
An Emerging System of Local Governance? A Review of Policy, Practice and Prospects for the Future

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Introduction

The profound changes in state structures and relationships that have affected the workings of many European liberal democracies in the last decades of the twentieth century have had important implications for the ways in which decisions are taken, implemented and assessed by the state. The emergence of the consumer and environmental movements has focused attention on issues of quality, sustainability and services responsiveness. The introduction of market mechanisms has necessitated improvements in service specification and the ongoing development of commonly understood performance measures and the involvement of new actors in decision-making processes have challenged many of the principles and practices of public administration and service delivery at a local level.

This article considers claims that these changes have resulted in a new system of governance emerging at a local level. The article then focuses on the relationship between local government and the local development sector¹ in the context of an emerging system of local governance. It considers the experiences of the interaction between local government and local development agencies, in particular the area partnerships, as they pertain to the development of new forms of decision-making at local level. The article suggests that despite the establishment of new structures and agencies to support the emergence of a system of local governance, these developments are by themselves insufficient to secure effective local governance. Accordingly, it recommends that a more robust form of local government should seek to use its community leadership role to embed appropriate systems of accountability and seek to 'join up' local action (Sullivan, 2003, 354).

The Move from Government to Governance in Ireland

Increasing use of the term governance in the 1990s 'led many political scientists to regard it as a new concept in the study of government' (Adshead and Quinn, 1998, 210). In Ireland,

¹ The term local development is used to refer to the following state-funded programmes:

RAPID – Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment and Development.

CLÁR – Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais/Programme for Revitalising Rural Areas.

LDTFs – Local Drugs Task Forces.

LDSIP – Local Development for Social Inclusion Programme Partnerships (area-based partnerships and ADM-funded community groups).

Leader Programme.

Community Development Programme.

It also differentiates the state-funded local development sector from the broader and more autonomous community and voluntary sector.

recent changes in both legislation and practice suggest that the established ways of carrying out the business of local government are giving way to a new, as yet not fully formed, system of decision-making. A number of commentators use the term governance to capture an understanding that there has been a 'period of change in governing arrangements at a local level' (Stoker, 2003, 9). These changes in governing arrangements are framed within a wider set of changes in economy and society that have been variously described as post-industrial or post-Fordist (see Painter, 1995). Pierre and Peters (2000, 52–55) maintain that a key factor has been the 'financial crisis' of the state, which has encouraged a reconsideration of its form and operation. However, many of the responses are more than the 'acceptable face of spending cuts' (Stoker, 2003, 10). They are a reaction to globalisation, the perceived failure of the state to address social and economic conditions and the increasing complexity of the governing challenges that face the state. At times, the European Union, central and local government have pushed the search for new partnership solutions to the challenges arising. In essence, the central concern is with how societies are being, and can be, steered in an increasingly complex world where governments must increasingly interact with and influence other actors and institutions to achieve their goals.

Williamson (1999, 10–11) also notes the trend in public policy decision-making away from attempts at 'decisive government determination of policy and bureaucratic implementation' toward an approach that features a negotiation and bargaining component between a variety of state and community actors. The aim is to develop a more collaborative approach to policy planning and implementation. This process of necessity involves a spatial dimension and recognises (and attempts to address) issues such as subsidiarity and stakeholder involvement. In addition, Williamson contends that the interests of local, informal networks and associations are recognised and efforts are made to take account of these.

As Adshead and Quinn (1998, 210–12) observe, increasing use of the term governance has not been followed with agreement on its defining characteristics. In the context discussed in this article, governance is taken to have a dual meaning. On the one hand, the term governance is used to refer to the adaptation by the state to the evolving external environment, e.g. globalisation, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. On the other hand, governance also denotes a conceptual or theoretical representation of the co-ordination of social systems and for the most part the role of the state in the process of co-ordination. This latter meaning of governance can be further divided into two categories. In the first category (sometimes called old governance) questions are asked about how and with what conceivable outcomes the state 'steers' society and the economy through political brokerage and by defining goals and making priorities. The other theoretical view of governance looks more generically at the co-ordination and various forms of formal or informal public-private interaction, most predominantly on the role of policy networks. Consequently, in the first approach, which could be labelled state-centric, the main issue is to what extent the state has the political and institutional capacity to steer and how the role of the state relates to the interests of other influential actors. In the second more society-centred approach, the focus is on co-ordination and self-governance as such, manifested in different types of networks and partnerships.

For the purposes of this article, it is the role of the state and its ability to steer or guide the new processes of decision-making that is of interest.

Recent Developments in Decision-making at Local Level

In terms of local government's role in this new emerging process of decision-making, Norris and Kearns (2003, 90) note that the recent development of local government in Ireland has been 'characterised by two contradictory trends'. On one hand, the structure established at the end of the nineteenth century has undergone a process of centralisation. Many of the functions that were originally within the remit of local government have been transferred to central government or regional service delivery agencies. As a result, Irish local authorities play a significantly smaller role in the delivery of services than their counterparts in other European countries (Roche, 1982). The recent example of the responsibility for certain aspects of waste management policy being repatriated to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government is instructive in this regard. At the same time, the longstanding tradition of local activism around economic and social renewal has been put on a new footing with the infusion of EU and Irish Exchequer funding.

Reform of the Irish system of local government has been on the political agenda for some time and has been memorably described as 'a false pregnancy that has lasted since 1971 at least' (Barrington, 1991, 163). However, the last five years have seen a concerted effort to clarify the role and function of local government in Ireland. This process includes the amendment to Bunreacht na hÉireann giving recognition to local government and the enactment of the Local Government Act 2001. While clarifying the role of local government is welcome, Minister Noel Dempsey's claim that the legislation was 'the most radical shake-up of local government in the history of the state' (as reported by the *Irish Times* on 14 May 1999) is far from accurate.

In essence, the services operated or provided by local government have been restricted to areas such as planning, social housing, waste collection and non-national road routes. This scenario contrasts starkly with the European model of local government where an extensive range of services are provided on an integrated basis solely by the local authority. In the Irish case, in tandem with the relatively limited function and discretion of local authorities², there exist agencies delivering state services that have a degree of discretion such as FÁS and the Health Boards. In addition there are other agencies funded by the Department of Social and Family Affairs with little or no local discretion. There also exist bodies such as the Area Partnerships and County/City Enterprise Boards that have to date operated in sectoral service/policy areas with some discretion but with quite targeted functions and normally on the basis of specialised and/or EU funding. For example:

Sub-county bodies such as Area Partnerships, Leader Companies, Community Development Projects.

County bodies such as County Enterprise Boards, Vocational Education Committees (VEC) and City and County Councils.

Regional or regionalised national bodies such Foras Áireanna Saothair (FÁS) – the state training and employment agency, Health Boards, regional tourism bodies, Teagasc and Enterprise Ireland.

² Which, it could be argued, has to date acted mostly as an agent of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Early endeavours, which aimed to overcome this issue of lack of integration, came in the shape of the Area Partnerships. These were established with the aim of addressing long-term unemployment. They followed the social partnership model embodied in the 1991 Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP) and the members of the Partnership Board included representatives of the community and voluntary sector, employers and trade unions and also a range of local state service providers such as the VEC, Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Health Board and Local Authority, FÁS etc. However, although apparently formal in terms of funding and rhetoric, there was no legally binding policy or framework for integration between the various partners involved in the partnership at the local level, which highlighted immediately some of the operational difficulties that came with interagency collaboration. In addition, the government's formal incorporation of new actors in the policy process at a national level and at sub-county/city level through the area partnerships, encouraged a challenge to the 'traditional structure of sub-national government' (Adshead and Quinn, 1998, 211).

By the early 1990s, it was increasingly evident that there was a lack of integration in the work of each of these bodies. In addition, the number of agencies operating at the local level not only confused many of the agencies and personnel operating at that level but also, and more importantly, many of the public, especially service users. In consequence, recent years have underlined the need, in terms of services, better value and responding to gaps etc., for linkages to be established between these various services.

Partially as a response to the lack of a local governance vision identified during the work of the area partnerships, the government's Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems proposed the establishment of City/County Development Boards (CDBs). The role claimed for the CDBs was that of bringing about a more co-ordinated delivery of public services at a local level. Central to this co-ordination role was overseeing the implementation of a ten-year strategy through relevant agency plans. In this way, it was hoped that CDBs would facilitate greater co-ordination and linkage of service delivery within each specific administrative area. Adshead (2003, 119) construes these developments as evidence of a move away from 'governance as hierarchies to new forms of network governance'. Similarly, Keyes (2003, 295) suggests that the CDB process is a serious attempt to address the deficiencies associated 'with the existing four models of governance: representative democracy, pluralist democracy, corporation and clientelism'. However, what little evidence exists would question these statements. If anything, it is possible to identify a trend of adding layers of decision-making in the guise of rationalising and that this demonstrates a lack of commitment to self-governance and reflects a centralising tendency³.

The Growth of the Local Development Sector in Ireland

It is helpful when examining the sector and its interaction with local government to understand the distinct roots of local development in Ireland, in particular the early role played by the Catholic Church and the importance of rural self-reliance initiatives. Due to the nature of British rule in Ireland, 'the Catholic Church did not play a major role in the

³ The recent announcement regarding the 'decentralisation' of civil servants could be seen as part of this trend. Arguably decentralisation implies an accompanying process of devolving power. It is proposed that what is actually being witnessed is a process of dispersal rather than decentralisation.

development of voluntary activity until the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act 1829⁴ (Donoghue, 1998, 2). Prior to the passing of the legislation, Protestant or non-denominational doctors and philanthropists had become concerned about the poor physical and medical conditions of those who were economically deprived in Irish society.

During the 1830s, a combination of the Catholic Emancipation Act and the passing of the Poor Law Reform Act 1834 prompted many Catholic religious orders to provide relief to those not covered by the Poor Laws⁴. In 1834 the first Catholic hospital was established and by 1900 there were 84 workhouse hospitals being run by Catholic religious orders (Luddy, 1995). From 1922 with the establishment of the present state, the influence of the Catholic Church became even more pronounced in the provision of education, health and welfare services. A hugely significant factor in the consolidation of Church involvement in the provision of such services was the principle of subsidiarity as proclaimed in Catholic social doctrine, i.e. that the family has the primary responsibility followed by the local community, for providing welfare and social services. Donoghue (1998, 3) notes that 'only when such avenues had been exhausted was the state to step in and accept responsibility for such provision'. The historical dominance of Catholic organisations in addressing social welfare needs which could not be met by the family continued into the 1960s.

It is notable that the services provided by religious orders in Ireland not only complemented state service provision but the religious were often the dominant or sole provider in particular social service areas. For example, the lay religious organisation, Saint Vincent de Paul, has 1,000 local branches comprising approximately 11,000 members and has been described as operating a 'shadow welfare state' (DSFCA, 1997, 31). The state historically valued the role of religious orders in the domain of service provision for a number of reasons. Firstly, it removed a perceived burden from the state. Secondly, the policy of allowing the Roman Catholic authorities free rein over the domain of welfare provision accorded with the religious convictions of the overwhelming majority of elected representatives. Finally, it enabled the existing political parties to avoid contentious and divisive social and public policy debates and encouraged a false consensus around moral and social issues. However, following the Second Vatican Council, there was a substantial change in emphasis in Catholic social teaching and the Church in Ireland began to encourage state expansion into the area of welfare provision.

Alongside the involvement of the Catholic Church in welfare provision there has been a long tradition of community self-reliance. This is particularly evident at 'community level since the late nineteenth century' (Ruddle and Donoghue, 1995, 3) though it has much earlier roots. The co-operative movement, supported by Horace Plunkett in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, played an important role in the development of this community 'self-reliance' ethos. Co-operative societies, organised around agricultural production, were designed to counteract the exploitation of the rural poor. Seen as one of the paths to economic progress, they were also a development on the part of people not in positions of formal power to wrest some autonomy for themselves and their communities.

⁴ The Poor Laws were a form of statutory welfare provision enacted and amended since Tudor times. A Royal Commission to investigate the system established in 1832 made a series of recommendations to reform the existing legislation. These were enacted in The Poor Law Reform Act 1838.

In rural areas, the trend continued and was a cornerstone in the establishment of Muintir na Tire⁵ in the 1930s.

Community self-reliance as a trend continued in recent decades and has become increasingly important in certain fields, notably in the area of disability and in the domain of community development. In the 1970s there was a huge growth in the number of groups concerned with 'different disabilities and mental health' and a number of umbrella bodies were formed to campaign for rights at a national level (Hayes, 1996, 13). Existing community development organisations, while having their roots in the co-operative and self-reliance tradition, owe much of their impetus and motivation to various developments in the 1960s and 1970s. Both the growth of the women's movement and the radicalisation of a number of Irish trade unions were instrumental in the development of citizen involvement and the strongest expressions of community activism during this time was in women's groups, tenants' groups and housing action groups. From the mid-1970s, state-funded anti-poverty programmes became an increasingly important part of this process. These programmes emphasised an ideology of empowerment, participation and social inclusion.

Arguably this change marked a paradigmatic shift as voluntary action moved from having a predominant focus on charity as a basis of help to an emphasis on the socio-economic and political rights of marginalised communities. Campaigning and advocacy became more prominent as did the focus on unemployment and the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups. Zappone (1998, 51) observes that at this stage the sector became a 'loose collection of diverse individuals and voluntary groups involved in the development of their local communities and the promotion of their economic, social and cultural interests'⁶. Collins (1993, 89) makes the point that the 'emergence of the community sector is potentially the

⁵ Muintir na Tire was formed in 1937 by Canon John Hayes. The movement used the parish as the basic unit of social organisation and its leadership came from clergy, teaching and the medical professions. Its main aim was to revive the community spirit of the Irish countryside through co-operative effort. The literature presents two broad critiques of Muintir na Tire. The first is that of a rural, conservative initiative. For example, Forde (1996, 9) underlines the very traditionalist role played by the organisation, observing that Muintir na Tire was established at a time when urbanisation was impinging on rural life and that it refused to acknowledge the possibility of class or other conflict in its parish councils. Following the period of sustained economic growth in the 1960s Muintir na Tire embarked on a programme of reorganisation and vocationally representative parish councils were replaced by democratically elected community councils. It was hoped that this would stem the declining strength of the organisation but the 'decline continued and the number of councils fell from 300 in 1970 to 120 in 1990' (Forde, 1996, 10). Collins (1993, 88) makes a similar point and writes of the 'triumphant arrival of muscular rural fundamentalism as the dominant ethos of Irish society' represented by Muintir na Tire. The second, more nuanced critique involves a closer examination of Irish local government in the 1930s and 1940s and the debate on decentralisation (it is also important to note the policies put in place during The Emergency 1939–1945). Due to a myriad of problems in local government management and operation, a number of counties were run by commissioners appointed by the Department of Local Government rather than by locally elected county councillors. The Local Government Act, 1941 empowered the commissioners and county councils to give formal recognition and resources to a local organisation if it existed for 'the general social and economic advancement of a locality' (Gallagher, 2000, 79). In Limerick and Tipperary approximately fifty Muintir na Tire Parish Guilds were recognised as Approved Local Councils. As Gallagher notes 'it was one of the very few cases in Ireland where official recognition was granted to the sector' prior to the establishment of the fourth pillar of the social partnership process in 1996. Unfortunately, this layer and process of government proved to be ahead of its time.

⁶ Arguably, this state of affairs continued until the formation of the following national level groups: The Community Platform in 1996 and The Wheel organisation in 1999. Despite having an overlapping membership, both have markedly different views on the role and function of the broader community and voluntary sector and their respective organisations. There has been (and continues to be) a debate within the sector in regard to the question of a formal national organisation to represent it as a whole – such an organisation exists in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Activity).

most significant social development in post-modern Ireland'. Despite a certain amount of hyperbole, it is evident that the advent of a coherent sector in the late 1960s and 1970s is essential to understanding the establishment and operation of the local development agencies.

Factors Affecting the Interaction between Local Government and the Local Development Sector

From a governance perspective, the local development sector makes a very interesting partner for local government. Unlike a number of other EU countries, Ireland has had a relatively independent source of welfare provision up until quite recently. This experience coupled with the richness, diversity and competence of many local development groups makes the sector a very strong and articulate partner in any decision-making process. In addition, a number of distinct institutional factors have had a significant effect on the public policy response to the patterns of social exclusion emerging from the 1970s on. The first of these, social partnership, has been at the core of public policy since 1987. It can be broadly defined as a search for consensus on economic and social objectives between various sectoral interests – trade union, business and farming organisations – and government. Since 1996 representatives from the community and voluntary sector have been included. The process has strong cross-party political support and has been apparent at a number of levels:

As a mechanism for agreeing wages and other policy matters through the formulation of national agreements⁷;

As a forum for discussion and debate on public policy through the National Economic and Social Council and the National Economic and Social Forum;

As a framework for policy implementation, for example the establishment of the twelve area-based partnerships in 1991 under the auspices of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress;

As a vehicle for trade unions and employers to discuss matters of concern at industry level through the National Competitiveness Council and the National Partnership Centre.

Despite the current economic climate and serious questions being raised about the efficacy of some of the components of the *Sustaining Progress* national agreement, social partnership remains a pervasive force in Irish public policy.

⁷ The Department of the Taoiseach is responsible for the overall negotiations and implementation of the Social Partnership Agreements, of which there have been six to date:

Sustaining Progress – Social Partnership Agreement (1 Jan. 2003 to 31 Dec. 2005);

Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (1 April 2000 to 31 Dec. 2002);

Partnership 2000 (1 Jan. 1997 to 31 March 2000);

Programme for Competitiveness and Work (1 January 1994 to 31 December 1996);

Programme for Economic and Social Progress (1 January 1991 to 31 December 1993);

Programme for National Recovery (1 January 1987 to 31 December 1990).

The six Social Partnership Agreements – which are focused principally on incomes, fiscal, social, economic and competitiveness policies – were negotiated between the Government and the social partners. The latter are organised into four pillars as follows:

Trade Union Pillar;

Employer and Business Pillar;

Farming Pillar;

Community and Voluntary Pillar (included for first time in negotiations on Partnership 2000).

The negotiations on each of the Social Partnership Agreements were preceded by the production of Frameworks agreed under the auspices of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC).

The second important factor affecting the development of the sector is the increased funding allocated to the various local development initiatives. Most of the support for the variety of local initiatives was provided in the mid-to-late 1990s by the Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development (OPLURD). The programme formed an integral part of the 1994–1999 Community Support Framework⁸. It is important to note that this ‘new localism’ was not simply an ‘EU implant’ (Walsh et al., 1998, 19). The driving force for these local development initiatives was central government, in particular the Department of the Taoiseach.

The stated rationale for enhanced local emphasis in economic policy has two components. First the need to address the spatial outcomes of economic restructuring. Macro-economic restructuring has and continues to result in growing ‘spatial polarisation in living conditions in particular localities’ (Nolan et al., 1999, 71). This was most notable in urban areas in the provision of an extremely polarised housing system, with a spatially isolated public rented sector catering almost exclusively to those in receipt of social welfare benefit. This group was primarily unemployed but increasingly they were unemployed lone parents.

The second component relates to a concern to identify new sources of jobs, especially in the informal services sector. The scale of poverty and social exclusion had by the mid-1980s caused a reappraisal of public policy for tackling poverty. The local co-ordination and delivery of welfare services was seen as a remedy. In particular, there was growing support for the introduction of innovative strategies that incorporated three main themes: ‘(a) multifaceted actions supported by relevant agencies, (b) the targeting of resources at specific areas or sectors, and (c) the participation of the intended beneficiaries of the services’ (McCarthy, 1996, 15). This approach was central to the rationale of the EU-funded Poverty III Programme and was ‘widely championed by the Combat Poverty Agency’ (Walsh et al., 1998, 20). It later formed the basis for the ADM-managed Integrated Services Initiative and to a lesser extent the area-based partnerships.

As noted earlier, there is a longstanding tradition of community involvement in social community services and enterprise development etc. However, the acceptance of the community as an official actor was an important factor affecting the development of the local development sector. Walsh et al. (1998, 23) note that this ‘tradition has remained institutionally weak due to the underdeveloped nature of local government and the lack of statutory recognition and support for community initiatives’. However, in the late 1980s a more positive attitude towards community development emerged on the part of government. The main instigators of this new approach were the Department of Social Welfare (now the Department of Social and Family Affairs) and the Combat Poverty Agency⁹.

The Development of a Coherent Local Governance System

It is clear from examining the changes in local government processes and actions that a change in the way they carry out their remit has occurred. They have been affected by the process of globalisation, EU membership and the changes in the way the state manages the formulation and implementation of public policy, in particular, the impact of the national

⁸ The Community Support Framework (CSF) is an agreement between the Irish Government and the European Commission regarding the spending of EU Structural Funds in Ireland. The National Development Plan (e.g. 1994–1999 & 2000–2006) is the basis upon which the EU-funded CSF is negotiated.

⁹ The Combat Poverty Agency was the co-funder of projects under the EU Poverty III Programme (1989–1994) and the designated national resource centre for community development programmes funded by the Department of Social Welfare (1990–).

social partnership process. For example, it is evident that local authorities are now working with voluntary housing bodies to develop and provide social and affordable housing¹⁰ in a relationship that would have been difficult to conceive of ten years ago. It is also evident from the growth of the local development sector and its increasing interaction with local government that a significant change has occurred in the way the various stakeholders at a local level relate to each other. Is a system of governance beginning to emerge?

In addressing this question, it is important to note the criticisms of the 'silo' mentality of local government and the consequent inability of government organisations to respond to cross-cutting issues which are high on the public's agenda. For example, community safety, drugs, the environment and social exclusion. These have led to initiatives that were designed to help 'join up' activities to achieve cross-cutting outcomes. In addition, clarifying whether the process being examined is reactive and/or ad hoc or being in some way supported by the central government activity is essential to understanding its coherence and sustainability. A number of documents have emanated from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government^{11, 12} and these provide a rough framework for the planned evolution of a system of local governance. In addition, a recently announced (and unexpected) review of the local development sector's involvement with local government is currently under way¹³. This suggests that the process shows signs of what was earlier referred to as 'state-centric governance'.

¹⁰ Tógáil Developments Limited and Dublin City Council provide a number of examples of successful collaboration in North Dublin.

¹¹ These include:

The first report of the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems (August 1998);

The second report of the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems – Preparing the Ground (April 1999);

The third report of the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems – Strategic Policy Committees: Guidelines for Establishment and Operation (August 1999);

The fourth report of the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems – A Shared Vision for County/City Development Boards (May 2000).

¹² See Ó Broin (2002, 47–59) for a more detailed examination of community participation in new structures established by the Local Government Act 2001: Strategic Policy Committees, Local Area Committees and the City/County Development Boards.

¹³ Responding to a Dáil question on the proposals to put community development projects under the remit of the partnerships (Dáil Éireann, Debates, 19 Nov. 2002), the Minister for Community Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs Éamon Ó Cuív informed the Dáil that his department had been established to produce a more co-ordinated engagement by the state with the community. As part of this process, he intended to undertake a review of the programmes and activities within the remit of his department, 'with a view to achieving optimal coherence across the various schemes. Any proposals in relation to the future administration and delivery of these programmes, including the community development support programmes, would be considered in this context'.

The terms of reference for the review are:

- (a) Improving on the ground services, supports and impacts on local communities, from within existing levels of resources;
- (b) Streamlining and rationalising structures so as to avoid overlaps, duplication and undue administrative overheads;
- (c) Bringing transparency, co-ordination and improved control to the funding and operation of local/community development measures;
- (d) Strengthening the democratic accountability of agencies and service providers in this area.

The review process has three main elements, which are:

- (a) A comprehensive consultative process with the various agencies and bodies, which began in February and was advanced at a national seminar in June 2003 attended by almost 300 participants;
- (b) A review of existing arrangements between Area Development Management Limited, Government Departments and other stakeholders;
- (c) A requirement that various local agencies and boards submit their annual work plans to city or county development boards for endorsement, in order to support greater coherence at local level.

However, the work of the CDBs and the formulation of two recent policy initiatives (RAPID/CLÁR and Social Inclusion Task Forces) raise important questions as to the coherence and direction of these state initiatives, especially if they are to be considered components of a state-centric governance approach.

City/County Development Boards

The City/County Development Boards provide the primary governance framework at a local level. As noted earlier, they bring together the key state agencies delivering services in a specific administrative area, the relevant local authority and a number of non-state stakeholders. A key problem that arises is that the bargaining and negotiation process envisaged in any governance system is largely absent. The relevant agencies can sign up to the agreed ten-year strategy and agree to implement the plan through their own activities. However, there is no sanction if they don't follow through on their agreement. In essence they don't bargain or negotiate because no resources or budgets are actually at stake. As a result if an agency chooses to, they can simply agree to the draft strategy, sign up to it and forget about their stated commitment. Of course it is more likely that they will claim that changes in resource allocation has forced them to revisit the original decision. However, the underlying element of voluntary compliance and the problems related to this remain valid.

Table 1. Typical Membership of a CDB

| Local Government (Typically 7) | Local Development (Typically 6) |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Cathaoirleach/Mayor (1) | County/City Enterprise Boards |
| Strategic Policy Committee Chairs* | Area Partnerships (2) |
| Town Representative (1) | Leader Groups (2) |
| County/City Manager (1) | |

"A Shared Vision"

A more integrated approach to public and local development service delivery

| State Agencies (Typically 9) | Social Partners (Typically 5) |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| FÁS | Employer & Business Organisations |
| IDA Ireland | Agricultural & Farming Organisations |
| Enterprise Ireland | Trade Unions |
| Vocational Educational Committees | Community & Voluntary Sector |
| Western Development Commission | |
| Dept. of Social & Family Affairs | |
| Regional Tourism Organisations | |
| Údarás na Gaeltachta | |
| An Garda Síochána/Health Boards/Teagasc | |

This results in a situation where due to the implementation of a Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs-initiated endorsement process, local development agencies with comparatively small budgets and staff numbers are the only agencies open to sanction. Recent directions from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs allow the CDBs to veto the proposed plans of a local development agency operating within its administrative area. No such sanction applies to FÁS, the

Health Boards, City/County Enterprise Boards, IDA, VEC or other state agencies despite the difference in budget.

This endorsement process was one of the initial steps introduced by the Department to bring greater cohesion to the social inclusion measures delivered through the local development sector. The guidelines accompanying the Department's decision were intended to provide some clarity between CDBs and the local development sector. Since the advent of the CDBs, there has been considerable confusion and no little tension generated because of the real and perceived overlaps of responsibility arising from the additional layer of social inclusion planning administration.

In addition, a number of state agencies operating at a local level may agree to certain elements of the strategies but find that regional and national level components of their organisations have issued conflicting instructions. This disconnect between the local, regional and national levels of state agencies is a key obstacle to the development of a coherent system of governance¹⁴.

A conclusion from examining the recent CDB, RAPID and SITF initiatives must be that they are firmly embedded in an undeveloped local government structure that lacks the operational capacity to co-ordinate and facilitate governance-type activities. While acknowledging the lack of coherence, it is important to remember that the new avenues of participation offered to those experiencing marginalisation and social exclusion on a daily basis are welcome. Prior to this they were offered very little by the existing institutions, structures and processes and any attempt to involve them in public discussion is a step forward. As Hardiman and O'Rourke note, any advance is an 'improvement on passive reception of services and the perpetuation of communal political alienation' (2000, 21).

RAPID and Social Inclusion Task Forces

With regard to *Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development* (RAPID) initiative and its rural equivalent, *Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais/Programme for Revitalising Rural Areas* (CLÁR), the programmes were launched on 8 February 2001 by the Taoiseach and the Minister for Local Development Eoin Ryan TD. The stated objective was to focus the attention of state agencies and their existing budgets (there was no new funding available for projects but £5million was put in place to support the programme) on the 25 most deprived urban neighbourhoods and rural communities.

In order to draw in the existing budgets of state agencies, the Area Implementation Team (management committee, hereafter AIT) of each RAPID area had to draft a strategic plan and needs analysis. This was announced some months after the area partnerships had completed the same process for the same areas. Despite the obvious duplication of effort, the statutory members of the partnerships were obliged to join the AIT and two community members were nominated by each partnership (in fact the composition of the partnerships' board was reproduced except for the social partners)¹⁵. In the Dublin area (home to 8 Rapid

¹⁴ deal of non-CDB work by their linked city and county councils. This makes it increasingly difficult to monitor the implementation and impact of the strategies.

¹⁵ Even the nomination of community members of the AIT was unclear. There was a considerable debate over whether they should be nominated by the partnership or existing community structures or whether a new round of consultation should take place as to how to select the community members.

Areas and 8 partnerships), a number of partnerships had to take over the running of the programme as the programme ran into problems of consultation fatigue on the part of the community and the lack of experience of many of the recently appointed RAPID Co-ordinators. In five of the eight RAPID areas in Dublin the Manager/Chief Executive of the partnership became the chairperson of the AIT.

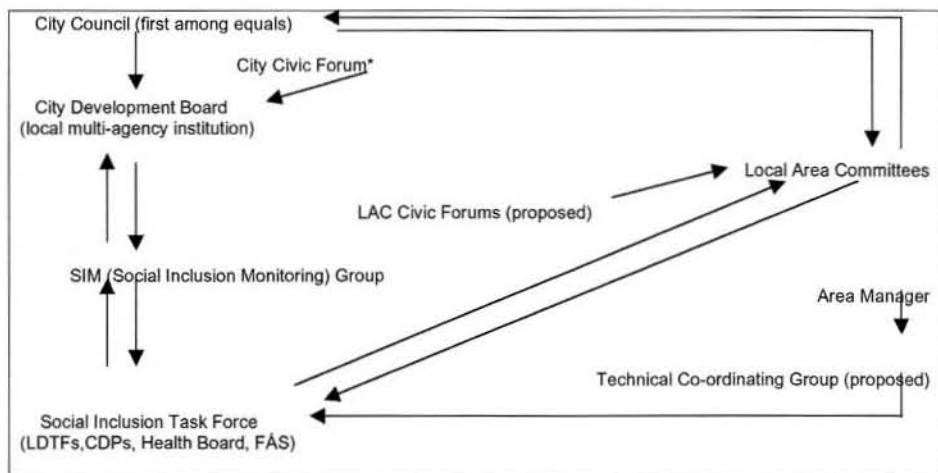
Despite the extra workload brought about by their involvement in the RAPID programme, a related though local, initiative in early 2003 caused substantial confusion to many local stakeholders. In February 2003, Dublin City Development Board announced that Social Inclusion Task Forces (SITFs) would be established under its remit but linked to the five existing local area committees (LACs) of the City Council¹⁶. The Task Forces have three objectives:

The development of a sub-local¹⁷ anti-poverty strategy;

Sharing information on a LAC area basis. This process was also to involve the tracking and monitoring of National Development Plan 2000–2006 social inclusion expenditure;

Enabling political accountability. This relates to the submission of the draft local anti-poverty strategy to the LAC. A Civic Forum (composed of local civil society actors) attached to the LAC would also comment on the draft strategy but it is the city councillors sitting on the LAC that would have the final say.

Figure 1. Proposed Social Inclusion Task Force Structures



¹⁶ The Local Area Committees in Dublin are:

North West – Finglas, Ballymun and Whitehall.

North Central – Clontarf, Kilbarrack, Beaumont, Marino, Raheny and Coolock.

Central – Glasnevin, Drumcondra, Phibsborough and Chapelizod.

South East – Ringsend, Irishtown, Rathmines, Ranelagh and Harold's Cross.

South Central – Ballyfermot, Inchicore, Kilmainham, Crumlin and Drimnagh.

The committees are composed of councillors and they address issues relating to the specific areas. Citywide matters are discussed at the full meeting of the City Council.

¹⁷ In this context sub-local is used to refer to an area below the administrative area covered by a county or city council.

It was also proposed that the senior city council official (the area manager) in each of the five areas in conjunction with the appropriate area partnerships form a Technical Co-ordinating Group. This group was to identify the core members of the Task Forces¹⁸. The announcement caused considerable surprise in the local development sector as it was seen as an aspirational objective and that it would not be addressed until an implementation timetable had been drafted and passed by the Development Board and the requisite resources put in place. In addition it became apparent that the City Council officials tasked with co-ordinating the initiative had not been informed of its expected implementation or briefed on its origins. After three months of negotiation, an agreement was reached between the City Development Board and the partnerships and is currently being implemented.

These initiatives are not isolated incidents. They demonstrate a confusion on the part of many as to what relationship should exist between the state, its agencies¹⁹ and the many non-state stakeholders.

Conclusion

Callanan reminds us that 'the environment in which local government operates is always going to affect and condition what local authorities do' (2003, 501). While a number of reforms have been undertaken, key matters remain to be addressed. The evidence suggests that key components of a local governance system are emerging. However, the implementation lacks coherence. The process of nurturing and supporting coherent and co-ordinated governance activities is still underdeveloped in comparison to many of our fellow EU members. As yet there has been no major changes to the distribution of functions between local and central government and it appears that there will be little movement in this direction in the foreseeable future. The element of financial discretion enjoyed by local government continues to remain limited. The recent announcement of performance indicators and league table for local government mask the reality that little has changed in terms of the devolution of power and responsibility. This in turn limits the capacity of local government to respond to the challenge of developing sustainable, realistic and beneficial working relationships with other local stakeholders.

However, while it is tempting to write off the recent changes as just another example of half-hearted reform that at least didn't do too much damage, this would be a mistake. This article suggests that the outlines of a complex local governance system are beginning to take shape. This emerging system draws its main inspiration from a 'localist' ethos, namely that the key task for local government is to meet the needs of its community either directly or indirectly. In that sense it places great emphasis on the search for what the issues are and what the solutions might be. Its reach is beyond the delivery of services. Its overarching

¹⁸ It is likely that the members would include Community Development Projects, Local Drugs Task Forces, the relevant health board and FÁS. The Social Inclusion Monitoring group of the City Development Board will have the final say on membership.

¹⁹ The final hurdle faced by the partnerships in 2003 was financial. In March 2003, ADM informed partnerships that there would be a 7 per cent cut in the 2003 allocation. This was despite the fact that the partnerships were three months in to the 2003 financial year and the fact that they operated on a three year budgeting cycle as they had been requested by ADM. This 'annualisation' of budgets turned to a 7 per cent cut into a 25–30 per cent cut for the majority of partnerships. A number were forced to make staff redundant and numerous projects were cut.

goal is the meeting of community needs as defined by the community within the context of the demands of a complex system of relationships between various institutional actors, communities and levels of governance.

In addition, the involvement of elected public representatives is the unique contribution of local government to the governance of local areas. Local government, on paper, remains the only institution subject to democratic constraints. This contribution is fundamental to the democratisation and legitimacy of any local governance system. For this contribution to have meaning, a substantial review is required of the manner in which elected councillors participate in decisions, the information they are provided with and their role as policy-making leaders rather than policy-taking 'foot soldiers' for nationally organised political parties (Kenny, 2003, 103).

This new form of governance is the objective. It marks a break from traditional public administration and service delivery in its vision of the role of local government and its understanding of the context for governing and the core processes of governing. It is obvious that it is a vision that has not yet been realised. Not only is there a considerable amount of evidence of traditional structures and thinking, but many of the recent reforms have been misconceived and implemented. The focus of this article is on what may be a messy and untidy period of transition. The article merely seeks to establish some elements of the direction in which the system is moving and to offer a brief outline of the form of the possible system of local governance. As can be seen, the road to a new system of local governance is neither straightforward nor easily travelled yet the process will not only help shape the future of public service delivery but will quite possibly determine the limits of democratic citizenship in Ireland for many years to come.

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