SWOT Analysis of Ireland’s National Territorial Scale

‘Dublin V the Concept of Balanced Regional Development’

20th June 2012
Introduction

Ireland has undertaken a SWOT analysis of our focus area which is the national territorial scale. We are looking at it under:

- The Planning System,
- Infrastructure and Mobility,
- The Metropolitan Area of Dublin,
- Outside the Metropolitan Area of Dublin, and
- The Dublin-Belfast Corridor

The Irish Planning System

Ireland’s first Planning and Development Act was published in 1964. Local Authorities were established in every county in Ireland.

In 2000 further legislation and regulations were introduced with the Planning and Development Act 2000. Regional planning and guidelines had statutory footing for the first time. A clear hierarchy in the planning system was established.

Institutional Roles and Responsibilities in Ireland

There are three main levels of planning in Ireland.

- **National** - Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG). They devise the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and issue guidance documents in respect of national planning issues. They also produce the National Development Plan (NDP) which prioritises capital investment in line with the NSS.
  - An Bord Pleanála (ABP) - Is an independent third party appeals system.

- **Regional** - 8 Regional Authorities. They were established in the Local Government Act of 1991 to promote coordination of public service provision and to monitor the role of delivery of EU Structural Fund assistance in the regions.
Local – 88 local planning authorities – 29 county councils – 5 city boroughs – 49 town councils. The implementation of the planning system is the responsibility of the 88 local authorities through Development Plans, Development Management, Enforcement and Local Area Plans.

SWOT Analysis

We looked at the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of five areas in the national territorial scale.

1. The Planning System
2. Infrastructure and Mobility
3. The Metropolitan Area of Dublin
4. Outside the Metropolitan Area of Dublin
5. Dublin – Belfast Corridor

1. The Planning System

Strengths
Third Party Appeals;
Open to all Development;
Short Time Frame (~ 8 Weeks);
Being part of the EU has lead to positive changes in the planning system.

Weakness
Reserved Function;
Development Plan Preparation - lack of synchronisation between regions;
Development Plan Period;
Regions - under resourced, lack of permanent staff and public representation;
Top Down approach;
Difference in where population growth was planned and where it has occurred;
The number of bodies under the local planning level;

Threats
Local Government Funding - lack of certainty;
NIMBYism;
Pro-Rural Attitude;
Lack of Awareness;
Pro-Development;

Opportunities
Pro-Development;
Strengthened Planning Hierarchy;
Media/Public/Recession - opportunity to change perception of planning;
2. Infrastructure and Mobility

**Strengths**
Port Tunnel – Direct link for HGV’s from Dublin Port to the motorway network bypassing Dublin City Centre;
Motorway improvements;
Centralised decision making;
Strategic Infrastructure Developments - fast track process (~ 9 months);
Private Investment;
Regions are connected to Dublin which is connected to the international hubs on the global network;

**Weakness**
Spatial Planning of Infrastructure;
Resources are in the West while the infrastructure is in the East;
No deep reinforcement of the grid network;
Lack of Density;
Airport connectivity to the country is bad;
Infrastructure is physically disconnected;
Rail - lack of serious investment, removal of services in 1950’s and 1960’s;
The population is car dependent;

**Threats**
Administration Fragmentation;
No Funding Commitment;
Disparate Population;
Aging Population;

**Opportunities**
Past development on east means the facilities are in place to develop the west;
Better Coordination;
Distances are short;
Infrastructure utilisation through dual use of motorway e.g. bus service

3. The Metropolitan Area of Dublin

**Strengths**
Large Population;
Centre of Government;
Time zone in Europe - means we have the ability to trade with American and Asia;
Public Transport Employment – all roads lead to Dublin;
Economic Engine of Ireland;
International Trading City;
Heritage + Environment + Art;

**Weakness**
Lack of Subsidiary;
County Council Funding – councils compete with one another rather then working together;
Administration Fragmentation;
Economic development relative to its density;

Threats
Lack of diversity in economic activates;
Continuation of Sprawl;
Local competiveness - no ‘for the common good’;
Funding uncertainties;

Opportunities
Funding - Dublin will always get funding due to its economic importance within Ireland
Ability to diversify;
Capitalise on the geographic location - proximity to the UK, connections to Europe, and
access to the rest of the country with relative ease;

4. Outside the Metropolitan Area of Dublin

Strengths
Broadband;
Agriculture;
Technological hub - e.g. Cork - pharmaceuticals;
Regional airports;
Tourism + Heritage;
Natural Resources;

Weakness
Disparate Population;
Lack of Connectivity between Regional Cities;
Numerous Cities with no critical mass;
Connections to Dublin only, lack of regional connections;

Threats
Rural Idyll;
Physical Infrastructure Deficit;
Social Infrastructure Deficit;
Abandonment of Traditional Economic Activity;
Lack of funding for the rural environment to favor Dublin;

Opportunities
Renewable Energy, an alternative economy
Border, Midlands, Western Regions (BMW) massive European Funding;
Agriculture + change in CAP;
Building upon the strength of the local communities e.g. Social Capital;

5. Dublin – Belfast Corridor

Strengths
Concentration of Development;
Towns along the corridor - Dundalk, Drogheda, Newry;
Joining the two largest cities in Ireland;
Population mass;
Education – Universities;  
Good Renewable Plan (Belfast);  
Diversify the Economy;

**Weakness**
Dominance of the Irish Market in North East of the country;  
Lack of a mutually supported vision;  
Two currencies;  
Fragile government links;  
Poor structural interactions;  
Little / no cross border collaboration;  
Different Countries;

**Threats**
Currency Fluctuation;  
Regional Support – Corridor might turn into a competition between Dublin and Belfast;  
Opening up to UK Market - therefore be even more dependent on the UK then we are now;

**Opportunities**
Strong rail / road / electricity links;  
Great competitiveness on the international market;  
Vaster pool of resources;  
Infrastructure Connections;  
Energy;  
Diversify the economy;  
Greater structural co-operation;

**Comment on the 15 Steps towards Territorial Cohesion**

**Governance of Stakeholders**
*Spatial planning cannot be carried out without involving stakeholders of all important interests’*

- A weakness in the planning system is that we have a top down approach to planning with our NSS.

**Bottom-Up Initiatives**
*For real support and to maximise the potential of regional assets, the intensive involvement of local communities as well as private parties is critical’*

- Rural Ireland has very strong local communities. As a result there is an opportunity to maximize the regions assets through bottom up initiatives.

**The Approach of Layers**
*This approach enables analyses necessary to establish a region’s strengths and weaknesses. It is also a tool to synthesise remedies for weaknesses and utilisation of applications in functional systems’*
After conducting the SWOT analysis we will now be able to move to the next step in territorial cohesion by considering, in a comprehensive way, the social, economic and physical aspects of the direction of future development by assessing territorial quality, territorial efficiency and territorial identity.

Ireland needs to capitalise on its regional assets and the strengths. The NSS 2002 – 2020 aims at giving the same values to every region. However if the regions are to capitalise on these assets then they should not have the same values and attributes. If they are to capitalise on their unique assets be in line with the 15 steps towards territorial cohesion then they have to understand their individual economic potential.

In order to achieve cohesion, all the regions need to have the same basic level of infrastructure and accessibility to education. As can be seen from the SWOT analysis Dublin and the Dublin- Belfast corridor would have the monopoly of this infrastructure.

Conclusion

The Planning System has been proven to be weak in relation to having a strong leadership and vision for the future, which has allowed for the public to act very strongly against the planning system. Although the system allows for diversification due to the fact that it ‘rules nothing out’ and so there in lies the opportunity, along with the bad perception at the moment, to change people opinion and bring in rules that gives clarification, and better regulation and transparency to the planning system.

Infrastructure and mobility has seen great investment over the last 15 years which has brought Ireland up to travel times per km travelled closer to the EU average. This development has been centred on Dublin which has resulted in lack of infrastructure funding between other regional cities. The biggest resulting threat is car dependency and the movement of the younger population towards bigger cities which leaves an aging population in ill serviced rural towns. Investment is concentrated in the east as economic activities are there and therefore a large amount of the population. However any development of the infrastructure of regional towns would have great results as all distances in Ireland are relatively short due to its geographical size.

The biggest strength of the area outside Dublin is that it is just as diverse as Dublin. However due to its lack of mobility it is much more difficult to get around from regional city to regional city then it is from any region to Dublin. The population that resides in this area, for the most part, consider it a rural idyll and do not want any development. Yet they still want social and physical infrastructure. There are great opportunities on the horizon with the change in the agricultural CAP and alternative energy developments to intensify this area but still keep its rural qualities.

Dublin, being the metropolitan city of Ireland generates great international investment. However the county councils do not work together enough to bring unified investment to Dublin due their funding. This could, if not managed going forward, result in lack of diversity in economic activities and the continuation of sprawl. Dublin’s greatest opportunity is that it is the capital and the seat of government and as a result will always have funding to diversify.
One of the greatest strengths of the Dublin - Belfast Corridor is the pool of resources available. However, there is no cohesion between these two cities. The biggest threat to this corridor is currency fluctuation and the fragile government links. Although there lies great opportunity to increase competitiveness on the international market and increase our energy consumption and generation should this corridor be developed to its full potential.

**Going Forward**

In our next presentation we will outline how we will:

- Build on the Strengths e.g. of the planning system
- Eliminate the weakness, e.g. infrastructure and mobility
- Exploit the opportunities, e.g. of the Dublin - Belfast Corridor
- Mitigate the effects of the treats of e.g. the area outside Dublin