

Sustainable Participation? Between Dynamism and Durability

(Lessons from Recent Regional Sustainable Development Research)



A paper presented to the 2nd CoCoNet Workshop: 'Evaluation and Models of Stakeholder Participation', Aberystwth, April 2nd and 3rd, 2004.





Introduction

- The Imperative of Democratic Participation?
- Putting Irish Regions in their context
 - A singular region?
- Sustainable Development in Irish Regions
 - (Local) Agenda 21 as a stimulus for experimentation
 - Horizontal and vertical integration
 - Top-down and bottom-up?
 - Between dynamism and durability?
- The Challenge of Sustainable Participation in an Enlarged Europe
 - The sustainability of the ‘Structural Fund Effect’
 - The sustainability of the ‘Participation Effect’



Background

- **‘Strategies for Regional Sustainable Development’, An Integrated Approach Beyond Best Practice, (REGIONET) 2003-4, Interdisciplinary Centre for Comparative Research in the Social Sciences (ICCR, Vienna)/ CEC DG Research**
- **‘Sustainable Destinations? Understanding the Environment Metabolism of Tourism’, Cleaner Production Promotion Unit/Department of Geography, IT Tralee – Environmental Research Institute, HEA/PRTL12 2000-2003**
- **‘Sustainable Communities in Europe’ (SUSCOM) 1998-9, Programme for Research and Documentation for A Sustainable Society (ProSus, Oslo)/ CEC-DG Research**



The Imperative of Democratic Participation?

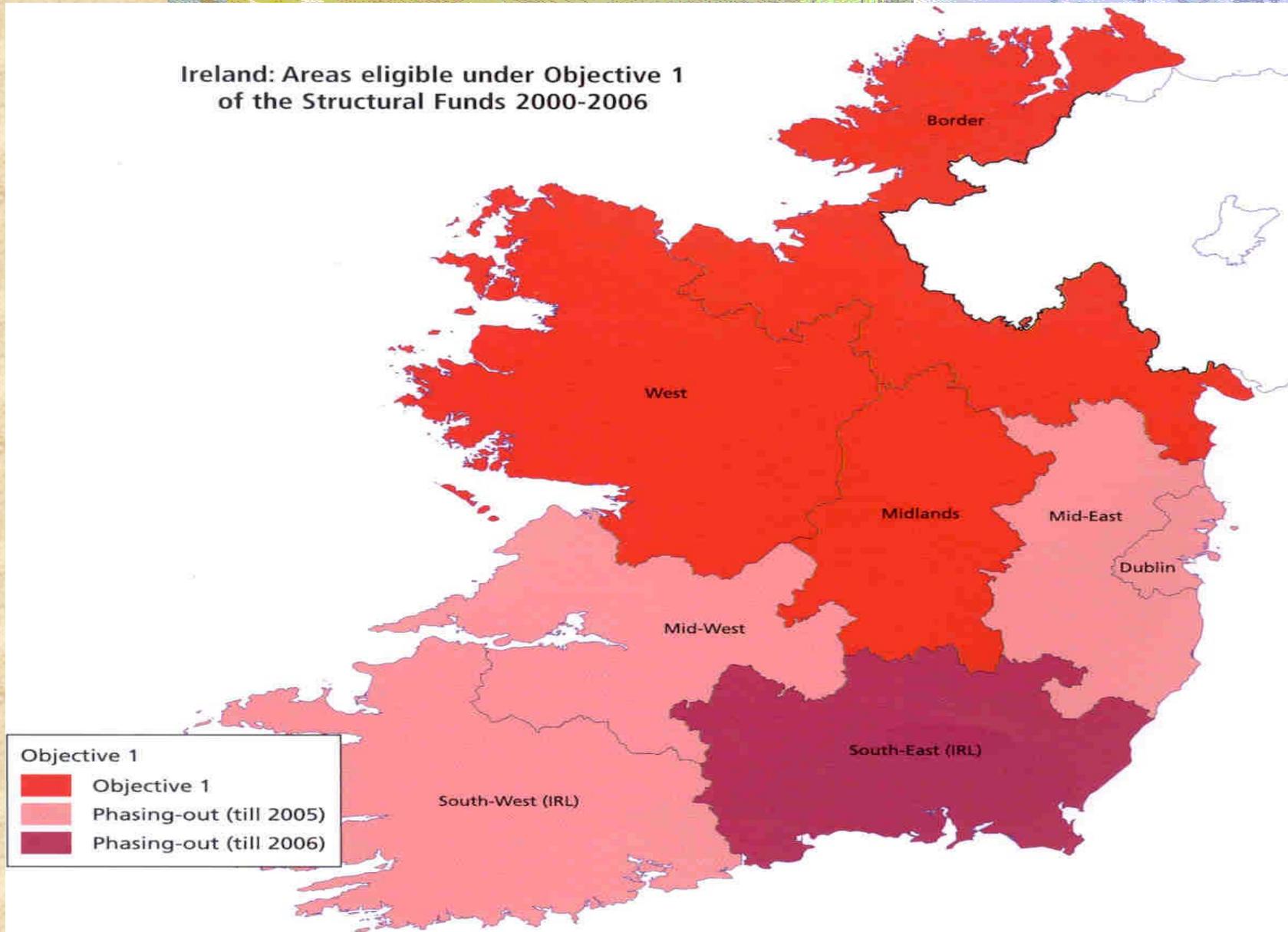
- Sustainable Development and Agenda 21 provide an injunction for democratic participation
- ‘Local Agenda 21’
 - 1991 - ICLEI Local Agenda 21 Campaign:
... to generate tangible results and increased standards of local performance through the institution of **broad-based participatory planning** aimed at advancing sustainable development
 - 1992 - Chapter 28 of Agenda 21
By 1996, most local authorities in each country should have undertaken a **consultative** process with their populations and achieved a **consensus** on ‘a local Agenda 21 for **the community**’
 - 1994 - Åalborg Charter
Åalborg 1994 ⇒ Lisbon 1996 ⇒ Hannover 2000 ⇒ Johannesburg 2002
- Academic literature focusses on a positive relationship between democratic participation and sustainable development



Putting Irish Regions in Context

- Regions = County plus model
- Pre-structural funds
 - Planning regions, Regional Tourism Authorities, Regional Technical Colleges, Regional Health Boards, Regional Fisheries Boards, Industrial Development Regions, Training regions, European Parliament Regions etc.
- Post 1988 Structural Fund Reforms
 - 8 NUTS III regions
- Post 1999
 - 2 NUTS II regions

Ireland: Areas eligible under Objective 1 of the Structural Funds 2000-2006



1. This figure includes the CSF's 1989-1993 and 1994-1999, Community Initiatives and Cohesion Funds.

- 
- NUTS III Administrative \Rightarrow non elected \Rightarrow coordinating function
 - NUTS II Administrative \Rightarrow non elected \Rightarrow distributive powers
 - Regional disparities
 - BMW: = 27% pop, dispersed settlement (small towns, rural areas), lower economic performance, different composition of GDP, skills and earnings
 - SERA: 73% Pop., concentrated in few urban centres ‘city-region Ireland’
 - No regional identity - *regions sans regionalism*
 - Regions created by Structural Funds



...a singular region?

- Objective 1, Objective 1 in transition
- Sub county (LEADER, Bantry Bay Charter), trans county (LEADER, Regional Tourism Authorities), multi-county (NUTS III, Waste)
- Tourism Destination (Tourism OP, INTERREG, LEADER)
- Resource region (river catchment/ basin districts, coastal zone)
- Border region, peripheral cross-channel, trans-European Spatial Planning Region
- City-Region/ Small Town, Rural Region (National Spatial Strategy)



Sustainable Development in Irish Regions

- NATIONAL LEVEL
- *Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland, 1997*
 - NUTS III regions – coordinating role implementing Agenda 21
- *Making Ireland's Development More Sustainable, 2002*
 - No regional focus as such
 - National Spatial Development Strategy ⇒
- *Principles of Sustainable Development, Comhar -National Sustainable Development Partnership, 2002*
 - Principle 7 = Regional Sustainable Development
 - ‘the development of resource potential in one regions should not compromise the ability of other regions to achieve their own potential’



- ***Revised Local Agenda 21 Guidelines, 2001***

- ‘Think like a region’

- ***National Spatial Strategy, 2002***

- ‘Balanced Regional Development’

- ‘through its focus on economic, social and environmental issues and on the inter-linkages between them, is a key policy instrument in pursuit of sustainable development’
 - A 20 year planning framework based on regional gateways and development hubs
 - Spending under the current National Development Plan in advance of the National Spatial Strategy



Agenda 21: a stimulus for experimentation?

- ***Comhar (2001)***

- ‘Specific implementation of the Strategy [for Sustainable Development] at local authority level has been poorly resourced ...even though overall local government funding has increased by 60 % since 1997’

- ***National Report to Johannesburg (2002)***

- ‘Since the mid-1990’s there has been considerable LA21 *type* activity though not necessarily labelled as such’

- ***Earth Summit Ireland (2002)***

- ‘Ireland has failed to develop any meaningful Local Agenda 21 partnerships’

- ***Local Sustainable Development on the Island of Ireland (2003)***

- ‘...Ireland has ... undertaken institutional reform of governance, which will make it better to progress the sustainability agenda, although the full impacts of this are yet to be realised’



- Late Start and Limited Response

- Less than 20% had mobilised by 1999,
- Current study indicates around 54% (Ellis, Motherway, Neill & Hand, 2003)

- Project based responses to a range of issues, time bound and limited

- Bantry Bay Charter, SRUNA, SEMPA, Mayo – Sustainable Tourism in the Coastal Zone

- Cross-sectoral integration & working within regional and ecological frameworks:

- related to county development plans and coastal zone management projects
- City/ County Development Strategies 2002, National Spatial Strategy 2002

- Models of participation ⇒ Cork Environmental Forum

- Fairness & Effectiveness
- Dynamism & Durability
- Horizontal & Vertical Integration into decision-making



Horizontal and Vertical Integration: Key Milestones

- Comhar -National Sustainable Development Partnership (1999)
- Planning and Development Act (2000)
 - Enshrines sustainable development
 - Provides for Regional Planning Guidelines and Local Area Plans
- Local Agenda 21 Guidelines (1995, 2001)
 - Guides Local Agenda 21 on the basis of reformed local government structures
- National Spatial Strategy (2002)
 - Basis for Regional Sustainable Development

- 
- Better Local Government (1996)
 - Strategic Policy Committee as delivery mechanism for Local Agenda 21
 - Guidelines Interdepartmental Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems (2000)
 - City/County Development Boards and Strategies (2002)
 - Implicit and explicit Local Agenda 21
 - Process is an adaptation of Aalborg Charter
 - Specific strategies show various degrees of adaptation/ embrace of Local Agenda 21
 - Local adaptation of national social partnership model with a support in the form of the community forum



...top-down and bottom-up relations

- Regional development, sustainable or otherwise tends to be overwhelmingly top-down.
 - Structural Funds + National Development Plan have sparked a (limited) debate about regionalism and balanced regional development
- Structural Funds have created institutions connected in a system of multi-level governance
 - Lack of identification to sustain ongoing bottom-up mobilisation
 - NUTS III ‘Points on a compass’ (Callanan 2003)
 - NUTS II ‘the Southern and Eastern region [...] was left over after the Border Midland and Western region had been defined (NASC/ Irish Regions Office, 2003)

- 
- Centralised control of Structural Funds:
 - ‘key factor in Ireland’s success’
 - ‘compromises the ability of regions to develop from within and to create self sustaining forms of dynamism’ ⇒
 - what is often vaunted as a “bottom up approach”, is more a ‘top-down’ incorporation of local activism (Storey: 1999, p. 314).
 - ...facilitation of local initiative requires frameworks and structures (and finance) from above in order to proceed.



...between dynamism and durability

■ ‘The Structural Fund Effect’

- Community Instruments have facilitated local authorities and partnerships pursuing projects with sustainable development goals.
 - These projects may fail to engage wider participation
 - While these institutions may be more durable may not be as dynamic than more broadly based initiatives

■ ‘The Participation Effect’

- Sustainable development and Local Agenda 21 have created a dynamic approach to participation in local and regional development
 - The experimental and project based nature may fail to connect with other structures and processes of decision-making
 - There may be no institutional context ensuring the durability of the initiative



The Challenge of Sustainable Participation in an Enlarged Europe

- The integration of sustainable development into European Regional Development Policies and the Structural Funds has encouraged regional actors to “think like a region”
- Few institutions formed in the context of the Structural Funds will survive a significant decrease in funding post 2006
- The ‘sustainability of the Structural Fund effect’ poses a particular challenge in the Irish context.



...sustainability of the ‘Structural Fund effect’

- Structural Fund inflows set to fall by half from 1999 levels in 2006 (McAleese 2002)
 - The nature of ‘Community Instruments’ is under review
- The prospect of regional authorities or regional assemblies being given executive responsibilities, would appear remote (Callanan 2003)
 - another redrawing of regional boundaries?
- European Treaties and Directives will continue to shape RSD
- Long-term instruments like the National Spatial Strategy may prove important for embedding RSD on the ground
 - Indications are that the regional component of the NDP has diminished somewhat (ESRI 2003)
- Durable and strengthened institutions at regional level require commitment at national level to RSD



...sustainability of the ‘Participation Effect’

- A number of ‘partnerships’ have dissolved:
 - due lack of effectiveness,
 - lack of legitimacy
 - ‘participation fatigue’
- Project based initiatives have dissembled after the funding source was withdrawn – no insitutional context for continuity
 - The cost is often that the capacity building and social capital may be lost to future projects due to lack of trust
- The transformation of the Irish context means that there needs to be more indigenous commitment to emerging models and institutions for enhanced participation



...lessons from recent regional sustainable development research

- Factors contributing to the viability of regional sustainable development processes include:
 - The integration of key actors, especially business;
 - Strong regional identities;
 - Stronger participatory elements in planning and implementation;
 - Strengthening social capital in the regions;
- Plus
 - Stronger cross-policy integration;
 - Enhanced role for regional development agencies;
 - Trans and Inter-regional cooperation
 - Enhanced role for the Committee of the Regions

(REGIONET Rapid Report 2002:3)