

mplan.ucc.ie

Presentation to
Association of Irish Regions
Training Seminar

6th February 2025

A dark blue background image showing the silhouettes of a group of people standing on a grassy hill. They are looking out over a body of water, likely a lake or bay, with hills in the distance. The scene is captured in a low-key, monochromatic style.

An evolving regional planning space

Some challenges + opportunities

| **Brendan O'Sullivan** CHARTERED PLANNER

Director, UCC Centre for Planning Education & Research

brendan.osullivan@ucc.ie

UCC CENTRE for PLANNING
EDUCATION & RESEARCH

- Some thoughts about **REGIONAL PLANNING IN GENERAL**
- Some thoughts about the **NEW PLANNING SET UP** (NPF, Planning Act)
- Some thoughts about the **METROPOLITAN CITIES**
- Some short term **CHALLENGES FOR REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES**



Planning at the regional scale:

Unlike a building project, it does not have an end point – so how do we know that it is effective?

- Is it **sound in planning terms?**
(*'spatially coherent'*)
- To what extent does **it guide decision-makers** in making difficult choices for the common good?
- Does it play **a tangible role for the actors** to whom it is addressed?
(*Influential with significant buy-in*)



ARTICLE

The Performance of Spatial Planning

ANDREAS FALUDI

Introduction

This article is about strategic spatial planning. Strategic spatial planning concerns major spatial development issues. Such issues may arise on any planning scale, but it is more common for them to be addressed at the regional and even more so on national level.

More in particular, this article asks how can strategic spatial plans be evaluated. At face value, evaluation in planning seems simple enough. Lest it should be considered a failure, planning must 'deliver the goods'. This means that the outcome of planned action must conform to what the plan says. For planning to achieve this, it must make the various agents that are normally shaping development according to priorities of their own, fall into line. So in order for strategic spatial plans to be effective, conventional wisdom has it that they must 'have teeth'. The government agency responsible for making the plan must be able to rein other actors in. 'Other actors' may refer to other government

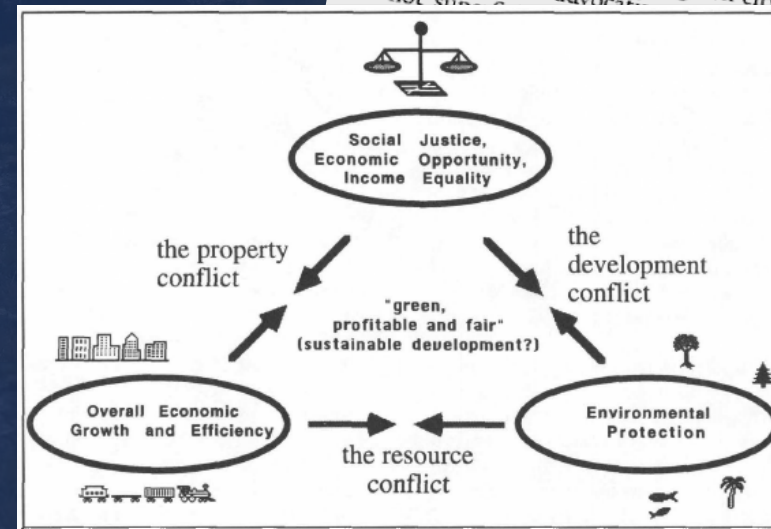
Good planning at the regional scale helps in making good decisions

- It assists in making difficult choices for the **common good**
- It acknowledges **the inherent contradictions** of Sustainable development
- In getting the right balance: it frames the criteria for addressing **conflicts**

Green Cities, Growing Cities, Just Cities? *Urban Planning and the Contradictions of Sustainable Development*

Scott Campbell

In the coming years planners face tough decisions about where they stand on protecting the green city, promoting the economically growing city, and advocating for personal preferences. Conflicts among these goals are not simple. Nor are they abstract notions of ecological, economic, and social justice. They are a real problem caused by the unevenness and economic recession. They are a core of planning, and are a leitmotif in our cities and rural areas. Without growth controls, the spotted landscape of sustainable development aspires to these conflicts, they cannot be



REMEMBER....

*CITY and COUNTY plans and planning decisions by law MUST be **MATERIALLY CONSISTENT** with the Regional Strategies*

*So these are **POWERFUL PLANNING INSTRUMENTS**: We must try to get them right.*





The new planning Set-up in Ireland

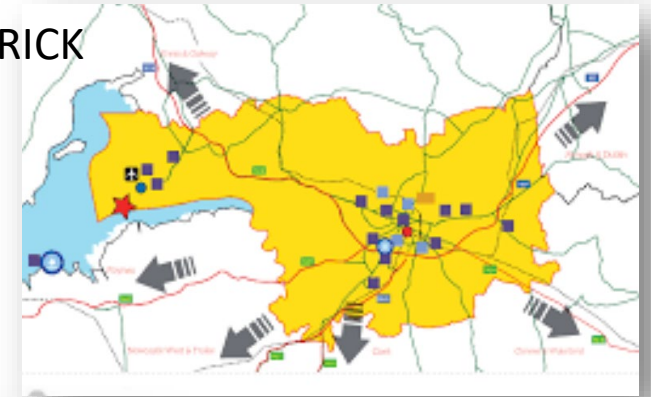


The new planning Set-up in Ireland

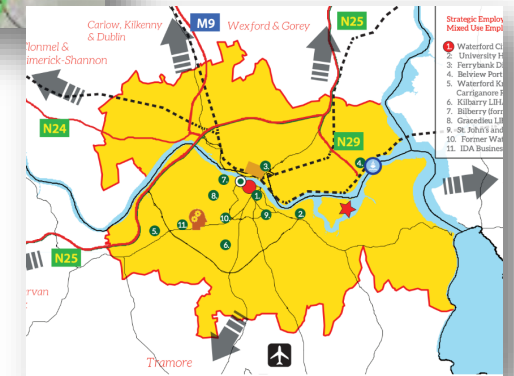
CORK



LIMERICK

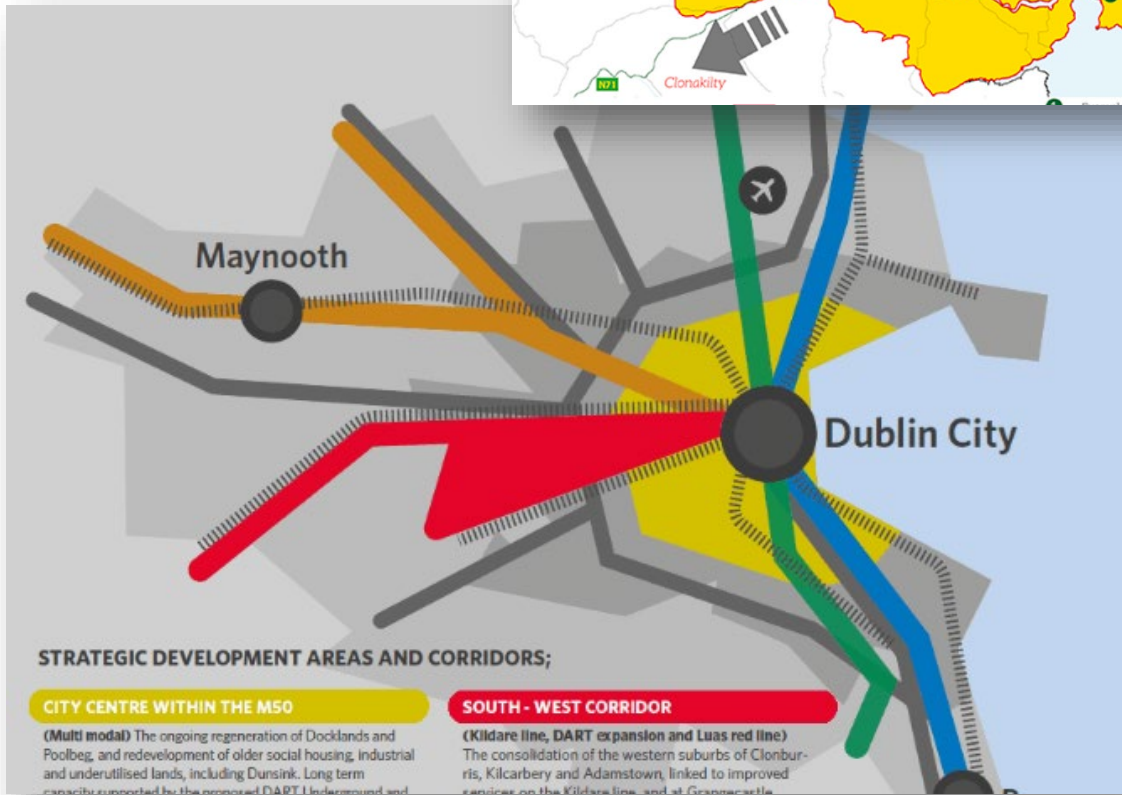


GALWAY



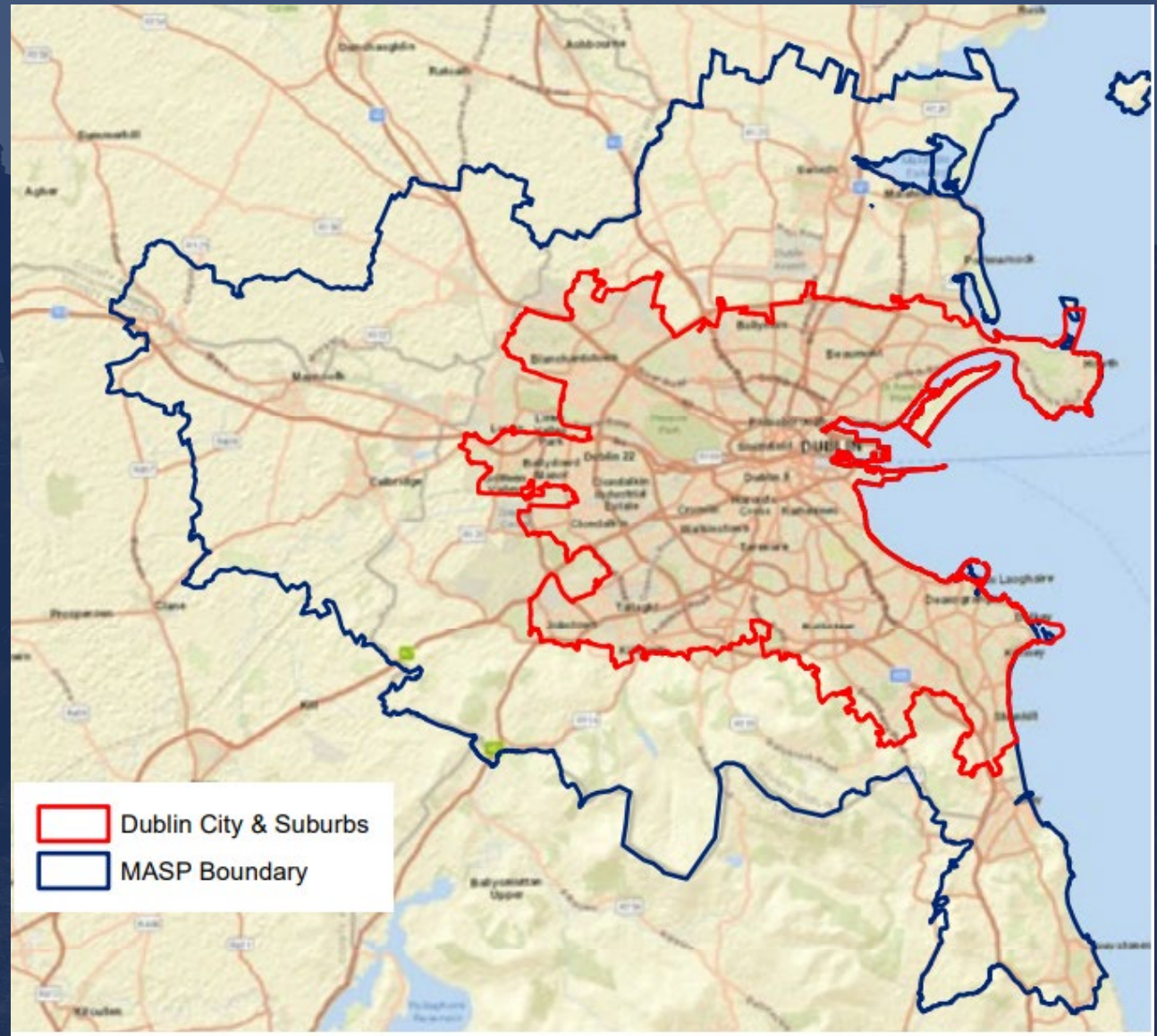
WATERFORD

The Metropolitan Cities



BUT WHERE are the METROPOLITAN PLANS for our city-regions?

MASPs are hidden away within the RSEs...! (To have authority and effectiveness they need to have a much higher profile and impact – at home and abroad).

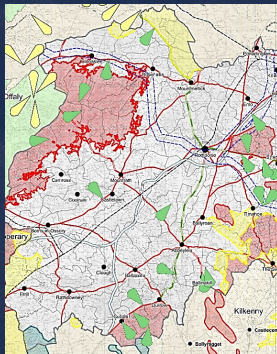
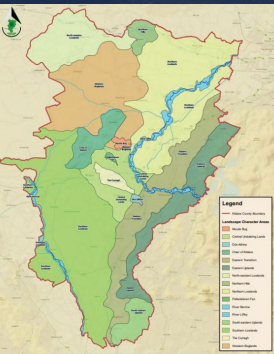
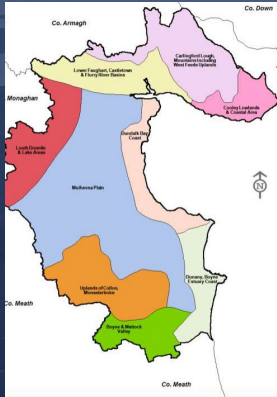
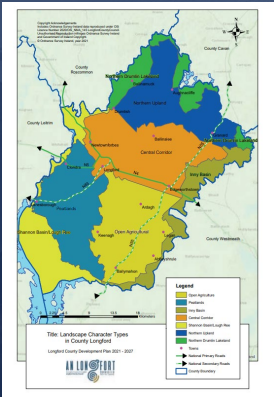


Challenge: On-shore Wind Energy



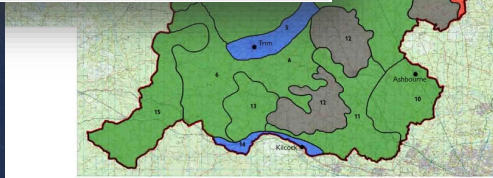
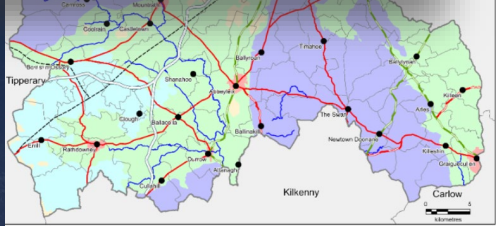
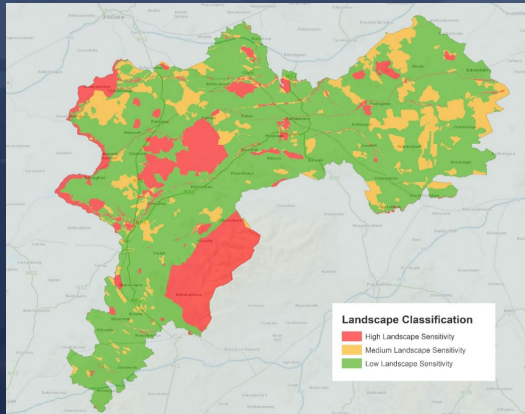
- The regions *MUST* deliver an additional **4,333** MW by 2030. (approx. 2,000 turbines; 80k ha)
- The NPF says the regions must now allocate this among the various counties
- How do you do this allocation?
 - *Based on population size? Electricity demand?*
 - *The robustness of the different landscapes?*
 - *Any other criteria? Do you have the expertise?*
- Are communities ready for this scale of change? How do we value one landscape over another? How do we make this call?

Another Challenge: LANDSCAPE



- *Each Assembly will be expected to carry out Landscape Character Assessments of their region*
- *The 'easy' (technical) bit is for experts to develop maps of landscape character areas for the whole region*
- *The first 'tricky' bit is to take account of how people and communities actually VALUE their landscape.*
 - *Remember: People are often only aware of this once their place or landscape is under threat.*
- *The second 'tricky' bit is to know which landscapes are more sensitive to different kinds of change.*

Another Challenge: **LANDSCAPE**



- *LANDSCAPE VALUES and LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY need to be verified / authenticated through sophisticated engagement processes. If packaged in with County Development Plan reviews (short consultation phases), no mature discussion on these can be held.*
- *This needs careful handling; if not, decisions about large scale change (e.g. wind projects) will result in local battles as projects come forward.*
- *The regions should take the lead on this and design special, well-resourced engagement mechanisms with adequate time to reach consensus and agreement.*

Some additional considerations

- Delegation of decision-making to the Regional Scale
 - Expertise?
 - Political capacity to reach consensus among diverse cities / counties?
 - Can brave decisions be made?
- Primacy of climate change targets...but at what cost?
- Reliance on related policies / guidance / strategies that have not yet been completed.
- National research priorities; resourcing of the planning service

HOW CAN THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY MAKE BRAVE DECISIONS?

And allow LOADS OF TIME FOR CONSULTATION; (statutory timeframes are inadequate for mature debate on important topics)

Avoid passing the big decisions onto the local authorities

Allocate clear locations for population growth and climate action

Make a BIG DEAL of the METROPOLITAN AREA STRATEGIC PLAN

Present mature and realistic proposals for engagement

Include policies 'with teeth' for RURAL PARTS of the region..

Frame local discussions about landscape value and sensitivity

+ Don't be afraid to PUSH BACK!