department of Social, Family and Community Affairs the number of recipients of the lone parent family allowance in Meath increased by 43.0% between 1996-99 compared with an increase of 39% in the State and 31% in Dublin, Table 11. More recent data shows there were 1,935 recipients of single parent payments in February 2001.

5.3.4 Persons with a disability

Table 11 also shows that in 1999 there were 2733 persons in the county in receipt of disability payments, an increase of 36.2% from 1996. Compared to Kildare or Wicklow the number receiving invalidity pensions is low but the rate of increase was twice the national rate. Data for February 2001 indicates that the number in receipt of disability and invalidity payments has risen to over 4,200.

Table 11 No. of recipients of Social Welfare benefits 1999 and percentage change 1996-99

	Meath	Kildare	Wicklow	Dublin	Ireland
One parent family Allowance 1999	1540	2468	2289	26983	70387
% change 1996-99	43.0	49.0	40.5	30.9	39.2
Disability payments	2733	3760	2849	28602	107057
% change 1996-99	36.2	38.7	33.6	21.9	33.0
Invalidity pensions	1050	1414	1199	15920	46946
% change 1996-99	18.9	12.3	8.3	6.0	9.1
No. on live register	2753	4347	4784	45483	176539
% change 1996-99	- 30.4	- 44.7	- 36.8	- 45.6	-34.6

As part of its working group on social inclusion, North Meath Community Development Association has established the North Meath Disability Equality Group, with an office in Moynalty. It provides supports to approximately 100 persons with physical and sensory disabilities.

The Department of Social Community and Family Affairs has adopted the following Mission Statement “to promote social well being through income and other supports which enable people to participate in society in a positive way”. The Department provides a wide range of services through its centres in Navan, Kells, Trim and Drogheda to the following target groups: the unemployed, one parent families, pensioners, ill and disabled, families via child benefit, voluntary and community groups, and community and development groups. Further details are contained in the audit of services report.

5.3.5 Access to Childcare facilities

The availability or non-availability of childcare facilities is another factor that may contribute to social exclusion arising from an inability to participate in the workforce outside the home. A report on Childcare Needs in North and South Meath prepared for North Meath Communities Development Association (NMCDA) and Trim Initiative to Development and Enterprise (TIDE) published in December 2000 found that just over one-quarter of parents are minding their children at home and 17% of parents use extended family members to provide childcare. The survey presents evidence of a high level of demand for childcare services. The absence of affordable and accessible childcare facilities emerged as a significant barrier for many women in relation to taking up work outside the home or participating in training or education programmes. The more limited availability of facilities and the poor quality of the public transport service in rural areas further exacerbates the problems associated with childcare for women with limited financial resources in those areas. Over recent months funding has been made available to the Health Authority to assist with the provision of better quality and more accessible facilities.

5.3.6 Travellers

Travellers are a group that has traditionally felt excluded from many aspects of mainstream society. The Census of Travellers taken in August 1998 showed that there were 157 traveler families in the county. Of these 93 were living in houses (90 provided by the Local Authority) and another 42 were accommodated on halting sites. There were a further 22 families without their own accommodation facilities. Most of the Local Authority housing has been provided in standard LA estates (56 of 90 units) with 32 in Traveller Group Schemes. The vast majority of the housing is located in Navan (76 units) followed by six in Trim and four in Dunboyne. There is one unit in each of the following areas: Bogganstown, Oldcastle, Athboy, and Bellewstown.

Meath County Council has adopted an Accommodation Programme for Traveller Families covering the period 2000-2004 which will include fifty houses and ten transfers. The Council will regard travellers who reside permanently in the county for at least six months as indigenous. Newly married indigenous couples who might otherwise reside in unauthorized encampments will be specifically targeted in the housing programme. The

Council has also included in its Plan proposals for providing employment opportunities for young travellers in order to break the cycle of long-term unemployment and to improve their life-chances.

Navan Travellers Workshop is a voluntary community organization working in partnership with travellers and the settled community. Among the objectives of the group is developing a sense of pride in culture and heritage among travellers and promoting respect for traveler identity and culture in the settled community. (See Audit Report for further details).

5.3.7 Asylum Applicants

The most recent group of residents in the County that are subject to various forms of exclusion is refugees and asylum applicants. The total number of asylum applicants arriving in Ireland has increased dramatically from 91 in 1993 to 1179 in 1996 after which the numbers have grown 7,724 in 1999 and 10,938 in 2000. Nigeria and Romania are the principal source countries accounting for 31% and 22% of the arrivals in 2000. The accommodation strategy adopted by the government in response to such a large influx over a very short time period includes provision of 330 places at the former Mosney Holiday Centre. The number of occupants of the Centre in April 2001 was 325.

6. QUALITY OF LIFE

The importance of maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for all members of the population has emerged as an objective in many recent studies that have begun to articulate a sustainable concept of development. Indeed, one of the five objectives of the National Spatial Strategy is to “improve the quality of life for all sections of society”. Research on Quantifying Quality of Life, undertaken by ERM for the National Spatial Strategy has identified different sets of factors that influence quality in rural and urban contexts.

In rural areas key issues are the provision of education at first and second levels and also employment and training opportunities. Other important issues are health care provision, leisure and recreation facilities and public transport. Access to public transport is particularly significant in the more disadvantaged rural communities, especially for persons and households belonging to the lower social classes.

For towns and villages ERM identified a large menu of factors that contribute to a good quality of life. Places that have the majority of the following attributes are regarded as having a good quality of life:

- good income level and distribution,
- high level of personal material assets (e.g., home ownership)
- access to economic, social and physical infrastructure,
- low crime level,
- good quality affordable housing units,
- balanced social mix,
- good community interaction (clubs, organisations, etc),
- high quality historic heritage,
- balanced industrial, service and tertiary employment mix.

The term 'quality of life' is used here in a broad sense to describe the conditions that contribute to a sustainable quality of life experienced by residents of the county. It is a multi-dimensional concept that embraces issues related to cost of housing, the quality of the natural environment and the cultural heritage; the availability of health services and other forms of social supports and protection; provision of recreational and leisure facilities, and parity of access to information. Most of the themes discussed in previous sections are also relevant to this concept especially access to education, range and quality of employment opportunities, settlement patterns which affect travel to work times, spatial segregation of social classes, and initiatives to overcome barriers to social inclusion, etc. In the remainder of this section data are presented on a number of indicators of the different dimensions noted above. A comprehensive analysis for all parts of the county is not feasible due to the absence of appropriate data, a problem that is not unique to Meath.

6.1 Housing

For many people today the cost of housing is a major concern. Local Authorities have a responsibility to assist persons requiring housing but unable pay the full market price. The Local Authority can provide assistance in a number of ways that include building and allocating housing to those in need, capital or rental subsidy schemes, shared ownership options, low cost loans for private house purchases, and paying rent of privately owned accommodation.

Meath County Council has an extensive stock of social housing units, amounting to almost 4,700 units at the end of 2000. These are generally located in estates, of which there are 129 in the county, located in 59 villages and towns. The vast majority of the estates are small, usually less than twenty houses. There are only two estates in the county with a little over 100 houses each, (both are in Navan) and there are only five with more than 45 houses: (Duleek, 91; Laytown, 84; Dunboyne, 72; Ashbourne, 57 and Ratoath, 45). Social science researchers have in a number of studies established links between type of housing tenure and a number of indicators of social disadvantage. The data presented here on the distribution of the larger social housing estates may help to explain the patterns revealed by some of the maps presented earlier, e.g., lone parent families, and long-term unemployment.

For those who can afford to purchase their own house a major element in the cost is the value of the site, which is influenced by market trends. The Local Authority through its Development Plan seeks to ensure that there is an adequate supply of land zoned for residential development. Section 4 of the Development Plan sets out in detail the strategies for residential development in both rural and urban areas. At the end of 1998 there were 837 hectares of serviced land with potential for just over 12,500 houses that could accommodate a population of almost 36,700. Approximately 28% of the zoned lands lie in Navan UDC and environs, with another 22% in East Meath and 17% in the environs of Drogheda. Thus, Navan is in a very strong position to grow rapidly over the short term. The contrasts between the east and the rest of county are likely to become more pronounced.

The Draft Housing Strategy prepared by Meath County Council (2001) estimates that approximately 21,500 new households will be established between 2001 and 2006. Fortunately, the amount of land zoned for residential purposes is more than adequate to meet the projected needs to 2006. By 2007 it is envisaged that about 47% of the households and population will be located in the urban districts of Navan, Trim, Kells, Ashbourne and the environs of Drogheda. The Housing Strategy analysis suggests that on average about 24% of the new households are likely to experience affordability difficulties. In accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 Meath Local Authorities will reserve up to 5% of residential land for social housing and another 15% for affordable housing.

6. 2 Quality of the natural environment

The concept of sustainable development has at its core the notion that development aimed to meet the needs of the current generation must not reduce the capacity of the environment to sustain the needs of future generations. In effect all development actions need to take account of their potential environmental impacts. There are a number of areas in Meath that are particularly important from an environmental perspective. These include five Special Areas of Conservation and 22 proposed Natural Heritage Areas (**Map 53** and Table 11). Full details, on each of these Areas is contained in Volume 3 of the County Development Plan.

The rural parts of the county have been analysed by the Local Authority planners for their visual characteristics with a view to assisting developers and others who need to have regard to the sensitivity of different types of development in parts of the rural landscape where there are differing capacities to absorb development. Eleven types of rural landscape are identified on the basis of their visual quality and the particular sensitivities of each are identified in the Development Plan. The eleven Visual Quality Groups of areas are:

1. the coastal zone,
2. the lower Boyne valley,
3. the other river valleys,
4. the Royal Canal corridor,
5. Slieve Na Calliagh Uplands,
6. Environs of Lough Sheelin,
7. Upland agricultural areas,
8. North Meath lakelands,
9. The Tara and Dunsany district,
10. Bogland areas,
11. Rural and agricultural areas.

The quality of the river waters in Meath is monitored by the County Council Environmental Unit. Meath County Council has recently been a partner in the EU funded Three Rivers Project which sought to establish monitoring systems and management strategies which will restore and conserve the waters of the Boyne, Liffey and Suir river systems to 'good ecological status'. The term 'good ecological status' is applied to waters suitable for sustaining natural aquatic ecosystems, which are unaffected or only impacted by human activity.

Water quality monitoring began at a national level in Ireland in 1971. Since then there has been a steady decline in the quality of Ireland's rivers and lakes. The national trend is reflected in the data collected for the river Boyne. In 1995 only 31.8% of the catchment was considered unpolluted compared with about 45% in the late 1980s. Moderate or serious pollution levels were recorded at 41 of 110 monitoring stations (**Map 54**). The deterioration in quality resulting from an increase in the total phosphorous load is mainly related to intensive farming practices and inadequately treated municipal waste water. A management strategy has been prepared that will seek to reduce the extent of pollution through a combination of enforcement of codes of good practice in all sectors (urban and rural) and promotion of awareness of the environmental hazards associated with certain activities. The overall objective is to restore the water system to 'good ecological status' as defined above.

The disposal of waste material can impact very negatively on the quality of the environment if it is not carefully managed. Recycling is a key component of any strategy for a sustainable approach to waste management. Meath County Council has already established a recycling facility at Navan and additional centres are planned for Trim, Kells and Dunshaughlin. The Council also proposes to increase the number of sites and the diversity of materials accepted at Bring Centres, and to encourage the provision of Bring Centres in all new housing estates. The efforts of the Local Authority in relation to environmental management and enhancing environmental quality are complemented by activities supported throughout rural areas by Meath LEADER (**Map 55**).

6.3 The cultural heritage

Meath has an extremely rich heritage of archaeological sites (**Map 56**), historical buildings, country houses (see also Map 42), demesnes and vernacular buildings. In addition there are many items of industrial archaeological interest such as mills, canals, roads and rail bridges. All of these resources help to define the county's character and identity and thus contribute to the quality of life that can be experienced by Meath residents. However, many of these resources are already coming under intense pressure associated with the growth in tourism (for example the Newgrange complex). In order to protect these resources for future generations it will be necessary to put in place appropriate management strategies. Carefully designed and appropriately located visitor centres, as at Bru na Boinne and Trim, can be a central component of heritage management strategies.

County Meath is unique in that it is the only county in Leinster with Gaeltacht areas. There are two such areas; Rathcairn, three miles south east of Athboy and Baile Ghib, six miles east of Kells. They had a combined population of 1407 persons in 1996, an increase of 12% over 1991. These areas are under constant threat which is accentuated by current demographic patterns and development pressures. Meath County Council has responsibility for implementing strategies to achieve government objectives that the Gaeltachtaí should survive and be developed as areas that are a distinctive component of the linguistic and cultural life of the county. In support of this policy the Council will require that a "Linguistic Impact Study" be carried out before any application is considered for single or multiple housing developments. Architectural styles that complement local traditions such as the Land Commission house style will be

encouraged. Furthermore, signage will be provided in Irish with explanatory details of the cultural significance of the area at entry and exit points.

The activities of the County Council in relation to the Gaeltachtaí are supported by Udaras na Gaeltachta and a local community based cooperative, Comharchumann Rath Cairn Teo. (See also Audit of Services Report). The mission of the Udaras is to preserve, strengthen, develop, and promote the Gaeltacht and the Irish language so that strong self-confident communities can achieve their full potential and enjoy a high quality of life. These objectives will be achieved through strategic initiatives in relation to industrial development, community and local development, and training and human resources. The Udaras approach emphasises the need for policies that are integrated and sustainable so as to enhance the quality of life of communities now and in the future. At present Udaras spends about £75,000 per annum in Meath on Community Development and about £10,000 on events to promote the language and culture. There is no limit on its spending in relation to supports for economic development – rather it is demand lead.

Comharchumann Rath Cairn Teo is a voluntary community based cooperative that seeks to advance the economic and social life of the people of Rath Cairn. Their activities include provision of enterprise supports, Irish language courses for students from outside the Gaeltacht, and a community development programme.

The Census of Population provides data on the number of persons aged over three years who can speak Irish. The data provides a crude measure of competence (subjectively assessed) in relation to ability to speak the language but it does not provide any information on the level of usage of Irish on a regular basis. **Map 57** shows that the highest proportions (approximately 50%) are in the districts in the southeast and also in the districts containing the Gaeltachtaí, The high values in the southeast reflect the younger age profile and the higher educational levels of the population.

6.4 Availability of health services and other forms of social supports and protection

The quality of people's health is clearly a major influence on the quality of their lives. The North East Health Board has overall responsibility for delivery of a very wide range of health care programmes and also for provision of facilities, general and specialist, to cater for the needs of the population (See Audit of Services Report for further details). The activities of the NEHB are complemented by a number of supports provided by the Department of Social Family and Community Affairs.

For many rural residents access to services is a factor that can impinge on the quality of their lives. Bus Eireann provides a limited public transport service while Dublin Bus serves only Dunboyne. Many of the Bus Eireann services are very infrequent, while inter-town and village connections are extremely restricted. The Meath Accessible Transport Project has highlighted difficulties with accessible vehicles, including those brought into use as part of a new bus service within Navan itself. (See Audit Report).

Over recent years there has been much concern over the provision of postal services in many rural areas. In addition to their primary function in relation to postal services the post office network is used for a wide variety of other services including:

- Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs payments,
- Television licence sales,
- Bill payments (e.g., Eircom, etc)
- Money transfers,
- Savings and investments,
- National Lottery.

Rural post offices also serve as important meeting places for people who may have limited opportunities to visit the local village. Recent analysis has revealed that many post offices are loss-making operations and that the overall situation is likely to deteriorate further over the medium term. In order to maintain the rural network it will become increasingly necessary to generate new business. One option is that all government departments should be required to maximise the amount of their business that can be channelled through the rural network.

There were 61 post offices in Meath in 1999, only nine less than in 1931. The rural network consists of 50 post offices with an average population served of 1500, compared with the national average of 1000. Thus the overall position for the rural network in Meath is probably less precarious than in other counties but ultimately much will depend on the overall strategy adopted by the Government and An Post in relation to the network. If An Post were to lose the contract it has with the Department of Social, Family and Community Affairs it would have very significant financial implications for the Company and especially for the future of the Network.

Personal security and concerns about the security of personal property are increasingly an issue that affects the quality of many people's lives. While the issue is relevant to all almost all age groups it is particularly important for elderly people especially those living alone. There are 14 Garda stations dispersed throughout the county with some additional ones in north Dublin (Fingal) and south county Louth that are also part of the Garda Division serving county Meath (**Map 58**).

Fire fighting is another important safety service provided by the Local Authority. There are seven fire stations at strategic locations throughout the county (**Map 59**): Navan (headquarters of the network), Trim, Kells, Oldcastle, Nobber, Dunsahaughlin and Ashbourne. According to a recent grading all stations with the exception of the one at Nobber have the full range of facilities that are deemed to be necessary.

6.5 Recreation and leisure facilities

The availability of recreational and leisure facilities can enhance the quality of life that people may experience in different parts of the county. Almost every village has facilities for some field-based sports. In addition there are 16 equestrian facilities and 11 golf courses (see Map 43) and there are also a number of walking routes such as the Boyne towpath (8 km,) and for swimmers there are extensive beaches at Bettystown-Laytown.

There are public swimming pools in Trim and Kells with another under construction in Navan. For indoor leisure and entertainment; residents of east Meath have access to a range of museums, theatres and art galleries in Trim, Navan, Drogheda and Dublin. Through the appointment of a County Arts Officer and further development of its library service (see below) the County Council plays a central role in the development of the cultural life of the community.

6.6 Parity of access to information

As society has become more educated there are increasing demands for access to information in a variety of formats. In order to cater for increasing numbers of readers there is a need for a well-resourced and accessible library service. Meath County Council supports the county public library service from its headquarters in Navan. There are in addition 11 branches throughout the county with only the southwest appearing to be relatively poorly serviced, **Map 60**.

The advent of information and communication technologies has brought about new ways of collecting and sharing information. If used properly the new technologies provide considerable opportunities for enhancing local democracy. Meath County Council has been to the forefront in ICT developments within the local government sector. Linking with the county library network facilities are been put in place to disseminate information over the internet. Already a facility has been provided in Duleek to enable people to seek information at a one-stop shop on planning applications and permissions as well as making payments such as motor taxation. The Draft Development Plan was placed on the Internet for the duration of the review period. Further developments of this type are planned for Dunshaughlin and other centres. These initiatives of course need not be confined to accessing and sharing official business information. The availability of internet access at public venues will greatly expand the level of access to the widest possible range of information sources on a basis that has the potential to support a more inclusive society.

The initiatives to improve access to information have been matched by parallel initiatives to facilitate greater levels of citizen participation and the concerns of other stakeholders in decisions that affect different aspects of development. Through extensive adoption of the partnership model in relation to a variety of complex tasks there has been a gradual transition towards a new form of governance that combines elements of both representative and participative democracy. The formation of the County Development Board is an important initiative in furthering this transition.

7. SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

This section provides an overview of the current position in relation to some key items of physical infrastructure that are necessary to support development in Meath that will be sustainable.

7.1 Transport

County Meath is well serviced by the National Roads Network with the N1, N2, N3 and N4 passing through the county to the main centres of population in the northeast,

northwest and west of the country. East Meath is also served by the Dublin-Belfast rail services. The growth of population and especially the increase in the number of vehicles on the roads has in many areas created severe pressures on the roads infrastructure.

The development of the transportation networks in the county will require an approach based on the principles of sustainable development which will require efforts to encourage greater use of public transport, especially for journeys to work. The current level of provision of public transport services is very limited, especially for movements between rural and urban areas and between the main urban centres, **Map 61**.

In addition to improving the quality of the public bus services, the main objective in relation to public transport over the medium term is to secure a high quality train service from Navan to Dublin city that will take large numbers of car-based commuters off the N3. There are also plans over the medium term to introduce Park and Ride facilities at a number of locations including Navan, Dunboyne, Enfield, Bettystown and Laytown.

Major upgrades of key sections of the roads network will be undertaken over the next five years. There are 35 projects at various stages at present with a planned investment of £875m. This will result in the upgrading of the N1 to dual carriageway status as far as Ashbourne, the N3 to motorway status as far as Trim and the N4 to motorway status beyond Kilcock (**Map 62**). In addition the following regional routes will be upgraded: the R154 Trim-Kilcock, and the R160 Navan-Trim-Longwood. The National Secondary Route N52 will become a strategic corridor linking Dundalk via Kells to Mullingar and beyond to Nenagh. There are also plans to provide over the medium term an outer ring road that will take traffic from the N1 via Balbriggan, south of Ashbourne to north of Dunshaughlin and from there to Kilcock. These improvements will greatly improve accessibility in the east of the county. It is expected that they will also result in safer driving conditions and therefore fewer serious accidents. **Map 63** shows the distribution of serious accidents over recent years. While there have been very many on the National roads and in the vicinity of the major urban centres, it is also noticeable that many sections of the county and regional roads have had high accident frequencies as they have been carrying traffic volumes in excess of their design capacity.

7.2 Environmental Infrastructures

The main items of environmental infrastructure relate to water and sewerage treatment, and waste management. In relation to water and sewerage treatment there is need for considerable investment in order to cater for the needs of increasing population and the demands of industrial development. Twenty five infrastructure projects are currently at various stages of planning or construction, with a total planned investment of £200m. Among the list of projects are a new regional water supply scheme from the Boyne to serve Navan and south Meath; the East Meath coastal drainage scheme to cater for the requirements of the coastal settlements including Laytown, Bettystown, Julianstown and Mornington; new water supply systems for Longwood, Summerhill, Slane, and Kells, **Map 64**.

The sewerage treatment investment programme will extend the existing network in Navan, provide new schemes at Longwood and Carlanstown and possibility also at Summerhill, Duleek, Ballivor, Moynalty and Kilmainhamwood.

Increasing population numbers and lifestyles associated with greater affluence are leading to ever increasing amounts of waste that has to be disposed of. In addition there are also very large amounts produced by agriculture and some industrial sectors as well as by the construction sector. In accordance with the Waste Management Act 1996 and the Waste Management (Planning) Regulations 1997 Meath County Council has cooperated with the Councils in Louth, Monaghan and Cavan to produce a Draft Waste Management Plan for the region.

A comprehensive strategy has been prepared that will involve measures to minimise the amount of waste for disposal by encouraging recycling and separation of disposable wastes. The main infrastructure item in the Plan concerns the provision of a new sanitary landfill site at Knockharley to replace the existing facility at Basketstown. The landfill site takes waste that cannot be otherwise disposed of in a safe manner.

Meath County Council has placed considerable emphasis on changing peoples' behavioural patterns in order to reduce the volume of waste produced. In 1997 it was the first Local Authority to appoint an Environmental Education Officer. Since then a recycling centre has been provided at Navan and additional ones are planned for Kells, Trim and Dushaughlin. A kerb-side collection service for separated waste materials will be introduced in urban areas and Bring Bank centres will be provided at rural locations.

7.3 Electricity

The very rapid growth of the economy over recent years has resulted in very significant increases in the demand for electricity, which has considerable pressures on the generating stations and the transmission and distribution networks. As a result there are a number of areas that urgently require additional major developments. These include extensive parts of East Meath as far north as Navan and extending west towards Kells (**Map 65**). This could potentially be a very serious constraint on further manufacturing and service industry development over the medium term, until such time as additional capacity is made available locally. Already the ESB have plans for a number of new installations in the areas at greatest risk (**Map 66**). Apart from providing new or expanding existing stations it may be necessary to install new high voltage distribution lines. In some areas there has been local opposition to such infrastructure. Therefore careful planning based on provision of information and a structure for consultation may be required.

7.4 Natural Gas

Natural gas is the cleanest of all fossil fuels and its chemical composition makes it an environmentally friendly fuel. Following the discovery of a major natural gas reserve off Kinsale in the early 1970s and the eventual construction of a pipeline to Dublin and further north there has been a very large increase in the consumption of gas for electricity generation and also for residential and industrial heating and other uses. As demand increased the Kinsale gas supply was augmented by imports via a pipeline system from Scotland. A second interconnector pipeline was put in place in 2000 that will bring additional supplies ashore at Ballough in north Dublin from which a new pipeline will be laid to Galway and from there to the Shannon Estuary. It will also be able to take gas from the Corrib Gas Field.

While the exact location of the pipeline from Dublin to Galway has to be decided it is very likely that it will pass through the area close to the southern boundary of the county. It will be possible to install distribution lines off the main pipeline which will provide an alternative more environmentally friendly source of heating and power for residential, commercial and industrial users.

7.5 Information Technology

Ireland has moved very rapidly into the Information Technology Age. The new information and communication technologies are very rapidly bringing about very significant changes in the nature of work, the types of economic activities undertaken in Ireland, the competitiveness of businesses, as well as having a major influence on individual lifestyles and especially on opportunities for independently pursuing lifelong learning. Central to the successful and widespread adoption of the new technologies are the provision of appropriate hardware and also of the skills to maximise the potential. Much of the responsibility for providing the appropriate skills and for promoting the new technologies lies within the domain of the education and training systems.

The main hardware requirements are the provision of high-speed communication lines. The provision of this infrastructure will be undertaken on a competitive basis by a number of privately owned commercial companies. The geographical pattern of provision to date (*Map 67*) suggests that there is a major risk of a digital divide emerging with many areas to the north of a line from Dublin to Galway at a disadvantage. The most likely scenario is that the fibre optic cables will be provided by the private companies in those areas where there are potentially large numbers of customers at high densities. In this case of East and South Meath is likely to be well serviced as part of the provision of networks throughout the Dublin Metropolitan region. The rural parts of the county especially in the west and north may be left at a further disadvantage. In this regard it may be appropriate for public bodies such as the Local Authority, with additional government support, to take on the task of providing the core infrastructure in those areas where the private sector is unlikely to do so.

8. SYNTHESIS: A SPATIAL TYPOLOGY OF COUNTY MEATH

This section provides a synthesis of the spatial patterns that have been examined separately throughout the previous sections. It is based on a statistical analysis of 30 indicators that have been measured for each of the DEDs in the county. Furthermore, as the typology presented here is a component of a national typology map, it provides a basis for establishing the wider context which the Meath CDB strategy needs to take account of.

A rural typology map for all of Ireland has been prepared by NUI Maynooth and Fitzpatrick Associates for the National Spatial Strategy. The map is intended as a summary of the different types of rural areas in Ireland at the beginning of the twenty first century. The map also identifies the urban areas, but these were excluded from the analysis as the focus was on identifying the different types of rural areas and how they relate to the urban centres. The classification is based on 30 indicators measured from the Censuses of Population and Agriculture for the each of the 2,716 rural district

electoral divisions (DEDs) in the State. It provides a summary synthetic profile for all DEDs in Meath while also establishing their position relative to the rest of rural Ireland.

Using a two-stage approach to the analysis the interrelationships between the indicators measured across all of the DEDs have been identified and used to produce eight new composite indicators which are then used as a basis to classify each of the DEDs into 'area types' where the main criterion is that each DED is assigned to the Area Type to which it is most similar.

8.1 The Indicators

The analysis was based on indicators selected to measure the following aspects of the rural socio-economic structure:

1. Demographic structure (6 indicators)
2. Labour force characteristics (8 indicators)
3. Education and social classes (3* indicators)
4. Sectoral employment profiles (5 indicators)
5. Structure /strength of agriculture (3 indicators)
6. Changes in demography and labour force (5 indicators)

*Only three indicators were selected to measure the education levels and distribution by social classes as these indicators are strongly correlated with some of the others.

8.2 The typology map

The typology map shows the distribution of six types of rural areas and also the urban areas that were excluded from the analysis (**Map 68**). The areas have been given the following summary labels.

1. Peri-urban areas
2. Very strong rural areas
3. Strong agricultural areas undergoing adjustment
4. Structurally weak rural areas
5. Marginal areas
6. Highly diversified rural areas

The distribution of population by area type (including Urban areas) for Meath and adjoining counties is shown in Table 12

Table 12 Percentage distribution of population by area type 1996

Area Type	Meath	Louth	Kildare	Westmeath	Ireland
<i>Urban</i>	46.2	66.8	65.7	44.5	60.7
Peri-urban	20.1	18.9	11.7	17.4	22.2
Very strong rural	29.4	11.9	20.2	14.8	10.4
Strong agricultural	0.8	0.0	0.8	5.5	16.2
Structurally weak	3.2	1.5	0.1	14.7	6.3
Marginal	0.0	0.9	0.4	1.2	3.0
Highly diversified	0.3	0.0	1.0	1.8	2.5

The most notable features are that the percentage identified as urban is larger than the CSO definition (here account was taken of population density levels in accordance with OECD standards) and that only 4.0 of the population reside in what are described as weak or marginal rural areas compared with almost 16% in the neighbouring county of Westmeath.

A brief description of each area type follows.

8.2.1. Peri-urban areas

These areas are generally characterised by high population densities, an advanced level of transition to a higher socio-economic profile (higher proportions with advanced levels of education, larger shares of the workforce in professional services and commerce functions), low level of reliance on agricultural employment and high levels of commuting to work. They are generally found in close proximity to urban centres and are particularly evident around the larger towns and the cities. In Co. Meath almost all of the area southeast of a line from Drogheda to Navan and Trim belongs to this category. The peri-urban parts are essentially those parts of the open countryside that have been subjected to very high levels of urban generated adjustment, they contain approximately one-fifth of the total population of the county.

8.2.2. Very strong rural areas

These areas are very prominent throughout the rural parts of the Mid-East and much of the Southeast. As well as possessing a strong agricultural base DEDs that constitute this cluster also exhibit an above average level of transition to non-agricultural employment. The rate of population increase in this Area Type is generally higher than in the peri-urban areas and is reflected in a more youthful population. The rate of increase in the number of persons at work is significantly larger than in the peri-urban areas (15.5% compared to 12.7% for all of Ireland). This suggests that some parts of this Area Type are experiencing the demographic and labour force effects associated with the recent

increases in long distance commuting. In Meath this area type, which accounts for almost 30% of the population embraces most of county beyond the limits of the urban and peri-urban areas.

8.2.3. Strong agricultural areas undergoing adjustment

The type of rural area is represented by DEDs that are mostly concentrated in the area to the west and southwest of Kells and contains under one percent of the population. In the wider national context these areas have a strong agricultural base due to a combination of larger farms with an orientation towards either dairying or tillage. Full-time rather than part-time farming is more the norm. Female participation labour force rates are below average and throughout all of these areas the rate of employment growth between 1991-96 was exceptionally low. Following the introduction of restrictions on agricultural output as part of the CAP reforms in the 1990s the opportunities for further expansion have become severely restricted.

8.2. 4 & 8.2.5 Weak rural areas

These two area types represent the rural DEDs that are economically and demographically most disadvantaged. The defining attributes are a strong reliance on a very weak farm structure (elderly farmers on small farms producing very low levels of output, high level of decline in number of farmers, though they still account for the largest share of the workforce), low levels of employment in manufacturing or services and a below average level of self-employment outside agriculture, and the lowest level of females in part-time employment. These economic attributes have contributed to the emergence of a very weak demographic profile based on an ageing population with relatively fewer households with young children. These area types account for only three percent of the population in Meath, mostly in the DEDs around Oldcastle. Also included are the following DEDs: Grangegeeth north of Slane, Cruicetown and Posseckstown in the hinterland of Nobber, and Killyon in the southwest.

8.2.6 Highly diversified rural areas

This area type is represented by only one DED, Kilskeer, southwest of Trim. Elsewhere in the country this type of area is mostly associated with scenic and high amenity landscapes that attract large numbers of tourists and support a distinctive socio-economic profile. This type of area has emerged as having higher levels of self-employment outside of agriculture (22.4% of the workforce) and higher levels of part-time work especially for women, though the share of employment in manufacturing is very small (only 11% of the workforce in contrast to approximately 20% in most other areas). The demographic structure is typical of areas experiencing some net in-migration of persons aged over 25. As only one DED in Meath belongs to this area type caution is required in any attempt to interpret it as a local example of an area type that is more typical of other parts of the country.

9. EMERGING ISSUES

There are a number of key issues emerging from the analysis that require further consideration in the context of preparing the CDB strategy. These include:

- A critical assessment of the relationship of Meath to Dublin on the one hand, and also of the implications of the Objective One status of four neighbouring counties,
- A need to situate Meath in the context of the National Spatial Strategy,
- While acknowledging the sources of differentiation within the county there is a need to maintain a countywide focus, and to avoid becoming too narrowly concerned with the needs of the individual electoral areas,
- Focus on enhancing quality of life for all residents in a context of very rapid change
- Promote sustainable working and living conditions
- Enhance the competitiveness of all economic sectors and attract new sectors that will provide employment opportunities for a more highly skilled labour force and increase the level of wealth creation in the county,
- Promote sustainable use of all environmental resources
- Implement the integrated waste management strategy
- Improve access for residents of locations away from the radial routes
- Overcome barriers that result in many different forms of social exclusion
- Develop a coherent identity for Meath, especially for new residents
- Enhance range of educational opportunities and maximise potential of existing educational resources.

The strategy that will be developed by the CDB will be largely based on the existing attributes taking account of untapped potential within the county. The strategy should be predicated on the model of development that underlies the National Development Plan, i.e. in essence the model sets as its objective the maximisation of per capita levels of wealth creation conditional on the principles of environmental and social sustainability². Environmental sustainability refers to the absolute need to ensure that economic development does not compromise either the level or quality of the environment in the long run. Social sustainability requires that development must be inclusive and must not fracture the degree of social cohesion that all societies need to remain viable, organic and dynamic.

The maximisation of per capita wealth creation depends on the interplay of four key factors. These are

Productivity, measured as the value of output per employee,

The employment rate, measured as the percentage of the labour force that is actually employed,

The participation rate, measured as percentage of the total number of persons of working age (16-65 years) that are in the labour force, and

The dependency rate, the ratio of the number of people who are not of working age to those aged between 16 and 65 years.

² The model, presented here in summary form, has been developed by NUI Maynooth and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

The crucial issue in policy and strategy analysis is to identify those variables that can be subject to influence and those that cannot. The dependency rate, for example, is dependent on the age structure of the population and is not amenable to major policy influence at national level over the short term. However, at county level the rate is sensitive to population movement patterns – an influx of young families will in the short-term lead to an increase in youth dependency. The employment rate is largely affected by cyclical factors, although at particular periods structural factors (such as the decline of traditional industries) may affect the rate quite significantly. Proactive labour market interventions and targeted sectoral supports sustained over a long period may be required to increase the employment rate.

The participation rate is influenced by economic, social and possibly cultural factors pertaining, for example, to the prevailing attitude towards married women working outside the home. This rate is capable of being affected by a number of initiatives. At national level tax incentives can be used to encourage more married women to (re)enter the workforce on either a part-time or a full-time basis. The participation rate can also be influenced by national and local initiatives to improve the provision of childcare facilities. An additional factor that can influence the ability of women to participate in the labour force is the availability of adequate transport facilities especially in rural areas.

The fundamental determinant of improvements in wealth creation and living standards over the long term is, of course, the ability of a county to enhance its overall level of productivity. Productivity increases can be influenced by two broad sets of factors, namely those affecting the sectoral composition of output and the accumulation of capital. The sectoral composition of output concerns the relative contribution from different sectors and sub-sectors. The main issue here is whether there is a significant presence of high value-added manufacturing and traded services in the county. Such activities usually have very particular requirements, such as suitable site conditions, access to large highly skilled labour pool, excellent communications infrastructure and attractive residential environments.

The second set of factors that influence productivity increases are related to the accumulation of capital. The processes involved here are those that influence investments in private capital (factory buildings, office space, equipment, housing, etc), public infrastructure (roads, rail lines, telecommunications, utilities, water and sanitary services, public housing, social cultural and recreational facilities, etc), human capital (education and training) and knowledge capital (research and development).

In conclusion, the CDB strategy will need to address the issues identified above and develop proposals for co-ordinated and integrated responses that will lead to development that will be economically, socially, culturally and environmentally sustainable and at the same time contribute to an enhancement of the quality of life of all residents while also maximising the contribution of Meath to the development of the state.

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