

Recent settlement change in County Cavan, 1981-2011

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Introduction

Cavan is considered by many to be part of Ireland’s rural heartland, a county of small towns and scenic countryside. This landlocked county of lakes and rolling hills has a timeless image, exploited in its tourism promotion as ‘the Lakeland county’ and a haven for fishing, boating and rural pursuits. However, the period from 1981 to 2011 has seen the emergence of a changed landscape, which challenges these assumptions.

This chapter considers the changing nature of the Cavan landscape over the past thirty years, focusing on how this change reflects new patterns of housing, employment and population structure.

Cavan before the economic boom

At 53,855 in 1981, the population of County Cavan had increased slightly from the all-time low recorded a decade previously. However, the issue of depopulation was an ever-present one. The century had seen a consistent drop in population from a high of 91,173 in 1911. Indeed, Figure X.1 and Table X.1, which shows the population of the county from the first census in 1841, reveals a consistent fall in numbers over more than 130 years. Little wonder, then, that reports of population growth during the boom years were greeted with approval by local newspaper, *The Anglo Celt*.¹

Figure X.1: Population of County Cavan at each census from 1841 to 2011

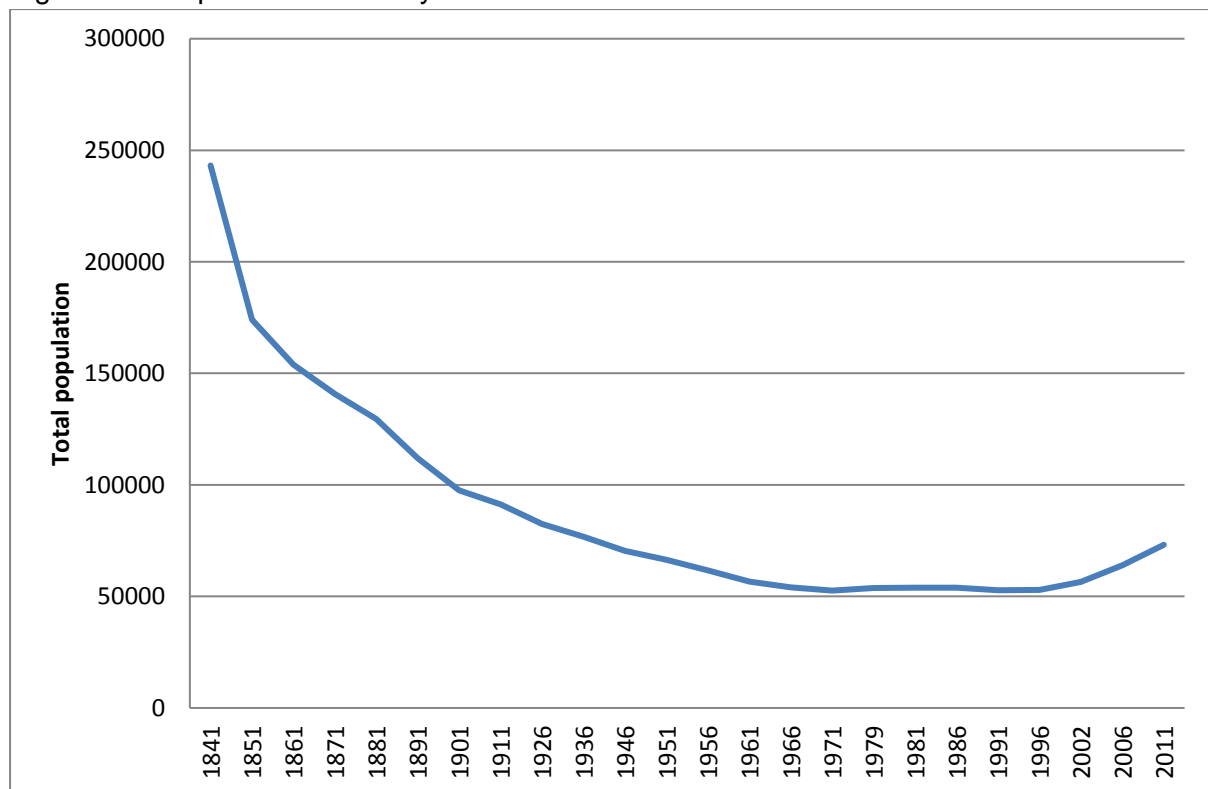


Table X.1: Population of County Cavan at selected census years, 1841-1981

1841	243158
1851	174071
1861	153906
1871	140735
1881	129476
1891	111917
1901	97541
1911	91173
1926	82452
1936	76670
1946	70355
1951	66377
1961	56594
1971	52618
1981	53855

Just 12.7% of the population in 1981 was living in the urban areas of County Cavan. By this date, well over half of the total population of the Republic of Ireland was deemed to be urban (55.6%), although the three Ulster counties in the Republic together accounted for the least urbanised of the four provinces. Indeed, only County Leitrim, at 6.1% urban, was more rural than County Cavan, in census terms. While there were 991 females per 1,000 males in the state as a whole in 1981, Cavan was second only to Leitrim in terms of the gap between males and females, with only 900 women for every 1,000 men in the county. This demographic imbalance reflects the predominantly rural nature of the county, with a tendency for young women to move to urban areas in order to avail of employment and education opportunities.

The rural nature of the county in 1981 is further reflected in the fact that 6,172 of the 14,712 dwellings in the county (i.e. 42%) were described as 'farm dwellings', referring to a private dwelling in which at least one person usually resident is a working or retired farmer.² Over half (i.e. 3,251) such dwellings had been built before 1919, a further 1,011 (6.9%) before 1940, and only 1,151 (18.6%) were less than a decade old. Over 43% of men in the county were classified as agricultural workers in 1981, compared to a national average of 20%, with a further 22% falling into the category of 'producer, maker, repairer'.

Cavan's job headlines of 1981 reflect some of the county's key employment sectors, namely construction materials and food processing. For example, the Kingscourt Construction Group, established in 1968, was expanding its plant at Kingscourt to provide 100 additional jobs manufacturing insulated steel cladding and roofing materials for the Irish and British markets³. The Lough Gowna-based Aircell Limited, a member of the Cement Roadstone Group, introduced a new cavity wall insulation process in 1981⁴. Meanwhile, an IDA grant-aided meat plant at Kilnaleck promised forty-five jobs processing meat products aimed at the Continental market⁵. Other headlines of 1981 reflect long-standing issues generated by the county's geographical characteristics, principally in terms of the water pollution prevalent in the drumlin landscape, particularly at Lough Sheelin⁶, and in the problems caused by smuggling and civil

unrest in this border region, the latter being particularly pronounced during the hunger strikes of that year⁷.

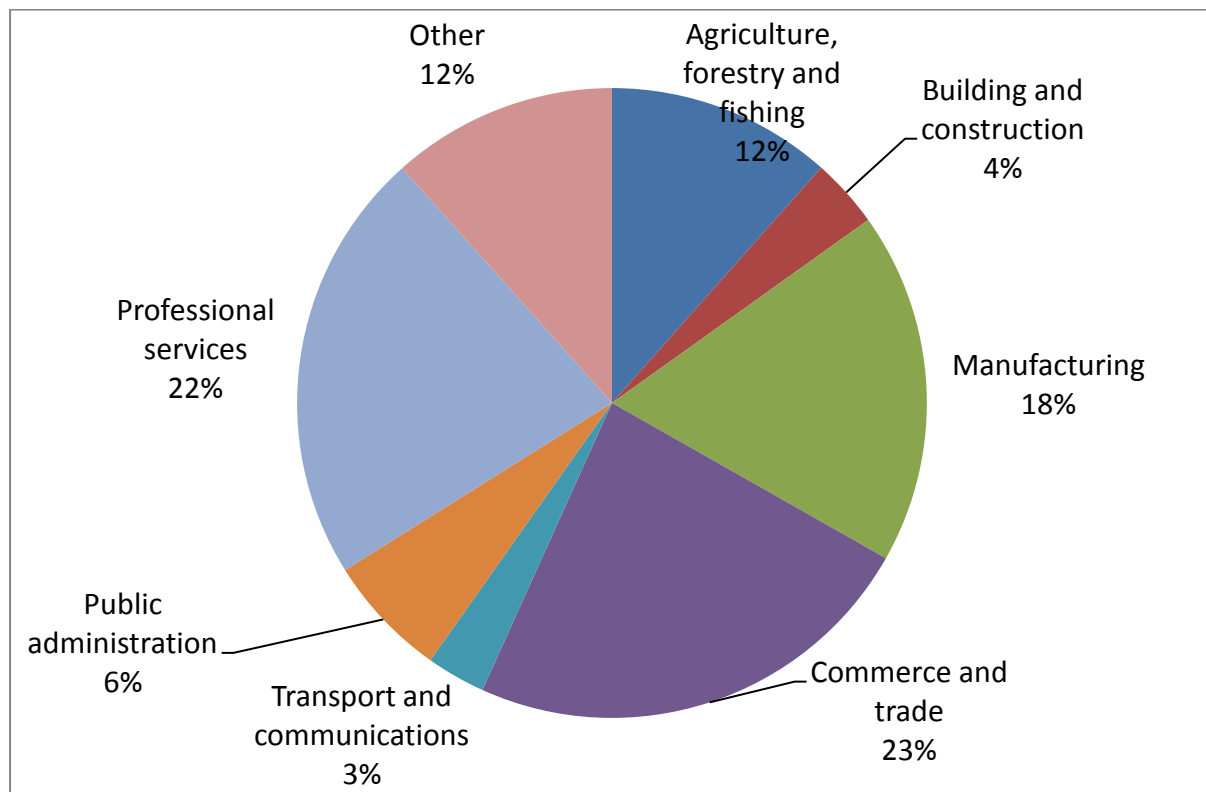
The county's main population centres in 1981 were Cavan town (5,035 including environs), Cootehill (1,805 including environs), Bailieborough (1,453), Kingscourt (1,267) and Belturbet (1,138). Although still relatively small, both Ballyjamesduff (846) and Virginia (657) had experienced significant growth in the previous decade. By contrast, Arva, Kilnaleck and Swanlinbar had all lost population over that time period. Overall, then, Cavan in 1981 was a predominantly rural society, studded with small towns, and with a traditional employment structure.

A Snapshot of Cavan in 2011

By census night 2011, there were 73,183 people living in County Cavan, an increase of almost 36% on the county's 1981 population. More than three in ten of that total (30.1%) were classified as urban-dwellers. While this is still relatively low in national terms, where 60.7% of the state's population is urban, the figure reflects a marked shift towards urban living in the county. Most of that shift was of very recent origin, given that the urban proportion of Cavan's population was still just 16.8% in 2002. There were other changes evident in the population structure too. The imbalance between men and women in the county, although still greater than the national average, was far less pronounced than it had been thirty years previously, with 977 women now living in the county for every 1,000 men.

Although Cavan was less rural in 2011, agriculture remained a major employer. One in five men at work in County Cavan was employed in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector (19.7%). This emphasis on primary employment is well above the national average of just 8.7%. Manufacturing industries (18.6%), and the wholesale and retail trade (13.5%), were the other most important broad industrial groups for male employment, with building and construction in fourth place at 10.8%. These 2011 figures contrast with the situation just five years previously, when construction was the largest source of employment for males working in the county, at 22.6% or 3,902 workers, followed by manufacturing industries (18.7%), agriculture, forestry and fishing (14.3%) and wholesale and retail trade (11.3%). This changed role of construction in the employment structure reflects national trends following the economic collapse and bursting of the property bubble after 2008. By contrast with these male employment patterns, there is greater stability in occupational structure for women living in County Cavan, who were most likely to be engaged in health and social work (20.5%), followed by education (14.3%), the wholesale and retail trade (14.1%) and manufacturing (9.2%) in 2011⁸.

Figure X.2: Pie Chart showing broad occupational structure in County Cavan, 2011.



Agriculture remains a prominent employer in County Cavan. Its heavy, poorly drained soils support dairying, beef and pig farming. Farms tend to be relatively small. The 2010 Census of Agriculture found that of 5,282 farms in the county, almost half (48%) were under 20 hectares in size, while two-thirds were under 30 hectares. Cavan's average farm size of 26.4 hectares contrasts with the national average of 32.7 hectares⁹. Just under 70% of Cavan's farms are classified as specialist beef production, with a further 11% and 7% engaged in dairying and mixed grazing respectively¹⁰. The county is Ireland's leading pig producer, with almost one in five of the national pig herd located in Cavan.¹¹ Some 332,880 pigs are reared in 80 farms in the county. Intensive pig production has put pressure on local environments, however, with pollution of lakes being a particular cause for concern.¹² Another prevalent form of intensive agriculture is in the poultry sector, with 1,097,381 chickens on 270 farms representing 10% of national production. The dominance of these agricultural sectors is reflected in food processing employment in the county. Lakeland Dairies, Ireland's second-largest dairy processing co-operative has manufacturing sites throughout the county, while the Abbot Nutrition facility at Cootehill processes half a million litres of milk daily into a range of infant nutritional products for the export market.

Cavan also has a strong reputation for engineering, ranging from precision engineering to agricultural machinery and machine tool parts. In recent years, energy production, particularly wind farms, has become a feature of the landscape. The county's largest windfarm, and the second largest in the country in terms of output, is located at Bindoo, near Cootehill. Building materials have long been important source of employment in Cavan. A number of quarries are located in the county, with Quinn Quarries and Gypsum industries (now Gyproc, part of Saint-Gobron) as major employers, while Quinn Cement is located in Ballyconnell. Indeed, the

various enterprises which came under the umbrella of the Quinn Group have been a major source of employment throughout the county over the past few decades, reflected in significant local sympathy and support for entrepreneur and former billionaire Seán Quinn, who was declared bankrupt in 2011.¹³ From early involvement in building materials, Quinn Group diversified into hospitality, including the Slieve Russell Hotel in Ballyconnell, as well as financial services such as the Quinn Direct insurance business headquartered in Cavan town and a health insurance business. In 2009, the Quinn Group employed more than 5,500 people throughout Ireland, a significant proportion of them in County Cavan.

Despite the employment strengths outlined above, relatively low educational attainment remains a characteristic of the Cavan population. The 2011 census found that 16.5% of people aged fifteen and over had not been educated beyond primary level. Cavan Enterprise Board has noted that the percentage of persons having any third level qualification in the county is significantly lower than the state average, a trend which is attributed to the absence of a higher education institution in the county.¹⁴ While some third-level courses are provided by the VEC and at Cavan Institute, most students emigrate to the main centres of population within Ireland and overseas to acquire a third-level qualification. They then tend to enter the job market in these areas, rather than returning to the county.

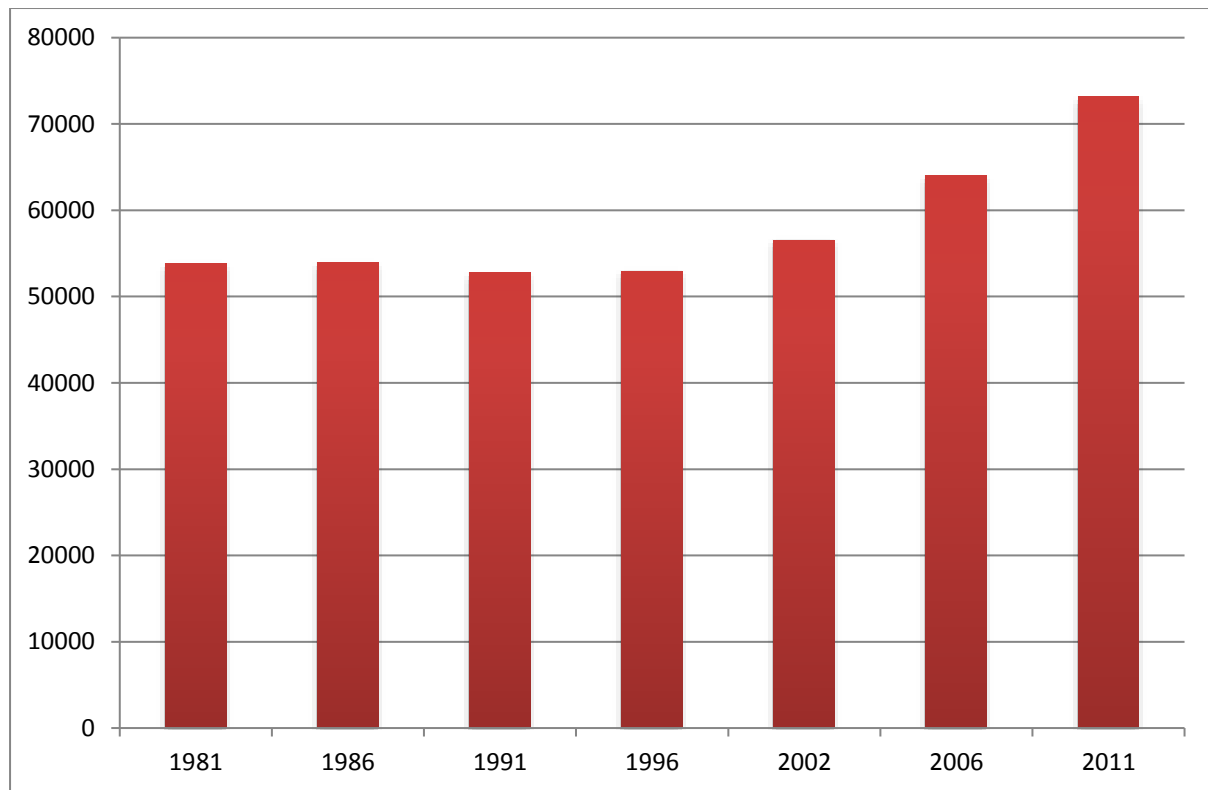
Factors influencing change?

The transformation of County Cavan's settlement and employment patterns over the period between the census of 1981 and that taken thirty years later in 2011 was not just the outcome of local changes, but also reflects trends operating at national and international level.

Cavan has been well positioned to benefit from Ireland's promotion as a 'food island',¹⁵ with its long-standing strengths in agriculture and food processing, while also building on its strengths in areas of engineering and manufacturing. Marginalised by its problematic location as a border county for many years, Cavan was able to benefit from a range of funding initiatives associated with the peace process from the mid-1990s.¹⁶ Cavan town was identified as a 'hub' town in the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020¹⁷, which seems to have stimulated development in the town. A range of targeted schemes, including the Rural Renewal Scheme, Town Renewal Scheme, as well as the RAPID (Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment and Development) and CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Árd Riachtanais) rural development programmes, have also impacted on the county in various ways, described below. Perhaps the most significant change over the period under consideration, however, is the impact of the continued growth of the Greater Dublin Region and the gradual absorption of parts of south-east Cavan into Dublin's hinterland.

The changing housing landscape of County Cavan

Figure X.3: Population growth in County Cavan, 1981-2011.



At the national scale, a booming economy, which encouraged return migration and immigration, and a building boom inspired both by this increasing population and the desire to maximise profits from construction, were features of Ireland in the period from the early 1990s until the financial crash of 2008. In Cavan, these forces are reflected in the fact that over half of dwellings in the county were built in the twenty years from 1991 to 2011.

During this period, Ireland's population has become more diverse, a situation which is reflected in Cavan. At the time of the 2011 census, 16% of those living in county Cavan (12,184 people) had been born outside of Ireland, the majority within the twenty-seven EU countries excluding Northern Ireland (9,976). As with those born in the USA (463), the substantial number of residents who identified England and Wales as their birthplace (3,386) can generally be explained by long-established migration patterns. By contrast, the prominence of a number of central European countries on the list of birthplaces reflects a more recent pattern of immigration to Ireland. The most significant of these were Poland (1,744), Lithuania (1,260) and Latvia (751). While the county also experienced the biggest percentage increase in Traveller population of any Irish county between 2006 and 2011, the number of Travellers in Cavan as a proportion of the total population remains below the national average, with just 453 Travellers enumerated in the county in 2011.

In part reflecting these population movements, religious diversity in Cavan had increased by the 2011 census. As a border county, Cavan has traditionally had a more religiously mixed population than the Irish state as a whole. In 1901, for example, 14.5% of the Cavan population was Church of Ireland, with a further 3.3% Presbyterian and 1% Methodist. For the twenty-six counties which now comprise the Republic of Ireland, those relative proportions

were significantly lower, at 8.2%, 1.4% and 0.6% respectively. In 2011, whereas the proportion of Roman Catholics in County Cavan was equivalent to the national average, there was a higher proportion of Church of Ireland and Presbyterian adherents. This has been a long-standing characteristic of the county, added to which there were 2,487 people with 'other stated religions' in the county in 2011, an increase of 82.9% on the previous census. Some 2,276 people stated that they had no religion, an increase of 56.1%.

Table X.2: Total housing stock in County Cavan, 1991-2011

1991	1996	2002	2006	2011
18111	18591	21165	28250	33711

Cavan's growing population required a corresponding increase in housing provision. The 2011 census asked householders to state the year of construction of their homes. In County Cavan, more than one-third of those who responded (36.4%) stated that their house had been built in the period from 2001, while some 15% of all occupied dwellings in the county had been constructed in the previous five years, one of the highest proportions in the country, alongside Laois (18.1%) and Longford (15.8%).

In order to understand this construction boom, it is necessary to look at national trends. As the housing market went into overdrive, young first-time buyers in the Dublin area were priced out of the market. Meanwhile, investment in roads facilitated a growth in commuting. The National Road Authority's aggressive programme to update Ireland's national primary road network included a significantly improved N3 route, with considerably reduced journey-times to the capital. The solution, then, for those who aspired to live in Dublin but could no longer pay a premium for housing in the capital, was to move to an ever-expanding commuter belt. Towns like Navan, then Kells and eventually the south-eastern County Cavan towns of Virginia and Ballyjamesduff were no longer considered to be too distant for a daily round trip.¹⁸

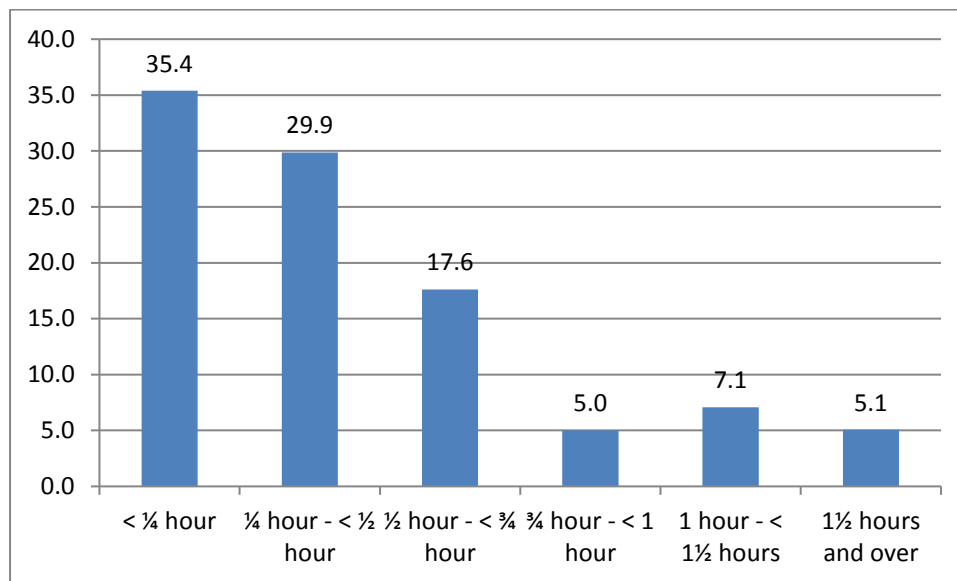
Figure X.4: MAP: PROPORTION OF HOUSING BUILT IN LAST DECADE, BY DED

The growth in housing supply had a marked landscape impact, particularly in the south and east of the county. Effectively, parts of Cavan were increasingly tied to Dublin, functionally dependent on the capital for employment, and the new housing constructed in these areas was largely aimed at commuters. This is borne out by the information gathered in the 2011 census on county of origin and on commuting. At 16.9 per 1,000 population, the net migration rate in Cavan was over three times higher than that for the State as a whole (5.5).

Among those now usually resident in County Cavan but born in other Irish counties, the greatest number were born in Dublin (5,557), followed by Meath (2,908), Monaghan (2,884) and Leitrim (997). Thus, over 7.5% of Cavan's residents in 2011 had been born in Dublin. Almost two-thirds of Cavan-based adults (65.3%) were spending less than half an hour travelling to work in County Cavan in 2011.¹⁹ However, 5% of workers had commuting times of an hour and a half or more, indicating the impact of long-distance commuting to Dublin.

Figure X.5: MAP OF COMMUTING DISTANCES

Table X.3: Commuting times for persons aged fifteen years and over, 2011.



A particularly striking example of the impact of the influx of Dublin-based commuters can be seen in the case of Mullagh, which grew from a village of 479 people in 2002 to 1,137 in 2011, a 137% increase. With twenty-two housing estates, the corresponding dramatic increase in the local national school population, from 80 to 380 pupils, strained local infrastructure, with increasing numbers of pupils being accommodated in prefab classrooms. The village has been radically reshaped by its proximity to the N3 interchange and increased accessibility to Dublin, with one national newspaper describing Mullagh as ‘a desirable location for Polish lorry drivers, East European builders and Dubliners looking for a cheaper home within commuting distance of the capital’.²⁰ In response to this negative portrayal, however, local members of Mullagh’s Development and Tourism Committee pointed to the positive outcomes of the village’s growth which, they claimed, far outweighed any negatives. Facilities included a new community sports hall and playground, as well as new footpaths. However, there was a recognition that some house-building was too dense, while none of the excellent facilities now available to the community had been put in place by developers.²¹ For all communities in the county, it is clear that it will take some time to adjust to the extensive changes, both positive and negative, which were wrought during the ‘Celtic Tiger’ era.

Figure X.6: Proportion of Dublin-born residents in each DED, 2011

Challenges posed by ‘one-off housing’

Just over 70% of the homes built in Cavan in the decade from 2001 to 2011 were ‘one-off’ houses, defined as detached houses in rural areas with an individual septic tank or other individual sewerage treatment system. The fact that the majority of new houses in the county are in rural areas, rather than urban housing estates, has clear implications from both planning and environmental perspectives. Provision of services to a dispersed population can be costly and problematic. In terms of water supply, just 43% of households in County Cavan are connected to a public mains, while almost a quarter (23.66%) use another private source, 17.27% are connected to a local authority group scheme and 12.48% are connected to a private group scheme. Less than two-fifths of households in Cavan are connected to the public sewerage mains, contrasting with two-thirds of households in the State as a whole. Reliance

on septic tanks (46.96%) is significantly higher than the national average. However, it should be noted that Cavan County Council was pro-active in introducing bye-laws in 2004 to manage septic tanks and other individual waste water treatment systems. As a result, in 2009 when Ireland was found by the European Court of Justice to be in contravention of an EU Waste Framework Directive, Cavan was explicitly excluded from that legal action.²²

The tendency to construct one-off housing has resulted in a very high level of car dependency in the county; in 2011, less than 14% of households did not have a car, whereas 45.6% of households had two cars or more. The provision of public transport to a scattered rural-based population is very challenging. Indeed, public consultation workshops undertaken in 2012 in association with the preparation of a new Draft Cavan County Development Plan identified lack of transport as an issue. For example, one comment stated that 'a lot of people from Dublin and other countries that now live in Cavan complain that we have poor facilities. In actual fact we have good sporting facilities, but the problem is lack of transport'.²³ Limited access to transport has been identified as a factor in loneliness and social marginalisation in rural areas.²⁴ Therefore the aims of Cavan Area Rural Transport are not just focused on developing a rural transport service to meet community needs in the county, but also refer to the need to sustain local communities to ensure that local shops, post offices and banks are viable, and to tackle isolation and social exclusion.²⁵

Aside from practical concerns posed by the need to provide services to a physically scattered population, the recent spate of construction of one-off housing has had considerable visual impact. Cavan residents have identified the detrimental landscape impact of some rural house construction. 'Houses should not impact on visual amenity and should be concealed architecturally'²⁶. In particular, the siting and design of new dwellings has been criticised, with references to 'Dallas-type dwellings which are unsuitable for rural locations', arguments that prominent siting with 'housing breaking the horizon, should not be allowed', and that 'the design of new dwellings needs to fit in with the rural architecture'. Excessive ribbon development has also been identified as an issue in parts of the county.

Growing Towns

While some parts of rural Cavan experienced growth in recent years, expansion also occurred in many towns, particularly in the east and south of the county. In marked contrast with the situation in 1981, County Cavan now has six towns with a population greater than 1,500, with the county town of Cavan joining the 'large town' category (i.e. towns with a population of 10,000 or more) at the 2011 Census. Cavan town's population had increased by 29.3% between the 2002 and 2006 census dates, with a further 29.4% growth to 2011. However, these statistics mask two contrasting trends which can be identified at a more detailed geographical scale, with population loss in the town centre contrasting with rapid growth on the outskirts. Between 2006 and 2011, the population of the centre of Cavan town fell by 7.2%, whereas the environs of the town experienced growth of 66%.

Ballyjamesduff almost doubled in size in the period from 2002 to 2006, when it grew from a small town of 871 people to attain a population of 1,690, a 94% increase. Although the rate of growth slowed somewhat between 2006 and 2011, the population reached 2,568, making it the second most populous urban area in the county. The rate of population growth in Bailieborough increased over the same period. Whereas it grew from 1,660 to 1,966 (18.4%)

between 2002 and 2006, the rate of population growth reached 28.7% between 2006 and 2011, with the population reaching 2,530. Both Virginia and Kingscourt also grew significantly (by 31.6% and 33.1% respectively), reaching 2,282 and 2,326. Of the smaller villages in the county, Mullagh and Butlersbridge experienced the greatest rates of growth, at 67.5% and 54.9% respectively. By contrast, both Killeshandra (-11.4%) and Swanlinbar (-20.7%) suffered loss of population in the intercensal period.

Clearly, there was a geographical variation in population growth in County Cavan between 2006 and 2011. An average increase of 15% was seen in electoral areas in the south-east of the county, particularly due to continued population growth in commuter towns such as Virginia, Ballyjamesduff, Bailieborough and Mullagh, which benefit from proximity to the N3/M3. As the *Anglo Celt* described it, 'over the past decade a transformation had taken place in the south and east of the county with previous small village-like settlements having expanded into substantial urban centres'.²⁷ However, there was a continued decrease in population in areas to the north and west of the county, suggesting the lack of success of interventions aimed at balancing development and promoting these areas.

Population growth in Cavan's towns was not straightforward. Focus groups in 2012 noted that, while certain towns had expanded, 'the necessary services have not been provided like schools, infrastructure, community facilities, health centres etc.'²⁸ Comments emphasised pressure on services and their inability to cope. Other quality of life issues related to rapid expansion were also touched upon, with residents commenting on an absence of community spirit in some areas.

Even during the boom years, the geographic unevenness of development was problematic, with a shift in the urban hierarchy of the county reflecting the impact of outside forces, as well as the population trends outlined above.²⁹ One major factor has been the economic sway of large retail multiples which were seen to be taking custom from the smaller towns. An opinion piece in the *Anglo Celt* in 2008 observed the 'key role' played by smaller towns and villages in County Cavan, which has a significantly greater proportion of such settlements than in its neighbouring counties. However, the smaller local market towns such as Swanlinbar, Blacklion and Kilnaleck were unable to compete with the expanding county town and other large urban centres, leading to a situation where former business premises had fallen into dereliction.³⁰

Landscape impacts of government interventions in Cavan

Even after the economic collapse, the local paper reflected on Cavan's experience of the boom in glowing terms:

'Cavan without doubt did enjoy an extended building boom - a period of non-stop housing construction for 15 years at least. Outside of the capital our county was the one which visibly changed the most - every town and village had new housing schemes to suit all incomes and the appearance of the countryside itself was also altered dramatically. After a century and a half of emigration and decline it was felt that Cavan was entitled to benefit from what was seen as a period of intense national regeneration. The county without doubt has been regenerated in terms of its array of housing stock and one has only to witness the new life in the villages to realise this'.³¹

The regeneration described by the writer did not solely arise due to market forces, but resulted at least in part from deliberate government intervention in the form of tax-based incentive schemes which aimed to bring about 'renewal' or 'regeneration'. One such scheme was the Rural Renewal Scheme (RRS), introduced in 1998 to help to stimulate the development of the Upper Shannon region, covering all of Counties Leitrim and Longford, as well as parts of Sligo, Roscommon and Cavan. It had become apparent that the economic improvements being experienced elsewhere in the state from the early to mid-1990s had not extended to this area, with its history of persistent high emigration, poor land and fragmented holdings. Special tax relief covering residential, industrial and commercial properties was available for both construction of new buildings and refurbishment of older buildings.

The western half of Cavan was included in the RRS, comprising the area west of the river Erne, which stretches from Lough Gowna to Belturbet, as well as some areas immediately east of the Erne, including Crossdoney, Belturbet town and Killykeen. The objectives for the scheme, which ended in July 2006, were to reverse the pattern of continuing population decline and to promote private sector investment in the area.

The intent behind the RRS was laudable. The areas designated for tax incentives were recognised as having suffered long term population decline and less than average economic growth. They were also regarded as lacking significant urban centres necessary to attract inward investment and generate economic growth. The Scheme aimed to address these problems by encouraging people to reside in the area and by promoting new economic activity. Therefore, tax relief was available only for dwellings intended for permanent occupation either by owners or renters.

However, no specific landscape or environmental guidelines accompanied the programme. While construction was stimulated, the landscape suffered.³² The degree of over-supply of housing in the area covered by the scheme has been noted, with an estimate of 11,000 dwellings being either built or refurbished, but not sold. At the time of the 2011 census, all of the designated counties exhibited high vacancy rates, which were highest in the parts of the counties designated under the scheme. Already in 2006, a report commissioned for the Department of Finance noted that 88% of tax relief in the RRS was for residential development, the vast majority for new build rather than renovation. It concluded that the RRS had had little impact on economic activity in rural areas; a large proportion of housing output was built speculatively and/or constituted 'deadweight'; excessively large dwellings were built in many cases; it was poor value for money; and that it had produced an oversupply of dwellings.³³

Plate X.1: PHOTO OF HOUSING IN RRS AREA OF CAVAN

Figure X.7: MAP SHOWING VACANCY RATES IN CAVAN, including RURAL RENEWAL SCHEME AREA

The problem of rural isolation and inaccessibility in parts of County Cavan was recognised by the inclusion of 85% of the county in the CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) programme. Introduced in 2001 by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the CLÁR programme aims to address rural depopulation and decline as well as deficits in infrastructure and services in rural areas through targeted investment in rural areas that suffered more than

a 35% drop in population between 1926 and 2002. CLÁR schemes cover a wide variety of developments such as roads, water supply, sewerage disposal, health, schools enhancement, electricity conversion, sports and community projects.³⁴ Between 2002 and 2007, almost €7.4 million was allocated to CLÁR areas in County Cavan.³⁵

While rural Cavan was targeted by a number of initiatives in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was also recognised that problems existed in some urban areas of the county. For example, in February 2002, the RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) Programme was launched in Cavan town. Targeting fifty-one of the most disadvantaged urban areas in the country, the RAPID Programme involves agencies working in cooperation with each other and the community to combat social exclusion and disadvantage. Cavan town was one of twenty provincial towns targeted under Strand II of the programme, which aims to improve quality of life and access to opportunities for communities in disadvantaged areas.

Cavan town was also one of four towns in the county, along with Cootehill, Ballyjamesduff and Bailieborough, which were designated under the Town Renewal Scheme launched in 2000. Already by the time of its annual report in 2003, Cavan County Council was reporting on significant investment underway in the four selected towns, and judging the scheme to be a success: 'The Town Renewal Scheme, coupled with projects carried out under other programmes, is resulting in revitalised and more attractive town centres. A new vitality and vibrancy is already obvious in the town centres and this will be built upon when many of the developments for which Planning Permission has been granted are completed'.³⁶ In the period leading up to its designation under the scheme, the population of Cavan town was increasing very moderately, with relative stagnation in the inner town area contrasting with growth in population in the environs. Old, abandoned buildings and derelict sites were scattered throughout the town. The aim of the renewal scheme in Cavan town was to revitalise and bring back life to the town. A total of sixty-six projects costing €45.4 million were recorded under the Town Renewal Scheme in the town, comprising a mix of commercial and residential schemes.³⁷ By 2006, the local authorities and key stakeholders in Cavan town were considering the scheme a success, in terms of tidying up and revitalising the town, by stimulating development in derelict and abandoned areas where no previous development had taken place. The refurbished shop fronts and new commercial developments created a more positive image for the town, while a knock-on effect was being experienced as more people started to reside there and more retail units were being refurbished or developed. The scheme was also credited with Cavan having been chosen as a location for the planned decentralisation of the government Department of Communications, the Marine and Natural Resources.

Despite these generally positive comments, the legacy of government intervention via various tax incentive and community enhancement schemes in the county has been mixed. While physical regeneration has been experienced in the designated towns, the impact of rural renewal has been problematic, and significant areas of the county continue to suffer from high levels of deprivation and rural isolation.³⁸

Impact of the Bust in Cavan: Vacancy rates, unfinished developments and increasing deprivation

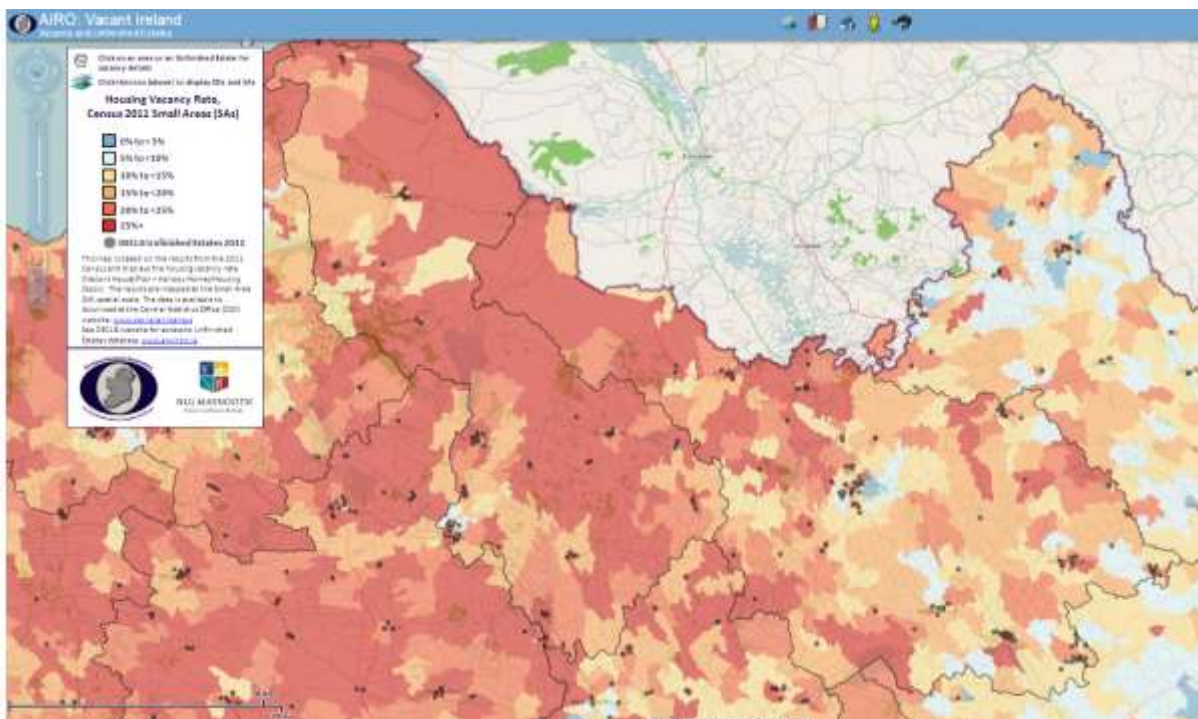
As one of the counties which experienced significant growth in housing supply and construction employment in the boom years, it is unsurprising that Cavan was also particularly badly hit by the economic collapse which followed. Already by mid-2008, the *Anglo Celt* was reporting that asking prices for houses in Cavan had fallen just under ten per cent compared with the previous year.³⁹ Despite the fact that population in the county continued to grow between 2006 and 2011, the rate of vacancy of dwellings rose, while the problem of unfinished developments, the so-called ‘ghost estates’, began to manifest itself.

Table X.3: Vacancy rates in County Cavan 1991-2011

	1991	1996	2002	2006	2011
Total housing stock (Number)	18111	18591	21165	28250	33711
Vacant (Number)	2170	2081	2720	5997	7277
Vacancy rate (%)	12	11.2	12.9	21.2	21.6

Of the 33,711 permanent dwellings in County Cavan in 2011, nearly one quarter (7,867 or 23.3%) were vacant on census night. This figure was significantly above the national average of 14.5%. Furthermore, there was a distinctive geographical pattern to vacancy in Cavan, with higher proportions in the north and west of the county than in the south and east, as seen in Figure x.?.

Figure X.8: VACANCY RATES BY DED, with UNFINISHED ESTATES (2011)



In recent years, economic crisis and an associated crash in property prices has led to a re-evaluation of the impact of the boom years. A recognition that development was out of kilter

with projected demand for housing came too late for certain parts of County Cavan. One study suggested that the projected demand for housing, based on census figures, was considerably lower than the actual provision of housing in the period from 2006 to 2009.⁴⁰ Whereas there was a projected demand of 1,151 units, the actual number of units built between April 2006 and December 2009 was 5,506, which was 257.2% above the requirement (i.e. an oversupply of 3,964).⁴¹ By 2010 it was recognised that the oversupply of housing was leading to increasing vacancy of housing, particularly in rural areas, and keeping prices low. It was also suggested that urban areas and the commuter belt towns such as Virginia, Ballyjamesduff and Kingscourt, were more likely to be able to absorb the oversupply within a relatively short period of time, once demand grew again.⁴²

The sudden collapse meant that, in addition to the oversupply outlined above, many developments which were underway remained incomplete. In 2011, the Department of Local Government and Public Health survey of unfinished housing estates identified 147 developments in county Cavan, accounting for 6,000 units, which were incomplete.⁴³ Following up on a survey undertaken in the previous year, it covered all housing developments of two or more dwellings. Information was gathered as to the total number of residential units granted planning permission, with a breakdown as to the types of housing granted planning permission (i.e., detached, semi-detached, terraced, duplexes and apartments), the number of units which were complete and occupied, complete and vacant, or under construction or partly constructed. The data provide an insight, not just into the scale of unfinished housing estates in the county, but also their location and the type of housing which was under construction in the final stages of the boom.

One of the most noticeable features of the table is the fact that, relative to the rest of the country, Cavan has more inactive unfinished developments and fewer completed developments. Whereas just under one quarter of developments nationally were categorised as 'A: development complete', the corresponding figure for Cavan was just 16%. Over three-quarters of all estates surveyed in Cavan were incomplete and inactive, compared with a national average of 63%. The survey report identified Cavan as one of the local authorities with comparatively higher levels of vacant housing relative to their existing housing stock, at 35 per 1000 households (third highest after Leitrim and Longford), and further suggested that 757 units were vacant in County Cavan.

Table X.4: incomplete developments in the State and in County Cavan in 2011.

		State		Cavan	
		Number	%	Number	%
A	Development Complete	701	24.4	24	16.3
B	Development Not Started	109	3.8	3	2.0
C	Unfinished Housing Development – Active	244	8.5	9	6.1
D	Unfinished Housing Development - Inactive	1822	63.4	111	75.5
	Total	2,876		147	

*Note: percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

In the same way that the benefits of the economic boom were unevenly felt across Ireland, and indeed county Cavan, so too has economic collapse been experienced in a geographically uneven manner.⁴⁴ By 2012, an index of affluence and deprivation commissioned by State agency Pobal showed that parts of Cavan were among the areas which had experienced the biggest increase in deprivation between 2006 and 2011. The decline experienced in the outer

stretches of Dublin's commuter belt, including parts of Meath, Offaly, Wexford, Roscommon and Cavan, was greater even than that experienced in traditionally deprived urban areas.⁴⁵ Using a range of data from the 2011 census, the Pobal HP Deprivation Index determines the degree to which each DED in the state is affluent or deprived. One of the authors of the study, Trutz Haase, has described these parts of the commuter belt which experienced the most rapid development towards the end of the boom, generally those areas within one to one and a half hours' commute from the city, as being 'unsustainable communities'. In many cases, this extended commuter belt had attracted many lower middle-class non-professionals, often in temporary jobs such as construction. According to this study, these regions recorded an above-average increase in male unemployment and a fall in people with high levels of education or from professional backgrounds, between 2006 and 2011. Overall, the Border Region remains the most disadvantaged region of Ireland, and Cavan the third most disadvantaged Local Authority area within the region.⁴⁶

Figure X.9: MAP SHOWING DEPRIVATION INDEX FOR EACH DED

And the future...?

County Cavan has experienced dramatic changes in its settlement patterns in recent decades. In part, these changes have been driven by external forces, but the role of government at national and local level in shaping change must also be recognised. Despite a period of strong population growth, house construction and infrastructural improvements, Cavan remains in many ways a hostage to geography. Its dramatic drumlin topography and many lakes are potential tourist attractions, but also impede transport links across the county. Its relative proximity to Dublin may continue to boost growth in the south and east of the county, but this will potentially exacerbate the divisions between these relatively more prosperous areas and the less successful, declining west and north of the county. It remains to be seen whether active local government and imaginative planning policies will successfully unleash the potential of the Breifne county.

¹ Carron, Tom (2011) Cavan's population growth to strain public services, *Anglo Celt*, <http://www.anglocelt.ie/news/roundup/articles/2011/07/06/4005342-cavans-population-growth-to-strain-public-services/print> [online] Can we just change these to *Anglo Celt*, 6/7/2011?

² Census 1981, Volume 8 Housing, Table 21A: Farm dwellings in each province, county and county borough classified by period in which built.

³ *Irish Times*, 30 Jan. 1981.

⁴ *Irish Times*, 6 May 1981.

⁵ *Irish Times*, 25 Nov. 1981.

⁶ For example, 'Mr Minister, tell us all about Cavan slurry' by George Burrows, *Irish Times*, 7 Feb. 1981, p. 20.

⁷ Typical headlines reflecting the unstable situation in this border area include 'Orange Hall fire charges' (*Irish Times*, 15 Oct. 1981), 'Military style rally held in Cavan' (*Irish Times*, 4 Aug. 1981), 'H-Block march passes through stretch of North' (*Irish Times*, 23 Jul. 1981), 'Jail for bomb offence' (*Irish Times*, 4 Nov. 1981). Other border-related activities are illustrated by a series of articles relating to smuggling, including 'Cattle smuggling threatens jobs' (*Irish Times*, 28 Jan. 1981).

⁸ Data are derived from CSO figures from the 2006 and 2011 Census, which record the population aged 15 years and over at work by county and broad industrial group. Percentages quoted are calculated on the basis of the total at work, rather than the total in the labour force.

⁹ Data derived from Table 1 of CSO Census of Agriculture 2010: available at <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/agriculture/2010/Tables2010.pdf>

¹⁰ Table 2:

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- ¹¹ CSO (2012) Census of Agriculture 2010: Final Results [online] <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/agriculture/2010/full2010.pdf>, accessed May 2013.
- ¹² During the 1970s and 1980s, the pollution of Lough Sheelin became a politically charged issue as the tourism potential of the lake's trout fishery was threatened by pollution caused largely by pig slurry. By 1987, in response to a question raised in Dáil Éireann, the Minister for the Environment, Pádraig Flynn, acknowledged the deterioration in the quality of the lake water despite the fact that a management committee was in place and that Cavan County Council had issued over 40 notices to pig producers banning slurry spreading during the winter months and restricting it during other periods (Oireachtas debates, 1987, online: <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1987/06/03/00099.asp>).
- ¹³ In July 2012, a rally was held in support of the Quinn family in Ballyconnell, which was attended by a crowd estimated at between 3,000 and 4,000. 'Mr Quinn appeared before a crowd of 4,000 who had gathered in his Ballyconnell heartland on Sunday to protest at the treatment of a man who created thousands of jobs in their area and was always generous to the local community.' (Irish Independent, 31 Jul. 2012). A further rally took place in October. <http://www.thejournal.ie/in-pictures-thousands-gather-for-quinn-rally-in-cavan-537591-Jul2012/>, and <http://www.broadsheet.ie/2012/10/15/scenes-from-yesterdays-quinn-rally-at-ballyconnell/>
- ¹⁴ Cavan County Development Board, A strategy for the economic, social and cultural development of County Cavan 2002-2012. [online]:Page 11.
- ¹⁵ An Bord Bia, the Irish food board, registered the trademark 'Ireland the food island' in 2008. It has since been used extensively in the international promotion of Irish produce.
- ¹⁶ The county has participated in the PEACE I (1995-1999) and PEACE II (2000-2006) Programmes, and is now actively involved in the PEACE III Programme which aims to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region. Cavan Peace Partnership (no date) *County Cavan Peace and Reconciliation Phase II Action Plan*, available online: <http://www.cavancoco.ie/peace-iii-programme>. Examples of cross-border initiatives include the West Cavan West Fermanagh Regeneration Project, operating since 2009; 'Building Bridges for Border Business', which ran from 2003-6; and Culture Cavan, an initiative funded by the International Fund for Ireland with the support of Cavan County Council, to foster participation and reconciliation among communities in Cavan and Fermanagh through music, drama, creative writing and the visual arts. Other initiatives tackle issues of social deprivation, as in the case of Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT), a cross border health and social care partnership comprising the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency, the Southern and Western Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Health Service Executive (HSE) in the Republic of Ireland. CAWT is managing a range of cross border health and social care programmes, part financed by the European Union's European Regional Development Fund through the INTERREG IVA cross-border Programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.
- ¹⁷ National spatial strategy for Ireland 2002-2020 : people, places and potential / Department of the Environment and Local Government, Department of the Environment and Local Government, Dublin : Stationery Office, [2002].
- ¹⁸ The Irish Times, 2011. Commuter belt shows strongest population growth. The Irish Times [Online], 01 July. Available from <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/commuter-belt-shows-strongest-population-growth-1.587869> [Accessed 22 March 2013].
- ¹⁹ CSO 2012, Census 2011, Profile 10 Door to door – commuting in Ireland, table CD005. Available online.
- ²⁰ Despair and dole queues amid the unfinished housing estates, *Irish Independent*, 8 Feb. 2011.
- ²¹ McMahon, Seán (2011) 'Mullagh responds to slight on image', *The Anglo-Celt*, 2 Mar. 2011.
- ²² Europa (2010) Commission asks Ireland to comply with Court ruling on septic tanks, European Commission - IP/10/1582 , 24/11/2010. Online: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-10-1582_en.htm
- ²³ Cavan County Council Manager's Report on submissions received for the Review of Cavan County Development Plan 2003-2009 [online], www.cavancoco.ie GET FULL REF
- ²⁴ The Nurture Programme. 2005. A Study of the Qualitative Impact of the South West Cavan Rural Transport Service on its Passengers [Online] Available from: [http://www.ruraltransport.net/pdf/A%20Study%20of%20the%20Qualitative%20Impact%20of%20SWC RTI%20on%20its%20Passengers.pdf](http://www.ruraltransport.net/pdf/A%20Study%20of%20the%20Qualitative%20Impact%20of%20SWC%20RTI%20on%20its%20Passengers.pdf)[Accessed 12 March 2013].
- ²⁵ CART Cavan Area Rural Transport, www.ruraltransport.net [accessed 12 November 2013]
- ²⁶ MANAGERS REPORT on submissions received for the Review of Cavan County Development Plan 2003 – 2009 and the preparation of a New Draft Cavan County Development Plan & Submissions received for the preparation of an Environmental Report for the Strategic Environmental

Assessment (SEA) Process & The outcome of the public consultation workshop, PUBLIC CONSULTATION PHASE 10th October – 5th December, 2012 [online], p. 34.

²⁷ Carron, Tom (2011) Cavan's population growth to strain public services, Anglo Celt, <http://www.anglocelt.ie/news/roundup/articles/2011/07/06/4005342-cavans-population-growth-to-strain-public-services/print> [online]

²⁸ MANAGERS REPORT on submissions received for the Review of Cavan County Development Plan 2003 – 2009 and the preparation of a New Draft Cavan County Development Plan & Submissions received for the preparation of an Environmental Report for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Process & The outcome of the public consultation workshop, PUBLIC CONSULTATION PHASE 10th October – 5th December, 2012 [online], p. 26.

²⁹ The Anglo-Celt, 2011. Cavan's population growth to strain public service. The Anglo-Celt [Online], 06 July. Available from <http://www.anglocelt.ie/news/roundup/articles/2011/07/06/4005342-cavans-population-growth-to-strain-public-services> [Accessed 22 March 2013].

³⁰ (2008) Saving our villages must be prioritised, Anglo Celt, Wednesday, 10th September, 2008 [online] <http://www.anglocelt.ie/opinion/comment/articles/2008/09/10/30896-saving-our-villages-must-be-prioritised>

³¹ Comment, Bringing life to the Ghost Estates, Anglo Celt, 27 October 2010 [online]: <http://www.anglocelt.ie/news/roundup/articles/2010/10/27/4001069-bringing-life-to-the-ghost-estates/print>

³² See discussion in Ruth McManus, 'Celtic Tiger Landscapes' in F.H.A. Aalen, K. Whelan and M. Stout (eds), *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape* (Cork, 2011), (FULL PG NOS HERE) p. 158, see also Ireland after NAMA blog: <http://irelandafternama.wordpress.com/tag/rural-renewal-scheme/>

³³ Goodbody (2005) Review of Area-Based Tax Incentive Schemes, Final Report, December 2005: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/documents/publications/other/Taxrev2006vol2.pdf>

³⁴ Source: Department of the Environment, <http://www.environ.ie/en/Community/RAPID/News/MainBody,26918,en.htm>, accessed 8 December 2012. CLÁR acts as a lever to raise money from other sources through funding and co-funding arrangements with Government Departments, State Agencies and Local Authorities. It complements the RAPID programme for disadvantaged urban areas and the RAPID II programme for provincial towns.

³⁵ REFERENCE NEEDED (from Dáil questions – O Cuiv)

³⁶ Cavan County Council Annual Report 2003, <http://www.cavancoco.ie/file/your-council/annual-reports/2003.pdf>, p. 37.

³⁷ Goodbody report, p. 105.

³⁸ <http://www.cavancommunity.ie/file/Social-Inclusion/Putting-us-all-on-an-equal-footing.pdf> Cavan County Development Board, Cavan Community Forum and Cavan County Council 2008, Putting us all on an equal footing: A profile of disadvantage in County Cavan

³⁹ <http://www.anglocelt.ie/news/addevents/articles/2008/07/23/29060-asking-prices-hit-new-lows/print>

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⁴¹ Kitchin, R., Gleeson, J., Keaveney, K. and O'Callaghan, C. (2010) A Haunted Landscape: Housing and Ghost Estates in Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. NIRSA Working Paper 59

⁴² Denning, R. (2010) Housing oversupply to impact on prices for 'some time to come', Anglo Celt, Wednesday, 27th January, 2010 <http://www.anglocelt.ie/news/roundup/articles/2010/01/27/3994363-housing-oversupply-to-impact-on-prices-for-some-time-to-come>

⁴³ 2011 National Housing Development Survey: <http://www.environ.ie/en/Publications/DevelopmentandHousing/Housing/HousingSurvey2011/>

⁴⁴ O'Brien, C, 2013. Commuter Belt Regions Worst hit by Downturn, Survey Finds. *The Irish Times*, 05 January. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/commuter-belt-regions-worst-hit-by-downturn-survey-finds-1.954268> [Accessed 22 March 13].

⁴⁵ The Pobal HP Deprivation Index (Haase and Pratschke, 2012), available online at: <https://www.pobal.ie/Pages/New-Measures.aspx>, accessed 27 March 2013.

⁴⁶ Page 1: The 2011 Pobal HP Deprivation Index Area Profile for County Cavan, Feline Engling, Trutz Haase, February 2013 [online]. Available at: <http://trutzhase.eu/deprivation-index/area-profiles/>