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BALANCED REGIONAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Professor Kevin M. Leyden
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What is balanced development? It is a planning strategy that attempts “to achieve a better balance of social, economic, and physical development and population growth between regions (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002). It is a set of public policies that maintain or improve existing growth centres, such as Dublin, while emulating this success in other urban, rural, or regional areas in need of additional social and economic development. The ultimate goal, of course, is to improve the quality of life for all and to do so by minimising the effects of uneven concentrations of infrastructure, services, well-being, and employment opportunities (NESC, 2005; and Pritchard, 2010).

With the recent decline of the economy we may be tempted to feel that talk of balanced development is out of sync with current economic conditions. Any sort of development in recessionary times feels like good development. But it is exactly now that we must begin to reconsider what Ireland got right and what we got terribly wrong in the boom years. To what degree did we enable and empower rural communities and urban neighbourhoods to address their own problems and innovate economically? When and how did we fail to think and plan for balanced and sustainable development? Why and how did we forget the value of planning and building places and communities that people actually value and seek to live in? If we had been thinking more about balance and less about the short term there would be far fewer ghost estates and long commutes. And finding our way back to prosperity may have been easier.

The papers included under the Balanced Development theme reflect the on-going research interests of three promising ISSP doctoral fellows. All three seek to understand how we can achieve public policies that are far from short-sighted. Peter Cush’s paper –part of a larger work -explores the difficulties of a small scale aquaculture cooperative, focused upon long-line mussel cultivation, in the Killary fjord near Leenane, Connemara. As Cush notes “…understanding whether a cooperative can manage common pool resources is a vital addition to rural development studies.” It can help us understand how and when the state can facilitate development and in what ways it can be a hindrance. This research will also help to examine the conditions that enable small rural businesses to survive in a competitive global market. Of course, it is about far more than the survival of a business; it is also about the survival of a rural way of life.

The paper by Ruth Pritchard examines the relationship between ‘balanced development’ policies and ‘strengthened democracy’ in practice in the community of Blessington, County Wicklow. Among other questions, Pritchard is interested in the complex interrelationships between economic development, social equity, improved environmental management practices, the changing nature of community power, and participatory democratic processes. Blessington Town is an ideal place to study these relationships given its recent transformation
from a rural village largely sustained by agriculture and granite quarrying to an urban commuter village where most residents travel to Dublin for employment. It is within this context that Pritchard explores the work and biases of the Electoral Area Boundary Committee which was charged to examine issues of electoral representation in light of considerable population shifts in the region. To Pritchard, balanced development must also include the ability of citizens to participate democratically in meaningful ways.

Finally, Margaret Tallott’s paper examines the question: what constitutes good environmental regulation? To do so she focuses upon the implementation of Ireland’s Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) regulations of 2006, which were designed to improve the energy performance of buildings and promote energy saving innovations in the construction industry and the manufacture of building materials. Using available data, Tallott provides a thoughtful initial evaluation of EPBD as a policy using principles outlined by Porter & Van der Linde (1995), Harmelink, et al (2008), and in light of the government’s own Regulatory Impact Analysis guidelines. Although her approach here is arguably still in development, Tallott’s work is clearly important; she points to a real need to systematically and empirically evaluate public policies to determine what is and what isn’t working as intended and what can be done to improve the implementation of policies that work.
SUSTAINING THE RURAL THROUGH COOPERATIVE ACTION

Peter Cush, Doctoral Fellow, Irish Centre for Rural Transformation and Sustainability, National University of Ireland, Galway

ABSTRACT

In recent times policy on social and rural poverty has experienced a shift. Policy had previously concentrated on fiscal distribution to society’s underprivileged. However over time policy makers and academics began to realise that social poverty was the result of an underdeveloped civil society where the proletariat had become increasingly disengaged from the public sphere. As a result policy began to look at ways of tackling social exclusion and incorporating the proletariat into the decision making process. This paper gives a description of that process and Ireland’s experience of tackling social exclusion. It is suggested in this paper that the proposed research may highlight some of the current policy deficits and challenges prevalent in rural development. This is because it engages with a small rural populace and examines the strategies they employ in sustaining the rural and the frustrations they have experienced in their attempts of bottom-up development.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the proposed research is to examine the dynamics of natural resource management. It seeks to understand whether a small scale cooperative can manage a common pool resource in a sustainable fashion. This will be done through an ethnographic study of shellfish cooperatives on the Killary fjord in North West Connemara. Such aqua-cultural resources are often of critical importance to the rural economy and provide one of the only long term employment opportunities outside of small scale agriculture for the coastal communities of the west of Ireland (Phyne 2006). As a result, sustainable resource management is an effective tool in reducing rural dependence, exclusion and poverty. On top of managing the local resource, industries engaged in aquaculture must survive in a challenging global market. Thus the second aspect of this research seeks to examine whether a ‘micro business’ such as a cooperative can adapt to meet the challenging externalities facing small scale producers in the global food market. The focus of this paper is to outline how the themes of such a research project can be linked to the wider issue of public policy. Consequently this discussion will be divided into two sections. The first section will examine the current policy debates surrounding the issue of social poverty and how it should be tackled. It will give a brief history of policy on this area. It will highlight the shift in policy making from a focus on income redistribution, to a more robust strategy that attempts to resolve social exclusion. This section will outline the current challenges that contemporary public policy faces in order to encourage a vibrant civil society where its citizenry are engaged activists allowed to fully express their economic, social and political rights. Once the current policy deficits or challenges are located, this paper can move on to discuss how the research questions and hypothesis generated by the project can be linked to the current welfare requirements. It will be suggested that the questions that this research will explore may meet the requirements of current public policy as it engages with a small and rural populace that are somewhat socially isolated and on the ‘margins’.
TACKLING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

There is much debate over the most effective ways of tackling social poverty and policy on the issue has shifted significantly over time. Historically policy on social and rural deprivation concentrated on processes of fiscal distribution. Poverty was seen purely in terms of a crisis of material deprivation and was responded to by increasing employment opportunities and economic growth (Mingione, 1996: 13). However over time policy makers and academics alike realised that the ‘social proletariat’ could no longer rely on contemporary capitalism. Capitalism had increasingly disengaged the proletariat from the decision making process and had left them in a dependent position on large scale producers and employers. Such a dependency meant that poverty could no longer be rectified by redistributing income and it required a new approach. Rather than relying on fiscal distribution policy makers began to examine crisis in the social fabric as a phenomenon explained by social exclusion. Those stricken by poverty were so because they of “their inability to fully exercise their social, economic and political rights as citizens” (Geddes, 2000: 783). Civil society had become separated and distanced from the public sphere and poverty and social degradation were a direct offset of that.

The underlying theme was the integration of those on the margins of society into the political infrastructure. Social poverty was not seen as a problem of fiscal distribution but as a consequence of a disengaged proletariat who were increasingly alienated from the political process. As Geddes (2000: 783) notes economic and social degeneration “begets a crisis of local governance.” The social proletariat needed to be integrated into the decision making process so that they became visionaries on their own future and that social development found its inspiration in the people it was designed to serve. Thus the salient issue in community development was that of empowerment and how those marginalised in society could become more engaged and integrated into the public sphere (Caragatta, 1999). This restructured the professional elitist stance of social development that tended to be over-economised, toward a more social one where civil society became invigorated and integration and participation became key areas of focus.

This “bottom up” model was seen as a means of mediating against Weber’s conception of the state as a coercive force and an “ultimate legitimate arbiter, superseding all other agencies” (Collins, 2002: 91). It has been argued that the state had previously exerted supreme authority over the public sphere which led to increasing marginalisation and social exclusion. This power is referred to as ‘power over’ (Varley and Curtin: 2006), where those in state agencies and bureaucracies denied those at the “bottom” capacity to govern their own affairs. In this new model the state and civil society work together and design policy so that decision making would be more democratic and participative. This model of policy making amounts to what Teague (2007: 97) refers to as the “social economy”. This refers to a system where civic associations and local agencies manage policy and decision making. It is argued that these civic associations are adept in managing local affairs as they have a girth of “knowledge of the local scene”. As these associations understand the idiosyncratic nature of local communities they may be in a better position than the state to manage local affairs. It is suggested that the knowledge that such civic associations have helps them to build trust, reciprocity and social capital within the local community which mobilises cooperation within neighbourhoods. These are “recognised as important ingredients in the success or otherwise of socially beneficial business activities in local communities” (Ibid: 97). Such local businesses are cited as an effective means of reducing social poverty and rural out-migration and of integrating neighbourhoods that help combat social exclusion.
In this model citizens regain a degree of control and power and become more actively engaged. It has been hoped that such a model may enable policy to be better equipped to deal with the needs of communities. This was because those who have the knowledge on the dynamics of the ‘local’ were integrated into the policy making process (Daly, 2007: 157). Therefore policy must promote forms of local governance that could empower local rural communities. One means of doing this is by promoting partnership arrangements between government agencies and local community groups. It is argued that through partnership arrangements local communities would be able to develop “power to” capacities where those at the bottom were allowed “to voice their own need rather than work toward meeting a need that is defined by others, often the government.” (Babacan and Gopalkrishnan, 2001: 11-12; cited from Powell and Geoghegan, 2004: 226). Partnership agreements enable civil society to be rejuvenated as it resolves the structural decline inherent in many rural districts. The hope with partnership agreements is that they encourage a participatory culture of involvement. This “democratic” system enables the crisis of local governance to be resolved as it encourages “decentralised empowered governance” (Teague: 2007, 94). This enables the marginalised citizens challenge the hegemonic power of the state as they have a more direct influence on decision making and policy. Geddes illustrates clearly the core ideological preference of the partnership model,

“‘Community involvement’ or even ‘empowerment’ is a dominant theme in the discourse of local partnership in the EU and in many member states. ‘Partnership for social inclusion’ means engaging the excluded within the structures and processes of partnership as active, if not necessarily equal, partners in ‘community governance’. Local partnerships, it is claimed, are intended to function as institutional arenas for networks of civic engagement and social capital linking ‘communities’ and community organizations with the formal organizations of the public and private sectors.” (Geddes, 2000: 793)

In theory, partnerships afford the proletariat bargaining power as it allows those at the ‘bottom’ develop “the ‘power to’ negotiate or counter those dominating and exploiting forces that exert ‘power over’ subordinate elements in society” (Varley and Curtin, 2006: 425). The old system of ‘top down’ development allowed a coercive system to develop that reinforced the states ‘power over’ a weak civil society. This centrally controlled system contributed to social exclusion that disengaged the proletariat from the public sphere. It has been hoped that partnerships may resolve such problems by encouraging mutual aid and self-help amongst communities. It is hoped that in this process the state operates at a more democratic level where it becomes an “‘enabler’ rather than an ‘enforcer’ assisting and empowering local initiatives to combat social exclusion and promote inclusive democratic forms that harness the participative potential of civil society” (Powell and Geoghegan, 2004: 39).

THE IRISH EXPERIENCE

The experience of partnership arrangements or the “social economy” (Teague, 2007) in Ireland has been mixed. Questions have been raised over the state’s commitment in developing an engaged citizenry. A vibrant civil society would encourage participation at all levels where citizens played a greater role to ensure the public sphere was not encroached by government interests. It would ensure that a “mutually re-enforcing relationship” was established that “provides a space for a diverse range of voices to be heard and where different interests and opinions are respected” (Daly, 2007: 168). At one level there has been support for addressing the deficits in Ireland’s civil society. Increasing corruption scandals, inequalities and the decline of the Catholic Church have led to a renewed interest in
empowering citizens (Ibid: 158). This combined with the fact that the ‘small man’ has been an historical ideological commitment of Finna Fail (Mair, 1987: 52), Ireland’s largest and most successful political party, provides encouraging reading. There have also been a number of successful community groups and civic associations that have promoted development in deprived and alienated neighbourhoods. The Paul society in Limerick has been relatively successful in promoting civic engagement. It has a national reputation for working with some of the most disadvantaged communities in Limerick and providing support for locally based initiatives that provide for a sustainable economic and social base (Teague, 2007: 96-97). Muintir na tire, a catholic community group, is another good example of a successful agency that has worked with local community initiatives that have protected neighbourhoods from threatening hegemonic and ‘power over’ forces (Varley and Curtin, 2002). The above provides some encouragement that Ireland has made steps towards giving power to the people that may help reduce social exclusion and alienation.

At one level, there are some positive signs towards negotiating the disempowerment of isolated communities. There is however many worrying trends which suggests that Ireland is still along way from resolving the crisis in local governance and civil society. There has been much criticism aimed at Ireland’s experience of partnerships. It has been argued in the literature that partnerships provide very little reform to the vertical power relations instigated by central state control. Many feel that partnerships often reinforce existing inequalities of power, leaving those alienated further on the margins. Powell and Geoghegan (2004: 39) have noted “the autonomy and vitality of local partnerships risks being suffocated by the centralised bureaucracy of the state, with its tendency to reproduce hierarchies of power at the local level.” It has been suggested that partnerships serve to further the interests of the state and many other dominant classes in Irish society. Allen (2000) argues that partnerships have allowed the state to co-opt potential oppositional forces into the hegemonic order. Thus social partnerships have the potential to act as a form of social control and reinforce the ‘power over’ capacity of the state. Many social partnerships have enabled state actors to monitor the activities of the local proletariat and ensure that their interests do not run contrary to that of the states. This has raised serious questions over the effectiveness of the partnerships as a mode of local governance that could mediate against the process of rural poverty and social exclusion. (Powell and Geoghegan, 2004: 255).

This difficulty has been experienced for two main reasons. Firstly partnerships require state assistances so that local initiatives have the necessary funding and resources to ensure that their ventures may be fulfilled. A condition of funding is often that a state evaluator be appointed so they can monitor the local initiatives. This means that there can be representation of ‘supra-local’ interests in local area partnerships. These ‘supra-local’ interests often have different aims than the local partnerships and can be unwilling to adjust to the local agendas. These external state actors hold a great deal of power in these partnership agreements as they provide the funding for many of the locally based initiatives. This allows the state authority over the local agencies and civic associations who are responsible for developing socially deprived areas. As a result the power structures of these partnerships often remain vertical that serves to reinforce the power of the state. This runs against the grain of local governance and ‘bottom up’ development that wishes to build horizontal power relations where the social proletariat gains influence and is allowed to fully express their will as social, economic and political citizens. (Geddes, 2000: 792-793)
This difficulty is compounded by a second problem as it is common that development agencies are only recognised as legitimate once they are professionalised. (Daly, 2007:164). The state resources will only be dispensed to those local groups who can prove that they have the professional capacities to run initiatives successfully. As a result many partnerships arrangements favour the professionals located in local areas rather than those who are most marginalised. This stands in opposition to the orientations of local governance that promotes inclusion and civic participation. This point is echoed by Geddes when he suggests that “‘community’ involvement normally draws on layer of local activists, such as those involved in local community or residents organisations, and fails to engage to any significant degree with the wider ‘local community or, more particularly with the ‘most excluded’”’ (Geddes, 2000: 793). For example, Varley and Curtin (2006: 430) note that Connemara West, a developing agency for North West Connemara, gained funding from the European Unions Poverty 3 programme as they had demonstrated their ability to be a ‘winner’ and have the professional capacity for “sustaining partnership-type community state relations”. The difficulty with such a policy is that it has a tendency to push those who are most in need of inclusion further to the margins. This raises further questions over whether social partnerships can rejuvenate civil society and generate ‘power to’ capacities to those at the bottom of the social, economic and political spectrum. (Ibid)

EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

The above problems with social partnerships highlight the current deficits in public policy and its attempts to combat social exclusion and rural poverty. The main difficulty is that it does little to resurrect civil society and give power to those at the bottom. Therefore policy needs to look at other modes of local governance that may foster a more active proletariat and encourage economic and social development in rural deprived areas. On a general rural development level, the purpose of the research is to examine the cooperative movement as an alternative strand of rural development that keeps the economic and social benefits in the hand of the local populace. It also seeks to examine whether small rural enterprises are efficient in meeting the challenging economic and social conditions posed by the demands of the local economy.

However the specific focus of the research is to examine whether a small scale cooperative can manage natural resources. It wishes to inspect whether cooperatives can develop a system of rules and norms that ensures that common pool resources are not subjected to depletion. This will be done through an ethnographic study of long-line mussel cultivation in the Killary fjord in Leenane, North West Connemara. These resources are of great value to those rural communities in the West of Ireland as work in the fisheries or aquaculture is one of the few forms of long term employment outside of agriculture (Phyne, 1996: 281). Consequently management of local resources are often a vital ingredient to the economic and social prosperity of local communities. Thus understanding whether a cooperative can manage common pool resources is a vital addition to rural development studies. At a policy level it also raises interesting question surrounding the role of the state. If a cooperative can effectively manage common pool resources, it questions what the role the state should play beyond providing technical and financial assistance. The difficulty with partnerships was that the state maintained a heavy handed approach and often operated as an enforcer rather than a facilitator. This proved to be detrimental to the focus on social inclusion and bottom-up development that has captured the scope of development policy making over the past two
decades. Thus if this research can prove that the Killary shellfish cooperative managed mussel production in an ecologically sustainable fashion and also survived in a competitive global market, then a genuine argument could be made that policy must focus on encouraging similar organic rural enterprises, that can help reduce rural exclusion and poverty. Policy may better serve those on the margins of our political and social infrastructure if it is designed in such fashion rather than relying on partnerships that have historically co-opted marginalised rural citizens into the doctrine and ideology of the states agenda.

The difficulty with cooperatives is how they are perceived by government agencies and policy makers. Varley notes that small scale industries such as cooperatives are often portrayed as transitory or as a class “without any long-term future” (1994: 1). Consequently there is often a misguided perception that these initiatives are destined for economic and social failure. Many feel that small scale local projects such as cooperative lack the ‘professional’ capacity to be ‘economic’. However this is problematic as small scale industries have historically contributed to the vibrancy of local communities and reduced their dependency on large scale corporations. (Curtin and Varley, 1991: 97-98). As Varley notes that there is no “absolute distinction” between “economic and uneconomic”. Rather notions of what is economic are “socially constructed” at a particular place and time (Varley, 1994: 2). Therefore it simplifies the nature of small scale industries and the positive effect they can have in reducing rural poverty. This point is clearly demonstrated in the aquaculture industry where small scale salmon farms survived the collapse in the salmon market in 1990 that led to the demise of two of Ireland’s largest salmon farmers, Carroll’s and Salmara. (Phyne, 1996: 287). As a result cooperatives experiences need to be documented so that policy can be adjusted to support them. In the case of this particular research project, the cooperatives success or failures in managing mussel cultivation and the globalising market needs to be illustrated so that policy makers can appreciate the dynamics of local industries development.

MANAGING COMMON POOL RESOURCES

Successful cooperative action over the use of natural resources is a dynamic process and its success is not in anyway a certainty. There have been just as many failures with cooperative action as their have been success. A large and substantial literature on natural resource management has developed. A brief outline of such literature is necessary so the reader can appreciate the difficulties associated with the sustainable management of important local resources. Two major theories have dominated the literature on natural resource management. The first one is referred to as the rational choice theory. The rational theorists argue that rational self interested individuals are unable to manage a common resource. They suggest that as individuals are motivated primarily by self interest, they will continue to extract from the resource until it is depleted. Individuals think only of their self interest and not of the collective outcome of the group. Consequently “rational actors cannot achieve rational collective outcomes” (Wade, 1987: 98) and as a result “freedom in the commons brings ruin to all” (Hardin, 1968: 1244). The rational theorists suggest that some form of coercion by an external authority is required if rational self interested individuals are to achieve their common or group interest” (Olson, 1971: 2).

However the cooperative action school believe rational actors can manage natural resources through collective action. The main tenet of their argument is that rational individuals can sustain a natural resource through the development of institutional and cultural norms. The
The collective action school suggests that the “normative, symbolic or cultural structures” (Granovetter, 1992: 26) of the group ensure that individuals are tied together by a moral economy. This moral economy creates a web of mutuality, reciprocity and trust which acts as a disincentive for individuals to cheat their neighbours and follow their self interest of utility maximisation (Stone, 1996: 550.) Such a moral economy creates pattern of social relations that would make it “unthinkable” to cheat their neighbours (Granovetter, 1992: 46) and ensure that individuals gear their activity towards collective ends. The cooperative school have developed a substantial list of conditions that should be present in order for collective action to be successful (McKean 1992, Ostrom 1985 and Wade 1987). While it is beyond the scope of this essay to explain them in depth, a brief discussion of them is necessary.

The first and most important condition is that the group set out a clear and well defined boundary of who has right of access to the commons. This is vital so that a community of users can be established and the trust and reciprocity necessary for collective action be realised. Once this is achieved the group can discuss how the commons is to be run and resolve any of the conflicts that may emerge. It is also important that the group be given independent jurisdiction over the management of the commons with as little interference from the state as possible (McKean, 1992: 258-260). Ostrom (2008: 13) notes that that the imposition of external rules by the state can often destroy existing local rules that can lead to the degradation of the commons. Consequently “the less the state can, or wishes to undermine locally-based authorities ... the better the chances of success” (Wade: 1987: 105). Another important feature outlined by McKean is the transferability of property. She argues that rights to use the resource should only be transferable between members of the same community and never to outsiders. This ensures that objectives remain cohesive within the group and prevents absentee landlords from “contaminating decisions about the uses of common property” (McKean, 1992: 262). The final important condition is the role of rules and enforcement. The socialisation process is not entirely sufficient to guarantee collective action. No matter how much the system is deemed as fair by its users and no matter how well connected the community is by a social and cultural normative framework the incentive to cheat still remains. Therefore a system of rules is vital and these rules must be easily enforced and also be perceived of as fair (McKean, 1992: 273).

The above conditions have been empirically tested and have been found to exist in a number of successful collective action projects. Thus it is important to examine whether these conditions are applicable to the case of the Killary shellfish cooperative or whether the cooperative can provide new insight into the collective action process. It will also provide insight into whether local organic enterprises can manage local resources in a sustainable fashion. This may enhance our understanding of the role that local small scale enterprises play in promoting the economic and social vibrancy of the ‘rural’ and empowering many of its alienated rural citizens. Policy on rural poverty could benefit from this as it may illustrate the importance that social capital and trust play in sustaining many of these local rural communities. It may also illustrate the effective role local citizen’s play in carving out their own vision for the future of their communities and how policy can be designed to promote this.

GLOBALISED MARKET

On top of managing the local natural resources, cooperatives and other small scale micro businesses must demonstrate their ability to survive in a competitive global market. The
main externality that confronts a small scale industry such as the Killary shellfish cooperative is the globalisation of the aquaculture industry. One of the arguments in the literature is that the globalisation of aquaculture has left many of the small scale industries in a dependent relationship with the larger industries. It is argued that this is the result of a shift in global commodity chains from ‘producer driven’ to ‘buyer driven’. Instead of producing themselves, large scale industries now outsource production to small scale industries. The large scale industries then purchase the produce from the smaller industries, providing the large scale industries with low cost products (Phyne and Mansella, 2003: 109). These larger scale industries or “downstream actors” are usually processors and retailers that are “lead drivers in setting governance standards in food chains” (Phyne et al, 2006: 191). These lead actors play a significant role in setting food standards, price and product quality. As a result the smaller scale industries that produce the products are marginalised in an oligopolistic market that favours the larger scale retailers (Winson 1993). Thus there is a vertical power structure in such a market where the small scale enterprises must adhere to the buyer driven standards in order to survive.

Many have argued that this has left many small scale enterprises in a dependent position with larger scale producers which makes it increasingly difficult for them to survive. However others argue that the effect of the globalising market on smaller firms is somewhat exaggerated (Mansfield, 2003). It is suggested that food standards in the industry are the process of ongoing negotiations and that a couple of lead firms cannot simply set the standards for the whole of the industry. Rather it is a fluid process that “… initiates a game of constant learning where there is no one single or ultimate solution” (Larner and Le Heron, 2004). As a result the small scale enterprises can hold a degree of power in the global food market. Through the process of negotiations they can challenge the dominant food retailers and thus mediate against the forces of globalisation (Barrett et al, 2002). This in turn raises interesting questions for this research. In the case of the Killary shellfish cooperative it may be interesting to examine how such a small scale enterprise survives in the globalised market. Have they been forced to compete in a vertically integrated market where they must adhere to the standards initiated by the large scale retailers in order to survive? If they must compete in such a global market, do they hold any bargaining power against the larger scale retailers? Or do the larger retailers maintain hegemony in the political economy of the global food market? It may be interesting to examine these questions in order to get a clearer picture over the strategies a small scale aquaculture industry uses in order to survive in an increasingly challenging market.

By examining the cooperatives attempts at managing both internal dynamics of resource management and external ones of the globalising market, this research may illustrate the obstacles that rural micro industries face in their attempts to mobilise themselves and develop their own capacity for action, empowerment and rural development. This may provide policy makers with a greater understanding of the issues that organic industries face. Rather than relying on the partnership model that has been fraught with difficulties, policy makers may look at such cooperatives or micro industries as a more effective model of building from ‘below’. Policy makers may then be better placed to design an effective strategy for reducing rural poverty and exclusion, an issue that has eluded them in the past (Geddes, 2000).
CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the current deficits that appear polemic in the debates surrounding public and social policy. This paper explained the difficulties in tackling social exclusion with the partnership model. It illustrated that the partnership model often fails to negotiate disempowerment due to a heavy handed approach from the state. It then went on to explain that policy may be better served in encouraging the growth of cooperatives and other micro industries in order to tackle rural exclusion and alienation. This discussion then illustrated that if policy wishes to serve such indigenous industries then a greater understanding of the processes that they engage in may be of significance. This study may provide policy makers with empirical insight into the challenges that small rural enterprises can overcome. It may illustrate to those in power that local community enterprises are efficient in managing their own affairs and that they can help reduce the experience of rural isolation. It may also illustrate the difficulties that many of these organic industries face in promoting local development. By examining both internal dynamics of resource management and external issue of the globalising food market, this research can provide a rounded picture of how a small scale rural project survives. The research may enable policy makers see the value of such rural enterprises and the importance of sustaining them in the future. There is huge potential in many of the rural communities in Irish society. Like many other forms of academic inquiry, this research is attempting to give such excluded rural communities a voice. To document their story and explain their attributes and what they can achieve given the right set of circumstances. The experience that this country has had recently with multinational corporations such as Dell illuminates the role that small scale indigenous enterprises may have in reducing out-migration, social exclusion and poverty. Therefore a study that engages with a small rural enterprise may be invaluable to public and social policy and it attempts to reinvigorate civil society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


THE POLITICS OF BALANCED DEVELOPMENT: STRETCHING THE BOUNDARIES OF DEMOCRACY IN BLESSINGTON, CO. WICKLOW

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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly explores the nature of the relationship between the policies of ‘balanced development’ and ‘strengthened democracy’ in practice in a rural town in the Greater Dublin Area. It describes the ways in which the case for enhanced elected representation for Blessington, Co. Wicklow reveals the politics of balanced development at the local level, where the re-definition of rural boundaries are of particular relevance to the legitimating of restructured rural spaces. The paper explores the reality of the twinned discourses of ‘balanced development’ and ‘strengthened democracy’, in the capacity of local governance groups to effect changes to their electoral boundaries, during the unique occasion presented by the activity of the Electoral Area Boundary Committee in 2008.

The paper concludes that the disparate discourses that underpin the aims of ‘balanced development’ accommodate significant policy contradictions, the primary evidence for which is the extent to which local governance actors appeared to be little empowered by boundary-definition processes that remained impervious to transformative change. In summary, the discourses of ‘people’ and ‘place’ may not be fully integrated, since spatial identities, including boundary definitions, are not available to democratic reflexivity. It is further argued that a newly complex local governance system contributes to a more fluid spatial identity, while the prevailing topography of power relations marshals consensus towards the unbalanced status quo. The conflict between both discourses is therefore revealed as an essential contradiction between a restructured spatial and temporal politics, but one in which new governance actors may now aim to represent both those governed and those governing. The case presented further suggests that regional plans may become more important as a lever for balanced development outcomes, but that this entails integrating regional strategic planning for social equity with participatory processes at the scale appropriate to restructured rural communities.

INTRODUCTION – THE POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHIC DIMENSIONS OF BALANCED DEVELOPMENT

Encapsulated by the phrase ‘people and place’, the term ‘balanced development’ is figuratively representative of an emphasis on a new localism and the belief, accorded under economic primacy, that competitiveness acts against, but is predicated upon, a measure of social equity (NESC, 2009; OECD, 2006). Delimiting an essentially inequitable competitive economy (Kirby and Murphy, 2008), which tends towards spatial agglomeration and

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1 The author acknowledges with thanks the consideration given to this paper by her doctoral supervisor, Prof. Chris Curtin, School of Political Science and Sociology at NUIG. The topic for the paper was also facilitated by the author’s attendance at the advanced Graduate Research Education Programme module ‘balanced development’ co-ordinated by NUI, Maynooth and Mary Immaculate College as part of the Irish Social Sciences Platform from March to April 2009.
commensurate with a developmental economy, capable of factoring in social equity – balanced development requires active intervention expressed in spatial planning documents such as the National Spatial Strategy, since the affects of inequitable or unbalanced development are registered in uneven concentrations of infrastructure, services and employment opportunities within the state (NESC, 2005). The aim of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) therefore is ‘to achieve a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between regions’ (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002, p. 10).

Resonant more particularly in considerations of the local, the town, the rural relative to the global, the city, the urban - balanced development is a goal that emerges in the measurement of its opposite and as a remedy to it. Indeed, much of the NSS and the European Spatial Development Perspective from which it draws, focuses on the future of Dublin and ‘favours an urban discourse’ (Scott, 2006, p. 813). In turn, the new rural paradigm proposed by the OECD (2006), describes the impact of rural restructuring as parallel processes under large scale global forces; what Marsden (2006) has summarised as the ‘different compromises’ that rural communities have made in response to modernising influences, so that place-based economic strategies are adopted by a newly diverse rural population, subject to a ‘much more pragmatic and market-oriented approach which combines agriculture with broader notions of the diversified regional economy’ (Marsden, 2006, p. 14). In this overarching policy discourse, if balanced development in economic or social terms is achieved by means of participatory democratic processes – then an economically desirable social equity is more likely to result. Each of these elements of the trinity of a developmental economy; balanced development, social equity and participatory democratic practice are key challenges, somehow resolved at the local level, more particularly, in rural areas. For Murray (2009), this policy approach submerges inherent contradictions in a normative discourse that is itself derived from disparate political and spatial planning frameworks, wherein balanced development is:

‘...a mantra with symbolic meaning in the conventional debates of convergence and divergence, core and periphery, urban and rural, east and west (in Ireland and Northern Ireland) and where the arguments so often conflate equity, opportunity and efficiency into a call for improved resource allocations from the centre.’ (Murray, 2009, p. 2)

The symbolic discourse of balanced development may signal area-based approaches and participative decision-making amongst its processes, but does its formulation in fact contribute to the transformative implications of a ‘strengthened democracy’? The example of the Area Partnerships (now the Integrated Local Development Companies) has regularly served as a proxy for the successful integration of the political and geographic dimensions of balanced development policy in practice (Turok, 2001). A core assumption of this paper is that a broader socio-political context is necessary to review these dimensions, as restructured rural communities respond to complex new forms of rural governance by building new flexible networks and multi-dimensional relationships (Hardiman, 2006; Peters and Pierre, 2001). The remainder of this paper therefore, examines the political and the geographic dimensions of the discourse of balanced development, by reviewing the political boundary (re)definition activity of the Boundary Area Electoral Committee in 2008. Feeding into the development of the Green Paper ‘Stronger Local Democracy’, the recommendations of the Electoral Area Boundary Committee would uniquely have repercussions for both local democratic representation and spatial planning. The term discourse is used throughout, as a
conscious referent of the shared knowledge on which policies of balanced development and strengthened democracy rely and interact.

BALANCED DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEXT – FROM GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNANCE


‘To reach its potential local government needs to be strengthened to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. These include:

- Continued population growth and balanced regional development;
- Tackling social exclusion and integrating new communities;
- Improved environmental management in areas such as waste, water quality, built and natural heritage protection, and the challenges of climate change; and,
- Ensuring greater connection between local government and local people.’ (Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government, 2008, p. 3).

The founding rationale in the Green Paper is given as the need for ‘greater freedom and capacity to tackle local issues locally’ to achieve a strengthened local government (Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government, 2008, p. 3). Despite the formal recognition of local government in the Irish Constitution in the 1990s, commentators have consistently criticised a lack of transformation of local government itself since the 1890s; specifically in terms of the limits of its function, remit and subordinate relationship with central government (O’Brien and Waters, 2007). As a general principle; ‘Irish governments have very limited administrative competences, conferred on them by national laws. There is a low degree of autonomy’ (European University, 2009, p. 169). Described as the ‘government of difference’, one of the fundamental rationalisations for having local government is that it allows the unique characteristics of the local to be factored into democratic decision-making (Weeks and Quinlivan, 2009, p. 2 - p. 3). According to the TASC report published in 2007, however, within local government:

‘Initiatives under recent legislation to establish effective social partnership arrangements for local authorities, together with the establishment of bodies for longer-term planning, have been hailed as an attempt to reverse the centralising trend but have done little to address the limited competences of elected local government itself.’ (TASC, 2007, p. 11).

In the absence of a transformed local government system, a transformed governance system has been produced in rural areas, if governance is defined to encompass the whole variety of organisations and the interactions between them that make up the process of governing as ‘a strategy to link the contemporary state to the contemporary society’ (Pierre and Peters, 2000, p. 52). Under this definition, local governance may include, inter-alia; Area Partnerships, County Development Boards, Strategic Policy Committees, Community Fora, and the development relationships that bind these entities to one another and to area-based representative community organisations.
For some commentators, integrating the multifactoral push-pull of a negotiated governance (Taylor, 2005) with traditional views of state form (e.g. competitive vs. developmental), new forms of governance reflect a ‘congested’ state (Skelcher, 2000), which has become both diffuse and distributed such that ‘… the state merely articulates a mode of authority which is essentially decentred’ (Ryan, 2007). According to Kooiman, new governance arrangements ‘trespass’ traditional conceptual boundaries in explicating the relationships between the state, market and civil society (Kooiman, 2003, p. 8). Furthermore, their conceptualisation anticipates that new forms of governance will direct attention to the distribution of power ‘both internal and external to the state’ (Stoker, quoted in Marsden and Murdoch, 1998, p. 1). For Varley and Curtin (2002), the changing pattern of leadership in evidence in rural Ireland is uneven, with some traditional power elites maintaining their power bases within new forms of governance, while other new power actors (e.g. professional development actors) have emerged. This is the context within which local people increasingly find it difficult to understand power relations (Kay, 2006, p. 78). One response has seen the establishment of groupings of area-based community development organisations as networks or fora at the local level. These may be said in turn, to decentre power towards a more simplified area based negotiation within local governance. As one instance, informal direct meetings between local area planners, community groups and local elected representatives in the context of the development of the new Local Area Plans or Village Design Statement processes have become common, if recent phenomena.

THE NEW RURAL PARADIGM – IMBALANCE AND IDENTITY IN THE BALTINGLASS ELECTORAL AREA

The largest settlement in the West Wicklow area, the town of Blessington in Co. Wicklow, epitomises the new rural paradigm, where; ‘Established villagers, blow-ins and foreigners have gathered together in conditions not so much of their own choosing but that are the outcomes of global flows that have transformed Ireland’s economy and society…’ (Inglis, 2008, p. 247 - p. 248). Subject to these pressures, Blessington’s citizens struggle against an acknowledged imbalance of development between the east and the west of the county. Blessington is situated in the extreme north west of County Wicklow on the N81, near to the Dublin and Wicklow uplands and the broad valleys formed by the Liffey and Kings River. Both a border town and a gateway town into West Wicklow, its reference distances indicate the social and economic ties that orient the town in relation its near neighbours, Kildare and Dublin. Blessington is 30km from Dublin, 11km from Naas, 30km from Baltinglass - but some 56km across the Wicklow uplands to Wicklow Town. A map showing these relative positions is given below.

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2 One of just four key objectives of the Wicklow County Development Plan is to ‘…redress the imbalance in growth and prosperity between the east and the west of the County.’ (Wicklow County Development Plan 2010 - 2016, Report on Pre-draft Consultation, February 2009, p. 11)
Map 1: Relative positions of the settlements of Blessington, Naas, Dublin, Baltinglass and Wicklow Town.

Like many commuter towns in the Greater Dublin Area, the Blessington area has experienced explosive population growth in the past two decades. In 1971, the population of Blessington was 1,170 people. The first second level school in the town had recently opened and its remit was to provide vocational training to prepare mostly young men for a trade. By 2008, the population of Blessington Town and its environs had grown to ca. 5,000 citizens. For older residents, these dates mark a period of rapid social change, from a time when Blessington was a rural village, to urban commuter style living today. Forty years ago, Blessington was sustained by local agricultural enterprise, in addition to extractive enterprise associated with granite quarrying and the production of sand and gravel. Today, the majority of residents travel to Dublin for services-based work. Blessington is now the largest town in the Baltinglass Electoral Area (BEA) covering the entire of West Wicklow and designated with the status of ‘Moderate Growth Town’ under the National Spatial Strategy hierarchy (2002).

BALANCED DEVELOPMENT AS A POLITICS OF BOUNDARIES

In March 2008 the Blessington & District Forum – a community organisation comprising 48 local area and interest group representatives - submitted a case to the Electoral Area Boundary Committee, seeking an increased representation for the Baltinglass Electoral Area (BEA) as a whole, and for Blessington in particular, as a strategy to address a strongly held local conviction that West Wicklow has a reduced capacity to advocate for balanced development due to under-representation. Uniquely in Co. Wicklow, there has been no change in the overall representation in the Baltinglass Electoral Area for approximately 20 years, up to and including the local elections of 2009. A map of the Baltinglass Electoral Area is provided below.
Since 1974, three out of a total of twenty-four County Councillors represent the BEA on Wicklow County Council and just one of these lives near Blessington. There is no Town Council in the BEA. One Deputy for the Wicklow constituency in Dáil Éireann lives and works in West Wicklow. Table 1 below provides figures for population change and representation from 1996 to 2006:

**Table 1: Population change and representation in Co. Wicklow by electoral area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electoral Area</th>
<th>Pop. 1996</th>
<th>Pop. 2006</th>
<th>No of Cllrs.</th>
<th>Pop. per Cllrs. (2006)</th>
<th>% pop. increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arklow</td>
<td>20,692</td>
<td>26,152</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5,230</td>
<td>26.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltinglass</td>
<td>12,749</td>
<td>16,992</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5,664</td>
<td>33.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bray</td>
<td>31,363</td>
<td>35,426</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5,061</td>
<td>12.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greystones</td>
<td>16,678</td>
<td>21,132</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5,283</td>
<td>26.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>21,201</td>
<td>26,492</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5,298</td>
<td>24.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>102,683</strong></td>
<td><strong>126,194</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,258</strong></td>
<td><strong>22.90%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Prepared on the basis of CSO Census statistics available at [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie) and as provided in the Electoral Boundary Committee Report (page 150).*

The Electoral Area Boundary Committee was established by the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government in January 2008, to review the boundaries and membership
of local electoral areas in most county councils\(^3\) (Electoral Area Boundary Committee, 2008). Based on considerable population shifts nationally in recent decades, the Terms of Reference of the Committee centred on two key objectives; to preferentially create electoral areas of between 4 and 7 members nationally, retaining 3 member areas in exceptional circumstances only and, to ensure a reasonable relationship (desirably keeping variances from the average to within + or –10%) between the population established by the 2006 Census and representation within each local authority. The Committee’s report would also feed into the development of the Green Paper on Local Government ‘Stronger Local Democracy’. The establishment of the Electoral Area Committee would offer the rural community in West Wicklow the first opportunity since 1974\(^4\) to align political representation with the spatial boundaries used in national spatial planning. In undertaking this task, the Committee developed a dedicated website, promoted its aims widely and invited written contributions from the public. The case made by the Blessington & District Forum, focused on boundary redefinition for an enhanced representation under three main points\(^5\).

Firstly, the BEA should be allocated an additional county councillor (from the existing 3 BEA representatives to 4) on the basis of increasing population trends in the BEA and a comparison with Bray showing a population ratio to councillor in Blessington Town and environs calculated by the Forum at 12% greater than that of the Bray Electoral Area\(^6\). Given that 3 of a total of 4 elected (local and national) representatives currently live in the Baltinglass and environs, it’s not hard to imagine that the proposed additional allocation of a County Councillor would likely also be anticipated to represent the Blessington district. An increased representation therefore, would also recognise the new position of Blessington relative to the old ‘capital of West Wicklow’, Baltinglass.

Secondly, the Forum further noted that the Blessington district has a present population per the 2006 census of 5,533\(^7\) and advocated for the extension of the town boundary to include the immediately adjoining housing estate communities of Kilmalum and Blessington Manor (presently in Co. Kildare, approx. 400 residents) as these areas ‘…form part of the natural community of Blessington town’, warranting also the establishment of a town council for the area. On the basis that Blessington is the main town servicing surrounding villages such as Kilbride and Lacken, the Forum could claim an existing population for this (wider northern) area of ca. 8,500. In conclusion, the Forum argued that the establishment of a town council based on these population figures would be logical. If their case was successful, the new Blessington Town Council would join the four existing councils as a fifth member of the Wicklow Town Council network and the sole Town Council in the West of the county\(^8\). Support for this rationale was made in a second submission, contributed by the local Green

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3 The full report of the Electoral Area Boundary Committee, including all submissions made to the Committee and referred here is available to download from the following website: [www.electoralareacommittees.ie](http://www.electoralareacommittees.ie)

4 In 1974, representation in the Baltinglass Electoral Area was reduced from four to three elected representatives. This was produced ‘with very little fuss’ according to Cllr. Jim Ruttle (Wicklow People, Thursday, 26th June 2008 – accessed online at [http://www.wicklowpeople.ie/news/no-extra-seat-for-west-councillors-1424457.html](http://www.wicklowpeople.ie/news/no-extra-seat-for-west-councillors-1424457.html) on 24th May 2009).

5 In some instance, figures have been combined where two submissions provided slightly different totals. Extrapolated figures do not alter the arguments given in the original documents.

6 The Electoral Area Boundary Committee subsequently recorded the BEA at 7.75% over average per capita representation, or within the +/- 10% differential prescribed under its remit.

7 The actual population of Blessington Town itself in 2006 was 4,018 persons, an increase of 115% over 10 years.

8 In 2006, approximately 14% (16,992) of the total population of Co. Wicklow was resident in West Wicklow (CSO, 2006).
Party representative (a future candidate in the local elections of 2009 and a member of the Blessington & District Forum), who claimed that ‘This will greatly benefit the wider West Wicklow area and remove the sense of isolation, and lack of political representation, widely felt throughout West Wicklow.’\textsuperscript{9} Finally, the Forum argued that the ‘natural division’ of Wicklow west of the Wicklow uplands even warranted the establishment of a West Wicklow County Council, citing the precedent of the dual council County Tipperary.

The Electoral Area Boundary Committee reported in June 2008, recommending the retention of the Baltinglass Electoral Area in its existing configuration and implicitly rejecting the case made by the Forum. Ignoring the contention included in the Forum’s submission that Kilmalum / Blessington Manor should now be included in the Blessington area in line with their Terms of Reference, which specifically limited the considerations of the Committee to potential for change internal only to existing county boundaries, the Committee focussed instead in their response on the (in their view) negative impact of increasing West Wicklow’s representation on the representation in other parts of the county. In their summary, the Committee noted the ‘very exceptional circumstances’ that existed in the BEA, which warranted the retention of a 3-seat constituency, but failed to address the specific issues raised in the two submissions made by Blessington interests. Overall, the Committee had acted across all electoral areas nationally to significantly reduce the number of 3 seat areas (largely, by amalgamating existing electoral areas), while at the same time increasing the number of 4 seat electoral areas. In fact, the Baltinglass Electoral Area would be 1 of only 3 three-seat electoral areas (of 24 considered) to be retained in its prevailing conformation. The exceptional circumstances cited by the Committee were referred as follows in the report:

‘West Wicklow faces away from the rest of the county. In addition to this, the electoral divisions in the Wicklow mountains are sparsely populated and a large area would be required to make up the population necessary to support a fourth seat in Baltinglass. This would involve undue encroachment on one or more of the three neighbouring electoral areas of Bray, Wicklow or Arklow which are each individually based around their own strong communities and natural hinterlands and... currently enjoy closely balanced representation. An expanded Baltinglass electoral area would also be disproportionately large and would contain areas with links away from Baltinglass. (Electoral Area Boundary Committee, 2008, p. 150)

This summation effectively acknowledges the existence of ‘fuzzy’ boundary identification in the BEA and, even, highlights an existing tension between territorial identification and territorial governance. However, the Committee, acting within its terms of reference, was unable to factor in the specific issues noted by the Forum and critically, under its mandate, prohibited from considering the totality of representation within the county. Finally, the Terms of Reference of the Committee precluded the option of increasing the total number of elected representatives, in accordance with the larger average populations that exist typically in electoral areas in the Greater Dublin Area. Another submission, made by the Mid-East Regional Authority to the Committee, regrets the lack of this option, since:

‘The Mid-East Region has shown the largest population growth of the eight regions in the Country under the last census returns, and this means that the voters are now underrepresented in terms of Councillor numbers in the three counties.’\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{9} Submission made by Mr. Pat Pidgeon, member, Blessington & District Forum and future candidate for the Green Party in the local elections of 2009.
\textsuperscript{10} Available to download from www.electoralareacommittees.ie
In essence, political representation in the counties immediately surrounding Dublin is inherently unbalanced and was always going to remain so under the prescribed remit of the Committee.

**SOME CONCLUSIONS – THE CONTRADICTIONS OF THE ‘BALANCED DEVELOPMENT’ DISCOURSE**

In a context of new forms of rural governance, ‘balanced development’ implies the empowerment of local communities to determine their development through a greater participation in local decision-making, since it speaks to the capacity of people to ‘maintain or to transform their environment, social or physical’ (Held, 2006, p. 270). The example of a community that is the epitome of rural restructuring is relevant as the ‘subject’ of the kinds of innovations in local governance that aim to integrate ‘people’ and ‘place’ for balanced development goals. The recommendations of the Electoral Area Boundary Committee as they related to Blessington in 2008, offered a unique opportunity to explore the discourse of ‘balanced development’ specifically within a political framework, to consider the relationship between the linked policies that support balanced development with policies that aim to strengthen local democracy through a commitment to participative local decision-making.

In Blessington, the geography of place and the politics of place are both intrinsically linked and incongruent. The need for a more balanced development policy implementation resonates clearly with the local community, both in terms of a wider spatial planning (e.g. living under the urban shadow cast by Dublin) and internally, within the county (e.g. being on the ‘wrong side’ of the Wicklow uplands barrier). In making a case to the national Electoral Area Boundary Committee for changes to their Electoral Area boundaries and by extension, to their representation, community actors in Blessington readily connected the potential for a strengthened local democracy with the potential for balanced development in the county. The failure to redefine the boundaries of their restructured community for democratic gain highlights some important contradictions of relevance to the exercise of balanced development policies.

Chief amongst these is the role of the state in defining rural identities, which extends also to terms under which any changes may be considered. Boundaries, and the democratic representation that is dependent on boundary definition, are of crucial significance to the legitimating of new rural spaces like Blessington. The example of Blessington demonstrates that the geographic boundaries of electoral areas are fixed in ways, which limit political representation and determine the capacity of communities to advocate for social equity. The case pursued here suggests that ‘people’ and ‘place’ are not recognised equivalently – local communities do not ‘make’ their place, this is the realm of state strategic planning, which is based on political boundary determinations to which local democracy has no access. Perhaps of more relevance to the realisation of balanced development goals into the future, these boundaries also shaped the permissible discourse on the development of Blessington as a community, since they acted to contain local democratic representation within the county. The state, then, in this analysis retains the primary power to define which identities or discourses are included ‘in’ politics and which are not – as Goehler puts it ‘when power emerges or is exercised, certain options to act are opened up or closed off to the parties involved’ (Goehler, 2009, p. 36). The ‘habitus’ of rural areas, the subjects of the kind of imbalances to be addressed, may not therefore be included in national policy making generally (Haugaard and Goverde, 2009, p. 189).
Furthermore, local governance, exemplified by the role played by the Blessington & District Forum had little purchase on many of these issues. The distance between the strategic planning ‘space’ and the geographic ‘space’ of Blessington as lived by its residents was in fact, relatively wide. For example, the Blessington identity crosses county boundaries and indeed, traditional urban / rural binary definitions. Moreover, the local governance space and the balanced development space were not the same. As one example, the Baltinglass Electoral Area contained its own internal boundary contestations, between the competing interests of Baltinglass to the ‘south’ and that of Blessington to the ‘north’ of West Wicklow. For another, the case made by the community was based on a completely different understanding of what constituted the Blessington geographic area than that understood by the state. The problem of scale then applies, in other words – as ‘balanced development’ and ‘strengthened local democracy’ policies both exert a ‘downward’ policy push towards local decision-making, so the correlate of ‘social equity’, which exerts an oppositional and ‘upward’ policy push, becomes less attainable (Kooiman, 2003, p. 58) and identity becomes more territorially fuzzy.

The dynamics of development have reached the point where local people are aware that a complex response is needed and are themselves reconfiguring their agency to match, stretching the boundaries of both governance and identity to do it. In the case of Blessington, the potential strength of area-based local governance organisations to represent new identities over that of local government in promoting ‘balanced development’ has been demonstrated. In addition, it is significant that local government was largely absent in the debate, having neither a role nor a responsibility in the considerations of the Committee. Under the prescribed parameters, the interest of local representatives is effectively marshalled as an interest in maintaining the status quo, since resistance on their part may have led to unpredictable internal transfers of power within the county. Thus, the interests of the local community in achieving balanced development became largely a ‘non-issue’ in political terms within local democracy, giving rise to the proposition that the work of the Committee actively mitigated against democratic transformation in this case (see also Gaventa, 1982, p. 137).

The evidence to date is that Blessington (along with the rest of West Wicklow) has suffered from a lack of development, relative to other parts of County Wicklow. In the view of the Electoral Area Boundary Committee, under-representation is immaterial to this fact, in direct contrast to the strongly held belief of the local community. It is not the intention of this paper to suggest that the Electoral Area Boundary Committee was or was not correct in its outcome with respect to the Baltinglass Electoral Area. The point is that the work of the Committee, its terms of reference and process, challenges us to think more clearly about the rhetoric of ‘balanced development’ and its horizontal policy relationship to ‘strengthened local democracy’ as co-discourses, which have real impacts beyond the purely symbolic. Ultimately, the new residents of Blessington Manor / Kilmalum, for example, may participate in the private and associational life of Blessington, but may have no expectation of

11 Debate on the future work of the Electoral Area Boundary Committee is recorded in the Minutes of Wicklow County Council for the meeting held on 30th January 2008. The substance of the comments recorded at that time, yield an overall sense that the Council representatives believed that the remit of the Committee was such that internal / cross border transfers of representation were unlikely and hence, the work of the committee would have little impact. The lack of local representation on the Committee is however noted. The author did not find any record of the Electoral Area Boundary Committee Report being discussed by the Council. The Council did however discuss the Green Paper that issued almost simultaneously with the Report, but is not listed has having made a formal response to the Green Paper.
representation in the strategic planning debates of Wicklow County Council that direct developments in the town. The question remains then, what is the policy relationship between balanced development and a strengthened local democracy? Although a strengthened local democracy was not part of the answer in the revelatory case explored, the role of the Blessington & District Forum revealed at the local level, some important policy dissonances.

SOME POLICY CONCLUSIONS – STRONGER LOCAL DEMOCRACY WITH BALANCED DEVELOPMENT?

The Irish public policy sphere includes a commitment to balanced development, whose salient features are expressed as challenges that may be addressed in a context of participatory processes and are replicated in the political discourse of a strengthened local democracy (Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government, 2008). The rhetoric of balanced development therefore suggests a synthesis of seemingly disparate discourses – that of a more participative democracy (encouraging civic engagement and democratic accountability) with that of an equitable development model (taking account of both ‘people’ and ‘place’). Hence, it emerges in policy instruments and processes that promise to generate ‘power to’ capacities amongst communities and yields common action spaces for decision-making (Goehler, 2000).

As rural restructuring – or the impact of unbalanced development - continues apace, a widening gap is in evidence; between policies, which aim to strengthen local democracy, and national strategic planning policies, which aim for regional competitiveness at a European scale. The ideal policy response envisages territorial specificities combined with adjustments in the governance structures to create balanced development. The dominant dynamic of this gap is therefore a conflict between a ‘tangled’ (Cerny, 2006, p. 693) spatial and temporal politics – that is; between decisions to allocate resources and decisions rooted in identity and autonomic decision-making (Botwinick and Bachrach, 1983). Borders are ‘impregnated with power’ and centrally involved in the production of identity (Paasi, 2009, p. 224). A critical feature of the contradiction between balanced development and strengthened democracy is that balanced development favours spatial planning foundations, such as boundary definitions, that are not open to discursive reflexivity and cannot therefore legitimate (or be legitimated in turn by) new rural spaces and identities. In turn, spatial planning for balanced development is dependent on adequate representation, while adequate representation is outside of the purview of either local government or local governance institutions. Indeed, commensurate national policy objectives of social equity, which contribute also to a successful developmental economy (NESC, 2005), may dictate, in practice, that the Irish State will continue to dominate in geo-political decision-making for balanced development – as has been suggested elsewhere (Paasi, 2009, p. 213). In this scenario, the subsidiary goal of the balanced development discourse may well be ‘illusory’ (Murray, 2009, p. 15) as is demonstrated in the empirical case presented here and commensurately, the capacity of local governance to represent local identities - a critical tenet of the balanced development discourse - is similarly constrained.

In a context of a newly complex rural governance system, regional strategic plans may become more important mechanisms for achieving balanced development, across rural and non-rural areas (Garrido et al., 2002; OECD, 2006). However, it is notable that regional (mid or meso) strategic planning levels in Ireland are almost entirely devoid of the kind of participatory democratic structures that are available at the county level. Future policy
directions that usefully integrate the policy goals of ‘strengthened democracy’ and ‘balanced development’ may incorporate both regional planning and strengthened regional democratic processes, in this case, in the event of a strengthened ‘regional’ democracy of the Greater Dublin Area. However, a loss of the capacity of the state to ‘fix’ geospatial boundaries could also be seen as the loss of the responsibility of the state to negotiate with local governance actors for social equity goals, unless social equity remains central to both strengthened local democracy and balanced development policies at a regional level. This is especially true given the proposition that the experience of regional policy in correcting regional imbalances is that ‘hardly have these disparities been attenuated than they tend to reappear’ (Maillat, 1998, p. 9).

REFERENCES


EX POST EVALUATION OF ENERGY PERFORMANCE OF BUILDINGS REGULATIONS

Margaret Tallott, Doctoral Fellow, Centre for Innovation and Structural Change, National University of Ireland, Galway

ABSTRACT

The finding of this paper is that Ireland’s, Energy Performance of Buildings Regulations 2006 fall short in satisfying Porter and Van Der Linde’s (1995), “Principles for designing good environmental regulations”. The Porter and Van Der Linde (1995) hypothesis that, “good environmental regulations will stimulate environmentally friendly innovation” is a worthy subject for study. However, as a prelude to such a study it is necessary to firstly explore, what constitutes good environmental regulation? This paper seeks to do just that. Using Porter and Van Der Linde’s (1995), “Principles for designing good environmental regulations”, as a guide and Harmelink et al (2008), ex post theory-based policy evaluation as a methodology revealed that there is significant awareness of the regulations among all stakeholders with indicators of energy innovation resulting from them. There are also a number of issues which need to be addressed if they are to be successful in achieving their objective. The main failings of the regulations are:

1. Resistance among estate/letting agencies to comply with their obligation to provide an energy rating for any property for sale or rent.
2. Oversupply of building energy rating (BER) assessors and undersupply of enforcement agents.
3. A lack of quantitative targets and data for indicators and measures of evaluation.

While these failings pertain specifically to the Energy Performance of Buildings Regulations, a serious failing which is highlighted in this analysis is the lack of a systematic process of evaluation for all ex post regulations and policy measures in Ireland. The theory-based policy evaluation methodology used in this paper provides a suitable means of addressing this failing.

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to evaluate the degree to which the (Energy Performance of Buildings Directive) Regulations, Statutory Instrument (S.I.) No. 666 of 2006 EU, satisfy Porter and Van der Linde’s (1995), “principles for designing good environmental regulation”. The relationship between environmental regulation and industry competitiveness has been hotly debated since Porter first raised this issue in 1991. In this and subsequent works Porter and Van der Linde (1995a, 1995b), the authors assert that “properly crafted regulations will, in organisations who, are attuned to the possibilities, result in innovation to minimize and even offset the cost of compliance in many circumstances”. This assertion has caused much debate among the business community and economists for almost two decades and has according to Hilliard (2004), “brought him into direct conflict with orthodox environmental economists who dispute his argument”. As a prelude to a thorough investigation of Porter & Van der Linde’s (1995), assertion this paper seeks to explore the issue of what Porter and Van der

In personal communications with the Dept. of the Taoiseach (21/09/2009), it was found that there is no formal mechanism for systematically reviewing regulations or policy instruments. This is an issue which will need to be addressed if regulation is to stimulate innovative solutions to problems being addressed by regulations. Statutory Instruments (S.I.) are sometimes used to transpose EU Directives into Irish law as in this case the EU 2002 Directive on the energy performance of buildings. Approximately 700 to 900 S.I.’s are introduced in Ireland each year. Many of which are relatively minor in their scope and impact. However, the Energy Performance of Buildings Regulations has far reaching consequences and has the potential to impact greatly on innovation in the construction industry. The stated objective of this EU directive is “to promote the improvement of the energy performance of buildings within the community, taking into account outdoor climatic and local conditions, as well as indoor climate requirements and cost-effectiveness” (EU, 2002). Member states are required to introduce a methodology relevant to their unique climatic and local conditions which will, calculate the energy performance of buildings. In Ireland this methodology is Dwelling Energy Assessment Procedure (DEAP) and is operated by Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI). Buildings account for the largest share (42%), of total EU final energy consumption and produce approximately 35% of all greenhouse emissions. More than 50% of all materials extracted from the earth are transformed into construction materials and products COM 860 (2007). In Ireland we have witnessed the collapse of the construction industry caused by the unsustainable way in which it was allowed to develop over the last decade. No industry is in greater need of innovation. If this innovation can be stimulated to proceed in a manner that also significantly reduces energy emissions then it is a win-win situation.

Although the underlying EU directive was only transposed into Irish Law in 2006 the EU directive was adopted in 2002 and is currently undergoing a recast process at EU level, in order to expand coverage, increase impact and improve implementation. Among the key proposals in the recast are:

- Minimum energy performance requirements to be set in respect of technical building systems, e.g. boilers, air-conditioning units etc.
- Establish common principles for definition of low and zero carbon (LZC) buildings.
- Set targets for increase in LZC buildings.

The Commission are proposing that the Directive should be implemented by 31 December 2010 for the public sector and 31 January 2012 for other buildings. It is therefore, a good time to evaluate how well they have worked so far and debate the implications of the proposed changes. Such debates are currently progressing in many other member states.

**DESIGNING REGULATIONS**

In 2002 the European Commission established a new method for evaluating policy instruments, “Impact assessment”, following this lead, the Irish Government produced a White Paper “Regulating Better” (2004). This paper outlined the need for more rigorous
assessment of regulations and led to the introduction of Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA) for all government departments and applies to:

- Proposals for primary legislation involving changes to the regulatory framework.
- Significant Statutory Instruments.
- Proposals for EU Directives and significant EU Regulations when they are published by the European Commission.

In 2009 revised RIA guidelines were issued. The RIA is based on six guiding principles: necessity, proportionality, consistency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. The RIA process is outlined in figure 1 and is included here purely to illustrate the linear nature of the process which is considered complete at “Publication”.

**Figure 1 The RIA Process**

Source: Revised RIA Guidelines (2008) Department of the Taoiseach
The RIA Guidelines outline the items which should be included in a Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA):

1. Summary of RIA
2. Statement of policy problem and objective
3. Identification and description of options
4. Analysis of costs, benefits and other impacts for each option
5. Consultation
6. Enforcement and Compliance
7. Review
8. Publication

There is no requirement for the RIA process to be carried out on regulation introduced prior to the commencement of the RIA process in 2005. In the case of EPBD Regulations no RIA was prepared.

Porter & Van der Linde (1995) put forward a persuasive argument: that properly designed environmental standards can actually trigger innovation that may partially or more than fully offset the costs of complying with them. Properly crafted environmental regulation they claim can serve at least six purposes:

1. Regulation signals companies about likely resource inefficiencies and potential technological improvements.
2. Regulation focused on information gathering can raise corporate awareness.
3. Regulation reduces the uncertainty that investments to address the environment will be valuable.
4. Regulation creates pressure that motivates innovation and progress.
5. Regulation levels the transitional playing field.
6. Regulation is needed in the case of incomplete offsets.

Where possible they suggest that regulations should include the use of market incentives, including pollution taxes, deposit-refund schemes and tradable permits. Such approaches often allow considerable flexibility, reinforce resource productivity, and also create incentives for ongoing innovation. They believe that no lasting success can come from policies that promise that environmentalism will triumph over industry, or from policies that promise industry will triumph over environmentalism. Instead, “success must involve innovation-based solutions that promote both environmentalism and industrial competitiveness”, Porter & Van der Linde, (1995).

Porter and Van der Linde (1995) proposed adhering to three principles when designing environmental regulation to encourage innovation:

1. They must create the maximum opportunity for innovation, leaving the approach to innovation to industry and not the standard-setting agency.
2. Regulations should foster continuous improvement, rather than locking in any particular technology.
3. The regulatory process should leave as little room as possible for uncertainty at every stage.
The steps they employ in applying these principles are; phrasing environmental rules as goals that can be met in flexible ways; encouraging innovation to reach and exceed those goals and administering the system in a co-ordinated way.

There is much support for Porter and Van der Linde’s assertions, as in Coakley et al (2005), who also claim that “regulation should not be seen as a challenge but rather as an opportunity”, based on evidence of several economic studies that have exposed the myth that regulation leads to competitive disadvantage (Network of Heads of European Environment Protection Agencies, (2005). They deduced that “these facts should be properly recognised and provide a stimulus to further useful environmental regulation”. Coakley et al (2005).

Harmelink et al (2008), addresses the issue of “what characterizes good and effective energy efficiency policies and their implementation?” They proposed the use of theory-based policy evaluation as an effective methodology for evaluating energy policies. Theory-based evaluation originated in the 1970’s and according to Van Der Knapp (2004), promises “that the set-up, implementation, delivery and utilization of evaluation research may be facilitated by taking the assumptions and objectives of public policy as a starting point”. Harmelink et al (2008), interpretation of the theory-based approach is, an iterative process of program design, evaluation, and redesign based on feedback and is outlined in figure 2 below.

**Figure 2 Outline of the policy cycle and the role of the theory in the policy cycle**

Harmelink et al (2008) employed six steps in the evaluation of energy policies:

1. Characterisation of the policy instrument, including a description of targets, timing, target groups, implementation agents, budget, expected energy savings impact and the cost effectiveness of the instrument.
2. Construction of a policy theory; include all the assumptions on how the policy instruments should reach its targeted impact.
3. Translation of policy theory to concrete and preferably quantitative indicators for each assumed cause-impact relationship.
5. Verification of the policy theory through interviews with the policy makers, implementing agents, and other stakeholders.
6. Analysis of the effectiveness of the policy using available information and making recommendations for improvements to the policy.

While their research found that ex post evaluation does not yet have a high priority among policy makers, their work did enable them to outline some general factors in policy design which they feel are important, and while not citing Porter and Van der Linde directly in their work, to a large extent agree with Porter and Van der Linde’s (1995), steps for designing environmental regulations.

**Table 1 Important Factors in Policy Design**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phrasing environmental rules as goals that can be met in flexible ways</td>
<td>clear goals and a mandate for the implementing organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encouraging innovation to reach and exceed those goals</td>
<td>the ability to balance and combine flexibility and continuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>administering the system in a co-ordinated way</td>
<td>the involvement of stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the ability to adapt to and integrate adjacent policies or develop consistent policy packages.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SELECTION OF EVALUATION METHODS**

Having studied some of the literature on evaluating regulations, Box’s (2000), quote might be employed; “All models are wrong, some models are useful”; is the case with the three models outlined above. While the Irish Government’s Regulatory Impact Assessment is aimed at evaluating regulations, it is only used before implementation whereas, the EPBD Regulations were enacted in 2006 and require an ex post evaluation methodology. Porter & Van der Linde (1995), outline principles and steps involved in designing regulations for innovation but lack a clear and concise methodology for doing so. Finally, Harmelink et al (2008), although not specifically aimed at improving innovation, do outline a concise methodology.

After examining these models it was considered most appropriate to use Harmelink et al (2008), theory-based model as the methodology for evaluating Ireland’s EPBD Regulations, for three reasons:

1. It allows the use of a concise methodology guided by Porter and Van der Linde’s (1995), principles for designing good environmental regulations.
2. It is an ex post evaluation methodology designed to evaluate existing regulation as is the case with EPBD.
3. It has been used extensively in the evaluation of energy efficiency policy instruments, including energy performance of buildings in the Netherlands and Italy.
Evaluation of EPBD Regulations
Evaluating Ireland’s EPBD Regulations using Harmelink et al (2008), six step evaluation methodology allows the systematic assessment of all steps of the policy implementation process to determine success and failure factors and also give insights into the reasons for success and failure.

1. **Characterisation of the Policy Instrument;** is the first step in this evaluation process, where the policy instrument, in this case the EPBD is described in detail. This includes a description of the policy instrument, the targets, the time line, the target groups, the policy-implementing agents, the available budget, the available information on the initially expected energy savings impact, and the cost effectiveness of the instrument.

The EPBD Regulations were transposed into Irish law in 2006 to give effect to certain provisions of Directive 2002/91/EC. The objective of this directive was to promote the improvement of the energy performance of buildings within the EU, taking into account variations in climatic conditions and requirements. While this is considered necessary to comply with the Kyoto Protocol of a reduction of 20% in emissions by 2020, neither the EU Directive nor the corresponding Irish Regulation contains specific energy efficiency or emissions targets.

The directive lays down requirements as regards; a general framework for a methodology of calculation of the integrated energy performance of buildings. Ireland’s methodology was developed by SEI and is known as Dwelling Energy Assessment Procedure (DEAP). S.I. No. 666 EPBD Regulations 2006, gives effect to this provision of the directive. Since 2006 various other provisions of the directive have been transposed into Irish law such as:

- The application of minimum requirements on the energy performance of new buildings, S.I. No. 854 2007, provides for the limiting of the calculated primary energy consumption and related CO\textsubscript{2} emissions insofar as is reasonably practicable.
- The application of minimum requirements on the energy performance of large existing buildings that are subject to major renovation, S.I. No. 873 2005 provides for the limiting of the calculated primary energy consumption and related CO\textsubscript{2} emissions insofar as is reasonably practicable.
- Inspection of boilers and air-conditioning systems, S.I. No. 854 2007 provides for oil and gas fired boilers meeting a minimum seasonal net efficiency of 86%.

The target groups for these regulations are; the building industry, householders, property owners and buyers. SEI is the implementation agent and local authority Building Control Officers are responsible for enforcement.

2. **Construction of a Policy Theory;** in step two a policy theory is drawn up which includes documenting all implicit and explicit assumptions on the way the policy instrument should reach its targeted impact. If there is no explicit policy theory the evaluator has to try to reconstruct the policy theory including the policy implementation process and mapping of the cause-impact relationship and the relationship with other policy instruments.
The assumptions behind EPBD are described by means of cause-impact relations. For each cause-impact relation suggestions are made for indicators and possible success and failure factors.

- **Preparation of the market**
  The government prepares the market for the transposition of the EU energy performance of buildings directive. In 2002 the government set up Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI), as Ireland’s national energy agency, to promote and assist the development of sustainable energy. This includes responsibility for advising the Government on policies and measures on sustainable energy and implementing programmes agreed by Government; such as, the implementation of the Energy Performance in Buildings; which, they assume will:

  - Encourage uniformity and in so doing reduce transaction and investment costs.
  - Facilitate purchase discrimination (i.e. impact on purchasing behaviour).
  - Stimulate quality improvement and product innovation
  - Afford energy efficient suppliers/retailers a competitive advantage.

SEI prepared the market for the new regulations by providing financial support through a number of schemes aimed at improving energy efficiency:

The Greener Homes Scheme provides assistance to homeowners to purchase a new renewable energy heating system for existing homes.

The Home Energy Saving Scheme provides assistance to homeowners to improve the energy efficiency of their homes through better insulation.

The Warmer Homes Scheme was introduced to address the problem of lack of available capital funding for improvements in low income households.

- **Introduction of Regulation**
  The EPBD regulations commenced operation on 1st January 2007 with the requirement for a Building Energy Rating (BER) Certificate to be prepared for:

    - New dwellings commencing on or after 1st January 2007
    - New buildings, other than dwellings, commencing on or after 1st July 2008
    - Buildings of any class in existence at 1st January 2009 offered for sale or letting on or after 1st January 2009.

The assumptions are:

  - That all stakeholders are aware of their new tasks and responsibilities and carry them out properly.
  - The BER certificate will facilitate the owner or buyer in making an informed decision when commissioning, purchasing or renting a property, acting as an incentive to improve the energy efficiency of the property.
  - Architects and engineers will design in such a way as to achieve compliance with the regulations and will try to maximise the energy efficiency of their designs.
  - The contractor will build the building in accordance with the technical specifications.
  - The BER certificate will be prepared showing the buildings energy rating.
Random sample checks on buildings will ensure they have proper BER certificates in order to avoid prosecution.

Once people start using the energy rated building they will behave in a way that maximises the energy efficiency of the building.

- **Interaction with other policies**

The Energy Rating of Buildings Regulations interacts with several other policy instruments, including but not limited to:

- S.I. 351 of 2009 - Building Control Amendment Regulations
- S.I. 355 of 2008 - Building Regulations (Part G Amendment)
- S.I. 259 of 2008 – Building Regulations (Part L Amendment)
- S.I. 854 of 2007 – Building Regulations (Part L Amendment)

Other policy interactions include incentive based schemes to prepare the market for tighter regulation. SEI introduced a number of incentivised schemes, including:

- “House of Tomorrow” scheme which invested €22 million in 90 projects amounting to 4000 houses over a 5 year period
- 12,000 low-income houses upgraded with energy efficient features
- Over 150 ‘Design Studies’ and ‘Model Solution’ demonstration projects were approved
- Capital support projects
- Feasibility study grants
- Over 1,500 education workshops

The assumptions of these interactions with other policies is that supporting innovation and demonstration projects would, raise public awareness and also cause leading players in the construction industry to avail of the funding to build homes of superior energy and environmental quality, thus assisting the adoption of the regulations.

3. **Translate into Indicators:** in the third step, the policy theory is translated into indicators. For each assumed cause-impact relation, an indicator is drawn up to measure whether the cause-impact relation actually took place and whether the change (or part of the change) that took place is due to the implementation of the policy instrument. Outlined below are details of findings in relation to familiarity, compliance and energy savings in relation to EPBD.

Familiarity with EPBD and BER can be indicated by the number of candidates taking up training courses to allow them to become BER assessors. As outlined in table 2, up-to August 2009 a total of 6,604 candidates have completed BER training, indicating there is a good level of awareness of the regulations. However, the fact that 6,604 candidates have been trained but only 2,884 less than 44%, have actually registered with SEI as BER assessors, could potentially indicate that there is over-supply. Further support for this indication can be seen from calculating the average income of BER assessors since the commencement of the regulation in January 2007. Based on an average price per rating of €247 (survey of BER advertisements 21/09/2009) and 65,259 BER certificates issued (Tables 3 & 4), indicates an average income to-date per registered assessor of €5,589 over a period of 2 years 8 months.
Compliance with BER certificates is indicated by the number of BER certificates issued by SEI up-to and including August 2009. A total of 65,259 certificates have been issued for new and existing dwellings (Tables 3 & 4). This figure on its own is insufficient to draw any conclusion. However, when viewed against the number of properties for sale or rent (one property provider alone daft.ie 21/09/2009 have 184,142 properties), it indicates a compliance rate of 35%. Considering this is just one agency the actual compliance rate could potentially be considerably less.

Looking tables 3 and 4 it could also be deducted that the construction industry is innovating in an energy efficient manner. The cumulative percentage of ratings in each grade show, new buildings have over 72% of ratings in the A and B grades, whereas, only 11% of ratings for existing dwellings were in the A and B grades.

### Table 2 Building Energy Rating Assessors (up to and including August 09)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Registered Assessors</td>
<td>2884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number Registered for New and Existing Dwellings</td>
<td>2650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number Registered for New Dwellings only</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Certified Assessors (including those registered)</td>
<td>6604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Training Providers listed with SEI</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SEI 2009

### Table 3 Building Energy Ratings for New Dwellings by grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy Grade</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Number of Ratings</th>
<th>% of Ratings</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.03%</td>
<td>.03%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.10%</td>
<td>.13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>1,621</td>
<td>11.18%</td>
<td>14.31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>4,056</td>
<td>27.98%</td>
<td>42.29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>4,395</td>
<td>30.32%</td>
<td>72.61%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>2,052</td>
<td>14.15%</td>
<td>86.76%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>5.72%</td>
<td>92.48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>2.72%</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>2.29%</td>
<td>97.49%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>1.23%</td>
<td>98.72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>.71%</td>
<td>99.43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>.30%</td>
<td>99.73%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.10%</td>
<td>99.83%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.17%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14,497</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source - Adapted from:
http://www.sei.ie/Your_Building/BER/BER_FAQ/FAQ_BER/Assessors/SEI_BER_Reports.html
Table 4 Building Energy Ratings for Existing Dwellings by grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy Grade</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Number of Ratings</th>
<th>% of Ratings</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.004%</td>
<td>.004%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.02%</td>
<td>.024%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.06%</td>
<td>.084%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>.75%</td>
<td>.834%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>1,635</td>
<td>3.22%</td>
<td>4.054%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>3,645</td>
<td>7.18%</td>
<td>11.234%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>4,714</td>
<td>9.29%</td>
<td>20.524%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>5,381</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>31.124%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>5,754</td>
<td>11.34%</td>
<td>42.464%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D1</td>
<td>6,326</td>
<td>12.46%</td>
<td>54.924%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>6,340</td>
<td>12.49%</td>
<td>67.414%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>4,320</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>75.924%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>3,629</td>
<td>7.15%</td>
<td>83.074%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3,723</td>
<td>7.33%</td>
<td>90.404</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>4,870</td>
<td>9.59%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50,762</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source - Adapted from: [http://www.sei.ie/Your_Building/BER/BER_FAQ/FAQ_BER/Assessors/SEI_BER_Reports.html](http://www.sei.ie/Your_Building/BER/BER_FAQ/FAQ_BER/Assessors/SEI_BER_Reports.html)

Information which could indicate the energy savings achieved since the introduction of EPBD are not readily available. SEI Key statistics (2008) show an overall increase in energy use 1.4% and an increase of 0.08% in related CO₂ emissions. As the most recent available figures actually pertain to 2007 it is too early to use this as an indicator of progress achieved.

4. **Preparation of a Cause-Impact Flowchart** In the fourth step the cause-impact relations and the indicators are visually reflected in a flow chart for EPBD in figure 3 below.
Table 3 Cause-Impact Flowchart for EPBD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship with other instruments</th>
<th>Cause-impact relationship</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Success and fail factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEI is established and various incentive schemes are devised for energy efficient buildings</td>
<td>Government prepares market for EPBD</td>
<td>Familiarity with BER - Number of training organisations established and BER Assessors trained</td>
<td>Mechanisms available for publicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and other regulations are revised to co-ordinate better with EPBD</td>
<td>Government introduces EPBD regulation. SEI make rating methodology available (DEAP) and registers BER Assessors</td>
<td>Compliance with BER Certificates</td>
<td>Available skills and capacity within enforcement agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractors build in a way that maximises energy efficiency</td>
<td>Number and ratings of BER certificates issued. Measures of compliance e.g. certificates issued as % of buildings for sale or rent</td>
<td>Available skills and capacity in the construction industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BER certificates are required before occupation of new buildings and before closing sale and rental agreements</td>
<td>Energy efficient buildings are realised</td>
<td>Use of energy saving measures in practice</td>
<td>End-user understanding and behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quantified energy savings realised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. **Verification of the policy theory:** In the fifth step the policy theory is verified and, if necessary adjusted. In step 2, the policy theory was drawn up with the help of available official documents and public information. In the fifth step, the policy theory is verified through interviews with policy makers, implementing agents, and other actors involved in the implementation and monitoring of the policy instrument.

Through personal communications with various stakeholders including The Department of the Environment, SEI, estate agents, householders and BER assessors it is possible to evaluate the extent to which the assumptions of the policy theory outlined in step two are holding true in practice.

Due to an effective advertising and promotional campaign there is widespread knowledge of the requirement for a BER certificate for new buildings, and for buildings being offered for sale or rent. There has been a strong up-take on the incentive schemes offered by SEI as evidenced by both the “House of Tomorrow” scheme which has had 90 projects totalling 4,000 new homes receiving €22 million in funding over 5 years and the “Greener Homes” scheme which has had 26,352 applications. Evidence of quality improvements and innovation can be found in tables 3 and 4 where new dwellings are receiving better ratings than existing dwellings. All of the above suggest that, the assumptions; that all stakeholders are aware and that the regulation will stimulate quality improvement and innovation, seem to be holding true, these are termed ‘success factors’.

However there is also evidence of certain ‘fail factors’. In March 2009 a group of BER assessors claimed that, “most second-hand properties currently on the market do not have the required BER Certificate with Advisory Report” and that it is only at the close of sale or rent through the insistence of the legal profession BER certificates are they being obtained. These concerns were communicated to SEI, the Minister of the Environment Heritage and Local Government and Minister of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) regarding what BER assessors believed to be; “a total lack of compliance” with the legislation. Subsequent to this a meeting with the Minister of the DCENR resulted in the department communicating with all Building Control Officers asking them to write to all estate/letting agents drawing attention to the mandatory requirement on owners and agents in relation to BER certification. On checking 20 properties (28/09/09), for sale or rent on www.daft.ie and www.property.ie none of the properties checked indicated a BER. Therefore, it holds that the assumption that the BER certification would facilitate purchase discrimination and afford energy efficient suppliers/retailers a competitive advantage is not holding true.

6. **Effectiveness and learning** In the sixth and final step, available information is analyzed to, conclusions are drawn analyses are made on the success and failure factors attributed to the analysed instruments, and recommendations are formulated to improve the impact.

Due to the fact that the EPBD regulations were substantially completed when the requirement for a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) became mandatory, no RIA exists for this regulation thus the information available particularly in relation to cost-benefit analysis is limited.

While some interesting findings have emerged from this analysis, it proved difficult to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the EPBD regulations. This is in part due to the difficulty
in accessing relevant data to indicate cost effectiveness and progress in net energy savings and also the relatively short period of time elapsed since implementation.

The findings in relation to success and failure factors of this regulation were:

- The mechanisms used for publicity were relatively successful in creating awareness of the regulations among stakeholders.
- The higher ratings of new buildings indicate success in terms of improved quality and innovation.
- The resistance of the estate/letting agencies in implementing the regulations is a serious failure factor.
- The oversupply of BER assessors is a failure factor.
- The lack of comprehensive data for indicators is a failure factor.
- The small number of Building Control Officers (usually 1 per county) is a failure factor which will make enforcement very difficult.

While the regulation has a number of failure factors which could be addressed relatively easily. The most significant failure factor is the absence of a systematic ex post evaluation or review mechanism for all regulations and policy instruments in Ireland.

CONCLUSION

The lack of a systematic method of evaluation for all policy instruments in Ireland is a cause for concern. This problem was acknowledged in the 2004 government white paper “Regulating Better” where it states “Little importance has been given to regulatory policy”. While this paper initiated the introduction of the Regulatory Impact Assessment for all new regulations it did not address the problem of ex post evaluation of regulations. A theory-based policy evaluation methodology could address this problem as suggested by Van Der Knaap (2004) “A theory-based approach is considered to be valuable for a government that wants to learn, whilst potentially reconciling positivist and constructivist approaches”.

Returning to Porter and Van Der Linde’s (1995) “Principles for good regulation”, the overall finding of this paper is that:

- EPBD does not contain clear goals which can be met in flexible ways. While the objective outlined in the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive does not include a quantifiable target in the form of energy savings the Irish S.I. 666 does not even include the objective. The omission of an objective from S.I. 666 is a mistake, considering the possibility that many stakeholders may only read the Irish S.I.
- The lack of clear goals outlined above makes it difficult to determine the extent to which incentive bases schemes are achieving or exceeding goals.
- EPBD did not undergo a Regulatory Impact Assessment and no systematic review process exists in Ireland for policy instruments. Consequently, co-ordination between stakeholders proceeded in a haphazard way. EPBD impacts on householders, estate/letting agents, builders, architects, solicitors, BER Assessors, building control officers, SEI, the EPA, the department of (environment, heritage & local government), the department of (communications, marine and natural resources) and the EU. There is much evidence to suggest a lack of coordination between these stakeholders in relation to EPBD.

In the lead-up to a recast of EPBD it is imperative that these issues be addressed.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Society in the broadest sense has been through many of its most radical shifts in the past half century. Futurologists, technological determinists, business analysts and social scientists have all attempted to track this change from a diversity of discipline perspectives. Many argue it is the way in which we do business, others highlight immigration or technological diffusion, and some cite the increasingly diverse cultural mix of developed countries as key markers of modern society. Yet while the disparities are plenty, one key theme also acts as a unifier in the analysis of contemporary society: knowledge. From business, to policy, through to community organisation, knowledge, and our appreciation of it as a fundamental building block, is universally recognised.

The papers submitted to this section of the volume dedicated to the Knowledge Society are in many ways reflective of the far reaching scope of the term itself. Ranging from issues dealing with healthcare provision, commercialisation of ideas through to the nature of knowing, all papers use knowledge, and how we as a society (and economy) exploit it, as a fundamental unit of analysis.

The policy relevance of this work is clear and all papers have made valiant efforts in lessening the gap between academic inquiry and policy actions. Ireland in 2010 has found itself in real need of these new policy avenues. Work here points to the countries reliance over the past few decades of success on importing knowledge through an industrial development model that was overly concerned with the interests of foreign investors. That indeed has marked the Irish case since the institution of ‘outward’ looking economic and social policies that date back as the late 1950s. With pause for reflection, much work, some of it reproduced here, has placed the Irish economic success story of the Celtic Tiger era up against the lack of success in terms of social provision over the economic boom. With a degree of confidence we might therefore argue that a knowledge society might be very distinct from a knowledge economy.

That said much of what is seen from the following papers is distinctly more positive and forward looking in nature. The influence of technology on how we work and how we can work, in terms of overcoming time and space barriers is highlighted. Related to this, the production of technology as knowledge itself forms the broadest theme for many papers. Together with contributions of education and science policy and the nature of managing human resources in the knowledge society, the summation of this contribution turns the focus back towards institutes of knowledge provision, universities and institutes of technology. One of the key questions put to them is how well and how better they can enable the production of knowledge diffuse through society and economy.
POLICY MAKING WITHIN AN ECOSYSTEM OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE COMMERCIALISATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR INNOVATION

Diana Nadine Boehm, Doctoral Fellow, Learning, Innovation and Knowledge Research Centre, Dublin City University

ABSTRACT

As scientific knowledge is increasingly important for new business development and innovation, governments are requiring universities to take a more active role as performers in national and regional economic development (Mansfield and Lee 1996). Although commercialisation is a topic receiving greater attention in the literature, empirical work strongly predominates. There is plethora of stage model approaches to commercialisation but no uniformity can be identified hitherto. Ergo evidence suggests that a holistic research paradigm is needed to inform practice and outline implications for innovation. The paper provides an overview of the European and Irish policies and R&D performances. Furthermore it discusses the role of scientific knowledge commercialisation in economic growth and presents the body of knowledge. The main part of the paper elaborates an ecosystem of scientific knowledge commercialisation and concludes on the opportunities and challenges that the ecosystem of scientific knowledge commercialisation poses for policy making.

INTRODUCTION

As scientific knowledge is increasingly important for new business development and innovation, governments are requiring universities to take a more active role as performers in national and regional economic development (Mansfield and Lee 1996). “The commercialisation of scientific and technological knowledge produced within publicly funded research institutions…is increasingly considered by policymakers as raw material for developing and sustaining regional economic growth” (Ndonzuau, Pirnay and Surlemont 2002 p281) Commercialisation is not only a matter of national concern but also a central issue for universities in Europe. Although commercialisation is a topic receiving greater attention in the literature, empirical work strongly predominates and there is no agreed theoretical framework. Evidence suggests that a holistic research paradigm is needed to inform practice. A holistic paradigm will provide for a better understanding of the environment and the actors involved as well as facilitating an analysis of all elements and the way they interact. This theoretical paper draws on the new St. Gallen management model to develop an ecosystem model of scientific knowledge commercialisation.

The paper is structured as follows: Section one provides an overview of the European and Irish policies and presents R&D performance figures. The subsequent section discusses the role of scientific knowledge commercialisation in economic growth and presents the body of knowledge. The main part of the paper, section 3, elaborates an ecosystem of scientific knowledge commercialisation and all system elements. The paper concludes on the opportunities and challenges that the ecosystem of scientific knowledge commercialisation poses for policy making.
COMMERCIALISATION OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE IN EUROPE AND IRELAND

Europe is on its way to forming a triple helix model of university-industry-government relations to create an innovative environment (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 2000). University-industry relations and the commercialisation of university-generated knowledge have become a common and widely accepted phenomenon. This can be seen in the literature and policy programs all over the world. There are several OECD reports e.g. Benchmarking Science-Industry Relationships (OECD 2002) and A New Economy?: The Changing Role of Innovation and Information Technology in Growth (OECD 2000) which embrace university-industry linkages and collaboration. Another example are the EU framework Programs or the US AUTM Projects introduced by the Governments which have been trying to improve these relations and the commercialisation of scientific knowledge for several years. There are current debates about the benchmarking of Europe with the US which might overshadow the challenges Europe faces with respect to fast developing Asian nations. While US investment in R&D is coming to fruition, the much discussed European Paradox shows that although high investment in R&D is made, low returns in commercialisation and economic growth can be seen. In most countries in Europe policies have been implemented to capitalise knowledge and protect intellectual property in order to address this dilemma: In the UK, the Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004-2014 was implemented to establish objectives for science and innovation over a ten year period. It also sets the target for UK economic growth, and the research funding system that is needed to deliver these (HM Treasury 2004). In the case of Germany, various policies are in place to embrace innovation. The federal government’s High-Tech Strategy (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2006) is a national strategy with the aim of developing a cutting-edge innovation market where technologies can be translated into finished products, processes and services, improving the cooperation between science and industry and accelerating the direct application of research findings. Under the strategy of the Federal Government for the internationalisation of science and research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2008) the federal government is trying to attract researchers, students and foreign investment to undertake R&D. The Initiative for Excellence (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2009), which is now in its second round, supplies project funding to support graduate schools, excellence clusters and cutting-edge research at universities.

Nevertheless, Europe is still behind the US and Japan in research and innovation performance with, on average, 1.77 gross expenditure on R&D in 2007 as a percentage of GDP compared to 2.68% in the US and 3.39% in Japan (OECD 2009). To be competitive, the EU members set a target to increase R&D performance to 3% of GDP by 2010. Ireland, with an R&D expenditure of 1.43% of GDP and 1.68% of GNP in 2008, is although catching up, still well below the EU average (Forfás 2009). The implemented Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) outlines how the Irish Government proposes to achieve the 3% R&D target. “Ireland by 2013 will be internationally renowned for the excellence of its research, and will be to the forefront in generating and using new knowledge for economic and social progress, within an innovation driven culture” (Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment 2006 p21).

The economic downturn, and the budgetary constraints it has imposed on the Irish Government, will not assist Ireland in facing its main challenge over the next decade; the formation of a knowledge-economy (NDP 2007) or smart-economy (Building Ireland’s Smart Economy 2008) i.e. a knowledge ecosystem. To meet this challenge Ireland needs to:
i. the relatively underdeveloped nature of science, technology and innovation (STI) in Ireland as evidence from the lack of a clear strategy in the past;

ii. the lack of balance and connectivity between discovery research, development and commercialisation;

iii. the lack of involvement in international research, collaborative agreement and networks;

iv. the low level of engagement in sciences in the education system at all levels (primary, secondary, third and fourth levels)

v. the underdeveloped nature of the research system in terms of capacity, quality and coherence needs to be addressed — particularly with regard to the growth required in order to achieve the Lisbon R&D targets; and

vi. the need to complement existing priority research areas (Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and biotechnology) with more emphasis on strategic research areas (e.g. sustainable foods) and key disciplines (e.g. mathematics).

To meet this challenge Ireland needs to:

i. develop a world class research infrastructure;

ii. protect and commercialise ideas and know-how; and

iii. implement strategies relating to research and development for enterprise, innovation and growth (Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment 2006).

Regarding the commercialisation of scientific knowledge the SSTI stresses that there are serious deficits in the Irish system particularly in the field of awareness, identification, evaluation, capture, protection and commercialisation.

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013, which outlines priorities for investment during the period 2007-2013, reveals the emphasis on the development of a knowledge economy and thus the creation of knowledge-driven competitive advantages across all sectors of Ireland’s economy (Government of Ireland 2007). Furthermore, the NDP points out that the strategies which lead to the success of the Irish economy will not be sufficient for future accomplishments. In order to achieve these undertakings, the Government will invest €8.2 billion in science, technology and innovation over the lifetime of the NDP and has decided to implement feedback methods to measure participation in the sciences, output of economically relevant knowledge and coherence and exploitation of national and international synergies.

Under the NDPS the investment in R&D has quickly augmented the size and quality of research in Ireland. The average annual growth rate of gross domestic expenditure on R&D from 1995 to 2006 was 7.8%, leaving Ireland in sixth position in the OECD (OECD 2007). Ipso facto the number of inventions has risen, paving the way for commercialising the IP generated. Yet the evidence on the role of universities in knowledge transfer is unclear. A report on technology transfer in Irish universities (InterTradeIreland 2006), suggests that at least some Irish universities are on a par with their international counterparts, in terms of number of patents registered. However, a recent study by Jordan and O’Leary (2007) suggests that HEIs contribute less to the innovation output than expected. They recommend investigating the factors which ameliorate and mitigate HEI industry interaction. Therefore, a holistic research paradigm, rather than empirical work alone, is extremely relevant to current policy debates in Ireland. In order to bridge the divide of research and policy-making and to build a knowledge ecosystem, or a smart economy, it is necessary to understand the
commercialisation of knowledge in a wider context i.e. the ecosystem of scientific knowledge commercialisation.

THE EXISTING BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge, seen as human capital and technologies (OECD 1996), is central to economic development and is one of the most important factors for a country’s international economic strength and competitiveness. Not only the US economy has changed from an economy of goods into a knowledge economy (Drucker 1992), but rather all OECD economies are now more reliant upon knowledge production and its distribution and utilisation. The ‘new mode’ or ‘mode 2’ of knowledge production, as opposed to the ‘old mode’ or ‘mode 1’ (where knowledge was created through basic research in the university), was coined by Gibbons et al. (1994 p4) who argue that knowledge is “always produced under an aspect of continuous negotiation and it will not be produced unless and until the interests of the various actors are included.” They further allege that: “Such knowledge is intended to be useful to someone whether in industry or government, or society more generally and this imperative is present from the beginning.” (Gibbons et al. 1994 p4) It seems that ‘science as a source of strategic opportunity’ and pari passu the mix of a ‘technology push’ and ‘market pull’ process of innovation can be seen as ‘mode 2’, where knowledge is produced in a trans-disciplinary manner with a diversity of actors. In recent years a non-linear recursive interaction of helixes has become an alternative mode, where the different ‘overlapping’ institutional spheres – Academia, State and Industry – generate a knowledge infrastructure and form tri-lateral networks and hybrid organisations (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 1997, 2000). The ‘triple helix’ is a useful approach that shows that internal and external partners are integrated and are able to network within the knowledge infrastructure. In order to form a working innovation system the three institutional spheres and the relationship among them are changing worldwide. However, it does not provide a holistic understanding of the wider system of knowledge commercialisation.

Traditionally, academia’s undertaking in society has been teaching and research. Now many authors note that universities play an amplified role in innovation and growth of economic clusters in growing knowledge economies (von Hippel 1988, Etzkowitz et al. 2000, Porter and Van Opstal 2001). With respect to the recognition that knowledge is central to economic development and is one of the most important factors for a country’s international economic strength and competitiveness, society has become progressively knowledge intensive and increasingly dependent upon knowledge-producing universities. This new role refers to creating entrepreneurial universities which commercialise scientific knowledge and partake in ‘entrepreneurial science’ (cf. Clark 1998, Etzkowitz 1998, Etzkowitz, Webster and Healey 1998, Etzkowitz et al. 2000, Etzkowitz 2001). The university is no longer just an institute of teaching and basic research, but is now a source of commercial value.

However, in current literature there is no general consensus about the meaning of the commercialisation of university research. In the broadest perspective, commercialisation can be best described as a process. This commercialisation “process usually occurs through a complex interplay between different actors and mechanisms” (Waagø et al. 2001 p119) and can be identified as a procedure of transferring and transforming theoretical knowledge into commercial value. The concept of commercialisation and the concept of innovation do overlap to some extent (Jolly 1997). There is literature on innovation via patenting, licensing, corporate venturing, joint ventures and strategic alliances but not sufficient and coherent
theoretical and empirical evidence on the processes that guide commercialisation across institution types (Markman, Siegel and Wright 2008).

Table 1: Stage models of commercialisation

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Invention</td>
<td>Imagining</td>
<td>Generate Business Ideas from Research</td>
<td>Scientific Discovery</td>
<td>Recognise the Opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>Incubating</td>
<td>Finalise New Venture Projects out of Ideas</td>
<td>Invention Disclosure</td>
<td>Assess the Commercial Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Demonstrating</td>
<td>Launch Spin Off Firms from Projects</td>
<td>Evaluation of Invention for Patenting</td>
<td>Assess Patentability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Promoting</td>
<td>Strengthen the Creation of Economic Value by Spin Off Firms</td>
<td>Patent</td>
<td>Develop a Commercialisation Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>New Venture Creation</td>
<td>Sustaining</td>
<td>Marketing of Technology to Firm</td>
<td>Implement the Strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>Product Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiation of License to Firm (Existing Firm or Start Up)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII.</td>
<td>Incubation</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII.</td>
<td>Business Development</td>
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<td>IX.</td>
<td>Initial Public Offering</td>
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A popular approach, amongst researchers in the field (Roberts and Malone 1996, Jolly 1997, Ndonzuau, Pirnay and Surlemont 2002, Siegel et al. 2003, Siegel et al. 2004, Spilling 2004, 2008) is to present the commercialisation process as a stage model. Spilling (2004, 2008) argues that a stage model implies a form of linearity for an easier understanding, but that interaction happens between the stages and that it will always start at the point of the existing knowledge base. Given the range of process approach variations which exist in surrounding literature (mainly focusing on spin-offs rather than different commercialisation strategies) no uniformity can be identified hitherto that would assist policymakers in their attempt to foster commercialisation.

Furthermore, knowledge literature highlights that knowledge has become a core competitive advantage but does not include issues with regard to influencing factors (Markman, Siegel and Wright 2008). Literature on technology strategy only addresses new product development and market entry issues rather than the transfer and commercialisation of the
technology. Siegel (2003) points out that studies on agglomeration, clustering, embeddedness and institution types do not cover the factors that influence the commercialisation processes and the interplay of the different stakeholders.

In addition, most researchers focus on world-class universities such as MIT and Stanford rather than medium-sized universities. Wright et al. (2008) question the relevance of these studies as many universities do not have access to a world-class research base. These questions give reason for further research at this level in order to provide meaningful insights for policy makers and bridge the divide between theory and reality.

Thus far, research shows that the triple helix model (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 1997, 2000) provides a good example of how academia, industry and the government form tri-lateral networks and hybrid organisations. However, it fails to provide for the surrounding environment – a complex ecosystem – that influences the formation of the knowledge infrastructure, scientific knowledge exploitation and commercialisation process respectively. Consequently, a holistic research paradigm that integrates the environment with its societal, technological and economical perspectives as well as outlooks concerning nature and sustainable development, is missing; a paradigm that seeks a better understanding of the commercialisation process, the factors that influence the interplay between the different stakeholders and institutions, as well as the impediments to effective research commercialisation. While acknowledging that an ecosystem approach is consistent with the national innovation system approach, the national innovation system focuses mainly on overall industrial capabilities and does not take the universities per se into consideration.

THE ECOSYSTEM OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE COMMERCIALISATION

This paper draws on the new St. Gallen management model (Rüegg-Stürm 2003) to develop an ecosystem model of scientific knowledge commercialisation. The new St. Gallen management model states that management is not just the management of a firm, but a mode of operation: i.e. a system of tasks which are embedded in an environmental context. Similar to this, the commercialisation of scientific knowledge is a process, a mode of operation: an entrepreneurial endeavour that requires the management of a complex system of tasks which exists across different environmental spheres (society, nature, technology and economy) and involves different stakeholders. The reasoning behind the St. Gallen management model can be thus applied to the ecosystem of scientific knowledge commercialisation as all system elements interact with each other also. In addition, the issues of interaction (resources, norms and values, concerns and interests), which are relevant in the management of an operation can be employed as stakeholder relations are of great significance to the commercialisation process.
The different environmental spheres are the context that influences the commercialisation of scientific knowledge. These spheres cannot be distinguished rigorously, but function as analytical tools to assist in the identification of upcoming developments. The social or societal sphere pertains to the humans as an individual or within the society. Humans are informed by their environment and therefore influenced by a complex scope of aspects e.g. commitment and motivation, educational background, human capital, age structure, willingness to take risks, role of the state, public infrastructure and educational infrastructure etc (Rüegg-Stürm 2003).

Nature is understood in terms of the environmental context; different societies, nations, regions or cultures have diverse attitudes towards environmental aspects (Rüegg-Stürm 2003). Issues that influence scientific knowledge commercialisation, and especially its creation, could be resources and deficits in resources, environmental intervention or other issues such as climate. The nature domain postulates the necessity to take the paradigm of sustainable development into account where relationships between firms and loci are considered (Gibbs and Krueger 2007). New economy firms see sustainable development as an essential part of their progress and economic growth regions such as Boston show that economic success, quality of life and ‘good environment’ are connected to each other. Although the theoretical underpinnings are still questionable (ibid.) it is an important consideration and worthy of future exploration.

The technology domain necessitates the supervision of technological progress (Rüegg-Stürm 2003). Scientific knowledge at universities and research organisations as well as R&D surveillance (i.e. observation between competing firms in industry or competing research institutions within academia) form an important part of the technology environment and
therefore technology development and progression. Furthermore, the technology sphere bears upon the development of a contextual framework for technology diffusion. Clusters such as the Silicon Valley, Bay Area and Boston in the US, Cambridge in the UK or Martinsried/München in Germany are examples of areas with high technological dynamics. Summa summarum scientific knowledge commercialisation will be more efficient if the participating stakeholders pay attention to technological progress and take account of their embeddedness within clusters of excellence.

The economical sphere relies on the fact that the commercialisation process is embedded within a national economy. Ipso facto, the exploitation of scientific knowledge is influenced by the economy of a nation or of the global economy. Therefore the following aspects are of importance when considering the exploitation of scientific knowledge: efficiency of labour markets and financial markets, availability of capital, interdependencies of global economics and so forth. As the lack of capital availability in form of venture capital is a major barrier to the commercialisation of scientific knowledge (Wright, Vohora and Lockett 2004, Wright et al. 2006) it is of upmost importance to look at the wider environment to gain a deeper insight.

As mentioned previously, scientific research commercialisation is a complex and heterogeneous process, requiring complex interactions between research suppliers, the businesses who want to exploit the research and the investors. Therefore the transfer of scientific knowledge asks for the involvement of several stakeholders and new partnerships between political actors, businesses and higher education institutes. As with the new St. Gallen management model, the stakeholders provide either resources and/or determining factors depending on the value added (Rüegg-Stürm 2003). The stakeholders interact in a manifold manner. The issues upon which the stakeholders interact can be either ideational or tradable goods or rights. Interaction issues regarding the new St. Gallen management model illustrate matters that stakeholders have when being confronted with the commercialisation process. While concerns, interests, norms and values are personal or cultural aspects, resources relate to non-sentimental objects (Rüegg-Stürm 2003). Concerns reflect universal targets of the stakeholders; interests can be understood as self-seeking or self-interested behaviours. Different values in terms of perceptions are essential so that stakeholders involved in the commercialisation process can evaluate concerns, interests and norms, where, according to social exchange theory, norms are generally accepted behaviours or guidelines for interaction (Lambe, Wittmann and Spekman 2001). They are understood to provide governing mechanisms for relationships in order to guide actions of stakeholders and to minimise potential danger of opportunistic behaviour. Furthermore, norms help to embrace long-term relationships. Resources, as an interaction issue for stakeholder, can be tangible or intangible: tangible resources are goods such as buildings, information technology etc. and intangible resources are know-how, licences, patents and trademarks as is the case in scientific knowledge commercialisation.

In sum, scientific knowledge commercialisation is a complex system, requiring complex interactions between all participating stakeholders: it is a dynamic process influenced by macro (economic, social, technological and ecological environment), meso (stakeholders such as university, firm, government agencies etc) and micro (individuals) factors and issues which have to be analysed and reconsidered each time a new technology commercialisation process starts in order to benefit.
CONCLUSION

Literature on scientific knowledge commercialisation states that society has become progressively knowledge intensive and increasingly dependent upon knowledge producing universities. This new role refers to creating entrepreneurial universities which commercialise scientific knowledge and do ‘entrepreneurial science’ (cf. Clark 1998, Etzkowitz 1998, Etzkowitz, Webster and Healey 1998, Etzkowitz et al. 2000, Etzkowitz 2001). Drawing on the ‘entrepreneurial paradigm’, entrepreneurial accomplishments are regarded to be only successful if the entrepreneurs are “integrated into diverse networks of interactive relationships and partnerships” (Meyer 2003 p109) i.e. individual relations, networks with firms or relationships with other external stakeholders (Goktepe-Hultèn 2008). Technology transfer occurs through established relations among stakeholders (Harmon et al. 1997) and therefore requires a deeper insight into the initiation and management of those relationships.

Furthermore, research commercialisation is a multifaceted and heterogeneous process. It requires complex interactions among stakeholders. Polanyi (1966, 1967, 1974) states that scientific knowledge transfer is only possible with communication and interaction of all stakeholders, as tacit knowledge (embodied and embedded in individuals and social networks) is needed to transfer the explicit knowledge. When all of the foregoing is tied together the need for effective interaction becomes obvious.

By virtue of the need for effective interaction the ecosystem approach is regarded to be of utmost importance to successful knowledge exploitation. Adopting a theoretical research paradigm, rather than relying on empirical work alone, is extremely relevant to current policy debates in Ireland. In order to bridge the divide of research practice and policy-making the ecosystem approach, where different stakeholder relationships are embedded in a surrounding influencing environment, advocates a holistic understanding of the environment and all stakeholders that will facilitate an analysis of all system elements and the way they interact.

The existence and perception of different nations, different environmental, societal, economic and technological spheres, as well as different interests, norms and resources of the stakeholders, poses challenges and opportunities for policy makers. With respect to Ireland, Irish policy makers have to recognise the changing policy context within the ecosystem of scientific knowledge commercialisation in order to design new policies. These new policies need to be tailor-made to the Irish context. This involves consideration of the country’s its governmental agencies, industries and higher-education institutes and embracing the importance of a holistic, rather than partial, view of scientific knowledge commercialisation. This will facilitate Ireland in being to the forefront in generating and using new knowledge for economic and social progress, within an innovation driven culture, as is the SSTI’s stated target.

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THE SALZBURG PRINCIPLES AND ISSUES CONCERNING THEIR IMPLEMENTATION: AN IRISH PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Since its inception in the 12th century, both the purpose and design of the PhD have changed substantially. Questions regarding the degree’s fitness of purpose are being addressed through a restructuring of PhD programmes. Issues relating to educational policy (specifically the Bologna Process and primarily the Salzburg Principles) involve generally three interdependent stakeholders: academia, employers and PhD candidates. This paper identifies three issues for consideration relating to these three stakeholders and the implementation of the Salzburg Principles in Ireland.

INTRODUCTION

The Irish Social Science Platform (ISSP) is a cross-border venture in Ireland which seeks to strengthen the knowledge economy through the provision of interdisciplinary and structured research within the doctoral context. Comprising of NUI Galway, NUI Maynooth, Queen’s University Belfast, Dublin City University, IT Sligo, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, and University College Cork, the platform conducts research across three areas, namely (i) building a knowledge society, (ii) balancing regional and rural development and (iii) sustaining communities (ISSP 2008).

This paper traces the emergence of the PhD from 12th century Germany through to its current realignment with the wider market place and identifies issues regarding how the Salzburg Principles are being implemented in the Irish context. There is particular reference to how the ISSP may act as a mechanism to enable doctoral candidates to develop transferable, interdisciplinary competencies which, in turn, fulfil these Principles and the needs of sectors beyond academia.

THE ORIGINS OF THE PHD AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The award of the doctorate first emerged in the 12th century as a license for teaching in a specialised area, yet with no reference to academic research (Park 2005a; Taylor & Beasley 2005). The traditional understanding of the PhD (or philosophiae doctor) first materialised in Berlin, Germany in 1810 (Park 2005a) under the guidance of Wilhelm von Humboldt (Cowen 1997). Von Humboldt envisaged the doctorate as an opportunity for students who had academic potential to embark upon an independent research project under the guidance of an experienced professor (Taylor & Beasley 2005), and to also develop personally through the search for ‘...absolute truth’ (Cowen 1997, p.185). The Humboldtian vision idealised research which would be predominantly autotelic rather than directly utilitarian in its search for knowledge (Cowen 1997; Goodchild & Miller 1997).
As higher education evolved throughout the 20th century, the notion of the PhD as “research for its own sake” was to come under scrutiny in the 1970s. Increased government interest in research and a widening of the availability of education saw public funding critiqued, raising questions regarding its integral fitness of purpose (Taylor & Beasley 2005). It is very much in this vein that these authors identify areas of concern which continued to trouble the traditional PhD throughout the 1980s and 1990s, namely:

- The lack of economic value stemming from the lack of a utilitarian research topic;
- Increasing specialisation, sardonically described by Cowen (1997, p.187) as ‘knowing more and more about less and less’, was becoming less and less relevant in a world where breadth of knowledge was as important as depth; and
- A lack of career focus in the PhD process, often leaving graduates in employment limbo.

The changing perception of the PhD across these areas occurred at a monumental time in higher education in Europe, namely the ninth centenary of Europe’s oldest university.

In 1988, the celebration of the 900th anniversary of Università di Bologna was met with the signing of the Magna Charta Universitatum which described four fundamental areas that had become pivotal to universities operating across Europe, namely: autonomy, the dual focus of teaching and research, freedom in research and training, and a focus on the European humanist tradition.

In order to preserve these principles as Europe was on the cusp of evolving again with the imminent Maastricht Treaty, the Universitatum declared that the ‘...mutual exchange of information and documentation, and frequent joint projects for the advancement of learning...’ would be greatly assisted by increasing and encouraging the mobility of teachers and students and additionally establishing an equivalency in terms of qualifications (Magna Charta Universitatum 1988). The Lisbon Convention (1997) addressed the essence of these principles by giving them a legislative basis thorough the mutual recognition of awards by signatory countries. This, in turn, informed the Sorbonne Joint Declaration (1998, p.1) which saw ministers in France, Germany, Italy and the UK call for the systematic creation of a ‘...Europe of knowledge’. This resonated with other countries and on 19 June 1999, the Bologna Process was signed by 31 ministers for education throughout 29 countries. The primary objective was to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) which would make the European region a world-class provider of higher education by 2010 through the provision of cycles of higher education. The first cycle describes bachelor degrees, the second cycle master degrees, and the third cycle doctoral degrees (Bergen Communiqué 2005).

The Bologna Process is monitored through communiqués which are held at various countries throughout Europe every second year. At these various recommendations regarding the progress made in moving towards the EHEA. In response to the 2003 communiqué, the Bologna Seminar held at Salzburg in 2005 arrived at a set of 10 guiding Principles regarding doctoral education in Europe. These are known as “The Salzburg Principles” and are as follows:

1. The core component of doctoral training is the advancement of knowledge through original research
2. Embedding in institutional strategies and policies
3. The importance of diversity
4. Doctoral candidates as early stage researchers
5. The crucial role of supervision and assessment
6. Achieving critical mass
7. Duration
8. The promotion of innovative structures
9. Increasing mobility
10. Ensuring appropriate funding (EUA 2007, p.21)

These Principles provide a basis for understanding how Ireland is responding to the needs of the wider market place whilst fulfilling its role in the creation of the EHEA and development of doctoral candidates through the continuing evolution of the PhD. This can be done through identifying how the Salzburg Principles centre the PhD as a result of interactions among three main stakeholders: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), employers, and the doctoral candidate. Each of these operates within the wider context of the EHEA, as illustrated in Fig. 1 below:

**Figure 1: Position of the PhD**

![Diagram](image)

**STAKEHOLDER: EMPLOYERS**

The criticisms regarding the nature of the traditional PhD have been focused primarily on the value of the competencies which it imparts to graduates in terms of direct application in the workplace. Engaging with the Irish government’s goal to double the number of PhD graduates by 2013, a recent Forfás (2008b) report identified that the PhD should act as a platform for the development of researcher careers in areas outside of academia. This stems from European policy whereby ‘... doctoral programmes promote interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills, thus meeting the needs of the wider employment market’ (Bologna Process 1999, p.4). Of particular note is the legislative basis with which the development of such competencies is concerned. The Qualification (Education and Training) Act 1999, sec.7a states that it is the duty of the governing authority to:
...establish and maintain a framework, being a framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State (in this Act referred to as a “framework of qualifications”), based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners.

The framework to which this refers is the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ 2003) which specifies four areas of competency that should be developed by doctoral graduates to differentiate them from holders of other awards. These are shown in Tab. 1 below:

Table 1: Doctoral competencies (NFQ 2003, p.17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>NFQ description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Exercise [sic] personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Communicate results of research and innovation to peers; engage in critical dialogue; lead and originate complex social processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to learn</td>
<td>Learn to critique the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight</td>
<td>Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such debates regarding the necessity for PhD programmes to offer candidates the opportunity to develop a wider portfolio of competencies and skills are reflected in Park's (2005, p.199) suggestion that the PhD be augmented from ‘...content to competence...’ in order to provide a stronger emphasis on the “process” of the PhD, as opposed to focussing primarily on the “product” in terms of the viva and thesis. Such a focus on the process of learning can have many beneficial outcomes for the development of student competencies, such as personal development, team-working skills and career development (Buckley & Hurley 2001).

With particular reference to the doctoral candidature period in Ireland, an inherent aspect within the ISSP is the emphasis on the structuring of the PhD process, primarily through the provision of taught modules called Graduate Research Education Programmes (GREPs), interdisciplinary summer schools and seminars. GREPs seek to equip candidates with the opportunity to develop personally and professionally in a wide range of areas (e.g. Career Development, Data Analysis, Entrepreneurship, Philosophy and so on), whilst summer schools bring together candidates engaged in three different strands of research, across the ISSP, for themed lectures.

This presents us with our first issue:

*Do GREPs and summer schools adequately provide mechanisms for the development of interdisciplinary competencies which are valued by employers in industry?*

**STAKEHOLDER: CANDIDATES**

The second aspect that the Salzburg Principles address is in relation to the candidate. We have seen that a purpose of the Bologna Process is to encourage members of the rich research communities which reside within academia into the wider market place to support the development of the knowledge economy. As such, there is an increased emphasis that PhD candidates ‘...should be recognized as professionals – with commensurate rights – who make
a key contribution to the creation of new knowledge’. One of the more radical proposals suggests that, as the doctoral candidate is an early-stage professional, there should be corresponding rights such as ‘healthcare, social security and pension rights’ (EUA 2007, p.15). This stands somewhat at odds with how doctoral candidates are indeed perceived across Europe: from 35 surveyed countries which operate under the Bologna Process, only three give candidate’s full status as employees, whilst 10 (including Ireland) identify them exclusively as students (EUA 2007).

Within the Irish context, however, the status of doctoral graduates has become more refined. Forfás (2008b) suggests that a structured career path for researchers is implemented, as illustrated in Tab. 2 below:

### Table 2: Researcher career path (See Forfás 2008b, p.10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Post-doctoral Fellow</td>
<td>Gain practical experience;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Internship)</td>
<td>Supervised by Principle Investigator (PI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Research Fellow</td>
<td>Personally secured funding;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PI acts as a mentor;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peer-reviewed selection process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Senior Research Fellow</td>
<td>Limited in number;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May apply independently for funding as per PIs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that phase one is post-doctorate, providing a structure through which candidates have the capacity and opportunity to plan effectively their careers is crucial (Forfás 2008b, p.11). This deliberate planning for professional development has become an especially important aspect of doctoral education: within the UK context, the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) found that inadequate career planning was most disadvantageous in moving into industry with a social science PhD, highlighted in this response by such a graduate:

> I was very fortunate in being offered a post-doctoral fellowship prior to the completion of my PhD. However, I would have benefited greatly from careers guidance aimed at doctoral students. Once I had decided to look for work outside my academic discipline, it became difficult. My lack of [non-academic] work experience was a disadvantage (Purcell et al. n.d., p.67).

HEIs have a role to play in assisting candidates in both career development and attaining experience during the candidature period. Under the auspices of the ISSP, professional development is an integral aspect of the taught element provided through GREPs (ISSP 2008b) which pertains to doctoral candidates researching under this platform.

Whilst such benefits (which can be made inherent in a structured PhD) are certainly valuable, the Salzburg Principles state that the expected timeframe should be three to four years, presumably inclusive of the additional workload stemming from module participation (EUA 2007, p.22). However, one must question how realistic this timeframe is. In the UK as of 2005, the traditional model saw 57% of full-time PhD candidates take up to five years to complete, with a further 14% completing within seven years. Additionally, non-completion rates were high among non-science candidates in comparison to those working in scientific disciplines (Park 2005b). One prospective area which may impact this is found in the 10th
Salzburg Principle which states that successful completion ‘...requires appropriate and sustainable funding.’

The European trend is that funding is not generally allocated directly to individuals, but rather to institutes and programmes (EUA 2007). If the ISSP is to fulfil its purpose and actively assists in the development of candidates with the skills and competencies to operate across a host of sectors, thus supporting Ireland’s knowledge economy at micro level and the EHEA/ERA at macro level, it is imperative that institutions recognise that candidates are given the resources in terms of time and finance to do so.

This presents us with our second issue:

How will the implementation and funding of a new structured PhD impact the time to degree (TTD) in comparison to the traditional model?

STAKEHOLDER: HEIs

The third and final aspect of the Salzburg Principles and how they are being implemented in the Irish context is focused on academic stakeholders. The Bologna Process from which the Principles are derived focuses on three primary issues: international transparency, international recognition of qualifications, and the international mobility of learners and graduates (NFQ n.d.).

The second Salzburg Principle emphasises the importance of having HEIs take responsibility for the development of relevant doctoral programmes. As the EHEA is comprised of 46 countries (Benelux Communiqué 2009, p.1), the adoption of strategies is open to variances with regard to how they are implemented. However, all members must verify their awards as being compatible with those of the Bologna Framework. In November 2006, Ireland’s verification of the NFQ as being compatible with that of the Bologna Process’ European Quality Framework (EFQ) made Ireland the first country to bind its own framework with that of the EHEA (Report of Steering Committee for National Consultation 2006). The parallels between the Bologna Cycles and the NFQ are illustrated in Tab. 3 below:

Table 3: (NFQ n.d., p.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EQF Levels</th>
<th>Bologna Framework</th>
<th>NFQ</th>
<th>Irish Award</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Short Cycle (within first cycle)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Higher Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>First Cycle</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ordinary Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Honours Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Second Cycle</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Master’s Degree, PG Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Third Cycle</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Doctorate / Higher Doctorate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These frameworks are a tool in fulfilling the third Principle which seeks to maintain ‘...the rich diversity of doctoral programmes in Europe...' through the implementation of policies which promote ‘...quality and sound practice’ (EUA 2007, p.22). This reflects also the duality of Ireland as both a country and as a European state through the provision of a structure by which Irish HEIs may connect to the pan-European context, thus encouraging the mobility of graduates both from and to Ireland (NFQ 2009).
The resolution of the dyadic which exists between the autotelic and teleological nature of doctoral research is an element which characterises much of what we have seen regarding the development and fitness of purpose of the PhD. This duality is seen in the first Salzburg Principle which recognises that ‘...doctoral training must increasingly meet the needs of [an] employment market that is wider than academia’. The chief concern residing here is thus that not should we only have the creation of new knowledge, but rather we should ensure that those who create such knowledge be able to apply their competencies across a wider plane.

This is furthermore addressed by the eighth Salzburg Principle which identifies that innovative structures be promoted in order to ‘...meet the challenge of interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills’ (EUA 2007, p.22) which similarly complements the sixth Principle that requests PhD graduate capability may be harnessed to achieve critical mass. Helping to instantiate these Principles is Ireland’s Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation (SSTI) that states its vision is ‘to make Ireland by 2013 internationally renowned for the excellence of its research and to the forefront on generating and using new knowledge for economic and social progress within an innovation driven culture’ by seeking to ‘...effectively double the number of PhD graduates between 2006 and 2013...’ (Forfás 2008a, p.4).

The ISSP is an innovative structure that supports the delivery of higher education within doctoral programmes across eight HEIs throughout Ireland, as illustrated in Tab. 4 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge society</th>
<th>Balanced regional &amp; rural development</th>
<th>Sustaining communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>DCU, NUIG</td>
<td>NUIG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUIG, ITS, NUIG</td>
<td>NUIM, QUB, MIC, UL</td>
<td>NUIM, ITS, NUIG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UL</td>
<td>NUIG, NUIM, UL, UCC</td>
<td>UL, UCC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As part of the platform, the institutions involved are seeking to implement a new PhD which moves from being a solely research-based orientation to one with a more structured process orientation. This is done through the provision of taught modules, summer schools and training seminars (ISSP 2008) which provides theoretically an environment that assists in the development of inter-disciplinary awareness and competencies.

However, initial research undertaken by the author finds discrepancies in the delivery of GREPs across the institutions themselves. Some have implemented GREPs which are assessed via an exam; some take a more content-oriented view. Others have yet to implement a taught element, focusing rather on their involvement in summer schools.

This presents us with our third issue: *Is the model utilised by the ISSP effective in creating an environment that allows academic institutions to offer structurally-comparable doctoral programmes?*
CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The continued evolution of Irish doctoral education must include the representation of all stakeholders. As well as academic and workplace focused needs, the Salzburg Principles include candidate oriented needs which seek to establish an environment focused not merely on a new pedagogy, but on a radical learner-led andragogy characterised ultimately by a continuously-developing, knowledge-based society populated by continuously-learning individuals who are constantly seeking to understand.

This paper encourages those involved in the creation of educational policy at doctoral level to consider three issues which represent the three main stakeholders as we move forward into fourth level education in Ireland:

- Do GREPs and summer schools adequately provide mechanisms for the development of interdisciplinary competencies which are valued by employers in industry?
- How will the implementation and funding of a new structured PhD impact the time to degree (TTD) in comparison to the traditional model?
- Is the model utilised by the ISSP effective in creating an environment that allows academic institutions to offer structurally-comparable doctoral programmes?

The changing face of the PhD within European and Irish contexts presents us with an unparalleled opportunity to strategically develop the structures and individuals which lie at the heart of knowledge creation. To redress Cowen's (1997, p.187) earlier statement of the PhD as an opportunity to know 'more and more about less and less', the revolution of the Bologna Process gives us the potential to radically transform higher education into a mechanism that develops graduates who know more and more about more and more. The ISSP can be at the heart of that transformational process in Ireland.

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HEALTHCARE HUMAN RESOURCE POLICY & NURSE WELL-BEING

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**ABSTRACT**

Recent policy debates surrounding issues regarding health service delivery and escalating costs have come to the fore within political and policy discourses. Indeed within the current economic climate this debate has broadened to include several areas of the public sector. What is the human cost involved in delivering adequate and efficient health services to a population currently exceeding four million? This paper will aim to illustrate how current policy connects with the practice of human resource management in health. It will look at the context of health services and the direction of Irish health policy. The relevance of looking at the role of HR specifically in this context in order to contribute meaningfully to enhancing the lives and work of health employee’s is then explored. The paper will look at nurses as a core employee health group, and the question of whether HR policies and practices can potentially influence employee well-being is asked.

**INTRODUCTION**

Research within the healthcare sector especially in the area of human resource management should be contextualised within a broad framework including political, economic and social policy arenas. This needs to incorporate both a European and a national perspective. Legislation in areas such as health, employment and business all impact on how health services can and are delivered to users. Together these combine with the management structures of health services in place at a national and local level to determine the impact services have on the whole populations health “Health services are labour-intensive, and provide employment for about 10% of European workforce. HRH usually form the largest single cost element in any health system, as much as 60-80% of total recurrent expenditure” (WHO, 2006:5). This paper will give an overview of the health services context in which HRM operates in Ireland and will look at what HRM should achieve from the employee’s perspective. The paper will focus on nurses and the potential role of HRM practices in the promotion of their well-being.

**HEALTH SERVICES CONTEXT**

The HSE is the largest employer in the State with 84,074 employees as at the end of 2008 who work in a range of different services. This translates into over 72,695 Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) employees (HSE: 2009). The majority of employees are front line staff who directly provide patient care. The budget for this organisation is the largest of any other public sector organisation at almost twelve billion euro. The most recent comparable data on Irish Health spending from the OECD outlines that “Total health spending accounted for 7.5% of GDP in Ireland in 2007, almost one and a half percentage points lower than the average of 8.9% across OECD countries” (OECD, 2009). Wiley (2005) estimated that health expenditure over the 1990-2002 period, increased over 300% from around 2 billion euro in
1990 to over 8 billion euro in 2002. However it is from 1996 onwards that the rate of growth in health expenditure began to see a sharp increase. The very establishment of the Health Service Executive in 2005 illustrates the biggest programme of change ever undertaken in the Irish public service. The Department of Health and Children is the other element of the Irish health structure which involves itself more with the overall strategic and policy issues facing the Irish health system. Combined, these form the two main organisational structures delivering our health service with huge numbers of employees at various levels. There have been a number of reports published analyzing the health structures and the health system in place in Ireland. Some of these include the Report of the National Taskforce on Medical Staffing (2003), Audit of Structures and Functions in the Health System – Putting Strategy to Work (2003) and the Report of the Commission on Financial Management and Control Systems in the Health Service (2003). There have also been a number of strategy documents setting out the plans for the future direction of Health Services. These include Quality and Fairness; a Health System for You (2001), Quality & Fairness; Primary care- a new direction (2001), Action Plan for People Management in the Health Service (2002), Health Information – A National Strategy (2004) and the Health Services Partnership Agreement (2006). The national social partnership agreements since 1987 all make specific references to health services. The current agreement, Towards 2016; Ten year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015, includes specific commitments for improvements in health outcomes for all the population.

DIRECTION OF IRISH HEALTH POLICY

Since the 1980’s there has been a change in focus in health policy with a reduced emphasis on institutional and hospital based care to a greater emphasis being placed on preventive health policies and community based services. This can be seen clearly with the publication in 2001 with a new policy document to improve primary care services entitled Quality and Fairness; Primary care- a new direction. There is also evidence of this shift in the first HSE employee handbook where it states “at an operational level the biggest challenge facing the HSE is the speed with which reliance on hospitals can be reduced and capacity to deliver care within the community setting can be built” (2009:4). Harvey (2007) explains that in general the objectives of health policies are agreed by policy makers, health professionals and the non-governmental community. The main areas of disagreement however concern how these policies are implemented and how resources are allocated. The great disparity in funding between hospitals and institutions and community based services is one of these areas. Wiley states that “within the Irish system, formula based approaches to resource allocation have not been applied; rather, a significant historical dimension can generally be seen to underlie the determination of health service budgets broadly determined by demographic factors, commitments to service provision, national pay policies and general economic guidelines such as projected inflation rates, which are applied to the public service as a whole” (2005:58). In recent years, as can be seen from the Department of Health and Children’s Corporate Plan 2008 there has been a shift in health policy to promote the provision of private health. The proposed co-location policy is seen as a positive move forward. This will allow use of public sites near public hospitals to build private hospital facilities. This is seen as a way of strengthening public health delivery systems and freeing up private beds in public hospitals. What does this mean for the overall delivery of health services? Will this result in reduced work pressures for public sector employees or will employees move from working in the public sector to the private? What influence will varying HR strategies have on employees work life?
THE HRM MISSION

“The importance of an effective personnel policy to ensure the satisfactory functioning of the health services is widely recognised……the task confronting those involved in personnel issues in the health services is formidable in view of the number and variety of grades” (Hensey, 1988:168). This fact still remains true and the task is even of greater importance when there is widespread change taking place. As Kebene et al. (2006) states that since all health care are ultimately delivered by people, effective human resources management will play a critical role in the success of health sector reform. He reiterates that all health care is ultimately delivered by and to people and so therefore a strong understanding of the human resources management issues is required to ensure the success of any health care program. Human resource policies and practices contribute to organisational success and this has been shown the case for the healthcare sector by Bartram et al., 2007; Carney, 2006; Keating & McDermott, 2008 and Khatri et al., 2006.

The National Service Plan for 2009 sets out a number of challenges for the Human Resource function within our health system at both local and national level. The main aim is ensuring the protection of patient care at all times using the resources available. The HR mission is seen as ensuring that there are capable people working together to deliver safe and efficient healthcare services every day. The Department’s of Health and Children’s Corporate Business Plan 2008 which runs until 2011 sets out as major points of strategic action a set of key objectives: promoting better health for everyone; providing responsive and appropriate care; ensuring fair access and putting in place a high-performing system. The support of the social partners and liaising with health care staff is seen and given as a priority in the ongoing development of health services. One of the key principles underpinning the partnership approach includes “skills development, training, and personal development planning to improve job satisfaction, career prospects and services in line with the ‘high trust, high skill, high quality workplace’ principle” (Health Services Partnership Agreement, 2006:6). The National Joint Council (NJC) will continue to be the primary forum for managing industrial relations in the health service as is set out in the most recent partnership agreement Towards 2016. The continuation of the employment control framework is set out as important to ensuring maintenance of service provision within budgetary guidelines. It is also seen as aiding the skill mix agenda. This is again supported in the national partnership agreement where it states “appropriate skill mix supports all professionals to expand their roles to meet the demands of changing service requirements arising from the implementation, for example, of the European Working Time Directive. There will be co-operation with the introduction of specific new skill mix initiatives, for example, Therapy Assistants and Theatre Assistants, and the mainstreaming of earlier initiatives”(2006:123). In addition to the performance management relationship which exists between the individual and the line manager, a strategic and integrated approach to teamwork, called Team Based Performance Management (TBPM) is being implemented. This is further supported by the National Development Plan where it states “the necessary shift towards a greater team-based provision of services in all aspects of health care will be supported” (2007:214). Nurses form a large cohort of health staff and are key health team members in the delivery of our health services. They are critical to successful front line service delivery and are represented and organised by a number of professional bodies.
NURSES AS A CORE EMPLOYEE GROUP

This body of professionals are represented by a number of organisations and groups to represent their interests and regulate the profession at a national level. An Bord Altranais or the Nursing Board is the regulatory body for the nursing profession in Ireland. It was established by the Nurses Act in 1950 taking over the functions of the Central Midwives Board and the General Nursing Council. The Nurses Act in 1985 saw the functions of the Nurses Board altered and expanded and they continue working under these rules. Its main functions are to maintain a register of nurses, to provide for the education and training of both nurses and student nurses, to make enquires into alleged misconduct or fitness to practice of registered nurses and to give guidance to the profession and to manage the Nursing Careers Centre. The National Council for the Professional Development of Nursing and Midwifery was established in 1999. This body has responsibility for the continuing education and professional development of nurses and midwives. Its role is to monitor changes in practice and service. The Irish Nurses Organization was established in Dublin in 1919 and is currently the largest professional union for both Nurses and Midwives in Ireland with about 40,000 members. It is the fourth largest trade union in Ireland. 34% of all staff employed by the HSE are in the nursing category at the end of December 2008 as is set out in the Integrated Employee and Well-being strategy 2009-2014 (HSE:2009). In addition the most recent ratio published of practicing nurses in 2007 in Ireland is an average of 15.5 nurses per 1000 population which was significantly above the OECD average of 9.6.(OECD, 2009). Despite this Ireland has needed to rely on international recruitment of nursing staff to fulfil service requirements in recent years. Buchan (2009) illustrates that in 2006 a total of 82,576 nurses were registered with An Bord Altranais and of these 65,000 were on the active register. This left 17,000 on the inactive register or currently not in practice. Humphries et al. (2009) highlight specifically that migrant nurse’s play a significant role in the Irish Health System. This research illustrates from unpublished data from the Irish Nurses Board that 40% of all nurses newly registered in Ireland between 2000 and March 2009 were from outside of the European Union. This is a critical human resource planning issue but also calls for specific human resource management practices to ensure employee integration. Employee welfare policies are critical for all employees to ensure employee well-being within an organisation and policies which promote a good quality of working life. Without this their ability to carry out their role within the organisation will be severely undermined.

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND WELL-BEING

“Well-being refers to the psychological and physical health of the employee” (Edwards, 1992:252). A definition put forward by an Australian academic states “subjective well-being (SWB), known colloquially as happiness, is described as a positive state of mind that involves the whole life experience” (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2008:443). In a review of the Gallup Studies it is noted that people spend as much as a quarter or a third of their lives in work. It is therefore critical that we look specifically at how our workplaces can promote well-being. Working to Our Advantage- A National Workplace Strategy (2005) sets out that a good quality of working life has to define future workplaces. It lists a number of factors which influences this, the first of which is “health and well-being at work” (2005:32). Employees working in all environments are susceptible to stress and ill health but ensuring employee well-being within the health sector needs to be made a priority. It should go beyond basic implementation of health and safety measures. The way work is organised and the overall work system in place needs to be looked at in order for the impact of HRM policies to
be fully understood and evaluated (see appendix figure 3). “Work systems-choices about what work needs to be done, about who will do it, and about where and how they will do it – are fundamental to both operations management and human resource management in organisations” (Boxall & Purcell, 2008:140). This is especially true for the organisations involved in health care delivery. The type of work systems in place has a significant impact on employee well-being. How workers are deployed to carry out their role all impact on worker well-being (Boxall et al., 2007). Research by Barker (1993) is cited as stating “furthermore, the particular nature and strength of behavioural norms developed by highly cohesive self-managed work teams may impact negatively on both performance and the well-being of individual team members” (Boxall et al., 2007:201).

Therefore the way work facilitates employees to create a work/life balance and to be supported in a work environment that promotes teamwork can all impinge on worker well-being. The need to look at the link between HRM and employee well-being has been recognised in the literature by Bach (2005) who cites research by Guest (1999) and by Peccei (2004). The importance of HR policy in improving the quality of employees working life is being given increased attention. Korczynski cites research to show the link with improved customer satisfaction. “There are also a number of statements made regarding correlations between customer views of quality and ‘a climate for employee well-being’. Schneider and Bowen (1993) argue that their research supports the existence of a relationship between the two factors…… Benjamin Schneider and David Bowen have shown that both a climate for service and a climate for employee well-being are highly correlated with overall customer perceptions of service quality” (2002:32). In the management of health services this is a prime objective. Patients although not viewed as customers traditionally still need to be satisfied with the service that is provided to them. Boselie et al. (2003) looked at HRM in a number of settings one of which included hospitals using control versus commitment theory in combination with New Institutionalism. They conclude that one cannot view control and commitment as a single dimension and in reality must be viewed in two dimensions. They elaborate that “work systems aimed at strengthening commitment and empowerment need at the same time to be embedded in a control system” (Boselie et al., 2003:1424). They further acknowledge that not all employees seek more responsibility and autonomy and that sometimes senior management use employee participation and decentralization schemes as a way to control costs by reducing numbers in middle management.

The Integrated Employee and Well-being strategy 2009-2014 (HSE: 2009) is aligned to the HSE Corporate Plan 2008 and the HR Strategy. This is the first such plan developed for the HSE. This strategy signals the recognition that the well-being and welfare of employees is a central component in delivering quality health services. It aims to provide a framework for understanding and addressing employee well-being and welfare priorities so as to ensure that the HSE is service oriented and a better organisation to work within. It has been recognised that due to the recent period of high economic growth rates, services benefited from increased resources but that with the slowdown in the economy this is going to negatively impact on resource expansion. The HSE Integrated Employee Well-being Strategy explains that ‘this is having a severe impact on the human side of the organisation, not only in terms of employee numbers and resources available for service delivery, but also in terms of the effect on employee morale. It is also necessary to recognise the effect that limited resources, allied to an expectation that existing levels of service will be maintained will have on employee well-being and welfare’(2009:8). In the HSE survey which they carried out in preparation of the strategy document over half (52%) said that their performance had been affected by work overload. Approximately a third of respondents said that their performance had been affected
by emotional demands of service users (32%) and by conflict in the workplace (31%) (2009:20). Korczynski calls on research by Aiken and Sloane’s (1997) to illustrate “The basic pattern was that nurses who worked in less hierarchical settings where they had greater say on how to do the work suffered less burnout - even when compared with nurses not constantly caring for dying patients” (2002:145). This highlights that the way work is organised should be assessed at a managerial level so as to ensure employee well-being and also optimum service delivery. This needs to be placed high up on managerial agendas. How can HRM help in achieving employee well-being? How can this be measured by either employees or their managers? Baptiste (2008) views employee well-being from an HRM perspective that looks after the quality of working life of employees by promoting attitudes and behaviours such as commitment, job satisfaction and work-life balance. He explains that through the promotion of these, continuous development and increased performance can be achieved.

Within the Irish health services context it is agreed among the parties of the partnership agreement to improve the quality of working life of employees (Towards 2016:86). Looking at nurses within an Irish context we see that the majority of nurses (92%) are female (Buchan, 2009:8). In addition 58% of all HSE staff is aged between 18-45 years of age (HSE, 2009). This is of particular relevance to HR policy makers within an organisation as many of their employees may well be combining their work with caring responsibilities outside of the organisation. HR policies therefore need to be flexible and adaptable to not alone ensuring the organisation is operating effectively and efficiently but also ensuring that the needs of their employees are being met. This form of strategic human resource management needs to be practiced regardless of the economic climate in which it is operating. In fact by not practicing such policies, a further drain on resources due to increased rates of absenteeism amongst staff and decreased levels of efficiency will result. This will subsequently affect patient outcomes. Michie & West (2004) illustrate a number of studies which link increased job satisfaction and reduced stress of employees in the hospital sector with improved patient outcomes. Proper relevant human resource practices with coherent and sustainable policies have to work towards the goals of positive employee outcomes as well as positive organisational and societal outcomes. This view is illustrated by Beer et al. (1984) in what is referred to as the Map of HRM territory (see appendix figure 1). These authors further illustrate two themes emerging in models “the theme of the first model (A), which is still the prevailing one used in blue-collar and clerical work, is a direct focus on efficiency and control. In contrast, the theme of the emerging model B is to build human commitment by direct attention to the integration of individual needs and organizational requirements and to achieve control and efficiency as a second- order consequence” (Beer et al. 1984:168). They refer to this as achieving a ‘high commitment work system’. The dual aims of achieving efficiency and control while still promoting the needs of employees has to be addressed within many organisations but most especially in health services due to the type of work involved in this sector. Baptiste (2008) further points to the need for organisations to be responsive to their employee needs and that this has to form part of the organisations overall corporate social responsibility policy. He states “however, the attainment of the company’s mission cannot be materialized until the key stakeholder’s (employees’) well-being is promoted and maintained as a socially responsible behaviour by the organization” (2008:156). He draws on research by Purcell & Kinnie 2006 to make the point that employee responses to HRM practices are what lie at the heart of all HRM performance models because the link between employee reactions and their subsequent behaviour is what is critical.
To conclude then it is necessary to focus on employee responses to HRM practices in particular. With regard to health services personnel there is a need to analyse the influence of current HRM practices and evaluate outcomes such as the promotion of employee well-being or not as further research may show. The practices which promote such positive outcomes will also influence the achievement of other organisational goals. In a health context, an efficient, cost- effective health service, available to those who need it at any time. There is a need to evaluate variations in human resource practices across public and private sectors. The external and internal political and economic influences in both sectors should however be first considered, as these alone will impact on the potential HR has in achieving the promotion of employee well-being. Together research on these areas will further inform us of the extent of the role, the human resource function has in delivering health services.

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Irish Nurses Organisation:
http://www.ino.ie/

International Centre for Human Resources in Nursing:
http://www.ichrn.org/
APPENDIX

Fig 1: A Map of the HRM territory  (Source: Beer et al. 1984)

Stakeholder Interests
- Shareholders
- Management
- Employee groups
- Government
- Community
- Union

Situational Factors
- Work force
- Characteristics
- Business strategy and conditions
- Management
- Philosophy
- Labour market
- Unions
- Task technology
- Laws and societal values

HRM Policy Choices
- Employee
- Influence
- Human resource
- Flow
- Reward systems
- Work systems

HR Outcomes
- Commitment
- Competence
- Congruence
- Cost-effectiveness

Long-term Consequences
- Individual well-being
- Organizational Effectiveness
- Societal well-being
**Fig 2: The Organisation of a Work System (Source: After Beer et al. 1985)**

![Diagram of the Organisation of a Work System](image)

Operating environment

Strategy

Culture

- Technology
- Leadership
- Work Content
- People
- Management policies and practices
Ciara Fitzgerald, Doctoral Fellow, Centre for Innovation and Structural Change, National University of Ireland, Galway

ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a rapid and substantial growth in university-industry technology transfer. Much of the research to date on the university-industry relationship focuses on the economic outcomes of the commercialisation of research process. In a departure from this line of analysis, the paper concentrates on the Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs), the intermediary in the university industry technology transfer process, and specifically their role in the university industry technology transfer process, from a strategic perspective. The paper will present the extant literature on the TTOs and contribute to a new research agenda in an effort to further the understanding of the role of the TTO.

INTRODUCTION

In essence, the term technology transfer refers to the process whereby invention or intellectual property from academic research is licensed or conveyed through use rights to a for-profit entity and eventually commercialized (Friedman and Silberman, 2003). The impetus towards university industry technology transfer commercialisation emanated from the US, with the passage of the Bayh-Dole Act in 1980 (Owen-Smith and Powell, 2001). Consequently, many universities established Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) to monitor, evaluate, and commercialise research results which account for the profits from inventions (Phan and Siegal, 2006). In an effort to mobilize the technology transfer from university to industry in Ireland, TTOs were established in all universities, with support also available for Institutes of Technologies. A primary purpose of this paper is to review the extant literature on Technology Transfer Offices. The contribution is a synthesis of theory, key empirical support, and emergent debates. A second purpose is to contribute to a new agenda for future research which ties to the strategy field, centres on strategic planning, strategy process, and the praxis and practices, and is capable of offering a deeper understanding of the role of the TTO in the university industry technology transfer process. The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section two gives an overview of the Triple Helix as a context for the study. Section three reviews the existing body of literature on TTOs and highlights the calls to look at the management practices within TTOs. Section four presents the contribution to the research agenda and finally, section five concludes the paper by outlining the contributions to policy makers.

TRIPLE HELIX CONTEXT

Etzkowitz (2003) proposes the successful metaphor of a triple helix where government, universities and firms are the three elements of a dynamic process of interdependence and interaction. The establishment of linkages between industry and science are considered paramount to the realisation of an economy that emphasises the role of knowledge and technology in driving productivity and economic growth (Beesley, 2003). A new organisation
field broader than the traditional organisational field consisting of industry, government and research has emerged (Leydesdorff and Etzkowitz, 1996). This is best captured in the concept of a triple helix system, which recognises that the future location of research and technology transfer reside in a triple helix of university-industry-government relations (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 1999). This model acknowledges that overall innovation performance of the economy is not dependent on how specific institutions perform but rather, overall performance depends on how they interact with each other as elements of a collective system of knowledge creation and use (OECD, 1994). Critically the Triple Helix Model affords central importance to the role of the universities in a context where the focus has previously been exclusively at the firm level of analysis. In the past, industry was considered the sole exploiter and generator of ovations, this dynamic is changing however, with the increased activity of the ‘entrepreneurial inn university’ in the innovation process (Melara and Arcelus, 2005).

However, there is an alternative thesis circulating among some theorists regarding the transformation of universities and the merger of the worlds of academe and commerce (Bok, 2003). It is argued that universities have been created and governed so as to serve narrow self-interests, rather than the public interest, and that this raises significant issues for all those concerned with the activities of universities, including policy makers, academics, industry. Some have articulated apprehension regarding increased secrecy related to the dissemination of scientific results (Louis et al, 2001). However, Godin and Gingras (2000) refute Gibbons et al.’s (1994) claim that the university is receding, arguing instead that universities have been able to stay at the centre of the knowledge production system through exploiting collaboration mechanisms. Typically, these relationships stem from universities establishing a tie with industry toward technology transfer by means of consulting, research by contract, and patent license (to existing firms); and spin-offs (stimulating the creation of new firms) (Piekarski and Torkomian, 2005). As a result of these relationships, universities have to act as ambidextrous organizations (Birkinshaw and Gibson, 2004) that not only pursue research excellence but also promote academic research commercialization. Consequently, as Jain et al (2009) argue, academic entrepreneurs can utilise a hybrid dual identity whereby their involvement in the commercialisation process does not impact the dissemination of knowledge via publication. While, there is much debate on the role of universities, there is a paucity of empirical research, at a meso and micro level, exploring the third mission activities in universities. To emphasise this, the next section reviews the conventional economic view of TTOs and highlights recent contributions that call for future research endeavours of management processes of TTOs.

**TTOs CONVENTIONAL APPROACH**

TTOs have become a focus of interest for scholars since the advent of the Bayh-Dole Act in 1980. However, the majority of this research has been almost exclusively at an economic level of analysis. To date, there has been a growing literature deploying conventional economic models to identify the value of the TTO in the commercialization process and applying hard measures to assess TTO performance (Jensen and Thursby, 2001; Thursby and Kemp, 2002; Markman et al, 2005). There is also considerable literature depicting the key impediments to effective university technology transfer (Siegal, Waldman and Link, 2003; Agrawal, 2001; Cunningham and Harney, 2006; Debackere and Veugelers, 2005; Lockett, Wright and Franklin, 2003). Furthermore, the organisational structure of TTO ( Bercovitz et al , 2001; Siegal et al, 2003) and the age of the TTO ( Rogers et al, 2000; Mowery et al, 2002;
Friedman and Silberman, 2003; Siegal et al, 2003) have been highlighted as factors which impact the outcomes of the university industry technology transfer process. However, it is possible that existing economic models do not adequately capture the complexity of the technology transfer process from the perspective of the TTO and we need to consider alternative theoretical perspectives to help us view the technology transfer process in different ways. Indeed, there is a need to break the shackles of the current economic literature dominating technology transfer literature and bring a softer approach to the TTO literature arena. Missing from much of the current conversation on university industry technology transfer is a deeper understanding of the involvement of a key actor- the Technology Transfer Office. The literature has defined the role of the TTO as; an intermediary that mediates between invention creators such as universities and invention users such as firms (Kodama 2008); a facilitator of the exchange between two (or more) transacting parties (in our case, the university scientist and industry) through the provision of value-added services (Wright et al, 2008); a coordinator of the commercialisation activity (Rasmussen, 2008); a “boundary spanning” or “gate-keeping” role, serving as a bridge between the firms and scientists (Markman et al, 2008). In recent times theorists have come to appreciate the intricate, complex task required by the TTO as articulated by Pelish, 2004;

Technology transfer has historically been viewed as the exchange and processing of information among those who create a technology and future users of the technology. Recent research has focussed on expanding this view. As a result, the concept has evolved from the exchange of information to a multi-staged process where organisational and environmental factors play a key role. (Pelish 2004, p. 5)

Subsequently, the major challenge faced by the TTOs is being addressed by the literature. That is the problem of pacifying conflicting demands from their stakeholders in technology commercialisation; academic scientists, university administrators and firms/entrepreneurs (Siegal et al, 2003). The key agents involved in addressing these conflicts are technology transfer office professionals (Siegal et al, 2008). These professionals, led by the TTO director, perform their role as boundary spanners and act as a bridge between ‘customers’ (entrepreneurs/firms) and ‘suppliers’ (academics, scientists). However, these agents operate in different environments and have different norms, standards, and values. The conventional economic approach has yielded a certain understanding of the function of TTOs but by broadening out the research focus to meso and micro levels of analysis, this provides significant opportunities to enrich our understanding of the operations of TTOs (Lockett and Wright, 2005; Markman et al, 2008). Specifically, Lockett and Wright (2005) argue that a key omission from the literature concerns any systematic analysis of the role and capabilities of the TTO. Furthermore, Markman et al (2008) call for the decision-making process of TTOs to be explored. In addition, there is a paucity of research on the important issues regarding the formulation and implementation of university industry technology transfer strategies (Siegal et al, 1999). In summary, there is a clear gap in the current TTO literature that needs to be addressed in order to gain a better understanding of the role of TTOs. The next section of the paper presents a new line of analysis that can potentially contribute to our understanding of the role of TTOs.
A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

The previous sections elaborated on the existing TTO perspectives. Undoubtedly, the literature to date has focused on the economic outcomes of TTOs. In line with calls for focusing on TTO management and governance issues, a new research agenda around strategic process is necessary in addressing key research themes from theoretical and practice perspectives. There are several perspectives on strategy process that are helpful in understanding the issues faced by technology transfer offices namely strategic planning, strategy formulation, and praxis and practices. The strategy process perspective provides a theoretical platform to develop a deeper understanding of TTOs and the role, activities and influences of TTO directors at meso and micro levels of analysis. A summary of this proposed contribution to a new research agenda is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Research Agenda encompassing three facets of TTO strategy process

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Theoretical perspective</th>
<th>Key Authors</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy Planning</td>
<td>Ansoff, 1965</td>
<td>How do TTOs devise formal strategic plans?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chandler, 1962</td>
<td>What is the role of the TTO Directors and other key stakeholders in the crafting of formal strategic plans?</td>
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<td>Bower, 1970; 1974</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pettigrew, 1992, 1997</td>
<td>How does the role of influential outsiders influence the actions of the TTO during strategy implementation?</td>
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<td>Quinn, 1980</td>
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<tr>
<td>Praxis and Practices</td>
<td>Whittington, 1996</td>
<td>What do technology transfer offices really do and how do they create value for their diverse stakeholders?</td>
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<td>Hendry, 2000</td>
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<td>Jazabkowski and Whittington, 2008</td>
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Using the alternative templates to interpret the strategy process of TTOs will surface a myriad of facts and details in a theoretically rigorous fashion. The research agenda, which centres on strategic planning, strategy formulation, and the praxis and practices, is capable of offering a deeper understanding of the role of the TTO in the university industry technology transfer process. Focusing on these facets of the process would better equip researchers to tackle such important questions as; what do technology transfer offices really do and how do they create value for their diverse stakeholders?; Why and how does TTO action derive thinking and strategies and how does the role of influential outsiders influence the actions of the TTO during strategy implementation? And finally, how do TTOs devise formal strategic plans and what is the role of the TTO Directors and other key stakeholders in the crafting of formal strategic plans?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A primary purpose of this paper was to review the TTO literature by focusing on the conventional view of the TTOs. Our synthesis of the literature confirms that the majority of technology transfer office literature only depicts the economic outcome of their role in the university industry commercialisation process. In order to be able to understand and map the
value of the TTOs, there have been several calls in the literature to understand how TTOs perform their work. In responding to this call the second purpose of the paper is to suggest a future research agenda that could potentially deepen our understanding of how TTOs perform their work. Consequently, the outcome of the review advocates contributing to a new research agenda focused on strategy process which involves creating a more realistic view of the role of the TTO by exploring the strategic planning, strategy formulation, and the praxis and practices of the TTO. An additional purpose of this research agenda is to compliment the economic literature dominating TTO research by offering a meso and micro level analysis of TTOs. In summary, a process perspective of TTOs is needed to fully address the organisational and management issues as being called for by the theorists (Wright et al, 2008). This new research agenda not alone could contribute to the existing literature but also have implications for practitioners and policy makers. The opportunity is here for new, more insightful perspectives of TTOs and their strategy process.

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FROM DEFICIT TO ENGAGEMENT: SCIENCE POLICY IN IRELAND

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ABSTRACT

Irish policy is currently guided by the vision of becoming a competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy. The vision coincides with a shift in governmental policy away from overseas industrial investment, towards the creation of a scientifically literate population. The aim of this paper is to illustrate how the evolution of science policy has contributed to Ireland’s competitiveness and economic development. Science policy to date is based upon a knowledge deficit model. Ireland needs to absorb its policy process in deeper public engagement and collaboration, at both upstream and downstream levels to change the framework on which science policy is based. The paper proposes that a total market approach to policy co-ordination, can actively facilitate knowledge co-creation and partnerships at macro, meso and micro levels of society, thus, illustrating its appropriateness as the recommended way forward for policy makers.

INTRODUCTION

Science is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The term science is almost always associated with the physical and biological sciences. However, the area of science comprises of a much wider spectrum incorporating medicine, engineering, environmental science, technology and the social and behavioural sciences (Weigold, 2001). Evidently, science is all encompassing, and its contribution to theory, learning and society is undeniably significant. The contribution of science to society manifests itself in a multitude of forms at varying levels, such as individual, interpersonal, institutional, community and/or societal and public policy (McLeroy et al., 1988 and Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Individuals embrace science in their everyday lives despite their unconscious awareness of its existence. As individuals move beyond their intrapersonal lives into their social networks, science unveils itself in discrete and obvious forms through technology, transport and the surrounding environment. At an institutional level, science affects people in conscious and unconscious ways. Students study science at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. Additionally, careers in science and its associated fields are pursued by a plethora of individuals. The institutional level of science is confronted with the extreme difficulty of attracting and sustaining the publics’ interest in scientific activities and processes. Science also plays an important role in communities and society by raising ones awareness of pertinent scientific issues. The mediatisation of science by the mass media to the public (Schafer, 2009), has the ability to increase the publics understanding and knowledge of science by facilitating a dialogue portal between science and society. Science communication initiatives engage the scientific community with the public through an interactive process of learning to produce one or more of the following responses to science: awareness, enjoyment or other affective responses, interest, opinion and understanding of science (Burns, O’Connor and Stocklmayer, 2003). Science communication affords scientists the opportunity to engage in a process of interaction and dialogue with the science attentive, science interested and the
residual public (Pardo and Calvo, 2002), which increases the participants’ confidence in partaking in public discourse relating to science (Bell, 2008). Science inevitably surrounds, affects and influences people’s lives, which necessitate the use of regulatory policies, procedures and laws to protect society.

Science and policy are mutually enforcing and work hand in hand for the betterment of society. Consequently, science is a critical component to the advancement of our knowledge economy and it is imperative to continue investing in the educational and outreach systems, to promote and maintain a scientifically literate population. It is widely accepted that a scientifically literate population can increase a country’s competitiveness and contribute to a nation’s economic development. Over the last decade, Ireland has experienced a sensational economic transformation from a country immersed in the Great Depression, to an internationally enviable economy during the Celtic Tiger era of the 1990s. Ireland’s formidable performance attracted substantial investment, leading to saturation in the employment market, increased GDP and output and a reputable educational system. However, in recent years, no nation has gone unscathed from the current turmoil of the economic downturn. Ireland in particular has received widespread attention, given its substantial demise from its renowned reputation as an affluent and prosperous country. The exponential decline in economic growth and competitiveness, coupled with a growing number of complex social problems are creating challenging times for Irish policy makers. Nevertheless, Ireland can learn from its previous economic downturns in formulating policies for recovery. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how the evolution of science policy has contributed to Ireland’s competitiveness, educational funding and economic development. Additionally, the paper aims to portray how a total market approach between formal and informal science institutions in policy co-ordination, can contribute to a scientifically literate culture, thus, reinforcing the countries aspirations to become an innovative knowledge-based economy.

SCIENCE AND PUBLIC POLICY

Science and public policy have an inextricably interlinked relationship. It is imperative for scientists and policy makers to understand the duality of their roles in the policy co-ordination process, as “the relationship between science and policy, in the form of policy for science as well as science for policy” (Lujan and Todt, 2007, p. 97) directly aligns itself to the European Union’s two pronged approach to policy making, which focuses on innovation-oriented research and protection-oriented research (Davison, McCauley, Domegan and McClune, 2008). Ireland’s scientific progress to date has been guided by the gradual co-ordination of policies and strategies which “support the strategic goal set by the European Union in Lisbon of becoming by 2010 the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the World (European Commission, 2002, p.6). In order to understand how policies can be formulated in the future for Ireland, it is necessary to track how science policies have guided us from the past to the present.

SCIENCE POLICY IN IRELAND: 1950 TO 1970

The main body responsible for policy direction and funding in the twenty year period between the 1950s and 1970s was the Industrial Development Agency (IDA). The IDA was formally established in 1950 within the Department of Industry and Commerce. The IDA was
responsible for attracting lucrative industrial investments into Ireland and abroad. Ireland’s attractive location on the periphery of Europe captured the interest of American multinationals. Once the companies located in Ireland, the IDA recognised the need for science and engineering graduates, which precipitated the involvement of the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The HEA was established in 1969 as the “statutory planning and policy development body for higher education and research in Ireland” Available at: www.hea.ie. One of the prominent functions of the HEA is to recognise where the demand for higher education lies. The period between the 1960s and 1970s required experts in the engineering and technical fields. Therefore, the IDA collaborated with the HEA, increasing the number of engineering graduates to sustain current FDI investment in order to attract subsequent multinational relocations.

Ireland’s attractive position, financial incentives and dedication to higher education paved the way for industrial development. The organisations relocating to Ireland were predominantly associated with the technological sector, which stressed the importance for science, engineering and technical graduates. Consequently, “Ireland began to consider science policy during the 1970s through the work of the National Science Council and subsequently the National Board for Science and Technology” (SSTI, 2006, p. 21). The emergence of science policy in the 1970s was guided by the need to produce science graduates, shifting public policy strategies away from industrial investment towards value-added outcomes such a scientifically literate population. However, these premature attempts to devise strategic science policy were hindered by the lack of resources and funding available to the governing bodies, as well as a lack of public engagement in the policy formulation process.

SCIENCE POLICY IN IRELAND: 1980 TO 1990

Industrial policy in Ireland between the 1980s and the 1990s embraced two persistent policy challenges which were to “embed multinational companies in the economy and to develop an internationally competitive indigenous sector” (Hilliard and Green, 2004, p. 6). Consequently, Ireland’s strategic focus centred around three key areas: employment, foreign direct investment and exporting. The island’s incredible ability to entice overseas investments was fast becoming the central focus of Irish policy, as manufacturing was dominating global trade. Furthermore, the domain of exporting gained considerable support from political agreements and governments worldwide, as trade agreements such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) focused on the “reduction and elimination of tariffs and trade barriers for the movement of goods” (Clark and Rajaratnam, 1999, p. 298). Nevertheless, Ireland’s preoccupation and over reliance on multinational activity became severely scrutinized as the indigenous industry was significantly lagging behind in terms of competitiveness and performance.

It was apparent Ireland’s indigenous sector needed to be reformed and restructured. Irish policy incurred the challenge of promoting enterprise and leadership in the Irish-owned sector. In 1982, the Telesis Report concretized the need for Irish policy to shift its energy into promoting growth and development in the indigenous industry. The IDA became the focal point for criticism, as it was predominantly involved the attraction of foreign investments. The Telesis Report confounded Irish scepticisms and fears that multinationals were in a sense manipulating the island for their own advancement in terms of access to European markets and attractive tax incentives. Foreign owned enterprises were not contributing to the local economy in terms of building and strengthening relationships with local suppliers, the
advancement of employee skills or the opportunity to exploit research and development facilities in Ireland. One could also assume that Ireland is partially responsible for these shortcomings, as the government had failed to advance the indigenous industry to parallel with the activities and missions of multinationals. Nevertheless, the Telesis Report highlighted the need for a policy shift in Ireland, which transferred the government’s attention to developing the indigenous industry. The growth of the domestic market was dependent on a skilled workforce which extended the focus of public policy to include science, in order to guide strategies governing the increased participation in science education.

In 1987, the Irish government identified the need to establish its first movement towards science policy with the legislation of the Science and Technology Act. The importance of science within society became apparent through the assigned functions to the National Board for Science and Technology. Although science was not at the heart of Irish policy, it became an important division within the overall strategy for Irish policy, as science is embedded in the overall framework for economic, industrial and national development. Science has the capacity to change our lives for the betterment of society with improved standards of living; highly skilled workforces and a scientifically aware public. As a result, the government established two bodies in the late 1980s to assist in the formulation and adoption of science promotion and development. The two groups were the Office of Science and Technology and the Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council (STIAC).

In 1992, the Cullinton Report was published which was the follow up document to the Telesis Report. “Unlike its predecessor, the Cullinton Report did lead to important changes. One of these was the Industrial Development Act of 1993, which split the IDA into three separate through interlinked state agencies” (Ramirez, Scott and Golden, 2004, p. 18). Enterprise Ireland was established to govern and promote entrepreneurial activity within the Irish-owned industry. Forfas is the national board responsible for providing policy advice to the Irish government on issues relating to trade, enterprise, technology, science and innovation (European Commission, 2004). Lastly, the IDA retained its name and became solely responsible for multinational activity. Evidently, Ireland was altering its core industrial policy and expanding its focus into distinctive areas such as science.

Ireland’s evolving dedication and interest in science policy emulates from the European Union’s commitment, following the strategies proposed in the Delors White Paper and the Green Paper on Innovation (White Paper, 1996). Europe’s example caused Ireland to re-examine the role of science and technology in public policy. Accordingly, Ireland set about designing valuable strategies for the appreciation of science and technology in society. In 1995, STIAC published its report entitled ‘Making Knowledge Work for US’ which was the first review of science policy. The STIAC report was the influential pioneer to the White Paper in 1996.

The White Paper substantially influenced the adoption and exploration of science policies. Previously, policy was engrossed in economic and industrial development alongside multinational importation. The White Paper recognised the significance of science to society and the vital role it upholds in communities, workplaces and governments, fortifying the need for greater scientific awareness, as well as raising the general level of appreciation for science today. The White Paper wished to establish an open forum between the public and policy makers to discuss the importance of science in the economy and the formulation of science strategies and policies. Additionally, the White Paper proposed a governance structure for
science policy in Ireland, encouraging open dialogue, collaboration and relationships between science offices and agencies, at both departmental and sectoral levels. Five fundamental proposals were put forward by the report which includes:

- A supra-departmental STI budget.
- A Cabinet sub-committee on STI.
- A junior minister with responsibilities in the two key STI departments; the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise and Employment. (Hilliard and Green, 2004).
- Responsibility for the national co-ordination of STI policy will lie with the Office for Science and Technology (OST).
- A permanent STI Advisory Council will be established.

The ideas conceptualised by the White Paper were theoretically impressive and ambitious. However, the materialisation of all of these proposals into effective policies was unattainable at the time. The establishment of a monetary function wholly responsible for STI was never opened up to debate. “The proposal for a Cabinet Committee was accepted in principle but never put into practice” (Hilliard and Green, 2004, p. 19), which illustrates the complexity of policy implementation. Nevertheless, the Office of Science and Technology embraced their role tremendously in co-ordinating Ireland’s science promotion and development. In response to the White Paper, Ireland established the Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation (ICSTI) in 1997. Moreover, the government became extremely conscious of the critical importance of science to our economy and renamed the Department of Education to the Department of Education and Science in 1997. The Department of Enterprise and Employment also followed suit in 1997 and rebranded themselves as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The rebranded departments identified opportunities for research in 1999. The Department of Education and Science collaborated with the HEA in devising the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI) initiative. The initiative was directed at research in universities, which at the time was dismally inadequate. The programme was designed to achieve standards and reputations of excellence in academic research. The initiative also wanted to achieve inter-system linkages with other institutions. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment was simultaneously working on another initiative in conjunction with Forfas and the ICSTI called the Technology Foresight Initiative. This project realised Ireland’s ability to create world class research was significantly lower than that of its European and international counterparts. Unlike the PRTLI initiative, Technology Foresight aimed to develop collaborations outside of the university arena into industry. “Though the two initiatives were launched more or less simultaneously, they were developed independently from each other with no co-ordination between the two governments departments involves (Ramirez, Scott and Golden, 2004, p. 21).

The end of the 1990s experienced a dramatic shift in focus to science education and science policy as depicted in the timeline diagram in figure one. The area of science policy was “very much ignored and neglected” (White Paper, 1996, p. 6) until the 1980s, when a period of discovery relating to the importance of science education emerged, increasing the publics scientific knowledge and skills. Suddenly, as Ireland realised the value of its own indigenous industry, science began to play a major role in public policy decisions for the advancement of our economy. The decade of the 1990s entered a period of conceptualisation for science policy, witnessing an unprecedented level of governmental restructuring as well as the vital
diversification of public policies to now incorporate the sciences. The end of the 1990s embraced a rapid period of development for science policy as multiple organisations and regulatory bodies were established to govern the area of science. However, science policy documents were only addressing specific industry challenges. Policy co-ordination needs to move away from a centralised top-down model and pay much more attention to dialogue (Inzelt, 2008), to overcome the lack of public engagement in policy formulation.

**SCIENCE POLICY IN IRELAND: 2000 TO PRESENT**

Ireland at the beginning of the twenty-first century experienced strong consistent growth. The era of the Celtic Tiger emerged and became even more pronounced as Ireland’s remarkable economic success advanced exponentially. The National Development Plan 2000-2006 was committed to the Irish STI system. The plan recognised that in order to become a knowledge-based society, funds must be allocated to support this goal. “In recognition of the evolution of the knowledge based economy where intellect and innovation will determine competitive advantage and in recognition of the fact that it is the accumulation of knowledge capital that will facilitate the evolution of the knowledge based economy, the government is committed to significant investment in the area” (NDP, 2000, p. 128). Ireland’s aspirations in becoming a knowledge economy were closely aligned to the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy set out in 2000, to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world (European Commission, 2002). In order to achieve the complementary European and Irish visions, it was necessary for Ireland to invest in its future.

The Technology Foresight Initiative of 1999 secured funding from the NDP (2000-2006) to invest in world class research. Consequently, Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) was established in 2000 to administer the funds. “Through strategic investments in the people, ideas and partnerships essential to outstanding research in strategic areas, Science Foundation Ireland will help build in Ireland, research of globally recognised excellence and nationally significant economic importance.” Available at: www.sfi.ie. Ireland’s commitment to its vision also necessitated the promotion of engineering as well as science which led to the formation of STEPS to Engineering in 2000. STEPS to Engineering were formally grouped to promote engineering as a career. However, as the economy grew rapidly, so too did the responsibilities of STEPS. STEPS to Engineering are much more than a promotional campaign instigated by the Department of Education and Science. STEPS to Engineering must assume the role of creating an awareness of engineering in schools and society, whilst explicitly portraying it in a positive view. The organisation must also convey the importance of engineering to society and in society. Discover Science and Engineering is another example of the extension of science policy to include science promotion. Science promotion and science development have been greatly funded, supported and driven since 2000.

Ireland’s economic performance has become heavily dependent on science and engineering in recent years. “But at the very time this demand is increasing, there has been a sharp fall-off in interest in the sciences throughout the educational system” (Task Force on the Physical Sciences, 2002, p. 4). As a result, Ireland established the grouping of the Task Force on the Physical Sciences in 2000, to review the complexities of the educational system and establish the reasoning behind the lack of interest in science. The HEA established two new funding schemes in 2000 and 2001; the Irish Research Council for Humanities and the Social Science (IRCHSS) and the Irish Council for Science, Engineering and Technology (IRCSET). Each of the systems have become fully integrated into the third level sector “establishing for the
first time a well funded and peer reviewed university system” (Ramirez, Scott and Golden, 2004, p. 21).

In 2002, the Centre for the Advancement of Learning of Maths, Science and Technology (CALMAST) was established in Ireland as the first of its kind which promotes and researches the learning of the three aforementioned subjects. CALMAST involves regional and national stakeholders from education and industry to actively promote maths, science and technology to the public, school children and teachers. “The aspiration of CALMAST is to reposition science in modern Irish culture” Available at: www.irishscientist.ie [Accessed 05/08/2009]. In addition to CALMAST’s commitment to science education, the Task Force on the Physical Sciences published their report in 2002, outlining a six-part action strategy to achieve a world class system in science education. The six recommended areas for action were:

1. Planning and Resources for School Science
2. Equity of Access
3. Teaching and Learning of Science
4. School Curriculum and Assessment
5. Promotion of Science and Careers
6. Science Education at Third Level

The Task Force recognised the momentous effort and funding that would be required to implement the six strategies, but a world class knowledge economy commands extensive resources. In 2003, Discover Science and Engineering (DSE) were formed as a result of the Task Force Report, to stimulate interest in science and its related fields among students and the general public. “Overall DSE objectives are to increase the numbers of students studying the physical sciences, promote a positive attitude to careers in science and foster a greater understanding of science and its value to Irish society” Available at: www.discover-science.ie [Accessed 20/07/2009].

The momentum of Ireland’s governmental dedication to science in public policy since 2000 was accelerating, in terms of the funding, drive and support for science development, science research, science communication and science promotion. In 2004, two fundamental developments occurred as a result of a report produced to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment from the ICSTI Commission. A cabinet committee for science, technology and innovation was formed, and the Office of the Chief Scientific Advisor was founded. The Commission firmly believed that the co-ordination of science policy between governmental departments exhibited dismal coherence prior to 2004. It is interesting to witness the dramatic turnaround in policy, given the developments implemented in 2004 were proposed in the White Paper in 1996. Nevertheless, Ireland’s buoyant economy was dependent on the integration of science with other public policies in order to achieve an innovative knowledge society. In 2005, the ICSTI was replaced by the Advisory Science Council, which was established as a stakeholders’ advisory forum (European Commission, 2004).

Ireland’s solid commitment to an innovative knowledge economy is presently governed by two policies; the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (SSTI) 2006-2013 and the National Development Plan 2007-2013. The SSTI policy is committed to “the shared vision of placing Ireland firmly on the global map in terms of excellence of our research and its application for the benefit of society” (SSTI, 2006, p.3). In order to realise its vision, the SSTI wishes to increase participation in the sciences at all levels of education and advance the level of research conducted, to produce research of global academic excellence.
Additionally, the strategy is committed to increasing the public’s knowledge and awareness of science for the betterment of society. However, SSTI is concerned about all areas of public policy not just science, as each area including health, agriculture, the environment and marine and natural resources contribute to making Ireland more competitive and sustainable on a global scale (SSTI, 2006).

In 2007, the Relevance of Science Education (ROSE) report was published. The publication exclusively investigates students’ perceptions of science in their school curriculum and their everyday lives. The ROSE report was conducted across thirty-seven countries and interestingly, the majority of these countries are experiencing significant decline in science participation, despite the varying methods of teaching and assessment. “However, declining numbers of students do not necessarily indicate a declining interest in science” (Rose Report, 2007, p.11), which compels governments to analyse the educational system as a whole rather than scrutinizing each component individually. The advancement of Irish policy has become even more relevant given the turbulent economic crisis it now confronts. Policy co-ordination and coherence is dependent on the fundamental understanding of the formulation of past and present policies in order to enhance future policies governing science. Ireland’s exceptional policy progress over the last sixty years is illustrated in the timeline diagram on the next page. The 1990s exhibited a significant development point for science policy as the focus subsided from overseas industrial investment to the development of a science based indigenous industry. As Ireland progressed into the twenty-first century, so too did science policy, as the focus moved into science promotion and communication alongside the development of science research. However, science policy documents do not embrace public engagement or deliberation which substantiates the lack of trust between science and society. Science is continually evolving as society progresses towards a knowledge economy and simultaneously, policies must adapt a total market approach to govern this innovative society.
### Figure 1  The Historical Development of Ireland’s Science Policy System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structures Influential Reports and Strategies for Science Policy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Governing Science</td>
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<td>1950 IDA</td>
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<td>1969 HEA</td>
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| 1970 National Science Council  
  National Board for Science and Technology                      |
| 1979                                                          |
| 1987 Office of Science and Technology  
  STIAC                                                           |
| 1987 STAC                                                     |
| 1993 DEE                                                      |
| 1994 Enterprise Ireland  
  Forfas                                                           |
| 1994 STIAC Report                                             |
| 1995 White Paper Report                                       |
| 1997 DES                                                      |
| 1997 DETE                                                     |
| 1997 National Competitiveness Council                         |
| 1997 ICSTI                                                    |
| 1998 Education Act                                            |
| 1999 PRTLI Initiative                                         |
| 1999 Technology Foresight Initiative                         |
| 2000 SFI                                                      |
| 2000 STEPS to Engineering                                    |
| 2000 IRCSET                                                   |
| 2000 Taskforce on the Physical Sciences                       |
| 2001 IRCHSS                                                   |
| 2001 Science & Society Action Plan                           |
| 2002 CALMAST                                                  |
| 2002 Taskforce on the Physical Sciences                       |
| 2003 DSE                                                     |
| 2004 Office of the Chief Scientific Advisor                  |
| 2004 Cabinet Committee on S, T & I                           |
| 2005 Advisory Science Council                                 |
| 2006 SSTI (2006-2013)                                         |
| 2007 ROSE Report                                              |
| 2007 NDP (2007-2013)                                          |
THE CHALLENGES FOR SCIENCE POLICY FORMULATION IN THE FUTURE

The governance of science policy must tackle two continuous challenges in a time of economic demise; policy co-ordination and policy implementation. Policy making processes challenge old conventional perspectives, striving for continual improvement over the long term for transformational and behavioural changes at individual, institutional and societal levels. In terms of science policy, changing people’s behaviours and attitudes towards science is a complex and time consuming process, which requires the involvement of science outreach and education providers. There is a belief in most societies that the general public are not knowledgeable about science. In fact, the public are said to have a knowledge deficit pertaining to science. The notion of a deficit model among the general public is a recurring theme among notable authors in the science communication literature such as Henriksen and Froyland (2000); Burns, O’Connor and Stocklmayer (2003); Sturgis and Allum (2004); Wilsdon and Willis (2004); Bauer, Allum and Miller (2007); Cullen, Sullivan and Junge (2007); Kim (2007) and Allum, Sturgis, Tabourazi and Brunton-Smith (2008). The model assumes people are resistant to learn about science because of their own fears and mistrust (Allum, Sturgis, Tabourazi and Brunton-Smith, 2008). Science policy to date in Ireland is based upon this model where policy documents only address specific industry challenges and do not incorporate public engagement. However, society and science need to move beyond “the deficits in the scientific literacy of the lay public toward a dialogue model” (Schafer, 2008, p. 476), assisting in the co-ordination of science policy through a participatory democracy (Hisschemoller and Midden, 1999). There are many formal and informal bodies involved in policy formulation at macro, meso and micro levels of society as depicted in the figure on the next page. However, there is an urgent need for collaboration and partnerships throughout the policy process to change the framework on which science policy is based, from a knowledge and skills deficit to a behavioural change model.
Figure 2  A Total Market Approach to Science Policy in Ireland

Adapted from Hilliard and Green (2004)
The process of policy making currently adapts a top-down approach where policies are devised by formal bodies at the macro level and implemented downstream. However, effective engagement between upstream and downstream partners could prove more productive, as it involves participation from every level in society, which in turn leads to greater support for science and technology, concretising the need for a public engagement approach to science policy. Therefore, policy co-ordination needs to adopt a total market approach of inter-system co-operation within and between formal and informal institutions.

In the past, support for science policies has been low, due to the lack of vertical and horizontal coherence between the macro, meso and micro levels of society. Inevitably, upstream partners such as the government bodies, advisory boards and policy makers have dictated the level of co-operation required from informal institutions in the policy process, which has been met with hostility and mistrust from the public. Governments need to move beyond a didactic approach of ‘communicating to’ the public, to a relational and participatory approach of ‘communicating with’ the public on scientific issues and policies. A total market approach achieves a synergy between all the policy co-ordinators which allows for greater debate by integrating positive and sceptical views on science, which will ultimately strengthen the support for future science policies. At the macro-environmental level, formal governmental institutions align their targets with European policies. At the meso-level, educational and outreach providers want to increase the level of awareness and participation in science, as well as contributing to a scientifically literate society. Industries also aim for higher scientific ability as it assists in the development of the indigenous industry. Finally, at the micro-level, the public want to engage in scientific debate as science surrounds our daily lives in obvious and surreptitious ways.

Science policy needs to integrate the needs of the total market, which compels greater communication, interaction and collaboration between macro, meso and micro levels of society. Downstream and upstream communications have the ability to reduce conflict, ensuring greater coherence horizontally and vertically throughout the system. The co-ordination of science policy is a value co-creation process that works up, down and mid-stream throughout an entire holistic system of active relationships (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). A total market approach creates the opportunity for effective relationships, partnerships and collaborations between private and state actors in a networked structure. However, upstream engagement must go beyond dialogue and participation, it cannot just inform decisions – it must shape them (Wilsdon and Willis, 2004).

Policy co-ordination processes are extremely complex and often the real disconnect is between policy and implementation. Science is a broad and pervasive area which necessitates strong governmental guidance and direction. However, the Irish system is not geared towards delivering and implementing the policy outcomes initiated by strategies. The resources and infrastructures needed to implement science policies are often too expensive and opportunistic. Current science policies need to take into account the economic developments post the Celtic Tiger era. Ireland is presently facing extreme hardship and a crisis of trust between the government and its general public. Additionally, the lack of fiscal funds available to support scientific progress will substantially hinder the implementation of science policies in the immediate future. Nevertheless, science has, is and will always be an important component of Irish public policy. Therefore, it is critical for the Irish society to actively participate in the policy co-ordination process, contributing to Ireland’s recovery and the smooth implementation of future science policies in order to achieve the national and European goals of becoming an innovative knowledge economy.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Irish policy has evolved dramatically since the 1960s. Science has become an integral component towards the advancement of a knowledge economy. The key challenge facing future policies governing science is the lack of a total market approach to co-ordinating strategies. Ireland needs to absorb its policy process in deeper engagement and collaboration between the multiple stakeholders at upstream and downstream levels. A networked policy approach has the ability to co-ordinate effective and strategic long term policies, ensuring Ireland’s continued success in scientific research and development. Additionally, science is implicitly vital to the economic reform process, which further compounds the urgent adoption of an innovative networked policy approach to the co-ordination and implementation of science policies now and in the future.

REFERENCES


ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE CHALLENGE FOR POLICY MAKERS

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ABSTRACT

A more active role for the Higher Education Sector within the wider context of the National Innovation System is increasingly heralded within the literature as a critical component of the drive toward internationally recognised innovative excellence and, consequently, of regional and national economic growth. As Gassol (2007) suggests, this transformation of the traditional role of higher education institutions has led to an increasing demand on the academy to generate ‘useful’ information and to ‘transfer’ it to the wider economy. Central to this process of technology transfer is the academic entrepreneur. Academic entrepreneurs are expected not only to discover and develop promising research opportunities, but additionally to develop and commercialise their research for the creation of innovative goods and services (Patzelt and Shephard 2009). Given the significance attached to the role of the academic entrepreneur as a driver of economic development then, it is somewhat surprising that there has been at best limited exploration of the institutional factors which impact upon the strategic decision making process of principal investigators as the leaders of research teams. This paper articulates the case for such an exploration, and sets out a theoretical framework for examining the impact of the institutional context on the propensity of academics to engage in the commercialisation of research. While external forces have certainly instigated change in perceptions of the role of higher education institutions, what remains to be explained is what impacts upon the choices actors within the institutions make with respect to their participation in this process. Additionally the author addresses the emergence of the entrepreneurial university and the third mission, with a view to illustrating the nature and rationale of the phenomenon itself. The role of the university within the knowledge economy is then addressed, and consequently the significance of academic entrepreneurship within this role highlighted, conceptualising on a strategic level the desired social and economic outcomes as articulated at the macro level. The paper will then discuss the suitability of the Irish context for the proposed investigation, before finally concluding with references to potential implications for both theory and practice.

INTRODUCTION

The recent upheaval in the global economy has led policy makers to reassert the essential role of the National Innovation System in both bringing about a national economic recovery and generating the conditions for sustained economic progress into the near future and beyond. It is difficult to overstate the centrality of Higher Education Institutions and consequently of the research community within this vision. Over the last thirty years, the role of the academy within the wider context of national economies has come under ever increasing levels of scrutiny, to the extent that the university itself has been drastically re-conceptualised as a major engine for economic growth and innovation within advanced, knowledge intensive economies. This transformation of the traditional role of higher education institutions has led to an increasing demand on the academy to generate ‘useful’ information and to ‘transfer’ it to the wider economy. As knowledge is increasingly recognised as a primary source of
economic advantage, the role of the university both as a producer of knowledge and as an agent of knowledge transfer within society has become increasingly critical within projections of preferred economic states.

Central to this process is the concept of academic entrepreneurship and, as such, academic researchers are confronted with an entirely new role which represents a clear and significant departure from the traditional academic behavioural set. In their engagement with this entrepreneurial process, researchers are expected not only to discover and develop promising research opportunities, but additionally to strategically develop and commercialise their research for the creation of innovative goods and services.

In this paper the author articulates the necessity of macro level initiatives centred on the promotion of research commercialisation being heavily informed by an in-depth understanding of the institutional factors which shape the behaviour of researchers at a micro level. It is proposed that what is particularly significant is the recognition at policy level that the macro level emphasis on the importance of research commercialisation as a central component of wider economic success, does not in itself change the long standing institutional pressures which shape the researcher’s likelihood to engage in this process. If the desired organisational and economic outputs are to be achieved, the incorporation of these considerations into the policy making process is surely a critical factor. This paper, therefore, articulates a theoretical position and thereby establishes a research agenda for the exploration of the institutional factors which impact upon the strategic behaviour of principal investigators as the leaders of research teams.

The paper will initially present an overview of the emergence of the entrepreneurial university, thereby illustrating the nature and rationale of the phenomenon itself. The role of the university within the knowledge economy will then be addressed, and consequently the significance of academic entrepreneurship within this role highlighted, conceptualising on a strategic level the desired social and economic outcomes as articulated at the macro level. Within this strategic framework then, the proposed study may be characterised as an investigation into the implementation of a strategic vision at an institutional and individual level, thereby focusing the study on the critical factors upon which strategic behaviour at this micro level is determined. The paper will then discuss the suitability of the Irish context for the proposed investigation, before finally concluding with references to potential implications for both theory and practice.

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY

While certainly not the genesis, the Bayh/Dole Act represents a major point in the diffusion of the concept of research commercialisation as a significant activity for HEIs (Berman 2008). In the aftermath of this act, the utilisation of HEIs for industrial development and the stimulation of entrepreneurial activity received ever greater levels of both academic and political interest in the wider global economy (Rosell and Agrawal 2009). The consequent proliferation of both scholarly activity and political initiatives has led to a perhaps premature but nevertheless understandable proclamation of a revolution within higher education, as academics and politicians alike seek to acclaim the emergence of an entirely new economic paradigm. This new paradigm is neatly encapsulated within the triple helix model, which conceptualises economic performance and development as dependent upon the interactions within the economy of three institutional domains; namely government, industry, and the
university (Cunningham and Harney 2006). As knowledge is increasingly envisioned as a primary source of economic advantage, the role of the university both as a producer of knowledge and as an agent of knowledge transfer within society has become increasingly critical within projections of desired economic states.

The recognition of this critical role then has seen the development of a ‘third mission’ for the HEI, namely the commercialisation of academic research for the purpose of economic development, complementing the existing traditional ‘missions’ of teaching and the conducting of basic scientific research. It should be noted here that as much as the third mission has been embraced in some quarters, it remains a source of considerable debate in others. There is considerable scepticism with respect to the scope for faculty to engage in commercial activity while simultaneously retaining a due regard for traditional scientific values (Callinicos 2006), and these concerns account for significant variance in the perception of research commercialisation within academia itself. Additionally, and fundamentally, the question of public good must dominate any justification of a re-positioning of the role of academic organisations in society, as the emergence of the third mission changes on a fundamental level the manner in which university research is expected to contribute to society (Glenna et al. 2007). Such considerations are of particular importance if the institutional context from which the academic entrepreneur is to be adequately understood.

ROLE OF HEIs IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

As Brennan et al. (2007) highlight, the re-conceptualisation of the role of academic institutions has seen them characterised as not only highly important for national economies but integral elements of such economies. Within this new capacity as creators of the knowledge that drives economic success and product innovation, the university adapts multiple roles, in terms of both the cultivation of the essential conditions for success (innovation, entrepreneurship, and management capabilities) and the creation and maintenance of the vital sources of competitive advantage (Cunningham and Harney 2006).

This characterisation reflects the new institutional perspective portrayed in Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff’s (1999) triple-helix framework. The triple-helix of university-industry-government relations aims to transcend previous models of institutional relationships, and as such account for “a new configuration of institutional forces emerging within innovation systems” (Etzkowitz et al. 2000, p. 314). As Cunningham and Harney (2006) note, the emergence of the triple-helix model indicated a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of inter-institutional innovative processes, a shift which in itself arose as a consequence of four primary factors:

- internal transformation of each of the helices, and in particular the re-definition and expansion of traditional academic tasks,
- growing impact of one helix upon the other – the Bayh/Dole Act for example was a government policy radically changing the framework for university activity by granting proprietary rights of federally funded research to universities,
- new tri-lateral networks and organisations arising out of interactions between the three helices, and
- recursive effects, as the helices further develop their capacities within existing networks they develop the capacity to create new network and organisational forms.
Within this framework then, the innovative process comes to be viewed in a holistic and systematic sense within which the university plays a critical role. As Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1997) assert, “The development of academic research capacities carries within itself the seeds of future economic and social development in the form of human capital, tacit knowledge and intellectual property”, and as such, the challenge of channelling the flow of knowledge in society falls to the university itself. At the core of the literature’s efforts to explain how the university may meet this challenge, lies the concept of academic entrepreneurship, which we must now address in more detail.

THE NATURE OF ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP

With the increased emphasis on knowledge as the key element of sustainable economic competitiveness, the entrepreneurial potential of academia in turn increasingly found itself at the core of important debates on the subject of economic development. Academia was now confronted with both a supply and demand fuelled push towards an area of activity quite novel to the traditional, Mertonian understanding of the role of the academic. From their review of the literature, Klofsten and Jones-Evans (2000) identify and classify this ‘entrepreneurial’ activity on the part of academia under eight specific headings, each of which falls outside the normally accepted duties of academics:

- **Large scale science projects** (obtaining large externally funded research projects)
- **Contracted Research** (Specific research projects within the university system for external organisations)
- **Consulting** (the sale of personal scientific or technological expertise to solve a specific problem)
- **Patenting/licensing** (exploitation of patents of licences arising from research by industry)
- **Spin off firms** (creation of a new firm or organisation to exploit the results of university research)
- **External teaching** (providing courses for non-university personnel and external organisations)
- **Sales** (selling of products developed within the university)
- **Testing** (providing of testing and calibration facilities to non-university individuals and external organisations)

Such activity clearly represents a departure from traditional notions of academic behaviour, and as Garrett-Jones et al. (2005) note, reflects far-reaching changes in the relationship between science, industry, and society. The increased susceptibility of academic activity to both market forces and social expectations, in turn serves to accentuate the cultural contrast between the academic environment and the industrial one. As Cunningham and Harney (2006) demonstrate, these cultural differences are many and they are extensive. Similarly Siegel et al. (2003) asserts that there is an essential conflict in the primary motivations of the university scientist on the one hand, and the firm or entrepreneur on the other. Additionally, these motivations are continually reinforced by the demands of the relative institutional environments. While there appears to be growing consensus then, as to the nature of both entrepreneurial academic activity itself and the potential conflict which it entails, there is in stark contrast, as Bercovitz and Feldman (2008) illustrate, a growing gap in the literature with respect to the institutional factors that differentiate the strategic behaviour of academics and in particular impact upon their inclination to become academic entrepreneurs. This is borne
out by the dramatic variance in entrepreneurial performance across academic institutions (D’este et al. 2007).

THE INSTITUTION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAVIOUR IN THE ACADEMY

Wright et al. (2009) assert that the institutional characteristics of universities are likely to have a considerable impact on the development of commercialisation processes, and consequently, are likely to play a substantial role in shaping the emergence of any behaviour which can be considered ‘entrepreneurial’ in the non-traditional sense. They draw their assertions from what Peters and Pierre (1998) recognise as the normative or sociological perspective of institutional theory. This perspective argues for the power of normative values and standards in the shaping of individual behaviour in an institutional context. As Peters and Pierre (1998, p. 568) propose, behaviour in institutions can be greatly illuminated by the employment of a “logic of appropriateness” as opposed to a logic of consequentiality. This has significant implications for our appreciation of the context from which commercialisation behavioural processes are expected to emerge in the institutional context of the academy. As Dillard et al. (2004) suggest, the motivation of legitimacy seeking behaviours are in turn influenced by the socially constructed norms imposed by the institutional context, leading to the conclusion that there is a relationship between the extent to which a behaviour is considered legitimate within these social constructions, and the extent to which there exists a propensity for the engagement with such activities on the part of the institutional member.

However, this theoretical perspective is incomplete without reference to another valuable approach within the wider field of institutional theory. The historical approach to institutionalism regards the institution as having evolved a core and dominant set of collective values which over time come to shape the organisation as deeply embedded value systems (Peters and Pierre 1998). Within this perspective the implementation or in the wider sense the emergence of new practices, norms, and values is a process characterised by conflict and often by political struggle. As Pant and Lachman contend, the powerful social control of evolved value systems may serve to legitimise, or render proscribed the ‘new’ behavioural processes implicit in strategic initiatives.

This raises some interesting questions in the context of the encouragement of commercialisation activity in the academic environment. It is generally accepted that the emergence of the entrepreneurial university in the United States was characterised by a gradual evolution from the teaching institution to the contemporary research facility. In contrast, European initiatives to promote the commercialisation of research have been top down in nature and as such represent an imposition of novel behavioural norms on a pre-existing institutional context. It is similarly generally accepted that this contrast is reflected in a clear disparity between the institutional structures of American universities and those of their European counterparts.

As we have argued, this disparity is indicative of a wider problem facing the re-conceptualisation of the HEI as an engine for growth and consequently, of the potential for the successful adaptation of the ‘third mission’ by academic institutions.
AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON A STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

It is within this context then that a greater understanding is required of the institutional framework within which academic entrepreneurship itself takes place (Berman 2008). Academic entrepreneurship, by definition, represents a unique and quite separate economic activity from entrepreneurship as it is traditionally understood. As such it seems probable that as a unique and separate phenomenon it is subject to a unique and separate variable set. While there is much focus on unique approaches to narrower technical factors such as intellectual property regimes, or licensing agreements, there is an incomplete understanding of the more fundamental impact of the unique environment which academia represents, on the strategic behaviour of the academic with respect to their commercialisation activities.

This must be considered on two important fronts; the need for a greater understanding and consequently cultivation of both an institutional environment which facilitates and encourages engagement with the research commercialisation process, and additionally the understanding and cultivation of an institutional environment which maximises the success potential of commercialisation activities (Hanson 2001). It would therefore follow, that the likelihood of the economic benefits of research commercialisation accruing as a result of strategic initiatives, will depend greatly on the extent to which such initiatives are informed by a comprehensive understanding of the micro level variables which impact upon such activity.

Numerous examples of potential barriers to, and stimulants of academic entrepreneurship are identified within the literature, and these provide a useful starting point for focusing the investigation. The perceived barriers exist at an institutional, and consequently at an individual and operational level, ranging from basic constraints on resources and expertise, to the ‘publish or perish’ culture inherent in academia. As alluded to earlier, the failure to align macro level objectives and micro level reality establishes a contradictory goal set for the individual researcher, wherein a goal established at, and driven from the macro level is in reality potentially detrimental to the individual’s personal outcomes. Similarly, the incorporation of appropriate incentives on a personal and career level into strategic initiatives is central to the cultivation of an institutional environment which optimises the return on commercialisation activities. An institutional perspective provides us with the opportunity to demonstrate how academics interpretation of novel modes of behaviour is shaped by structural, societal, and cultural pressures which is critical to an overall understanding of their engagement with the commercialisation process (Oliver 1991).

As Pant and Lachman (1998) suggest, the extent to which strategies conflict with value based behavioural patterns at this micro level impacts significantly on their success probabilities. Additionally, Boardman et al. (2009) highlight the need for theory driven investigation of the attributes and variables at this individual level which act as predictors for entrepreneurial behaviour. Similarly Gassol (2007) argues that it is far from sufficient to articulate an organisational strategic vision in the expectation that this alone will ensure it’s implementation, and consequently it is of the utmost importance that the internal pressures of the university as an institution are to be understood and managed if the desired economic and organisational outcomes are to be achieved.
IRELAND AS A RESEARCH CONTEXT

The Irish context provides an excellent example for the investigation outlined within this paper. Irish governance has placed a culture of innovation and research commercialisation at the heart of projections of economic progress, something re-iterated in the recent Smart Economy government document:

A key feature of the Smart Economy is building the innovation or ‘ideas’ component of the economy through investment in human capital and its ability and effectiveness in translating ideas into valuable processes, products and services. It has the objective of harnessing the ingenuity and creativity of people to drive research, innovation and commercialisation. It has, at its core, the creation of an exemplary research, innovation and commercialisation ecosystem so as to create ‘The Innovation Island’.

(Building Ireland’s Smart Economy: A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal 2008)

As such, there has been significant engagement with the concept of the third mission on a policy level. The Strategy for Science, Technology, and Innovation (2006) emphasises such themes as building world class research, commercialising ideas and knowledge, research and development for enterprise, innovation and growth, science education and society, and international research and development collaboration. As a consequence of a planned 8.2 billion euro total expenditure by 2013, the following objective is declared:

‘Ireland by 2013 will be internationally renowned for the excellence of it’s research and will be to the forefront in generating and using new knowledge for economic and social progress within an innovation driven culture’

(Strategy for Science, Technology, and Innovation 2006)

Given the centrality of research commercialisation in the pursuit of this objective, the Irish context represents a highly fertile opportunity to pursue in turn the theoretical investigation proposed within this paper.

CONCLUSION

While the emergence of the entrepreneurial university as a phenomenon has allowed us to understand the rationale underlying macro level initiatives aimed at the promotion of research commercialisation, it has also allowed us to contrast the behavioural expectations of the academic entrepreneur with those of the traditional university scientist. As such, we have seen that the environment in which academic entrepreneurship is to arise is an essentially distinct institutional context, and is therefore subject to unique institutional factors. Understanding these institutional factors, it is argued, is a critical component in both the successful implementation of the broader strategic vision of excellence in research commercialisation, and additionally in the conceptualisation of the strategic behaviour and decision making of principal investigators at the institutional level. This understanding may serve to bridge a significant gap within the literature, as well as inform the formulation and implementation of relevant strategic initiatives. Finally, the suitability of the Irish context for the investigation outlined has been demonstrated. The centrality of research commercialisation within the Irish policy framework renders this particular context highly suitable for the proposed study.
The present economic crisis presents policy makers with an array of challenges as grave and as complex as have confronted any generation of policy makers in the history of the Irish state. On a fundamental level, the nature of our economy and the manner in which we perceive and foresee both our societal and economic development is under as intense a level of scrutiny as can be imagined in a modern society. As such it is a time of uncertainty. It is a time of uncertainty, but it is also a time of opportunity. There have been few occasions in the history of the state which have provided the sufficient level of both pressure and desire which is required if a seriously considered vision for the future of the state is to be drafted. We have unquestionably arrived at such an occasion.

REFERENCES


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ABSTRACT

The second key challenge noted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2004) eBusiness Strategy report is the building of confidence among Irish SME’s and Micro-enterprises in the development of online trading. Its associated April 2006 progress report (Department of Enterprise 2006) further stressed the necessity of Irish business to be at the forefront of eCommerce. While Irish online shopping is performing well in comparison to OECD countries (Department of Enterprise 2004) and European Union members (CSO 2008), there is an absence of information codifying optimal methods for displaying product information in online trading. This research addresses the gap in knowledge regarding optimal information presentation formats in online trading scenarios.

Within the context of supporting the consumer decision making process lies a body of knowledge discussing decision strategies which may be utilised, the formation of consumer consideration sets and research on how best to present product data to a consumer. Somewhat lacking is research into the applicability of these domains to electronic commerce systems despite the value they hold for practitioners. The research here proposes an investigation into the product data presentation structures which exist in many free, open source webstore software systems operating for many thousands of businesses. This research identifies the shortcomings of online consumer decision supporting systems in light of the functionality and attributes expected of the decision supporting aspects of these e-commerce systems, strategies which are appropriate to support the consumer purchasing environment and methods which may be suitable to deliver some of the benefits of decision support to the online consumer. Specific management and policy implications are presented.

Keywords: ecommerce, decision systems, data visualisation, decision strategies.

INTRODUCTION

There is a long tradition of studying and defining the consumer decision making process and the theory surrounding those cognitive processes and steps involved is well-established (1990; Roberts and Lattin 1991; Klenosky and Perkins 1992; Kardes, Kalyanaram et al. 1993; Andrews and Srinivasan 1995; Roberts and Lattin 1997; Bearden, Hardesty et al. 2001). Information systems research, through the label of decision support systems [DSS] has sought to clarify and support, decision making processes across a wide variety of decision situations (Desanctis and Galleu 1987; Alavi and Joachimsthaler 1992; Crossland, Wynne et al. 1995; Barr and Sharda 1997; Chen and Lee 2002; Power 2007), including not least the consumer decision making process (Guttman, Moukas et al. 1998; Häubl and Trifts 2000; van der Heijden, Verhagen et al. 2003; van der Heijden and Verhagen 2004; van der Heijden 2006).
Information systems are most useful when they remove or lessen the weaknesses of the human mind in terms of information processing capabilities, allowing for greater emphasis of human thought on more creative competencies. Information systems are best purposed to heavy computation and processing, relieving humans hindered by limitations of information processing (Todd and Benbasat 1992). Reduction of cognitive effort is seen as a valid goal of DSS development, indeed some research suggests that aiding a reduction in computational effort will incentivise decision makers not to avoid computationally intensive decision strategies (Kleinhunz and Schkade 1993). This work seeks to elucidate the steps to a consumer purchase decision with a view to understanding how that decision can be supported by leveraging the competencies of information systems to match the methodologies or strategies employed by the decision maker.

Beach’s (1993) image theory work views the selection of choice strategy as being dependent on, amongst other things, the repertoire of strategies known to the decision maker. Information systems, in this case taking the form of webstores, may be designed to support decision strategies appropriate to an online purchase decision. The value of such a support may accrue from improvement in the decision itself or by aiding a deeper analysis of the choices available through supporting strategies (Todd and Benbasat 1987). This paper discusses the antecedents of a purchase decision, the strategies which are appropriate to making that decision, current methods employed by webstores towards supporting the purchase decision and hypothesise how these methods support online consumer purchase decisions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Consumer Purchase Decision Process

The consumer decision is a process of successive refinement of the set of brands evaluated (Roberts 1989) which can best be understood through “tiered levels of behaviour” (Roberts and Lattin 1997). These brands are evaluated from sets which can be structured logically to aid understanding. The super-set, that is all existing brands in the marketplace, is referred to as the Universal Set (Kardes, Kalyanaram et al. 1993; Andrews and Srinivasan 1995). The consumer may not be aware of all of the brands in this set (Andrews and Srinivasan 1995), that sub-set of brands of which the consumer is aware is referred to as the Awareness Set (Nedungadi 1990; Roberts and Lattin 1991; Andrews and Srinivasan 1995; Roberts and Lattin 1997). As the name implies, it is a subset of the Universal set which a given consumer is aware of, though it does include those brands which the consumer becomes aware of during the purchase decision (Andrews and Srinivasan 1995). The set of brands which the consumer then proceeds to gather information on is referred to as the Evoked Set (Roberts 1989; Hauser and Wernerfelt 1990; Roberts and Lattin 1991). Roberts (1989) describes the Evoked Set as “the brands on which a consumer gathers information” and distinguishes it from the Consideration Set by describing the latter as the set of brands the consumer evaluates. The Awareness Set and Evoked Set have also been referred to collectively as the Retrieval Set (Kardes, Kalyanaram et al. 1993). The set which the consumer evaluates further from the Evoked Set is called the Consideration Set (Roberts 1989; Hauser and Wernerfelt 1990; Nedungadi 1990; Roberts and Lattin 1991; Kardes, Kalyanaram et al. 1993; Andrews and Srinivasan 1995; Guttmann, Moukas et al. 1998). The Choice is made from this final Consideration Set.
There are a number of decisions made through the process described above. Consumers are generally unaware of the Universal Set because of cognitive limitations, complex choice tasks, evaluation and search costs (Andrews and Srinivasan 1995). Many authors support a two stage process for arriving at a consumption decision, the first being a heuristic screening decision followed by the purchase decision itself (Hauser and Wernerfelt 1990; Klenosky and Perkins 1992; Beach 1993; Kardes, Kalyanaram et al. 1993; Andrews and Srinivasan 1995). The earlier screening stage tends to employ simpler heuristic and non-compensatory strategies (Hauser and Wernerfelt 1990; Beach 1993). Considering the view of consumers as cognitive misers during the purchase decision, switching to less accurate non-compensatory strategies when faced with the larger sets makes sense (Kleinmuntz and Schkade 1993). Beach (1993) offers a definition of screening as a process governing the “admission of options to the choice set”. Beach proposed a theory, referred to as Image Theory, which frames choices as being made through any number of strategies, depending on the strategies known to the decision making consumer. Whereas the choice decision based on the Consideration Set may invoke many different strategies, the screening decision invokes just one – the non-compensatory compatibility test (Beach 1993). Further, Beach (1993) found that screening and choice decisions are seen as distinctly separate from each other and that decision makers do not bring information forward from the screening decision phase [Evoked set to Consideration set] to the choice decision phase [Consideration set to Choice] leaving the possibility of sub-optimal choices. This effect echoes what is the availability judgment error described by Chen and Lee (2002), also referred to as the recency effect where more weight is given to more recent events. Zhang (2004) found that the availability to decision makers of multiple preference formats increases decision makers’ satisfaction levels, implying that the support of multiple decision strategies by a system may aid in decision quality. Next follows an investigation of the decision strategies commonly employed in purchase decisions and how systems may be designed to support these strategies.

**Consumer Decision Strategies**

Decision strategies are employed to support decision makers in their goal of minimising cognitive effort involved in the choice while maximising the accuracy and quality of the
decision (Alavi and Joachimsthaler 1992; Todd and Benbasat 1999). Todd and Benbasat (1999), citing many empirical studies assert that effort influences strategy selection more than accuracy. People generally prefer strategies that do not induce computations and numeric value trade-offs (Slovic, Fischhoff et al. 1977). Kleinmuntz and Schkade (1993) suggest that this is because feedback to the decision maker regarding the effort expended is immediate while feedback on the accuracy or quality of the decision made is not. Kleinmuntz and Schkade (1993) refer to this trade-off between effort and accuracy as the cost-benefit perspective and posited that strategy selection can be influenced by the method used to display the information pertinent to the decision. Suggested variations on a systems information display include form [numerical, pictorial, verbal]; organisation [table, matrix, list, paragraph, hierarchical cluster]; and the sequence [random, ascending or descending on an attribute value, alphabetical, chronological] (Kleinmuntz and Schkade 1993). Thus, the reduction of decision maker effort is a valid target for researchers but supporting an increase of decision accuracy and quality is a more noble goal. Decision maker strategy selection can be influenced by the design of the information display, and the display may be designed to support decision strategies applicable to the problem domain. Indeed, Todd and Benbasat (1999) tell us that the best designs are those which make it easier for the decision maker to employ the best strategy. Zhang et al. (2004) found that exposing multiple formats to the decision makers increases the decision makers’ satisfaction with the decision process. The authors further recommend that decision systems should provide a choice of functionalities to support preference formats (Zhang, Chen et al. 2004).

Early stages of decision processing involve relatively larger choice sets and tend towards comparison on one attribute and some rejection of alternatives. Latter stages involve weighing advantages and disadvantages of the reduced set (Slovic, Fischhoff et al. 1977). Roberts (1989) describes these two broad types of strategy, in his study of consideration set formulation, as conjunctive when the test is one of sufficient acceptability and compensatory when the test is one of sufficient utility, Acceptability being a threshold measure and Utility being a more processing intensive function of weighted attribute importance and attribute quantity (Todd and Benbasat 1999). Thusly, the secondary stage deals with a relatively smaller set and lends itself to the usage of strategies more onerous as regards processing, compensatory strategies, whereas the primary stage deals with a larger set and lends itself to the usage of strategies which reduce the set without onerous processing, conjunctive strategies. Research suggests that decision quality is improved when more compensatory strategies are employed (Todd and Benbasat 1992; Häubl and Trifts 2000).

In order to understand current practices in helping online consumers make purchase decisions and to understand what kind of decision strategies are commonly supported in online shopping environments, the authors examined online store software and a number of popular online stores.

**Decision Quality**

Decision quality is often seen as the result of the trade-off between decision accuracy and cognitive effort in that an accurate decision is seen as a quality decision (Raghunathan 1999; Speier and Morris 2003; van der Heijden 2006). It is often implemented by measuring deviation from the norm, i.e. utility or value maximisation (Todd and Benbasat 1992), indeed Barr and Sharda (1997) used value maximisation as an indicator of decision quality by measuring net earnings, return on investment, market share and return on assets. Decision qualities’ empirical measurement is typically achieved through the loading of the subject system with dominated and non-dominated alternatives, best elucidated by Häubl and Trifts
(2000), “An alternative is dominated if there is at least one other alternative that is superior on at least one attribute while not being inferior on any attribute. That is, a dominated alternative is known to be within the efficient frontier of any consumer. By contrast, an alternative is non-dominated if no other alternative is superior on an attribute without, at the same time, being inferior on at least one other attribute.” Thusly, preferences shown by the subject for non-dominated alternatives indicate poor decision quality (Häubl and Trifts 2000; van der Heijden 2006).

**Decision support in the wild**

An examination of convenient samples of open source ecommerce supporting software was conducted to determine the support available for compensatory and conjunctive decision strategies. The decision-aiding functionality found were various implementations of sort, search, filter, and view mechanisms. The open source webshop software examined were: Magento; OpenCart; OSCommerce; OSCSS; PrestaShop; Zen-cart; VirtueMart; CubeCart; Quick Cart Lite; UberCart and Satchmo. Open source systems were chosen for convenience; their wide popularity and availability to SMEs and the ability of the researchers to modify the software to suit further experiments should the need arise. The systems were surveyed for the presence or absence of functionality to aid in decision making as in Table 1.1. Although the measures below for number of websites is a tentative one and useful mostly for comparison, undoubtedly these systems are being used on a large scale for numerous ecommerce businesses.

**Table 1.1 Decision aiding abilities of common open source ecommerce software.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Software (‘No. of websites’)</th>
<th>View</th>
<th>Sort</th>
<th>Filter</th>
<th>Search</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magento (19,900)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpenCart (10,600)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCommerce (8,690,000)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCSS (5,340)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrestaShop (74,500)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zen-cart (2,490,000)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VirtueMart (397,000)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CubeCart (2,730,000)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick Cart (472,000)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UberCart (82,400)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satchmo (245)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: ‘Popularity’ represents the number of search results returned in Google.com for “Powered by Software name”.*
Viewing configurations

Figure 2 Left to right, Tile, Paragraph and List product viewing configurations

The organisation of data into structures or groups affects information acquisition (Kleinmuntz and Schkade 1993). Kleinmuntz gives examples such as tables, matrices, lists, paragraphs or hierarchical clusters as data structures. The common structures found in webstore software, as diagrammed in Figure 2 above, are lists, where the product data are structured in one row per product; tiles, where the product data is shown in one block per product usually in a three-by-many configuration [three tiles across a screen by x number as one scrolls down]; and paragraph, where product data is shown on multiple lines forming a paragraph per product, effectively a one-by-many configuration. Comparisons are enabled here only by the list structure, and then only when attributes are displayed in aligned columns to form a matrix table. This particular type of list is similar to what Häubl and Trifts (2000) call a comparison matrix, however some do not also have attribute sorting abilities. Thusly, viewing the product catalogue via a list structure can be seen as supporting compensatory strategies more than conjunctive strategies.

Searching and Filtering

Searching reduces a set of alternatives by excluding alternatives and returning a subset. It is thusly a conjunctive strategy. Constraint-based filtering (Guttman, Moukas et al. 1998) appears to be the filtering method observed in webstore software. Searching and Filtering are distinct attributes of decision supporting systems (Holsapple and Whinston 1996). Filtering is conceptually similar to searching in that it results in a sub-set of alternatives and supports conjunctive strategies.

In the majority, the systems studied returned search results in the same configuration [i.e. Tiles, Paragraphs or Lists] as for browsing the product catalogue. Viewing a product catalogue or indeed the result of a search or filtered results as line items should support a better and/or faster purchase decision than viewing the same data in tiled or paragraphed structures because lists are more amenable to comparison.

The question follows as to whether viewing product catalogue information via a tile configuration, a paragraph configuration or a list configuration supports a consumer purchase decision. Considering that it appears to be easier to compare product data in the list configuration leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 1: Product catalogues structured in list format support better and/or faster decision making than product catalogues in tiled or paragraph formats.
Sorting

Sorting is a discrete information processing task (Häubl and Trifts 2000). It is a decision-supporting function (van der Heijden 2006). The ability to sort increases a decision makers’ ability to identify, and thus avoid, sub-optimal choices. The ability to sort helps a decision maker determine the relative utility of the alternatives (Häubl and Trifts 2000). Thusly, sorting can be seen as supporting compensatory strategies more than conjunctive strategies. As discussed above, it is proposed that viewing product catalogue information or search results or filtered results in the list configuration should support the consumer purchase decision. It also follows that, if the product catalogue, search results or filtered results are also sortable a better and/or faster decision may arise. Thus the following proposition arises:

Proposition 2: List configuration which are sortable support better and/or faster decision making than list configurations which are not sortable.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Decision makers tend to use strategies which are enabled by the display format (Häubl and Trifts 2000). It follows that, depending on what display format the product information is presented to the decision maker in, different strategies influencing the decision process are supported and encouraged. Therefore, there are a number of different ways in which the data display format can affect the decision-making process and its outcome. These affects warrant investigation: the impact of product data display format on strategies and decision quality; the impact of search and filtering on the decision process; the impact of sorting capability; and the combinations of each of these. These overarching questions present a structure for this research through a sequence of experiments as follows:

Experiment 1: To investigate the affects of search and filter mechanisms on the quality of the derived consideration set and subsequent purchase decision when the search and filter results display format is manipulated as displaying results via tiles, paragraphs or lists.

Experiment 2: To investigate the affects of product catalogue sorting and search and filter result sorting on the quality of the derived consideration set and subsequent purchase decision.

Experiment 3: To investigate the affects of nested sorting by product attributes on the quality of the derived consideration set and subsequent purchase decision.

However, this paper concentrates on an investigation of the affect display format itself and propose a pilot study via controlled experiment to test the two hypotheses advanced above. The task shall consist of the selection and choice of an MP3 player from a webstore created specifically for the experiment. The manipulated factors proposed are Tile configuration [Yes/No]; Paragraph configuration [Yes/No]; List configuration [Yes/No]; Sortable list configuration [Yes/No]. The proposed model is diagrammed in figure 3 presented below. The webstore shall be stocked with MP3 players in such a way that the choices made by the subjects can be independently deemed to be good or bad decisions regardless of the subjects preferences. This is achieved by constructing dominated and non-dominated alternatives, as described previously.
Figure 3 Product data display configurations influence on consideration set and decision quality

It is proposed that subjects be randomly assigned to each of the four conditions. Instructions include the stipulation to use the systems’ shopping cart to hold their preferred products before making the final, single choice. Decision quality will be inferred from the number of dominated alternatives which appear in the subjects shopping cart. The time taken to complete the process shall also be recorded. It is proposed to draw the sample from a number of different graduate programmes in a university. Many other studies in commerce and information systems have utilised students as representative of the Internet using population (Ives, Olson et al. 1983; Ahuja, Gupta et al. 2003; Negasha, Ryan et al. 2003; van Iwaarden, Wiele et al. 2004; Lee and Kozar 2006). Aladwani and Palvia (2002) administered a 55-item instrument to 104 students between 18 and 21 years old. Palmer (2002) conducted his survey with 35 undergraduate and MBA students. Garrity et al., (2005) argued for the use of students as an appropriate sample, stating their place as present and future consumers of web technology. This suggests a sample composed of university students may be representative of the wider population of e-commerce consumers and would be appropriate for this research.

EXPECTATIONS

It is expected the results will indicate that product data viewed in configurations which support comparisons to produce better quality consideration sets and better quality decision making. As such, it is anticipated that the results of the experiment will support the use of the list configurations as a dominant factor in the production of higher quality consideration sets and thus higher quality product choice. It is further expected that the sortable list configuration will support higher quality consideration sets than the standard list configuration. While it is expected that the list configurations will be the better decision-aiding product data views in their ability to support data point comparisons, it is also expected that the subjects using systems with list and sortable list display configurations will also make at least as good or better decisions as the subjects using the tile and paragraph
configurations but in a shorter period of time. The model predicts that the subjects with the sortable list configuration will attain the highest quality consideration set of any of the subjects groups. The results of this research will be applicable to many ecommerce systems, in particular to the numerous websites that are using the systems referred to in this paper. Many of those systems have built-in features or customisable code which can be used to make the product catalogue or search results return in either tile, paragraph or list configurations. It is expected that the results of this research will make it easier for practitioners to decide what display configuration is appropriate at what stages of the consumer decision process.

SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The layout of product information is a concern for web based ecommerce. This research seeks to address this gap and provide managers of online shopping systems with the tools to structure their product offerings in a way which will enable and encourage better decision making by consumers. Though outside the scope of this paper, there is some research investigating the effect of ecommerce systems and decision performance on behavioural intentions. These include the intention of a customer to use the ecommerce system, then intention to return a measure of loyalty and the intention to purchase. This research takes a step towards expanding the knowledge of management on these influences by focusing on the effect of product information layout on decision performance.

The product information layout predicted as the most advantageous by this research is the table approach where alternatives and attributes are presented in tabular form. Prior to Internet commerce, these formats were relegated to specific industry publications such as Consumer Reports (Todd and Benbasat 1999) and some authors argued that formats which support decision making in this way should be encouraged through policy (Bettman and Zins 1979). The development of such policy best practice scenarios for Irish SMEs involved in ecommerce may go some way to encouraging confidence among SMEs in their online trading ability.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment eBusiness Strategy reports (2004; 2006) acknowledge a need for Irish business to be in the vanguard of online trading. Developing and expanding our collective knowledge of decision processes and technologies which can be leveraged to assist the consumer in online trading scenarios and disseminating an understanding of online trading to management of SMEs involved in online trading is a well-grounded direction for research in this context.

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SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

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A number of distinct avenues of enquiry are being fruitfully developed by ISSP doctoral fellows under the sustaining communities theme. Papers presented at the annual conference demonstrate how a diversity of issues intersects to create complex opportunities and challenges for community life. These papers, by leading scholars of the future, focus not just on the immediate public policy challenges, but show considerable promise in their concern with emerging themes and future challenges. The conference theme of ‘bridging the divide’ between research and public policy was well served with all papers addressing gaps between current policy priorities and possible future outcomes for communities.

Papers covered a breadth of areas from the significance of psychological research in tackling mental health issues in communities, to the importance of building inclusive communities through social capital development. Papers taking a psychological perspective outlined the role of psychological stress in home-based caregivers and the implications of sleep loss on well-being in terms of public policy development. The broader need to consider the significance of psychological research in making policies for sustainable communities was also addressed. These papers demonstrated a high level of technical expertise in psychological research, but also demonstrated that social isolation, mental health and work related stress are significant future challenges for policy-makers. There is little doubt that the challenge of sustaining communities is more likely to be adequately addressed by the contribution of such technically proficient and policy-oriented specialists from across the social sciences in future.

Papers concerned with policy issues affecting children and young people demonstrated the importance of youth mentoring, cultural competency and new technologies in building sustainable communities. Inter-connectedness of different aspects of community life in producing sustainable or challenging public policy contexts was addressed by research linking transport and social capital and by papers analysing gender and healthcare. Unusually, gender papers were focused on men and masculinities. Some fascinating research is underway examining the disproportionate amount of ill health suffered by men because of issues relating to masculinity and gender norms. Specifically, the need for male norms of interpretation of illness to be clearly related to national policies on men’s health is being recognised as a considerable challenge in the future. Some papers focused on particular communities, in one case that of men from sexual minorities and the particular health challenges they face. Not all papers were concerned with the Republic of Ireland, some focusing on cross-national comparisons, or civic engagement in specific non-Irish national contexts. Each paper, did however, make a strong case for developing a clear research-policy agenda in tackling multiple challenges of policy problems shared by communities worldwide.
Above all, these papers demonstrate huge progress in how social scientists, theorise, analyse and contribute to knowledge of sustainable communities. The potential of the Irish Social Science Platform as a stage for demonstrating the strength of multi-disciplinary research programmes is especially clear in the case of sustaining communities. It is only by considering multiple influencing and mitigating factors that we can begin to understand the challenge of building sustainable communities in terms conducive to developing progressive public policy.
THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH MENTORING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: IMPLICATION FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

In the presented paper, we aim to describe the types of natural as well as formal mentoring relationships and their settings, and discuss their possible use within the youth work and social services settings in the Czech Republic. The aim of the presented paper is to explain the principles of good practice of mediation the mentoring principles through the formal mentoring intervention, and explore the possible future use of mentoring principles in youth services in non-English speaking European countries, in particular in the Czech Republic. First of all, we will outline the background of formal mentoring intervention and explain the principles of mentoring from the social support theory perspective. Secondly, we will summarize the occurrence of mentoring relationships within the natural social networks, and describe the current forms of mentoring programs, which use the mentoring principles. We will also mention the signs of mentoring relationship quality and efficiency of mentors according to the previous research. Thirdly, we will move to the description of current social policy Acts to explore the framework for the mentoring intervention. We will mention the social services, which implement the mentoring intervention in the Czech Republic within these Acts, and explore the possible development of mentoring intervention within the existing legal framework. Finally, we will discuss the possibilities of further implementation of the new programs for youth using the mentoring principles and forms, in both natural and formal settings. We will provide the youth work managers with the new ideas of possible use of mentoring principles within newly developed programs in the youth services and youth work settings in the Czech Republic.

WHAT IS YOUTH MENTORING?

Mentoring is a one-to-one relationship between older, experienced mentor and younger, less experienced child or adolescent, who obtains the support and care from mentor. Natural mentors are, in general, the significant adults, who create the special kind of relationship to support the children and adolescents through their transition into adulthood, to help to socialize them, to mediate them the values and rules about their culture and society, and to help with development of child’s personality in well-being. Mentor provides ongoing guidance, instruction, encouragement, support and care aimed at developing mentee’s personality, competences and skills. (DuBois, Karcher, 2005, Brumovská, 2007). Quality mentoring relationship brings the children and youth the socio-emotional skills, personal development and well-being (Rhodes, 2002, Eby, 2006).

Nevertheless, the natural mentoring relationships fail to appear in the post-modern society for many reasons: The state of poverty, overloaded families’ structures, the failure of cultural agents and natural important adults, cultural minorities, which are often oppressed by the dominant culture, limiting the form of families to the restricted frontiers of two-parent and single-parent families and so the limiting of natural social networks, “rugged individualism”
and “self-realization” – they are all the social problems of the post-modern society, which weaken the natural social networks (Feuerstein, 1988: 95-98). On the other hand, many natural mentoring relationships develop within the natural social networks without the recognition of mentoring character, function and possible positive influence on children’s and youth’s development.

YOUTH MENTORING – HOW DOES IT WORK?

Mentoring intervention and formal mentoring relationship can be seen in a few different perspectives (DuBois, Karcher, 2005, Miller, 2005, Brumovská, 2007). For explaining the roles of mentor and mentee, and their interaction in social environment, we will use perspectives of system and social support theories. We will also mention the sings of quality mentoring relationship and efficiency of mentors approach according to the previous research findings.

Systems and social support theories emphasize the social focus of the clients within the natural social networks. System perspective sees the role of social intervention in enhancing the more effective social relations within the social systems (Payne, 2006: 145). Mentoring intervention in this perspective can be seen as a „mentee-focused”, trying to enhance mentee’s healthy development using the potential of his/her natural social environment. Mentoring intervention tries to foster the lack natural mentors or significant adults (Charon, 1991) in the lives of disadvantaged children and youth. Systems theory provides the explanation of how the formal mentoring relationship occurs, as well as its content and outcomes. It explains how the behaviour in one social system created the learning possibilities in another. For example, how the interaction of mentee with mentor influence mentee’s outcomes in school and changes in other social relationships within the family and peer groups (Payne, 2006). Therefore, the systems theory is a perspective, which can explain, how the benefits of mentoring relationships are mediated into the improvements of mentee’s life.

The centre piece of the mentoring intervention is the quality mentoring relationship (Rhodes, 2002). Closeness is the key quality factor, whose predictors are trust, empathy and respect. Factors of closeness were described as feeling of connectedness and belonging to the reciprocal network, intimacy, that is the presence of intensive, mutual, genuine conversation and sharing (DuBois, Karcher, 2004). These factors of quality are coherent with the quality social support (Dolan, 2006, 2009).

The formal mentoring intervention is as far beneficial for children and youth as the mentoring program is capable to create the quality mentoring relationships (Rhodes, 2002, Brumovská, 2007). Mentor, in ideal case, has a role of informal support, providing guidance, instruction and encouragement to his protégé. Mentor and mentee spend the leisure time in different activities, including recreation, discussion and personal topics, establishing the closeness, trust and mutuality in the relationship.

Mentor’s behaviour towards mentee can be seen as a provision of social support. The quality of social support provided by mentor is a factor which mediates the benefits of mentoring relationship to mentee within the relationship. Mentor’s approach to the child is crucial for establishing the quality and thus the benefits of mentoring relationship (Morrow, Styles, 1992, 1995, Sipe 2002, Rhodes 2002, Spencer, 2007, Brumovská, 2003, 2007). To outline the principles of good practice in the formal mentoring relationship, we will summarize the
features of mentors, who make change in mentees’ lives: Effective mentors make a commitment to being consistent and dependable, maintaining a steady presence in the youth’s life. They recognize that the relationship may be fairly one sided and take responsibility for keeping the relationship alive. Successful mentors initiate contact and ensure that meetings are scheduled rather than waiting to hear from youth. They also have attitude of caring and wanting to do more for those mentored. They also respect the youth’s viewpoint, are open and flexible, listen to what youth have to say and pay attention to what they think is important. They pay attention to youths’ needs for fun. They understand that not only is having fun a key part of the relationship building, but it also provides youth with different valuable opportunities. Good mentors tend to be better acquainted with the mentees’ families. Non-supportive parents can sabotage the formal mentoring relationships, but successful mentors have found that it is helpful to meet and interact with the mentees’ parents. Finally, successful mentors seek and utilize the help and advice of program staff, value the support and guidance that the program staff can provide (Sipe, 2002:254).

Although not all mentors are successful and there are the significant risks of formal mentoring relationships for mentees (Rhodes, 2002, Grossman, Rhodes, 2002, DuBois, Karcher, 2004, Spencer, 2006, Brumovská, Málková, 2008), the conscious development of quality and professional leadership of voluntary mentors can avoid the risks and achieve the benefits mediated by developed mentoring principles.

In the perspective of social support theory there are four different types of support to be distinguished in mentor’s interaction with mentee: emotional support, when mentor express caring, empathy and concern, esteem support, when encouraging and expressing the belief in mentee’s ability, information support, when providing suggestions or advice, how to deal with the certain situation and tangible support, when providing or offering the material stuff needed by mentee (Cutrona, 2000:111-112).

Weiss (1973, cited in DuBois, Karcher, 2005) distinguish five functions of social relationships. Four of them concern to mentor’s role when fulfilling the mentee’s needs through their interaction: emotional integration, social integration, reassurance of worth and provision of assistance. The absence of certain function leads to deficits or distress. The role of mentor is to provide the function of mentoring relationship which is missing in mentee’s life or support the functions, which are weakened. The fifth function of social relationships according to Weiss (1973, cited in DuBois, Karcher, 2005) is the ‘opportunity for nurturance’. It explains the benefits the mentors can gain out of the mentoring relationships and emphasize how important are the expectations of mentors in formal mentoring relationships, when caring about mentees and being satisfied with their role while fulfilling this function of mentoring relationship in their lives.

**FORMS OF NATURALLY OCCURRING MENTORING RELATIONSHIP AND FORMAL MENTORING INTERVENTION**

Mentoring relationship can be divided according to its’ environment to the *natural, informal mentoring* relationship, which occurs in the social networks and to the *formal relationship*, fostering the functions of the informal human social networks and established by the mentoring programs.
The naturally occurring mentoring relationships often develop within the social networks without the recognition of their character and function of mentoring. DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) found out that the natural mentors for children and youth are most commonly their relatives (siblings, uncle, or aunt), friends, teachers, doctors and counsellors, couches, youth workers, youth group leaders etc. The description of the natural mentoring relationships will help the practitioners to recognize them in the natural social networks; and possibly use their potential and benefits for children’s and youth’s development by strengthening them without the need of establishing the formal mentoring program setting.

The types of informal mentoring relationships from the young people’s perspective were the subject of the study of Philip and Henry (1996). In their study, youth described the natural mentoring relationships in 5 different forms: classic, individual-team, friend-to-friend, peer group and long-term relationships. We will paraphrase their description of natural mentoring relationship types (Philip, Hendry, 1996: 192-3):

Classic mentoring is a one-to-one relationship between an older, experienced adult and young person, who benefit from the bond with mentor. Mentor provides support, advice and challenge. Support can be provided e.g. through shared activities, when mentor serve as a role model and gives mentee recognition as a ‘special person’.

Individual-Team mentoring appears where a group of youth look up to an individual or small number of individuals for advice, support and challenge. This form of mentoring develop the most often in the youth work setting, although it can appear in any organized settings too. The mentor’s are characterized as having both the understanding and respect for the peer group. They don’t have to be necessarily much older than the youth, but they are recognized as having valid previous experience, which is reliable and relevant to group.

Friend-to-Friend mentoring provides a ‘safety net’ or social support in the times of distress among the peer group. This type of mentoring is especially beneficial for youth, who might be mistrust to adults. It also provides a testing ground for disclosure of sensitive information, or discussing the values and beliefs before the youth come out with them in public. This type of natural mentoring was mostly cited by young females, who were ‘best friends’ and also were in the wider set of friendships.

Peer group mentoring develop where an ordinary friendship group takes on a mentoring role in specific times. This type of mentoring often occurs when a peer group of friends has a common interest and usually takes place in a special social context. The mentoring peer group takes a role of arbiter or resource and provide the appropriate strategies of behavior in the certain social context. For instance, the group of peers interested in drug misuse in the rave scene provides the strategies how to relate with the opposite sex in the given social setting.

Long-term mentoring involve the relationship with the ‘risk taking’ adults. This type is similar to the classic mentoring, but differs in the character of mentor. Mentor can have a background of rebellion and challenging authority and is perceived by young people as resisting adult definition of social world. The mentor is often known from the youth’s childhood.

As we see, the natural mentoring relationships take up the different forms. The formal mentoring intervention is inspired by the natural mentoring relationships and set up the
different forms of mentoring programs, where the mentoring principles are used and benefits mediated to children and youth from the disadvantaged backgrounds.

Formal mentoring relationships can be divided according to the program’s settings, which set the rules for the relationship, provide different support and make the differences between the form of formal mentoring relationships and its quality (www.mentor.org, 28.9.2009):

*Traditional mentoring:* This type of mentoring program offers to develop a one-to-one caring relationship of the youth and older, experienced adult person. The couple meets typically once a week and makes the activities inside in the community. The role of mentor can include tutoring, career exploration, life skills development, game playing and sports, offering entertainment and cultural events. In the Czech Republic operates a few youth mentoring programs within the traditional mentoring form (www.petp.cz, 22.9.2009).

*Peer mentoring* is a one-to-one mentoring of child or youth mentee and peer mentor, who is in the same age-group as his/her protégé. Peer mentoring is often used in school-based settings, as the source of mentors is broad there.

*Group mentoring* is a form of mentoring, which consciously uses the mentoring principles within the small youth groups. There are one or two youth leaders as mentors leading the group of children or youth in different leisure-time activities. The first group mentoring program Kompas, which operates in the Czech Republic, was inspired by the Canadian group mentoring practices (www.dcul.cz, 22.9.2009).

*Intergenerational mentoring* is a form of mentoring, which matches the children and youth with elderly people, older than 55 years. This is a new promising form of mentoring intervention, as it connect the vulnerable populations of children and youth on the one hand, and elderly people on the other hand, and has a few additional benefits to the traditional mentoring. For instance, the intergenerational connection transmits the traditions and cultural patterns to the youngest generation and thus preserve the cultural values. The elder generation, on the other hand, can gain the new skills concerning to the new technologies through the informal education activities in connection with youth. The principle of generativity (Erickson, 1973) is targeted in this type of formal mentoring by engaging the elderly people, who might have their own children grown-up and independent, but who still have a potential as well as need to nurture and mediate their life experiences to the further generations. Thus, this type of mentoring relationship offers a huge potential, which has not been used so far. In particular, UNESCO Intergenerational programs aim to develop this type of mentoring relationship in the third-world countries due to the benefits it offers (Hatton-Yeo, 2008).

*E-Mentoring* aims to fulfil the mentoring principles and benefits through the internet technologies. However, this type of mentoring needs further research of the best practices recommendations as it was found as less efficient than the personal types of mentoring relationships (Rhodes et al., 2002).

Mentoring intervention can be implemented as site-based or community based, with relational/experiential or goal-oriented focus of the relationships (DuBois, Karcher, 2004). The youth mentoring intervention typically focus on children and youth disadvantaged by the socio-economical circumstances, children from single parent families who lack the support of adult role models, children, who lack the communication skills to engage with peer groups, children, who with learning disabilities, ADHD, young offenders, children at-risk of social
exclusion, children from minorities etc. The present mentoring services in the Czech Republic focus on children and youth at-risk of social exclusion, young offenders, young people from Roma minority, young mothers, unemployed youth and adults, volunteers serving the elderly people in the form of intergenerational program. There are many services for children and youth, which don’t recognize that they operate on the mentoring principles. Therefore, we will briefly outline the legal framework for the present mentoring intervention and will try to identify the settings where the mentoring intervention can be developed in the future or where the mentoring principles can be identified and used more efficiently in the established services:

MENTORING AND SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The legal framework for the present and future mentoring intervention in the Czech Republic is given by three acts: the Act about the Social Services 2006, the Act about Voluntary Service and the declaration about youth services, which is based on the Declaration of the Child’s Rights and involve the ordering of informal education services for children and youth within the leisure time.

Firstly, The Acts about the Social Services and Voluntary Services forms the framework for the present mentoring programs. One of the biggest mentoring programs in the Czech Republic, Big Brothers Big Sister/5P is implemented as a Activating Complementary Service for the Children and Family. It uses the volunteers as mentors under the Act about Voluntary Services and operates together with other complementary services in order to provide a holistic support for children and families within the Act.

Brumovská and Málková (2008) studied the mentoring relationship development in the Czech mentioned mentoring program. We sum up the findings in order to manifest the example of good practice within the traditional Czech mentoring intervention and to illustrate the example of youth work practice within the established services, where the potential mentoring principles in use are not recognized yet:

The quality Friendly – Equal type of mentoring relationship mentors began with observation of the child’s needs and with the friendly-equal approach towards the child. They enjoyed the activities together with the children during the meetings and they successfully tuned up to communication level with the child. They got know the interests, personality and needs of the child through the activities and successfully overcame the first challenges with mentee with understanding, patience and commitment. After 4 months of the relationship duration the volunteers were satisfied with the course of its’ development. They started to turn their attention towards the child’s needs. They saw, that the importance of the enjoyable experiences the child can get from the common activities and they focus on developing of such experiences. They didn’t contact the parents unless it was necessary. The further development of the relationship continued more than one year and it’s probable that it was developed into the qualitative beneficial long-term mentoring relationship.

In general, the Act about the Social Services 2006 outlines the possible future mentoring intervention in those types on services, where the aims are:
- Educational, instructional and activating actions
- The actions, which mediate the contacts with social environment and improve the social network of the clients
- The actions, which advocate for the client’s rights and personal needs
- The trainings of social skills in order to increase the employability of clients
- The trainings of personal skills which leads to independency of clients

Practically, this implication means that mentoring principles and formal interventions can be used in the broad range of social services within the Act about Social Services 2006, where these aims of service are cited.

Secondly, the Act about the Voluntary Service 2001 set the framework for the voluntary mentors, their rights and obligations. It gives the future service providers the framework for sources of the service staffing. Mentors, who are volunteers, provide the informal support to mentees and create the alternative option to the formal services, provided by professionals (Cutrona, 2000).

The cooperation of professionals, who manage the professionally lead mentoring services with the volunteers as mentors, is the ideal connection of informal support for vulnerable children and youth together with the formal support in cases, when the more professional intervention is required.

In addition, the engagement of voluntary mentors promotes the benefits to the community and the society in general. Mentors as volunteers are educated towards and disseminate and the civic virtues, solidarity, tolerance and social cohesion in the community through their voluntary role and civic engagement in involve besides the personal benefits the role brings them (Philip and Hendry, 2000). Therefore, the framework set by these two acts establishes the proved setting, within which the new mentoring services can be developed.

Third potential setting for future development of the youth mentoring principles in the Czech Republic is the youth work services, which provide informal education in the leisure time for children from the major population. As the youth work services nowadays operate in two distinct ways, the traditional and modern, and such a implementation is typical for post-communist countries, we will firstly outline briefly the historical overview on their development.

Interestingly, the youth work and informal education in the Czech Republic has historically a long tradition of voluntary clubs and societies since the beginning of 20th Century. During the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918 – 1938) the camps, clubs and societies for children and youth were established especially in the area of sport. However, the tradition was interrupted after the WW II with the beginning of communist regime. The Russian framework of youth work was implemented in 1950th and used for promoting the system’s political ideas except of the short break of social democracy in 1962-1968. The young generations were educated in the ideology of communist system through these services since the early school age. However, the system of youth work was also valued for providing the leisure time activities for every child and young persons in general in the Czechoslovakia of the time. (Pávková et al, 2008).

After 1989, the transition of the society from communism into capitalism induced the new needs of the children, youth and their families to be fulfilled by the youth work services. The
three main streams of youth work were established: The new youth work organizations in community settings, organized by NGOs, the renewed organizations with tradition from the beginning of 20th century, which were interrupted in their operation during communism, and the transformed traditional youth work organizations, which operated during communism and are still supported with the youth policy as a statutory youth work organizations until nowadays. The leisure-time schools of languages, art and music where the music and art skills are taught are unique Central and Eastern-European statutory services within the youth work policies in EU.

The youth work policy, as far as it promote and provide the broad range of services for children and youth, offers the hidden possibilities 1) for developing the new mentoring interventions or 2) for using the mentoring principles consciously by youth workers. The mentoring principles can be developed especially within the youth clubs and societies, school and afterschool clubs, youth café and non-formal and informal education in general, especially in a form of group mentoring.

For instance, the present nation-wide project, funded by EU Structural Fund, which aims to promote the informal education and its’ principles – The keys for Life – has the main objectives to promote the development of key life skills of children and youth and the instruments, which mediate those skills (www.kliceprazivot.cz, 28.9.2009). The mentoring principles could be implemented in this particular project in many of its’ topics, for example, in the topics concerning to the voluntarism and civic engagement, youth leadership and in the form of intergenerational mentoring or peer mentoring.

In general, the mentoring principles within the youth work setting can be used by every youth worker in order to establish the supporting, encouraging and positive relationship with children and youth s/he works with. The mentoring approach differ from the commonly used youth work approaches with its’ quality, respect and trust it develops, and the benefits for youth it can mediates. The principles of good mentoring approach are in fact coherent with the good practices in Czech youth work, which are, however, not always achieved by youth workers (Pávková et al, 2008). The youth workers should be aware of the mentoring principles and try to implicate them into their daily practices when working with children and youth in order to contribute to their positive development.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF MENTORING PRINCIPLES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

In conclusion, the utilization of mentoring principles can be developed in two ways:

Firstly, the professionals, who are aware of the principles and benefits of mentoring bonds can establish the new mentoring relationships in the setting of their practice. It might concern to adult youth leaders, school educators, teachers, youth workers, youth club leaders, school counsellors and all the professionals, who are in daily contact with children and youth. The support they develop in this form of mentoring will be more formal, but still significant and beneficial for their protégés.

Secondly, the mentoring principles can be developed within the formal mentoring programs in community organizations, NGOs and social care services in general within the Act about the Social Services 2006. The formal mentoring intervention typically uses volunteers as
mentors, which role is established by the Act about Voluntary Service 2002. In this case, the mentoring intervention has a triple benefits: Firstly, it brings the benefits for children and youth within the community, which the program aims to serve, supporting their healthy development and reducing the social disadvantages. Secondly, in case of intergenerational programs, mentoring principles transfer the traditional cultural heritage, values and knowledge across generations in informal way (Hatton, 2008, Feuerstein, 1986).

Thirdly, it promotes the development of the community and the mentor’s personality, awareness and identity within the community through the civic engagement s/he engages in through the voluntary mentoring role.

To sum up the review of forms of natural mentoring relationships and formal interventions, we can agree that the mentoring principles are in general widely used across different forms, setting, target groups and aims. It means that as far as the practitioners in social and youth services are aware of the mentoring principles, they can develop the mentoring bonds and use its´ benefits for children and youth within the network of services they provide. Mentoring relationships are naturally important social relations, which supports healthy development of children and youth. In the same time it is a cheap intervention, targeted directly to the needs of mentoring clients. In addition, it brings the benefits of social cohesion and solidarity to the wider community through the civic engagement of the volunteers in the role of voluntary mentors. These are the sounds arguments for establishing the new mentoring intervention and educating the youth work professionals as well as volunteers in its´ principles. The social policy makers, who are concerned with services for children and youth, should be aware of this social intervention and promote its´ further development culturally appropriate also outside the English-speaking countries, in particular in the Czech Republic.

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MEN, MASCULINITY, AND CANCER: THE ROLE FOR RESEARCH AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

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ABSTRACT

This discussion starts by problematising gender. It asks what problems men may face when the structure and construction of gendered norms such as masculinity are considered. Looking at how men may interpret illness and symptoms, questions are posed around how far men may be willing to dismiss symptoms, if they interpret illness or sickness as something which could undermine their personal perception of themselves. The theoretical concept of ‘masculinity’ is then introduced, and assessed. It is then further developed through an examination of the work of a second key author on gender. The facts about men and their health are then laid out. Three aspects of the National Policy on Men’s Health are then discussed in the light of the two previous sections. The National policy is critiqued and discussed. The discussion then concludes that while the National policy is a welcome and innovative move, there may be aspects of the policy that can be developed further in the future, with help from projects such as my own research.

‘Gender… is an act in the sense that ‘doing’ gender involves ‘sustained social performances’ which involve the repetition of socially established meanings’ (Jagger; 2008, 26-7).

INTRODUCTION - WHAT IS A ‘MAN’?

‘What is a man?’ This is a crucial question that I would like to explore. While reflecting on the specific issues in the National Men’s Health Policy that relate directly to my own research, I intend to explore this question. With this reflection on ‘man’, and ‘his’ construction, in mind, I will illustrate aspects of the national policy which could be developed in the future. Using my own research as the basis for an examination of ‘man’ and ‘his’ construction and ‘his’ health, I will be in a position to argue for development, and possibly change, of and in the national policy.

My project looks at the social experience for men dealing with prostate and testicular cancer. Health is not simply a matter of biology, Cockerham argues it is much more, involving factors that are social, cultural, political, and economic in nature’ (2004, 2). The World Health organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or injury (ibid). To be healthy means also having a sense of well-being (2004, 2). This does not mean that healthy people are free from all health problems; it means that they can function to the point that they can do what they want to do what they want to do (2004, 2). Ultimately ‘biological success in all of its manifestations is a measure of fitness’ (ibid).

We can see the potential for a very different definition of health to be conceived by the patient, and the doctor. On the one hand we can hypothesize than a man may have ‘health problems’, but that he may still be ‘healthy’ none the less, due to an overall sense of well
being. I would suggest that part of this sense of well being may emanate from the rewards of that are conferred on some men for undertaking what could be described as actions comparable to an overall ‘hegemonic masculinity’. On the other hand, with respect to the biomedical approach, Doctors could remain unaware of certain symptoms in two ways, either by not seeing the patient due to the overall sense of well being that the patient has, or due to an underestimation of those symptoms, if the patient did visit the doctor, and a possible misdiagnosis. I would suggest that more understanding and compassion for men who experience male specific cancer is needed.

**MASculINITY – FULCRUM OF THE RESEARCH**

‘Masculinity, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture’ – Connell (1995, 71).

One of the most important concepts to refer to here is the concept of ‘hegemonic’ masculinity which comes from R.W. Connell. This is the theoretical framework that I will adopt, as it details a hierarchy in which men of different ‘ideals’ are categorised.

R.W. Connell argues that there is a hierarchy of masculinity which places ‘Hegemonic’ masculinity at the top and subordinate masculinities of varying kinds beneath it (2005, 829). Connell partitions masculinities into hegemonic, marginalized and subordinate components. Social practice is a practice of classifying (2006, 120). In examining the ‘relations’ between different masculinities, it is necessary to explore both the plurality of and hierarchy within masculinities. Hegemony refers to the culturally exalted position afforded at any given time to one form of masculinity over others, and reflects men’s domination of women and a complex system of inter-male dominance. It is defined therefore against a range of subordinated and often stigmatised masculinities, and accentuates many of the masculine traits associated with more traditional constructions of masculinity. The language of ‘domination/ subordination’ around masculinities has also given rise to the term ‘marginalisation’, which Connell (1995) notes is always relative to the ‘authorisation’ of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group. Connell (1995:81) reiterates that neither hegemonic masculinity nor marginalised masculinities are fixed character types, but rather:

“…configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships.”

Messerschmidt (1993) notes that men construct masculinities in accordance with their position within social structures, and with their access to power and resources that such positions afford them. Does this position change when men are faced with a diagnosis like cancer?

Interest in and concerns about men’s health are threefold, relating to male mortality, morbidity, and health-related behaviours (2007, 15). Thus, we must attempt to define men’s health. Robertson concurs with his peer that ‘a men’s health issue is a disease or condition unique to men, more prevalent in men, more serious among men, for which risk factors are different for men or for which different interventions are required for men’ (2007, 17). This definition stays true to my own research, where I am exploring diseases which are unique to men, and which can be considered more serious due to the (increasing) numbers of fatalities that can be linked to them. I am also suggesting that the risk factors are more serious for men,
as they are disguised from fellow men, fellow patients, and from medical practitioners. I am suggesting that this disguise is the ‘use’ of ‘masculinity’.

A more comprehensive definition, and one which is even more in keeping with my own research argues that men’s health can be defined as ‘one arising from physiological, social, cultural, or environmental factors that have a specific impact on boys or men and/or where particular interventions are required for boys or men in order to achieve improvements in health and well-being at the individual or population level’ (2007, 17). I am suggesting that interventions need to be delivered that are cognizant of notions of masculinity. This is similar to Robertson when he suggested that ‘it allows us to understand and explore male health issues in the context of gendered relations’ (2007, 18).

Any attempt to develop phenomenological studies of the body, and the ‘self’ on the one hand, with an attempt to explore medical pluralism on the other, needs a conceptual framework that encompasses both levels (2006, 2). I am attempting to do just this. I will use ‘masculinity’ as both a frame of reference and a frame of analysis, in relation to an exploration of the causal relationship between ‘masculinity’, and men’s increasingly negative health outcomes. This would allow a contribution from sociological research that would inform both the medical professions and men in general, as well as policy.

Do men avoid being proactive about their health ‘to save face’? Going to the doctor can be a daunting prospect for anyone. The idea of going to the doctor means that a person considers him/herself to be ‘ill’, and they ‘bring and report the symptom to the doctor so that the detective work can proceed’ (1998, 3). The patient is required to act and report in a very specific manner, in a way which the doctor can easily interpret and offer solutions to. Yet, as Armstrong points out, ‘unfortunately for the efficient working of this model, people do not behave according to expectations in that they do not seem to use symptoms as triggers to seek help’ (ibid). Thus, despite desired expectations, it would seem that many people do not behave in a way that allows the doctor to work as a ‘detective’. The doctor is expecting to be approached in a specific manner that does not always seem to be the case. Can we therefore suggest that even from the very beginning, if a patient does not fulfil the expectations of the doctor and report symptoms of every description to the doctor, that the engagement will be compromised? I would suggest so. What we must also keep in mind is that symptoms, as indicators of illness, almost invariably led to help seeking behaviour (1998, 4). This is not the case. It would seem that patients must subject their symptoms to some sort of evaluation or some form of interpretation before deciding to seek medical advice (ibid). This is central to my own research, where we are trying to establish if ‘masculinity’ forms part of the ‘interpretation’ that men subject their symptoms to, before seeking medical advice. It is important to state clearly that ‘hegemony’ is not based on force, as Connell emphatically states (2005, 60). Hegemony does not mean total cultural dominance, it means ascendance reached within a balance of forces (2005, 60).

THE FACTS ABOUT MEN AND THEIR HEALTH

Men in Ireland today have a life expectancy of 77.1 years from birth (2008, 29). Women in Ireland have a life expectancy of 81.8 years from birth (2008, 34). Men die, on average, almost five years younger than women do and have higher death rates at all ages, and for all leading causes of death’ (2008, vii). So why are there such discrepancies between the number of years women live, and the numbers of years men live? One cannot hypothesize for every
cause of death, but one leading cause of death for men can be explored, cancer. Prostate cancer kills on average the same number of men each year to the comparable disease in women, breast cancer. Yet, there is no screening or information programme for men, and there is also a lack of openness and comradery for men faced with such difficulties, which seems in stark contrast to the comradery felt by women battling the disease, who fight it together.

Why are men alone in their battle with diseases such as prostate and even testicular cancer? This is the core question of my research, a question which I am exploring with an understanding of the complexity and importance that independence and strength are for men. Does prostate cancer threaten this strength of body and character; does it go to the very heart of male identity and threaten this in some way? These are all questions I am exploring, but for now I will hypothesise that a man’s sense of self preservation, identity and masculinity are embodied in their physical state of strength, independence and well being. I am suggesting that specific diseases which threaten the physical working and strength of the male body also hit the core of male identity, and that in supporting men with these diseases, we also need to be mindful of the social and cultural consequences of disease for men, and how they can be supported at such a difficult time.

Thus, despite traditionally being to the forefront of health service policy and provision, men have tended to be more reticent in terms of advocating or speaking out about their own health’ (2008, vii).

While the gap in male:female mortality for all causes of death is consistent across all age groups, it is most pronounced between the sexes aged 20-30, with men in this age group being approximately 3.5 times more likely to die than their female counterparts (2008, 32). This is also the main age group in which testicular cancer is most common in men. I am not intending to make a correlation between them now, but what I am suggesting is that my research has the potential to explore the social experience of disease for men in this age group, and establish if men with testicular cancer are at risk and a major contributor to the figures. There are also many other causes of death for this age group, yet cancer is one which I intend to explore in detail.

In 2003, it was estimated that men in Ireland could only enjoy, on average, 63.4 years of healthy living, free of disability and/or ill-health’ (2008, 34). Also a man’s inability to live a full and productive life is a considerable burden on the economy in terms of associated healthcare costs and loss of workplace productivity’ (2008, 34). So do men themselves contribute to this situation which sees them at such an advantage? This is possibly one of the greatest conclusions which may influence future policy.

THE NATIONAL POLICY – WHAT IT PROPOSES

1 - The policy looked at building gender competent health services with a focus on preventative health. In formulating the policy, the authors became aware that there was a need to do two things when trying to develop an understanding of men and the health services. Firstly, they were aware that there were barriers within the health service that need to be explored and examined, but they also became aware that there were barriers within men themselves that also need to be addressed. This is an awareness and approach that I will also explore in my work.
It is important that men are able to make more informed decisions about their health, the authors argue (2008, 68). Men tend to have a shorter life expectancy than women, and tend to use primary care services less frequently, for a shorter period of time, and ask fewer questions (ibid). Thus the limitations between and within existing services need to be explored.

There is a tension between what men want, and what they are willing to ask for. While it may be possible to have a professional relationship based on respect and trust, I would argue that to some extent, it is illustrative of the dualism that men may feel about their interaction with health service providers. I am suggesting that on the one hand men want to ensure that the service is discreet and confidential, but at the same time, they, like every person, seek acceptance and acknowledgement. I am suggesting that there is a dualism in the approach that men take to health care professionals, and this dualism may be partly responsible for confused approach and expectations about health services. It could also be responsible for putting some men off seeking help, as they may feel that this dualism is too ambiguous to overcome.

There are barriers within men themselves, and refers to the fact that men may not want to appear weak or a failure by being ill (2008, 68). The report made the important point about when it is acceptable to seek help, only when the ‘threshold of ill-health has been exceeded’ (ibid). What this sub section of the report fails to do is address the possibility that there may be a link between men’s internal barriers, and the service providers. Thus, I will suggest that the dualism between what men want and what they see as possible or realistic needs to be explored in this light.

Of course, such a move calls for the provision of primary care which are based on health checks and screening initiatives (2008, 69).

While the report promotes the establishment and utilization of community based services as central (2008, 69). The authors see the context of pubs, sports clubs and schools as sites where services could be targeted at men who may be less likely otherwise to use services (ibid). I argue that getting men to look at their bodies as they would their cars can only be a short term solution, and I think the policy should state this, and make provision for the movement away from such health promotion, which I argue merely reproduces traditional notions of masculinity. This policy has stated its willingness to reproduce such notions, thus the aim of the policy seems to be to address men’s health problems and reinforce traditional notions of masculinity. This is how the policy differs dramatically from my own research. In my own research I am promoting a move away from traditional notions of masculinity, to a notion that is more flexible and more realistic, while at the same time trying to tackle the issue of ‘men’s health’. I am not disputing the importance of targeted and specific work based initiatives, but I can only see them as a short term solution. I am disputing the desire to reproduce traditional notions of masculinity, when there seems to be no obvious need to do so? I hope that my own research will illustrate just how unrealistic ideal notions of masculinity are, and more importantly, how unhelpful they are to men dealing with such critical disease.

2 - The policy also explored creating gender competent cancer prevention measures and screening services. In terms of cancer prevention, the policy clearly acknowledges that current cancer services are failing men, and that action needs to be taken (2008, 70). The
report suggests that 80% of cancer patients present to primary care, so this service needs to clear in its understanding of and interaction with people in this context (ibid). An expert symposium detailed what it would like to see happen about men and cancer, and their recommendations are outlined in the policy (2008, 70). The symposium called for a review of existing evidence, further research to establish why people delay presenting with cancer, and how it varies with gender. The symposium also called for research to explore the psycho-social elements of cancer diagnosis, and for an increased focus n cancer prevention programmes. My research will seek to address a number of these issues, particularly an examination of why people delay seeking advice when symptoms of cancer appear and how this varies according to gender.

There is no screening programme for prostate cancer in Ireland at present. Much of this is due to the fact that the majority of medical organizations either recommend against screening, or they point to the lack of sufficient evidence to justify its use (2008, 71). This is partly due to a fear of over diagnosis. As all diagnosis do not need treatment (check this out again), there may be over use of treatment, which can lead to other complications such as incontinence and impotence (ibid). However, screening would identify the disease, raise incidence rates and thus rates of intervention.

There seems to be a lack of willingness to go down this route, for good reason perhaps, but I would argue that once again, reproductive capacity is prioritized above optimal patient safety, and that this is not just a symptom of the medical profession, but society more generally.

Thus, through the development of gender competent health services, with a focus on preventative care, the policy clearly outlined a need to improve men’s primary care services (2008, 73). There is also a need to develop more gender competent cancer services in particular, and to implement these measures while endorsing guidelines (ibid).

3 - In terms of promoting gender competency in the delivery of health and social services, the consultation process that the policy authors went through shed much light on the area of promoting health. They found in particular that there was a need to include professional men’s health training on the relevant undergraduate and post graduate courses in University (2008, 63). The objective of this move for the authors was to adopt best practice in engaging with men using health services, and the authors saw a need for increased measures to attract more men into the education and caring professions (ibid).

The point is made that although there is much literature on the area of men in the academic context, this is only starting to translate into more formal structures in recent times (2008, 63). The authors have suggested that all third level institutions have a role to play in creating and promoting academic programmes which will focus on men’s health (ibid). The limited training, the authors argue, may be a first step, but there is no data available on the success of this data. Thus, the authors argue that the training needs to be tailored to meet the needs of different health professionals and allied health professionals (ibid). This is where my own project had an opportunity to make a contribution.

Thus the overall objective of this policy strand is to develop health and social services with a clear focus on gender competency in the delivery of services. Thus, specialized academic programmes, training protocols, and the promotion of these strategies needs to be prioritized.
I have not yet examined the numbers of males in caring professions, and factored in this as part of my study. I cannot see scope for such a move in my study, due to the logistical problems that I can overcome as a lone researcher. However, such issues will be kept in mind.

4 – In terms of promoting men’s health, the policy outlined the need to address taboo issues that face men, masculinities and men’s health (2008, 49). It looked to the internet as a possible means through which it would disseminate its message. There are two problems with the use of the internet to promote men’s health (ibid). Firstly, to target men with health information, men need to be drawn to the information, by simply putting it on line does not mean that it will reach the audience intended. Secondly, the use of the internet as a means of support goes against another aspect of the policy I would argue. The policy is suggesting that a more holistic approach be taken to the issue of men and men’s health, thus, can the use of a medium such as the internet be classified as a holistic approach to men and their health. Or is it rather a new approach to try to go around the ‘old’ problems that the issues faces, and try to get to men on an individual basis. In other words, the policy, inadvertently, acknowledges that ‘masculinity’ is in some way a barrier to ‘health’, and the only way around this is to bypass the ‘social’ dimension of that identity, and deliver the health message and the private, personal level. This may be innovative use of technology, but it faces the same ‘old’ problems. It does not address the core issues that face men and masculinity, but rather, offers a short term solution to try to move men out of a situation where masculinity is in some sense, a barrier. This I feel is a major issue that needs to be addressed by the policy if it is to have the extensive and long lasting success that it desires.

The policy criticizes the stereotypical approach that aspects of the media, particularly the internet, reinforce traditional notions of men’s health, and masculinity more generally. The policy highlighted the shift in portrayals of masculinity away from violence and aggression towards a more ‘deficit based’ portrayal of masculinity, in terms of household skills, parenting skills, for example (2008, 49). This ‘men in crisis’ approach implicates men as ‘instigators of their own adverse health outcomes (ibid). I would hope that my work would go some way to addressing this problem.

Health promotion must be gendered (2008, 51). This is the approach which the policy is suggesting is not just important to health related policies, but rather, an approach that needs to be adopted much more generally. ‘Gender is one of the most important determinants of health behaviour’ (ibid). The policy is thus acknowledging that some health behaviours may in fact be ‘active expressions of masculinity’ (2008, 51). This project is exploring the hypothesis that the relationship between a man’s identity, medical knowledge, and sense of ‘masculinity’ may in fact impact on their health decisions and ultimately their health. The policy continues by dealing with specific issues, such as diet (2008, 52), physical activity (ibid), overweight and obesity (2008, 53), and stress management (2006, 54) to name but a few.

The risky behaviour that this report highlights, and many others, have been linked to masculinity, this is an important fact. The authors have stated that basic sexual education is missing in Ireland. Not only have we a problem about educating men in general about their health, the sexual health of very many men is a basic problem that may first need to be overcome. This however also illustrates the total absence of education that addresses the needs of men. Thus there may be a need to establish an agency with responsibility for the education of men regarding issues from sexuality to health, and everything in between.
While some health risks may be more common than others, a concerted effort is needed to promote and market a more holistic interpretation of men’s health to help foster a positive sense of self (2008, 61). The report suggests that this could be done through the establishment of promotional and marketing strategies (ibid). Yet, the policy states that these strategies need to both challenge and support traditional notions of masculinity (2008, 61). Thus the policy would support initiatives to ‘develop health messages that appeal to men by challenging them to take greater responsibility for their own health so that they will be able to fulfil their traditional support role as provider, protector, husband and father’ (ibid). I have a huge problem with this statement and would argue that in some respects, it contradicts other initiatives and suggestions that the policy brings to bear. Thus while the strategic aim of supporting men in the quest to adopt positive health behaviours may be a worthy cause, I would suggest that doing so with the intention of supporting traditional notions of masculinity cannot have major effects. While this may be a realistic approach, in terms of the fact that men are not going to ‘give up’ their ‘traditional’ role easily, I would suggest that the policy has serious faults when at the one hand it criticizes the reproduction of traditional notions of masculinity that do not go well with health care, compared to their own initiatives that want to promote change and support traditional notions. This policy is once again shown to be lacking in the finer detail, as it attempts to make a ‘catch all’ approach to the issue of men and their health.

CONCLUSION

Connell argues that the world is gendered (1995, 5). Connell argues that the social position of men in this gendered world leads to a ‘impersonality’ of its discourse, structures of power, communication in science, and, the reproduction of its internal culture (1995, 6).

I would argue that my study of the relationship between masculinity, embodied performativity, and the use of health services are an example of such a gendered world. It appears not all men are benefitting from a ‘privileged’ position. The health service illustrates an impersonal discourse which is producing very traditional notions of what the status of the male body should be. This is reinforced by the structures of power which rely heavily on such sectors of the medical profession and providers, giving them not only physical power, but also power over the discourse. This reproduces an internal culture, a culture in my example, where there is a perception that the ‘male role’ cannot be maintained if certain services are used.

I am not suggesting that services in general are generally preventative towards men. There is a perception among men that the use of certain health services will lead to a questioning of their own (sexual) identity. As an internal perception, it illustrates the way certain types of ‘maleness’ are idealised, even when such ideals go against what may be necessary to actually maintain or heal a male body.

Masculinity, in Connell’s own words, is a knowledge created by the very power that it claims to study (1995, 7). It is, in itself, a very cyclical notion. It is both a personal perception, and a social fact. Both contradicting, yet supporting, each other in the construction of what is the social reality of desired forms of masculine behaviour, and desired forms of embodied masculinity.
While it might be admirable and desirable to have a ‘gender aware’ health service, that does not remove the fact that the social setting in which men, and women, are immersed, does not change, and whether the services are gender-aware or not, does not change the fact that men still have to negotiate a delicate social situation, when faced with the social consequences of disease and their treatment. This is something that I hope my research can illustrate most strongly, which could have a major impact on future develops within this policy, and other documents.

It would appear that one of the best possible way that sociology could contribute to a greater understanding of men’s health, for medical professionals and for men, would be to first of all gain a greater understanding of the acknowledgement, interpretation and understanding of symptoms, and how these are communicated to the doctor, and then to enable a greater interpretation by the ‘doctor’ of what is communicated by the patient, and what social factors may affect an understanding of the acknowledgement, interpretation and understanding of symptoms, and how these are communicated. This is something which could be developed within the policy in the future.

While many of my critiques here may seem to undermine the policy in a number of ways, I have done this for two reasons. Firstly, it illustrates the manner in which this project can compliment the existing policy, and secondly, so that the policy can learn from projects such as mine, which it has expressed a desire to do so. What has to be welcomed is the initiative to promote an increased focus on men’s health research in Ireland, to establish the centre for research, and to continue to underpin and evaluate the policy. I will stress the need for a willingness to dispose of policy that does not meet current or future needs, rather than continued evaluation and underpinning. In some cases, a clean slate may be the best way to move forward.

Of course, the greatest contribution that my research could make to policy would be to create a basis for such policy to be funded independently, rather than through ‘existing’ funding. Yet, such a footing would also require the maintenance of the ‘catch-all approach’ of this policy.

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THE SOCIAL POLICY RELEVANCE OF EARLY RESULTS FROM A CROSS-CULTURAL, QUALITATIVE STUDY ON RURAL ADOLESCENTS' EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND FUTURE LIFE PLANS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on PhD research which explores the ways young rural people in Ireland and Vermont, USA conceptualise their academic achievement and their ideas about future life plans. Through in-depth, qualitative research this doctoral work ultimately hopes to offer insights which might contribute towards future elements of the National Development Plan’s School Planning Initiatives (National Development Plan 2007-2013, Initiative, and Department of Education and Science 2009), County Council Development Plans (Meath Local Authorities 2007) and the Rural Development Plan (CAP Rural Development Division 2007) in the effort towards supporting rural young people, communities and schools. In this paper I will share a brief background to the research, detail the methodology, discuss some of the preliminary findings and offer some initial thoughts on how the analysis will continue and hopefully afford rich data to inform governmental and policy initiatives relevant to rural areas.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on cross-national, qualitative doctoral work investigating the rapidly changing social climates of rural/semi-rural Ireland and Vermont, USA. The research examines several sociologically related areas including identity development, education, socio-economics, social/cultural capital, gender, migration and the impact socio-economic development has had within each of these contexts. This paper will give a short background to the research, review the methodology and offer a discussion of some initial findings and their possible contribution to policy and initiatives relevant to rural areas, schools and young people.

In the past half century, Vermont and Ireland have experienced similar economic development. Initially, growth in both locations was largely based on service industries surrounding various forms of tourism (O’Connor and Cronin 1993; Lin et al. 1999) followed by periods of manufacturing development and then the arrival of large multinationals from burgeoning IT sectors due to market and policy incentives (Allen 2009; Klyza and Trombulak 1999). The past twenty years have seen each area experience intensive, unsustainable property booms which presently have had serious negative effects particularly for rural communities (Halloway 2008; Carlson 2008). However, simultaneously, both locations have also been experiencing unprecedented numbers of young women attaining significant academic honours and entering third level and post-graduate education (Central Statistics Office 2002, 2007; US Census Bureau 2000, 2007; Bettie 2002; Mickelson 2003).

Female participation in education is not a new phenomenon in rural areas (Ní Laoire 2000, 2005; Redmond 2009), nor is their generally higher performance compared to male counterparts a precedent (Jacob 2002; Mickelson 1989). Rather it is the level of education
attained and the particularly high performance of young women in recent years that is thought-provoking (Central Statistics Office 2002, 2007; US Census Bureau 2000, 2007). Also, in First World countries the majority of out-migrants from rural areas are women. This presents increasingly serious issues surrounding nearly all aspects of rural living (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Corbett 2007, 2007a; Dahlström 1996; Stockdale 2002).

In working to understand social change, globalisation’s effects and attempting to plan for a better future, I would argue that it is important to study people who, though thousands of miles apart and culturally quite different, are enacting similar behaviours. This project examines the various influences contributing to high levels of achievement in Ireland and Vermont’s rural young women today with a smaller sampling of component young men to maintain some level of gender comparison. The project works to explore the effects rapid economic development has had on formerly subsistence agrarian-based rural economies by investigating local young people’s identity development and relationships with education and their home communities. I am trying to illuminate the definitive changes in structure, definition and accessibility of social/cultural capital through education and academic attainment and its relationship with rural out-migration. I hope this project will be able to contribute some suggestions towards rural community sustainability strategies such as the Rural Development Plan 2007-2013 (CAP Rural Development Division 2007) and also help to address various issues presently concerning rural education arenas (Muiris O’Connor, Statistics Section, Department of Education and Science 2007). This paper begins some of that discussion.

STARTING POINTS

My aim is that findings from this research might contribute towards discourses surrounding education, recreation, community and various other youth-focused initiatives in Ireland and Vermont while simultaneously working to contribute to wider thinking on other rural issues like housing, community sustainability, amenities, transport and services. Goals and strategies set out in governmental publications like National, Regional and County Development Plans—both in Ireland as well as Vermont—often outline broad targets and it can sometimes be difficult to gauge whether they’re being accomplished or not and to tailor projects for specific area and community needs. Things like the School Development Planning Initiative which works in conjunction with the National Development Plan as well as Vermont’s Schools on the Move initiative set admirable, long-term goals, including elements like increasing infrastructure and transportation and addressing issues like increasing the performance of secondary school students across the board (National Development Plan 2007-2013, School Development Planning Initiative, and Department of Education and Science 2001; National Development Plan 2007-2013 et al. 2009; Vermont High School Task Force 2002).

While laudable on premise, plans and initiatives like these are geared towards systematically evaluating “the larger picture”. This means that they deal primarily with large, quantitative data in order to inform the strategies and plans they lay out. This is beneficial in terms of attending to broad trends but in order to truly address the concerns of the those who reside in rural areas and attend rural schools, it is vital to delve deeply into their thoughts, feelings and hopes for both themselves and their communities in order to work towards bringing about the changes local people feel are needed most. These might range from newer school books and more computers, to better broadband access or shopping and transportation facilities. The
point here is that the change and support initiated is coming directly from and to those who live in and engage with these spaces and places.

This “ground-up”, participant focused approach is a key element of my research and indeed, largely informs my theoretical framework. Internationally, the work on education and young people’s identity formation is considerable (Scheirer and Kraut 1979; Pat O’Connor 2006, 2008; Corbett 2004, 2005, 2007; Côté 2002) 12. However, there is comparatively little research on the Vermont context and what is available for the Irish case leaves room to join the discussion. Informed by Bourdieu, the prevailing theoretical standpoint asserts relational discourses as crucial in exploring how young people formulate and enact concepts of self within their lived environments, particularly within the realm of education (Stets and Harrod 2004; Pat O’Connor 2007). My qualitative design was based on this premise and took shape in an effort to examine how these groups of young people navigate between the self, the social and the community when planning ahead.

With the rapid changes and shifting social values of modernity, identity development can be an increasingly difficult, unstable process which further impacts discussions surrounding cultural reproduction and educational inequality (Dumais 2002; Mickelson 2003; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999). Gender further mitigates these processes with a recent argument suggesting that in Ireland, while gender remains a significant aspect shaping young people’s self-concepts, certain areas of consumer culture are in fact weakening its impact and diminishing its distinctiveness (O'Connor 2007). However, young women, and particularly educationally inclined young women, remain firmly in the majority of rural out-migrants (Ní Laoire 2001, 2005). As such, I felt these findings prompted further research into the relationship between constructions of gender, rapid development and rural out-migration while being mindful of the decline of many rural communities coinciding with the increasing push towards and reliance on a knowledge-based, credentialed labour force so often heard of in recent political and economic discourse (National Competitiveness Council and Forfas 2009; Belluck 2006; Berry and Dalton 2004).

How today’s young people construct and navigate who they are, their relationships with their communities and what they plan for in their futures are important elements to consider when trying to formulate strategies to viably support rural areas. If young people understand their future lives to be situated “elsewhere” this is oftentimes informed by conceptualising their home communities to be fundamentally lacking in infrastructure, facilities and or future jobs for them to work at. Further, there is often something less material at play as well, such as a sense of dis-embeddedness or the feeling of being “pushed out” by those who wish they could stay. Ironically, both of these feelings are largely based on experiencing their home community as lacking a “place for them”, a sentiment that can be seen among many rural young people throughout the globe, but again, this is most especially the case among young women (Andres and Licker 2005; Corbett 2007a; Dahlström 1996).

By asking rural young people about their future life plans, ideas about their mobility and relationships with their home areas, we are afforded with a powerful tool to inform how we go about planning new developments as well as supporting existing communities. For example, the suggestions found in Feasta’s (2003) address of current land development practices show concerns for things like transportation, local amenities and facilities and highlights infrastructural needs in a general way. The nature of these suggestions, as in the

12 For further reading see also Pat O’Connor et al. 2004; Archer 1982; Aronson 2002
case of the National Development Plan and the School Development Planning Initiative, is a broad one, theoretically able to be tailored to particular communities’ needs. Preliminary findings from my work offer just such specifics, from which transportation routes young people feel would be most beneficial in a certain area to what kinds of facilities they feel they would like most and indeed, many even explicitly discuss jobs they would like to work at later in life. They lay out clear, precise ideas about what could be focused on in their home areas, showing evidence of in-depth thought and critical consciousness. This kind of data offers pragmatic and community-focused avenues for consideration regarding future developmental initiatives. Further, the findings so far hint at the ameliorative possibilities long-term projects could have for creating valuable jobs, career paths and infrastructure for local young people and communities. Such long-term plans could include things like tax incentives for various industries or firms to set up in particular locales, price-breaks on land for building places of employment or education etc.

By informing and implementing suggestions like those Feasta (2003) and the National Development Plan (NDP/CSF Information Office 2000) offers with on-the-ground youth perspectives, pragmatic and feasible strategies and projects might be implemented in such a way as to facilitate not just responsible town development but also to foster an environment where young people feel they would not only like, but be able to stay and belong to. What is more, by scrutinising the contentious links between status reproduction, familial and peer socialising processes and conceptualisations of the place of knowledge and skills within rural communities and the wider economy, we can gain deeper insights into how rural economies and communities can be developed, built upon and facilitated. I have used the word ‘place’ specifically here as I’m investigating the idea that young people—rural young people in my case—often view education as a singular means of mobility, of maintaining or gaining various forms of capital and/or status away from where they’ve grown up (Alston et al. 2001; Andres and Licker 2005; Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Bryant and Pini 2009; Corbett 2007, 2007b).

METHODOLOGY

Fundamentally, I wanted to examine the impact of socioeconomic background on the adolescents in my sample areas, especially in terms of how this might have influenced their relationship with education, their communities and indeed their conceptions of self. However, I avoided defining socioeconomic status as ‘middle’ or ‘working-class’. Instead I’ve used the terms ‘blue collar’ and ‘white collar’ to select and categorise my samples. I did this because in both Vermont and Ireland’s case, their most recent economic booms were largely fuelled by their respective building and property industries, genres of work traditionally attributed with predominantly working-class status. However, as the majority of development in these economies was in these sectors, those who worked within them would not necessarily have lived what would traditionally be considered working-class lifestyles. Rather, those who were in the building and property industries during the boom would more than likely have lived middle to upper-class lifestyles until the downturn took hold in 2007/2008. By using this more socioculturally-based delineation I contend that I’ve gained a sharper lens for my analysis, especially as different nations/areas have developed via particular industries and hence harbour at least somewhat diverse socioeconomic statuses.

I think this categorisation helps highlight the social and cultural variables at work here. I think it also helps underscore and account for variations like the case of blue-collar young
people excelling in the education system (Bettie 2002; Corbett 2007a; Dumais 2002; Shaw 1994). As such I’m working towards a more socioculturally sensitive categorisation as opposed to one based more on financial capital. Thus, I drew from schools of both statuses to explore each group’s conceptualisation of self and their respective relationships with their identities, educational achievement and views of their future place within the wider economy. The reflexive activities adolescents engage in while constructing their concepts of self underscore the importance of acknowledging their agency and recognising them as actively and consciously participating in the creation of particular identities and behaviours within various social fields, settings and indeed institutions.

In Ireland I chose study areas within Leinster because the most considerable building and urbanisation of previously semi-rural and rural areas occurred there due in large part to demand for housing in the Dublin commuter belt (Gleeson et al. 2008:68-72). In Vermont, I selected from Addison, Washington and Orange Counties as the most concerted development occurred in this area as well, being roughly within a one hour radius of either the state’s capital city, Montpelier and/or largest city, Burlington. Both areas have undergone major development of the past twenty years and have seen serious consequences for local communities as a result (The Real Estate Bloggers 2006; Curtis 2006; Cullen 2000; Cunningham 2004).

I then identified and selected eight areas in total, four in each Vermont and Ireland, two white and two blue-collar respectively, and their component public, mixed schools. Once participation was agreed, I asked the schools themselves to select their two top performing young women and their single top performing young man from fourth year (tenth grade in the US), fifth year (eleventh grade), and sixth year (twelfth grade). I did this to respect the schools’ confidentiality regarding academic performance records etc.

The primary research method was cross-sectional, semi-structured, approximately 60 minute in-depth qualitative interviews in conjunction with short questionnaires on themes I wanted participants to reflect. This method aimed at examining participants’ levels of conscious reflection on their internalisation of various messages surrounding academic achievement, relationships with and feelings about their home communities and the practical application of said values and concepts for future life trajectories. I’m trying to examine the internalisation processes with special attention to what degree (if at all) participants’ personal identities and future life plans are consciously (or unconsciously) informed and shaped by their conceptions of educational achievement, the social/cultural benefits thereof, their relationships with their home communities and family or friendship networks. A short, reflective essay title was also distributed during a class period of the schools’ discretion wherein the participating students’ entire class would engage in writing a ten-minute response if they so chose. This was designed to help bring insights into whether or not the aspirations and motivations of the selected high achieving students are in any way anomalous.

“LIVING HERE”

The data is currently in the very early stages of analysis and so no firm findings can be presented, however, the following discussion is offered to suggest the implications of the

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13 I also didn’t want to be too intrusive and felt that the less contact or presence I would have within the schools themselves then the less they would feel they had to do in order to participate. This generally worked well in terms of gaining access.
findings to debates both theoretical and policy-focused. As geographic situatedness will influence systems of meaning and socio-cultural nuances etc, I felt a comparative approach would hopefully serve as an interesting and engaging addition to the discourse, especially in terms of various arguments surrounding globalisation and the perennial global-local debates (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Corbett 2007b; Fagan 2002; Sorensen 2009). Further, by comparing cross-culturally, one area might gain insight into policies and practices which have affected positive change in the other location and so perhaps tailor-make a similar initiative of their own.

At the time of writing (July/August 2009), I have only transcribed twelve interviews, six from a blue-collar school in Leinster and six from a blue-collar school in Vermont and am only beginning their analysis. However, something I found interesting thus far was that those who discussed being particularly decided about future plans tended to come from families without a long history of education. These students all shared relatively new legacies of academic involvement, showed intense intrinsic motivation and appeared to hold conscientious, concrete ideas about education and career paths, mostly which led out of the home community. This was spoken about with remorse but then justified due to there being either “no jobs” available for the careers these young people aspired towards and or no feasible means of public transportation for them to commute to where they would be able to work if living locally.

N: I know meself I won’t live here like, in L-, like I know I won’t… I wouldn’t live here, I’d move to Dublin, I think there’s more job opportunities up there. Like for what I want to be I can’t achieve that here because like there’s no colleges obviously and just no job opportunities I think so definitely Dublin. But anywhere like, but probably just Dublin… (“Anne” 16 year old Irish female)

P: …I feel like our community has like small businesses but they just don’t generate enough profit and that’s really hard, so I feel like a lot of people from P- or from M- travel to work, like they have to go to Montpelier, to Danville and St. Johnsbury, to find work, everyday, they travel, a lot of people don’t work in the community, there are a few exceptions but for the most part people travel, they leave the community and come back everyday and that’s because there isn’t a lot in the community. (“Potter” 17 year old Vermont female)

Interestingly meanwhile, those adolescents from families where both parents had engaged with at least some third level education discussed having little tenable focus regarding future plans for education and/or careers.

J: That’s actually, like, people always have ideas like “oh yeah I want to be a teacher, I want to be a garda” and I haven’t got a clue… (“Jenny” 15 year old Irish Female)

F: I can’t really see myself in like a desk job all day and I really don’t see myself doing like a specialised like mechanics field or anything like that, or like engineering or something like that…so I think that I’m just going to go to school for liberal arts and hope for the best (laughs) (“Frank” 17 year old Vermont male)

This is noteworthy because extensive work has been done surrounding what Lareau (2002; Lareau and Weininger 2006) called ‘concerted cultivation’, a conscientious moulding of young people by their parents through specific and strategically selected activities so as to ensure greater advantages for higher education and subsequent adult life (Bartel 1971; Corbett 2007b; Shaw 1994; Apple 2001; Vincent and Ball 2007). This early finding is thought-provoking as upon further analysis it may lead to developing ideas surrounding the
socio-cultural influence of blue-collar locales on childrearing among the more white-collar residents of rural places. In terms of policy or institutional context it may also provide insights into how curricula could be developed as well as serve as a catalyst for reviewing the resources available in blue-collar area schools and so contribute to debates surrounding school funding, implementation and governance that are currently in the Department for Education and Science’s Area Development Plans, Schools Building Programme 2009 (Department of Education and Science 2009a, 2009b).

SUCCESS SPECIFICALLY AS MOBILITY

Alongside these ideas of concrete future life plans requiring leaving the home community, there is also a pronounced relationship between the idea of “being successful” and moving out of their rural home communities apparent in nearly all the interviews. Sometimes this was expressed overtly and other times in more subtle ways of linking ideas about life plans for settling elsewhere or “going where the job takes me”.

L: If I got my degree and…a really good job and I was happy in my job and then I’d settle down and be happy in my life, that’d be success…during college I’d probably say that I will live here but after that I’d prefer to move away even just for change nearly. There’s nothing really here that’d keep me here so I’d probably travel for that. (“Louisa” 17 year old Irish female)

E: I can’t see meself living at home or living around my home you know, I would always probably think that I would actually move off you know. (“Edward” 16 year old Irish male)

This is somewhat worrying as in the current economic climate these areas face serious social, economic, ecological and political issues due not in small part to the ways they have been developed during their respective boom years. As such, these places would benefit considerably from highly motivated, educated and skilled young people remaining within these locales as tomorrow’s employers, community members and problem solvers.

Currently Vermont’s governance structure feels that the mass exodus of its young people is such a problem that an initiative has been enacted called ‘The Vermont Promise Scholarship’ whereby the programme will ‘provide Vermont high school graduates more than 1,000 awards per year for up to 50 percent of the cost of tuition – over 12,000 scholarships during the life of the program – to attend one of the state’s institutions of higher education’ (Casey 2006). In return, graduates are asked to begin their lives in Vermont upon completion of their education and ‘if they do, the state will forgive the full award’ whereas ‘if they choose to chart their course elsewhere, the state will treat a portion of the scholarship as a no interest loan’ (Casey 2006).

The phrase ‘starting their lives’ means recipients committing to living and working in Vermont for five years after the completion of their studies. This initiative has only been in place for about the last two years and so it is yet to be seen how this state effort might influence young people’s future plans. However, with my participants making many references to the cost of education this may prove to be a key effort in helping encourage in-state settlement patterns of talented youth like my study participants. However, I’d suggest that in order to affect a more fundamental shift towards wanting to stay as opposed to choosing to stay out of convenience or in fulfilment of the Vermont Promise Scholarship there needs to be more attention to the ways young people are constructing their ideas about
home, belonging and their own communities. These are all questions I am exploring at present.

Thus far to my knowledge, there are no organised or state-led initiatives geared towards encouraging talented youth to remain within rural areas in Leinster. Again however, it will be interesting to see how the Vermont Promise Scholarship unfolds in the coming years as to whether or not this is a truly viable means for retaining more educated young people within the state of Vermont or if they will simply ‘do their time’ and then move out of state anyway.

PARENTS, FAMILIES AND PLANNING AHEAD

The students who detailed focused future plans also discussed education as a primary focus of their lives in a fervent and committed way. They derived meaning and showed complex relationships with their schools, the concept of “education” and their sense of self. Narrating home lives filled with parents supporting them to achieve and aspire within the educational field, these young people describe themselves as working towards goals which were decidedly out of their parents’ reach.

E: ehm, my parents…they didn’t have a great education themselves but they always wanted, they want to see me doing well (“Edward” 16 year old Irish male)

P: I want to be the first girl in my family to go to college and finish so that [is] motivation for me. (“Potter” 17 year old Vermont female)

N: …me ma and da never had a proper education…I want to be able to make me ma and da proud of me…so I believe that education is real important to me. (“Anne” 17 year old Irish female)

Those who expressed less certainty about future educational and career goals described families less concerned with academic excellence or cultivating university-bound young people.

Y: …my mom’s always been really supportive of my brother and I taking a gap year…my brother did that and I’m going to do that. And when I was like ‘what if I didn’t go to college’ my parents were like ‘yeah we’ll be supportive of that too’. (“Lyra” 16 year old Vermont female)

J: I was even talking to me da about this yesterday cause like some parents push their kids into things, like they kinda push them into sports or to go to college or something like that, and my dad always says “as long as you’re happy I’m happy” which is good because like you don’t feel pressure to do anything. [I could] sit at home “and I’m happy so you’re happy” (“Jenny” 15 year old Irish female)

Again, this is interesting in its departure from much of the literature on class and childrearing. I think this helps to highlight why my categorisation of blue-collar and white-collar areas is a helpful analytic tool and may yield interesting and insightful findings. It is these kinds of findings that I think may help practically inform innovative discussion about the nature and implementation of such things as Careers Counselling in Ireland or new forms of Transition Year that might best maximise students life trajectory options and support students in their decision making processes. This kind of data affords us with the chance to make practical
and immediate suggestions for changes in school curricula and the ways in which Careers Counselling and Transition Year are managed and implemented.

**‘SUCCESS’ AS SELFLESSNESS**

Another overarching theme across the interviews was that for these adolescents, ‘success’ was at least in some way to do with contributing to the wider good. It is moving to read some of these students’ thoughts on what they would need to feel they had been successful in life. There were too many quotations even in the small group I’ve transcribed so far to include them all here, so I’ve selected three as particularly poignant. I would argue that if these students can achieve even half of what they dream of, then tomorrow’s world will be a much better one than today. What is more, these young people expressed powerful sentiments that could be harnessed for community good through youth work, youth activity programmes like clubs and societies or even the implementation of “Tidy Towns” in areas which have none as was mentioned to be lacking by several respondents, resulting in them regularly picking up litter themselves on their own time. These few suggestions are all structural level implementations which could effectively tap into the positive and community minded feelings these young people expressed, helping both them and their communities in positive ways.

E: …success to me would be making something of my life and just to make an influence and make a difference to other people’s lives then…through teaching…because the fact that I think that I can actually share what I have [with] other people and you know influence their lives or hopefully get them a good job when they grow older, you’re not being selfish…you’re returning the favour that was passed on to you really so that’s, I think success would be seeing people succeed in life…I like the idea that they’d be actually taught by me and that sort of way and I’d be proud, I’d be proud of the fact that I had sorta made a difference. (“Edward” 16 year old Irish male)

N: …success for me is being out there and making a difference in the world and that’s success to me now. (“Anne” 16 year old Irish female)

R: …I’d feel that in my life I’ll have been successful if I’ve actually like helped the world…I don’t want to just come here and leave and have nothing had been different…I want to be able to say that I actually made it better, not like huge, drastic, world-changing things, like I don’t want to be president or anything…but I just want to make an improvement. (“Rose” 16 year old Vermont female)

Finally, those who discussed “making a difference” as something they would endeavour to do specifically through their careers, were also those whom I’m currently tentatively calling “the Planners”. The ways these young people have so systematically considered their life plans and strategically organised their thoughts surrounding their future life trajectories is one of the most compelling findings thus far. This is because much of education and class reproduction research would indicate that students with these kinds of socioeconomic backgrounds would often have narrower life course horizons (Allatt 1993; Bourdieu 1984; Lareau 2002; Lareau and Weininger 2003, 2006). However, these young people had the most profoundly and intrinsically motivated plans for affecting real change in the wider social world with goals ranging from becoming a secondary school geography and history teacher to plans to work with reintroducing animals to the wild. It is this kind of motivation that policy makers and planners should be attending to, especially in efforts like the Rural
Development Plan (CAP Rural Development Division 2007) and the Schools Building Programme 2009 (Department of Education and Science 2009a, 2009b). These young people would undoubtedly become engaged in their communities in deep and meaningful ways if there were structural elements, spaces and places with which they could be involved (e.g. sports facilities, youth centres, organised community work initiatives etc).

LOOKING FORWARD

Ultimately this project hopes to show similarities and differences between Vermont and Ireland in terms of the nuances and influences affecting and developing various different changing forms of capital within rural contexts. I am endeavou ring to glean insights concerning the nature and dynamics of areas rapidly developed from agrarian subsistence economies with respect to the fields of education, socio-economics, migration and identity formation. I am aiming to contribute to discussions surrounding how to vitalise and support our rural areas which have suffered during the recent economic booms and subsequent busts. This research also works to provide rich, qualitative data to engage with issues of education in rural areas and how this influences young people’s future plans. I also hope that this research might prove to be a useful compliment to areas more quantitatively covered in projects such as the current National Longitudinal Study by the ESRI and the Children’s Research Centre as well.

This work began with ideas surrounding young women’s high educational achievement and the processes of identity construction and enactment with respect to the class and cultural background. So far, the data are yielding many different lines of inquiry, including senses of altruism and highly definitive notions of self-achievement among particular groups across both locations. Further, the essential merit of the work is in its examination of two different cultural areas experiencing very similar processes. Thus the insights I hope to garner should prove uniquely innovative in terms of what they might offer to various debates surrounding education and community sustainability, not just theoretically, but pragmatically in terms of affording evidence to inform future elements of things like the Rural Development Plan and the School Planning Initiative.

While it is still early, I would tentatively offer that this study is beginning to highlight the changing cultural currents of today’s Irish and Vermont rural societies, showing where the two areas share particular socio-cultural traits and where they differ in terms of promoting high academic/credential achievement and suffering from talented youth out-migration. Perhaps findings like these might help inform better planning and developmental practices in our rural areas, which have suffered during the recent neo-liberal and capitalist hegemony of most of our institutions and arenas. Indeed these are very broad and long-term goals, but perhaps by engaging with those talented youth who will populate the innovative and creative economies so many of our nations aspire towards, we might learn how to support and build more sustainable rural communities, economies, spaces and places instead of watching them experience difficulty and in some cases outright decline.

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MENTAL HEALTH, PUBLIC POLICY AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: THE IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH.

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ABSTRACT

Mental health and well-being is fundamental to our ability to cope with the everyday stressors of life, to participate in paid employment and contribute to our communities in a meaningful way. In the absence of mental well-being, individual functioning is impaired. The effects of this are considerable and can be translated into the personal costs to the individual, such as lack of fulfilment and loss of independence, and into economic and societal costs such as increased social welfare payments and increased pressure on the health care system. From a policy point of view, the promotion of positive mental health is of extreme importance. Until recently, data concerning the prevalence of mental illness both in Ireland and in Europe has been almost non-existent. The increasing awareness and recognition of the importance of mental illness has lead to the establishment of more initiatives to determine the number of those affected by mental illness, to promote mental health and to identify the factors contributing to mental ill health so that they can be reduced. Researchers in the area of mental health and well-being are in a position to offer many significant ideas and perspectives as to how mental health might best be protected and promoted so as to ensure that policies aimed at achieving economic growth and sustainability are effective.

INTRODUCTION

Approximately one in four individuals will experience some mental health problems in their lifetime. (World Health Organisation, 2001). The World Health Organisation has defined mental health as “a state of well-being” in which an individual can recognise their abilities, engage with the everyday stressors of life, can work “productively and fruitfully” and contribute to their community. (World Health Organisation, 2007) This definition recognizes the importance of mental well-being in allowing individuals to function as independent members of their community, capable of caring for their own basic personal needs, of occupying paid employment and of interacting with others in their environment. Poor mental health can impact negatively on an individual’s work, relationships and their sense of personal fulfilment. The cost of poor mental health extends beyond individual distress and suffering. Mental illness accounts for considerable societal and economic costs including mental health care and social welfare costs, work absenteeism and a decline in productivity. It is not surprising then that the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being, established at an EU high-level conference in June 2008 acknowledged mental health and well being as “a key resource” for the EU’s success as a “knowledge-based society and economy” and stressed its importance for “growth and jobs, social cohesion and sustainable development” (European Commission, 2008). Those conducting research in the area of mental health are concerned with identifying the factors which contribute to poor mental health, and in turn physical health, and with developing effective strategies and interventions that will ensure the achievement and maintenance of positive mental health. The empirical evidence base arising from this research informs our understanding of how mental health and well-being impacts...
on our daily lives in ways that strongly influence social cohesion and economic prosperity. This paper will illustrate both the humanitarian and economic importance of communicating these findings to policy makers.

PREVALENCE OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Our mental health is affected by a number of environmental, social and biological factors such as stress, daily hassles, personal dispositions and the quality and duration of sleep. The European Commission’s 2005 Green paper on improving the mental health of the population stated that in excess of 27% of adult Europeans are estimated to experience at least one form of mental ill health in any given year, with anxiety disorders and depression being the most common forms of mental ill health experienced. Closer to home, findings from the Health Research Board’s National Psychological Wellbeing and Distress survey published in 2007 revealed that 12% of the Irish adult population are currently experiencing psychological distress, with 6% of the population surveyed having been prescribed medication for mental illness in the previous year and 9% having spoken to a GP at least once in the past year about mental health problems (Doherty et al., 2007). It can be presumed that these figures have increased further in recent times given the concerns of economic uncertainty. In economic terms, it is estimated that mental ill health costs the EU an estimated 3 - 4 % of Gross Domestic Product (Report of the expert group on mental health policy, 2006). The overall economic cost of mental ill health problems in Ireland in 2006 was more than 3 billion euro, which accounts for 2% of Gross National Product (O Shea & Kennelly, 2008). These figures alone highlight the prevalence of mental ill health in Ireland and in Europe and the economic impact of this.

STRESS

Of the factors impacting on mental health, stress is particularly significant. Stress can be defined as a “negative emotional experience” accompanied by biochemical, physiological, cognitive and behavioural changes which serve to overcome the stress or accommodate its presence (Taylor, 2003). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested that when an individual is faced with a potential stressor they engage in primary appraisal to determine whether the stressor is positive, negative or neutral in nature. Secondary appraisal occurs when a stimulus is deemed negative and the individual must decide if their resources and coping abilities are sufficient to deal with the challenge, threat or harm posed by the situation. It can therefore be said that the extent to which a situation or event is experienced as stressful depends on the individual’s appraisal of it, i.e. greater levels of stress are experienced when the individual perceives a discrepancy between the demands of the situation and the resources they have to cope with it. In addition to the psychological distress caused by stress, it also causes physiological changes in the body, which if sustained can have long-term consequences for our physical health.

One way in which researchers have examined the physiological outcomes of psychological stress is to examine one’s pattern of cardiovascular reactivity in response to stress. Cardiovascular reactivity refers to the change in one’s resting blood pressure and heart rate in response to an “aversive, challenging or engaging” stressor (Treiber et al., 2003). A number of studies have shown that one’s cardiovascular reactivity to stress in the laboratory can predict their blood pressure levels when tested again at a later date. (Treiber et al., 2003)
Such findings allow us to identify those at greatest risk of cardiovascular related disease in the future. Research findings therefore suggest a pathway between stress and cardiovascular disease such that stress contributes to increased cardiovascular reactivity which in turn is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease (Lovallo, 2005). The significance of this finding is highlighted by the fact that only 50% of the variance in new cardiovascular disease cases can be attributed to risk factors such as family history, smoking, obesity, diabetes mellitus and hypercholesteremia (Treiber et al., 2003) and by figures obtained from the Central Statistics Office, which show that diseases of the circulatory system including hypertensive disease and ischemic heart disease accounted for the greatest number of deaths each year in Ireland from 1998 to 2006 ahead of cancer, disease of the respiratory system, injury and poisoning (CSO, 2009). Research investigating the factors contributing to stress and the means by which these factors can be alleviated or moderated is thus one way by which we can aim to reduce the incidence of cardiovascular disease, improve the health of our population and contribute to the sustainability of communities. The implementation of stress management programs and the delegation of tasks are ways by which we can aim to reduce stress in the workplace.

STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Figures from the European commission in 2005 stated that 28% of employees in Europe report stress at work (European Commission, 2005). Stress in the workplace can be related to a number of factors including work overload, poor organisation of working time, poor management and leadership styles, role ambiguity and little input in decision making. Although stress can at times be adaptive such as when it prompts us to work harder or faster to complete tasks and meet deadlines, the adverse impact of ongoing or intense stress extends beyond the individual and the quality of their work to increased business costs and lower profitability. High levels of stress in the workplace can lead to absenteeism, a decline in efficiency and productivity, staff turnover, interpersonal conflict between staff who may feel under appreciated or that their workload and responsibility is greater than that of others, poor job satisfaction and poor job commitment. Sparks, Faragher and Cooper (2001) in reviewing the factors that influence health and well-being in the workplace, pointed to employees' perceptions of job security as a significant factor. Perceived job insecurity may affect an organization or business through reduced employee morale, motivation and commitment to the employer. Smithson and Lewis (2000 as cited in Sparks et al., 2001) proposed that the negative outcomes of perceived job insecurity be counteracted by providing affected employees with greater opportunities for training and self-development, by ensuring open communication during times of uncertainty and by encouraging employees to develop their repertoire of transferable skills. Other factors implicated by Sparks et al. (2001) in the experience of stress in the workplace include work hours, the level of control over one’s work and management style.

The economic costs of stress in the workplace are reflected in increased social welfare payments in the form of sick benefit and disability allowances to those who are unfit to engage in paid employment. Health care costs increase as individuals seek treatment for their illness and businesses are faced with lower profits and reduced levels of innovation. O Shea and Kennelly (2008) pointed to the results of the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) published by the Central Statistics Office in 2002 as evidence of the disruption in job performance arising from mental illness. The findings of this report showed that those suffering from a “mental, nervous or emotional” disability worked on average 29.5 hours a week compared to the national average of 36.8 hours (O Shea & Kennelly, 2008). The
implementation of stress management programs and efficient methods of delegating tasks are ways by which we can aim to reduce stress in the workplace.

ANXIETY

As is the case with the term ‘stress’, a concept familiar to the majority of individuals in today’s society whether or not they are directly affected by it, most individuals are familiar with the term ‘anxiety’ and will agree to experiencing this emotion to a greater or lesser extent on occasion. In clinical terms, anxiety can be described as an “aversive emotional and motivational state” which occurs in threatening circumstances (Eysenck et al., 2007). Anxiety is commonly experienced when one’s current goals or values are threatened. As referred to above, anxiety is one of the most commonly experienced mental illnesses. A distinction can be made between state anxiety, i.e. the level of anxiety being experienced at a particular moment in time, and trait anxiety, the level of anxiety an individual characteristically experiences across situations. State anxiety is the outcome of the interaction between an individual’s level of trait anxiety and situational factors which could include an imminent presentation or job interview. Depending on the level of anxiety being experienced, it can interfere greatly with an individual’s ability to focus on a given task and in severe cases can disrupt everyday life to the extent that the individual is unable to direct their thoughts away from the source of their anxiety. Research findings illustrate the existence of an attentional bias in those experiencing anxiety such that their attention is directed to thoughts and stimuli that relate to their anxiety. Compared to those who are not experiencing anxiety, anxious individuals find it difficult to ignore threatening or negative information. The existence of this attentional bias has been shown using the emotional Stroop task. In the emotional Stroop task individuals are presented with a series of words, which are positive, negative or neutral in meaning and which appear in different colours on the computer screen. Individuals are instructed to ignore the emotional content of the word and to report instead the colour in which the word is presented. Results across a number of studies have been consistent with the finding that individuals with a greater vulnerability to anxiety take longer to report the colour of words which are negative in meaning, suggesting that they are distracted from the task of colour naming by the semantic meaning of the word (MacLeod et al., 2002).

This bias in attention towards threatening and negative material interferes with the individual’s ability to focus on day to day tasks. When such distraction occurs in the workplace it can ultimately lead to a decline in productivity and to the individual taking longer to complete tasks. Dual task performance and the ability to switch between tasks are impaired (Eysenck et al., 2007). A growing body of research on anxiety is now also examining the impact that one’s interpretation of objects and events has on anxiety levels and the findings of this research offers promising ways of reducing anxiety related thoughts. This research has shown that anxiety can occur when an individual interprets an ambiguous situation or object as something that poses a threat to them in some way. An interpretation bias can develop when the individual consistently interprets situations or events in the same manner. When this interpretation bias is negative or threatening in nature it can lead to the experience of repeated anxiety. Those exhibiting a negative/threatening interpretation bias have been shown to experience greater anxiety reactions when faced with a stressor (Wilson, MacLeod, Rutherford, & Mathews, 2006). Mathews and Mackintosh (2000) among others have demonstrated that individuals can be trained to interpret ambiguity in either a positive or negative manner. These findings have important implications for approaches aimed at reducing anxiety. MacLeod, Koster and Fox (2009) concluded that approaches that modify
one’s interpretation bias have proven to be effective in “ameliorating emotional dysfunction, reducing the symptoms of clinical pathology and attenuating vulnerability factors associated with the development of psychological disorders” (Macleod et al., 2009, pg 96). These findings represent just one approach to reducing anxiety. Given that anxiety has a number of causal factors, such an approach will not be effective for all individuals. Furthermore, the extent to which such an approach is successful will depend on the severity of the anxiety. Of significance here is the fact that this research has a value in suggesting one way by which anxiety may be alleviated, allowing individuals to engage fully in their daily lives. The importance of communicating such findings to policy makers should not be underestimated. From an economical point of view, the increased capacity of the individual in the workplace will improve productivity and efficiency and reduce absenteeism, while from a humanitarian point of view, quality of life and well being is improved, thus contributing to the sustainability of communities.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

The report of the expert group on mental health policy in Ireland, ‘A Vision for Change’, recognised not only the economic costs of mental illness but paid due attention to the issues of social exclusion and social capital. Individuals who are unable to work as a result of a mental illness may become isolated from the social networks in the workplace and the support which they can often provide. Psychological research findings consistently point to the importance of social support relationships for individual adjustment and the ability to cope with everyday stressors and major life events. Similar to stress, low levels of social support have been linked to cardiovascular disease through its impact on cardiovascular reactivity (Hughes, 2007). Social support acts as a buffer against high levels of stress and can take a number of forms including tangible support (practical support such as cooking a meal for someone who is ill), informational support (providing information), and emotional support (listening and providing reassurance). It is necessary to note however, that whether or not social support is beneficial to the individual depends on the means by which it is delivered and the context.

Bolger and Amarel (2007) examined the effects of visible support, invisible support and no support on participants’ distress levels when given the task of delivering a speech. Results showed that distress levels increased most in the visible support level and least in the invisible support group. They concluded that supportive acts that are subtle, unobtrusive and invisible to the recipient are more effective than explicit visible support. The authors suggested that explicit acts of social support may increase the recipient’s feeling of incompetence, reduce their levels of self-esteem and communicate to them that one sees them as incapable of coping with a given stressor. Hughes (2009) also concluded that the optimal amount of social support required differs across individuals. Persons who prefer independence and personal space are likely to feel a less intense ‘need’ for social support than persons who prefer the company of others. Overall, such research findings help inform policies concerning social inclusion and social capital, in that they serve to define the parameters of optimal social support, and so provide a further example of how psychological research findings can inform policy making.
CURRENT POLICY

As it stands, existing mental health policies are concerned primarily with providing for those individuals who have been clinically diagnosed with a mental illness and who are in need of care. In Ireland, the Mental Health Act established in 2001 governs issues relating to mental health. This act, which also established the mental health commission to regulate the standards and provision of care in the mental health service, outlines the procedures for admission, detention and treatment of those with a mental disorder in a mental health care facility. In the 2006 report of the expert group on mental health policy, the authors implicated the “qualitative” changes in Irish society in recent decades as important factors influencing the way in which mental health care is delivered. They described contemporary Irish society as “more rushed”, “less caring” and “more materialistic” (p. 53). These lifestyle factors can impact negatively on our psychological health and well being, creating a challenge for policy makers concerned with the provision of appropriate mental health care.

Policies outlining procedures for health and safety in the workplace have tended to focus on physical risks and hazards to the exclusion of psychosocial risks that can interfere with one’s experience of positive mental health. It is only in recent times that the importance of planning for and promoting positive mental health in the workplace has begun to come to the fore. The European Pact for mental health and well-being is an important development in this regard. As referred to above, the document outlines the critical importance of mental health and well being for the realisation of social cohesion, economic development and the sustainability of communities. In the document it is proposed that each EU member state contribute to the promotion of positive mental health, the prevention of poor mental health and the provision of support and services for those affected by a mental illness. This aim is also evident in the aforementioned report of the expert group on mental health policy in Ireland. The report emphasises the importance of mental health promotion and highlights a number of important points: all individuals have mental health needs, mental health promotion should be available to all age groups to enhance protective factors and decrease the risk factors for developing mental health problems, and mental health promotion programs that target the whole community are of benefit to both those individuals diagnosed with a mental illness and those who are not. The promotion of mental health then constitutes a fundamental element of the recommendations of this report on the provision of mental health care in Ireland in the ten year period from the year 2006 onwards.

CONCLUSION

The psychosocial phenomena discussed in this paper, namely stress, anxiety and social support, are well understood and well researched. Social science research in the domain of stress and anxiety related mental health has the potential to inform policy in the areas of employment law, occupational health and safety, and health promotion. It is frequently the case that efforts to improve work place performance are aimed at reducing absenteeism and increasing employee productivity. Employers and policy makers should seek to increase the quality of life of individuals and in doing so will enhance the economic benefit of people being healthier. The benefits to society of promoting and improving mental well being extend beyond the workplace and can be translated into numerous economic benefits, the most obvious of these being a reduction in social welfare payments to those unable to work due to stress related mental and physical illness and a decline in the cost of health care provision. In
humanitarian terms, greater attention to the mental health needs of the individuals in our society will foster a population that is fulfilled, productive and content.

The sustainability of our communities is very much dependent on the physical and psychological health of the people in those communities. An individual’s capacity to work, interact with others and reach their potential is affected by their mental health status. The role of psychological research in all policies that promote well being, including those not specifically related to mental health per se cannot be overstated. This point is emphasized in ‘A Vision for Change’ which stated that without understanding of the factors influencing mental health, we cannot hope to prevent mental health problems, promote better mental health or deal with mental health problems in an effective manner (Report of the expert group on mental health policy in Ireland, 2006). Campaigns aimed at healthy living frequently promote ways of maintaining and improving physical health. We are frequently presented with messages encouraging us to eat a healthy diet, engage in regular exercise, quit smoking, reduce our alcohol intake etc. Greater awareness needs to be generated as to the importance of caring for one’s mental well-being. In addition, the means by which we can do so need to be clearly expressed. Effective policies are best achieved by adopting a multidisciplinary perspective. Those conducting research in the area of psychology can advise policy makers as to the potential impact of particular policies on the mental health of the population and can help in designing policies and approaches that protect, promote and improve the well-being of individuals in all aspects of their lives; in schools, the workplace, the community etc. At a time when much attention is focused on the concepts of ‘smart economy’, ‘knowledge based economy’ and ‘innovation, it is crucial that we are mindful of the fact that underlying the achievement of such is a population that is both physically and mentally healthy and thus capable of contributing to those activities that will make economic prosperity a reality.

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ABSTRACT

Psychological stress is a universal aspect of daily life. The negative impacts of stress on personal well-being are well documented, and include strong adverse associations with physical health, mental well-being, economic productivity, and social cohesion. Such phenomena are believed to be particularly acute among socially and economically vulnerable groups, such as persons who occupy an unpaid caring role.

Previous research has indicated that caregivers exhibit high rates of depression, anxiety, and other indices of mental ill-health. However, given that, within societies and families, medical and social attention is ordinarily focused on the recipient of care rather than on the giver, these problems remain largely undiagnosed and, therefore, unaddressed.

Some of the detrimental effects of caregiver stress are perhaps avoidable, in that they can be minimised through burden-reducing and/or stress-recognising interventions. Social support is one mechanism that has been shown to have strong buffering effects on the negative consequences of stress. Chronic stress has also shown to be related to physical health outcomes and the present paper will detail some associations between this stress and immune health.

Anticipated demographic growth in the population of older adults makes inevitable a corresponding growth in the population of persons caring for older adults. Similarly, increasing recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities to play meaningful and productive roles in society draws attention to the importance of the overall health and well-being of their caregivers.

In seeking to encourage public policy that genuinely helps to sustain communities into the future, the present paper will examine the evidence-base surrounding caregiving stress, caregiver health, as well as the impact of social support-based interventions aimed at its reduction. As such, it is important that this research not be neglected in debates about policy; but rather, come to be relied upon more and more in the coming years.

INTRODUCTION

Stress has long been associated with poor health outcomes, and psychological research has supported this assertion over many years of investigation. It has been found that certain occupations and groups of people are particularly vulnerable to stress, and the associated negative effects, with caregivers representing a much studied sector. Along with their caregiving responsibilities, other aspects of daily life compete for the resources of the caregiver, such as time, energy and financial demands. Caregivers are relied upon to fulfil a role that greatly enhances the quality of life of care recipients, maximises the degree to which
care recipients can live in mainstream society, and lightens the resource load on state-funded care services. With anticipated shifts in demographic trends over the coming years and decades, it is imperative that the work of the caregiver is acknowledged and that provision is made to sustain the valuable contribution that they for our communities into the future.

INFORMAL CARE

The present paper is concerned in the main with informal care. That is, care provided, primarily by family members on an unpaid basis to older persons or persons with a disability (Cross, 2009). Informal care is deemed as family care and often consists of one person with limited additional help and at considerable personal cost (Cross, 2009). Not surprisingly, caregiving has been identified as a chronic stressor that places caregivers at risk for physical and emotional problems (Pinquart and Sorensen, 2006). Current policy debates centre on older people as recipients of care (Cross, 2009), however many older people also provide care for other older adults and family members. It is quite common for older adults to care for their spouses in the home. As older adults age, chronic illnesses may become more frequent meaning that the burden of care on older adults (spousal Carers in particular) may increase as people grow older and as health deteriorates.

Although data concerning informal care in Ireland is lacking it is accepted that actual levels of informal care provided and received by older people may be higher than levels previously reported in census data, as indicted in a recent research study by McGee and colleagues (2008). This emphasises the point that informal caregivers are vulnerable to under-representation and it is necessary for policy to ensure that they are comprehensively supported and recognised for their efforts. Their work is immensely valuable as informal care allows many members of society, particularly older adults, to maintain a degree of independence from formal health and social services, while also reducing the burden on the state’s health and social services (McGee et al., 2008).

THE PROFILE OF CARERS IN IRELAND

McGee (2008) reports that in the Republic of Ireland, most care provided by older adults is in their own homes, with spouses identified as the group within the home who provided the most continuous levels of care to older people. If spouses are the group that are providing the majority of care, then it is logical to assume that they are of comparable age to the care recipients, making them older adults themselves. Census data from 2006 suggests that there are over 160,000 Carers in the Republic of Ireland (The Carers Association, 2009), of whom approximately 18,000 are over 65 years of age (Cross, 2009). This report by the Carers Association (2009) estimates that on average, Carers provide 24 hours of unpaid care per week. Interestingly, the report found that the average number of unpaid hours of care provided per week increases as the Carer’s age increases. According to the report, younger Carers (aged under 25 years) provide an average of 16 hours of care per week, whilst Carers aged 65 years and over provide an average of 36 hours of care per week (The Carers Association, 2009). This perhaps reflects the trend for spousal caregiving in the home. These findings imply that a large proportion of Carers are older adults and that these people absorb the largest number of caring hours. This is significant to consider in terms of policy because, as the paper will outline, older people are particularly vulnerable to negative health effects associated with stressful situations, such as caring.
Research by Pinquart and Sorensen (2006) suggests that there are gender differences in burden, depression, amount of care provision, and quality of a caregivers relationship with the care recipient. The vast majority of Carers in Ireland are female, accounting for 100,214 (or 62%) of all Carers. This compares with the national average for the entire population in Census 2006, where 50% were female and 50% were male (The Carers Association, 2009).

In recent times, absolute life expectancy in years has become not as relevant for policy makers. Burden of care is an extremely topical issue. Currently, there are approximately 467,926 persons aged 65 years and over in Ireland constituting 11% of the population. By 2021, this population is projected to grow to 750,930 and constitute 16% of the population. There will be a greater number of older adults in our population, and these older adults will live longer lives than previous generations. This population shift will lead to a greater demand for caring services in the coming years (The Carers Association, 2009), in order to ensure that older adults have the highest possible quality of life and levels of well being. Older adults will love longer in our future society, but they may not necessarily have sustained good health. A better indication of a population health status than overall life expectancy is healthy life expectancy. This is defined by the World Health Organisation as the average number of years that a person can expect to live in "full health", taking into account years lived in less than full health due to disease and/or injury. In Ireland the WHO statistics on average that men have a healthy life expectancy of 68 years, while women have a healthy life expectancy of 72 years (World Health Organisation, 2008). This has some implications with regard to spousal caregiving practices. As we have seen, older adults assume a large burden of care, and the majority of caring is done by women. This may reflect a traditional role in society for women to take on caregiver roles. However, as can be seen from health life expectancy statistics, it may be that women assume Carer roles because on average they remain healthier for longer into older adulthood.

**SOCIAL SUPPORT**

Social support is a widely used concept in psychology that can refer to drawing on the emotional and task resources provided by others as a means of coping with stress (Baron et al., 2006). Much debate surrounds definitions of social support however, with experts differing on what they believe it to refer to. In some cases it refers to aspects of the social network, at other times to specific behaviours, and sometimes to our perceived availability of support resources (Uchino, 2006). It is clear however, that it is a multi-faceted concept which encompasses all areas of human social relations.

Psychologists have proposed a stress buffering theory of social support which is particularly applicable to caregivers. A buffering effect suggests that the effects of having social support may deflect some negative consequences associated with stress. It posits that reduced social support, increased isolation and withdrawal will increase the probability for depression in the event of stressful life events. Life events which may be deemed as stressful include bereavement, illness and others. Caregivers who do not feel adequately supported in their daily lives are more vulnerable to experiencing depression should they encounter further, more stressful experiences to deal with. Previous research has reported that social support may mediate depression in caregivers, and that the level of reported caregiving burden is associated with caregiver stress (Clyburn et al., 2000). This research study emphasised the need to provide caregivers with skills to manage their burden and to provide supportive networks for Carers, particularly for those working with people who have the most severe
behavioural problems and functional limitations (Clyburn et al., 2000). Research has shown that increased burden of care significantly relates to decreased health-related quality of life among caregivers of stroke victims (Morimoto et al., 2003). This suggests that policy makers should be working to relieve some of the caregiving burden in order to sustain caregivers to perform their caring duties better and for longer. These research findings have not been adopted in policy making decisions however. Deficits in social support have long been associated with increased rates of depression following stressful life events generally, suggesting that poor social support in the context of the stress of caring and the occurrence of life events may increase vulnerability to depression (Waite et al., 2004).

**PSYCHONEUROUIMMUNOLOGY**

In recent years, psychologists have grown interested in the negative consequences of the stress associated with caregiving relating to immune parameters. Questions such as does how we think or feel affect our physical health? The scientific research field of psychoneurouimmunology is concerned with investigating the relationship between psychosocial processes and nervous, immune and endocrine functions (Ader and Cohen, 1993). It has been able to determine some links between these processes, especially for respiratory health and stress (Cohen et al., 1991).

There is evidence that elderly caregivers are particularly susceptible to negative health effects associated with chronic exposure to a stressor (such as caregiving), because of a phenomenon known as immune senescence. Immune senescence may be defined as those alterations in immune function which occur to some degree in all older individuals and are distinguishable from immunodeficiency secondary to underlying disease, malnutrition, toxic exposure or genetic disorder (Solomon and Benton, 1994). Quite simply, it is the gradual and natural deterioration of ones immune system as one grows older, independent of any other disease or condition. This implies that regardless of exposure to stress, older people in general are more vulnerable to infection, and take longer to recover after illness than younger people. Older adult caregivers are particularly susceptible to disease and infection due to the combination of their naturally declining immune systems and the stress associated with caregiving (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1991). Solomon and Benton (1994) support the assertion that caregiving is associated with increased risk for negative immune changes and increased risk of health problems associated with diminished immune functioning. Caregiving strain and burden have been found to be related to levels of an immune substance known as secretory immunoglobulin A (sIgA), such that caregivers who experienced greater strain and burden had lower sIgA secretion rates (Gallagher et al., 2008a). Secretory immunoglobulin A is a substance found in bodily fluids such as blood and saliva that is implicating in respiratory health functioning. Lower levels of sIgA are associated with poorer immune resistance against respiratory infection such as colds and flu, an immune challenge that older adults may be vulnerable to.

A common experimental design that has emerged from research in the area of psychoneurouimmunology is that of the immunisation or vaccine study. A vaccine is administered to groups of people who are often described as stressed or not stressed. Individual and group levels of immunity are assessed through the immune response that is displayed after administration of the vaccine. Typically, when a vaccine is administered to healthy people, levels of disease-specific antibodies (disease fighting substances in the body) increase several fold in a healthy, non-stressed group of participants. The levels of antibodies
are commonly measured by obtaining blood or saliva samples which are then analysed in laboratories. Results from such research studies suggest that chronically stressed older adults may be at higher risk from (viral) disease because of an inability to mount an “appropriate” immune response to vaccination (Vedhara et al., 1999), relative to non-stressed older adults, or younger people. Quite simply, stressed older adults do not manifest the same multiplication of antibody levels as non-stressed healthy populations; instead they exhibit a much more blunted reaction. This suggests that even health policies that implement vaccination schemes for older adults may not be as effective for chronically stressed people such as caregivers without further considerations of the psychological factors involved. Stressed people in general have poorer immune functioning, as do older adults in general. However, groups of chronically stressed older adults are perhaps most vulnerable to immune challenges and poorer health overall.

SOCIAL SUPPORT AND HEALTH

Several research studies have illustrated the numerous health benefits of social interaction and social support. Greater sociability is associated with more and better social interactions, superior performance of health-enhancing behaviours and better regulation of emotions and stress-hormone levels (Cohen et al., 2003). Interestingly, Carers with three or fewer social roles were found to be more vulnerable to infection than people with greater than three social roles (Cohen et al., 2003). It has been argued that because older populations have increasingly narrow social networks, this may exacerbate the effects of immune senescence (Murasko et al., 1988), as described previously in this paper.

In 1979, a now classic study reported that people who were less socially integrated had higher rates of mortality (Berkman and Syme, 1979). This finding was important as it was independent of self-reported physical health status at the time of the study. Much research, particularly investigating examples of cardiovascular health has proposed that social support may be beneficial to health because it buffers the potentially harmful influences of stress-induced cardiovascular reactivity (Cohen and Willis, 1985). A review by Bert Uchino (2006) suggests that social support is also related to better immune function, supporting an earlier review by the same author where links found between higher levels of social support and better immune functioning for older adult populations (Uchino et al., 1996). In research using a healthy, non-caregiver sample, individuals reporting lower ratings of social support were less likely to demonstrate the appropriate clinical reaction to a hepatitis B vaccination, an multiplication of the levels of antibodies in the immune system (Glaser et al., 1992). Social support, particularly tangible social support (e.g., help with childcare/housekeeping, provision of transportation or money), was shown to be positively associated with better antibody response to vaccines administered to healthy students (Gallagher et al., 2008b). These research studies demonstrated that higher levels of social support, even in a sample of participants who were not experiencing a chronic stressor such as caregiving, resulted in improved vaccination response.

THE FUTURE OF CARE IN IRELAND

The future of informal care services in Ireland is hampered by the fact that families are being asked to do too much without adequate support from the statutory sector (O'Shea, 2006). Family care accounts for over 50% of the overall burden of dementia care in Ireland (O'Shea,
2006) It is highlighted that particular concern should be shown for those people who are caring for people with dementia, with many of these Carers reporting this to be a stressful experience (O'Shea, 2006). These Carers make significant adjustments to their own lives in order to care for these people with dementia with up to two thirds of Carers reporting a financial strain and 60% making some adjustment to work as a result of caring (O'Shea, 2006). Dementia refers to a collection of conditions, of which Alzheimer’s disease (AD) is the most common. It is a disorder in which individuals lose independence of daily functioning because of cognitive dysfunction (Knopman, 2006). Prevalence of depression among caregivers of people with dementia has been estimated at between 40 and 60% (Redinbaugh et al., 1995), indicating that caring for people with dementia may be particularly stressful for the caregiver. The economic value of informal care services, typically provided by family members is substantial, and it results in a considerably reduced burden that would otherwise have to be met by formal health and social care systems (Arno et al., 1999). However, this reduced burden for the state may be met personally by Carers. Any change in the balance of provision of informal care has the potential to put a substantial strain on formal health and social services (McGee et al., 2008).

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The creation of a sustainable caring environment is an important task for policy makers. The involvement of localised Carers (for the most part family members) is essential for sustaining communities. Where possible, it is desirable to provide care for an older person in their own home. Current government policy supports the concept of older people remaining in their homes (Cross, 2009), with policy documents and reports such as National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (The Office for Social Inclusion, 2007) and Towards 2016: Ten year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2016 (Department of the Taoiseach, 2006) emphasising community care. This is an admirable aim, ensuring that those who are in need of care will have the opportunity to be provided with it in their own homes and communities if they so wish. While a number of relevant policy documents have been developed in the past, it is widely acknowledged their measures have been hampered by huge implementation problems. They have also been limited in terms of their reliance on untested assumptions about caregiving, stress, and social support, and their ignoring of the full gamut of social science research on these concepts. However, whilst every effort should be made to facilitate community care, it is essential that policy makers are aware of the toll that caregiving exerts on Carers, particularly older adult caregivers. If policy makers are to continue to rely on the caregiving resources of families of older adults, it is essential that provisions are made that can sustain older adult caregiving efforts for longer. Establishing properly funded peer support resources that provide real aid and assistance to people coping with caring for a loved one will ease the burden of stress on these individuals.

The Health Service Executive in Ireland recommends that adults over the age of 65 are immunized against Pneumococcal disease and influenza (National Immunisation Office, 2008). In order that optimal immunisation results are obtained when vaccinating Carers, supports should be put in place to ensure that all caregivers, but in particular elderly caregivers, feel supported or that they have someone or somewhere to go to if they need help or respite, in order that they can benefit the most from vaccinations. The establishment of abovementioned support networks for Carers could increase the success rates of these vaccination programs for older adult caregivers. Currently and in the coming months, a major health concern is the administration and distribution of a vaccine against the H1N1 virus, also
known as “Swine flu”. Adequate resources of social support for caregivers would potentially increase the effectiveness of such an immunisation scheme, prolonging health and reducing healthcare burden on services which are to become more stretched in the future due to demographic changes.

CONCLUSION

Carers experience chronic stress as a result of caregiving. This stress has the potential to negatively impact on their health. Older adult caregivers, for example spousal caregivers, are especially vulnerable to these negative health outcomes. Research has demonstrated that social support is one means through which these negative health effects could be reduced or lessened. Policy makers should not neglect to acknowledge the enormous contribution that caregivers make to their communities, as they aim to maintain and increase quality of life for care recipients, by maximising dignity and independence of the care recipient while simultaneously reducing the resource burden on state-funded care services. Policy makers should ensure that policies benefit this vulnerable group and allow them to continue their important caring work, which in turn sustains the communities in which they live. The present paper has provided the research background to simple measures such as social support provision that could improve the effectiveness of existing health strategies and policies such as immunisation.

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THE NEED FOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND RESILIENCE TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The availability of new technologies and the compression of time and space have facilitated decision-making through global governance structures that cut across national boundaries. As individuals, communities, organisations and nations try to adapt to rapid social change, and or, the homogenisation of operating systems to meet global set standards, they become stressed, especially if these new practices contradict held traditions and values. A tension is created between trying to influence global policy and the need to work with groups and communities. Currently, perhaps the most pressing issue at a global level is the need for sustainability, but it is unclear how this need for sustainability translates into action at a local level.

This paper focuses upon children and youth as various international conventions accord priority to them. Youth are referred to as a pre-requisite for sustainability. As modern knowledge expands through globalisation it is seen to infiltrate indigenous cultures. As a result, the basic everyday systems where resilience protective factors are seen to be embedded become undermined. When this occurs it is seen to pose the biggest threat to the well-being of children.

To promote long-term sustainability, a culturally competent approach to research has the potential to gain a better understanding of how culture is a determinant of resilience. By creating a dialogue that is systematic and consciously aware between indigenous and modern knowledge the potential to maximise positive outcomes that promote the well-being of children and youth may be created.

INTRODUCTION

The world appears to be grappling with constant change, as globalisation facilitates the unparalleled transfer of social, cultural, economic and political processes and technologies across national boundaries. These transactions occur through the compression of time and space and provide a sense of immediacy about the world (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007:195). The world is witnessing a phenomenon, referred to as the Knowledge Society, which indicates that economies and societies are being organised differently than in previous eras (Gibbs and Krueger, 2007). The availability of new technologies enable global governance structures to cut across national boundaries, but decisions made at global level still need to be implemented at a national and local level.

Engelstad (2009) moots that a tension between the macro and micro level is created as it is recognised that a need exists to influence global policy, whilst simultaneously working with groups and communities at a national and local level. A potential consequence of negotiating the space between the two levels is stress for individuals, communities, organisations or
nations as they try to adapt to rapid social changes, and or, to the homogenisation of operating systems to meet globally set standards, especially if these new practices contradict held traditions and values (Maddi and Khoshada, 2005).

What is currently known is by the early 2000’s the question of culture, identity and representation have become significant issues at a global level (Mac na Ghaill and Haywood, 2007:13). As global civil society organisations have gained momentum, demands for governance institutions to be transparent and accountable for their decisions and the subsequent impact upon the environment, labour conditions, women, children and the poor have been successful in their attempts to influence global policy (Clarke, 2003). However, Gibbs and Krueger (2007) suggest that sustainability as a rights-based issue in the global civic sphere is one thing, but on the other hand, it is unclear how this need for sustainability translates into action at local level.

This paper will focus upon children and youth in an attempt to explore some of the tensions that exist between the macro and micro level. The rationale for this choice is that various global and international policies and strategies accord priority to children and youth, for example, the UNESCO Medium-term Strategy (2009-2013); the Millennium Development Goals (2000), many of which focus upon the promotion of child and youth health and well-being; and the African Youth Charter (2006:6) which recognises youth as a pre-requisite for sustainable development.

As the paper forms linkages between globalisation, policy, culture and resilience a position develops that supports Fennell and Arnot’s (2009) suggestion that to maintain long-term sustainability a systematic and consciously aware dialogue between indigenous and modern is required. A conclusion outlines the need for cultural competency and resilience that supports children, youth and adults to critically engage with matters that affect their lives as a possible method of contributing to the development of such a dialogue.

**CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

The term ‘child’ and ‘youth’ are contested as there are varying provided definitions. The United Nations (1989) defines a ‘child’ as an individual up to 18 years of age and a ‘youth’ as a person between the ages of 15 and 24 years. The African Youth Charter (2006) defines a ‘youth’ as a person between the ages of 15 and 35 years. At a national level, legislation regarding justice, education and health make other distinctions based upon age. In some societies, age is determined by traditional cultural practices rather than legislation (World Bank, 2004).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children (1989) recognises the need to protect and to support young people. As a legally binding international instrument it incorporates the full range of human rights; civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. National governments that commit to undertake the obligations of the Convention are obliged to protect and ensure children’s rights and have agreed to hold themselves accountable, if they do not meet this commitment before the international community.

The African Youth Charter (2006) is intended to accelerate youth participation in matters that affect their lives. The preamble reaffirms the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of children and youth under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) and
through the African Charter on the Rights of the Welfare of the Child (1999). It also acknowledges commitments to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and encourages members to support and advance the agreed targets.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

It is Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) that is seen to be pivotal as it informs the interpretation of the remaining articles of the Convention (CRC, 2009). Article 12:1 states:

State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child and being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

The domestication of the Convention into national policies has often led to the conceptualisation of Article 12 as the “participation” of young people. The term participation is widely used to describe processes, information-sharing, dialogue between children and adults in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and inform the outcomes (CRC, 2009:5).

The African Youth Charter (2006) is more explicit regarding youth participation as a right when compared to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), as it states Under Article 11:

Every young person shall have the right to participate in all spheres of society

It details ten measures that State parties need to undertake in order to promote active youth participation in society.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 2009:19) outlines the importance of creating and promoting opportunities to enable child rights to be heard. Child participation is viewed as a tool to stimulate the comprehensive development of the personality and the evolving capacities of the child. When creating these opportunities adults working for and with young people need an understanding of the environmental, socio-economic and cultural context of the child’s life (CRC, 2009:30).

So in practical terms how does an adult gain such an understanding of a child’s life? Secondly, if the adult is a researcher, who has a task to conduct research with children, the need to gain this insight would appear particularly important, especially if it is hoped that the research may inform policy and the development of strategies to promote the health and well-being of children and contribute to long-term sustainability.

THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

Although there are many different approaches that can be applied to the study of childhood and youth development Bronfenbrenners Ecological Systems Theory (Tudge, 2008) provides a useful tool to assist a holistic analysis of a young person’s life. This theory places the child,
as an individual and a social actor, at the centre of a set of systems. These systems are named the micro; the meso; the exo and macro and all are considered both temporal and spatial. The micro system is the everyday life of the child. The meso system may impact upon the child, but the child is not necessarily part of that system e.g. the mother/father has a particularly stressful day at work, when they return at the end of the day to their home, they transfer some of their frustrations into the family unit. The exo-system is the environmental context and the macro system the wider national and global.

The micro system incorporates the every day life of the child, this is where the customs, traditions, language and social interactions take place that provide identity conclusions for individuals and groups, referred to as culture (Ungar, 2007:291). The importance of culture in shaping a child’s development is recognised by the three disciplines that have traditionally researched childhood development; cultural anthropology, developmental psychology and sociology. The ecological theory enables culture to be explored within all of the systems of a child’s life.

CULTURE

Engelstad (2009:210) offers the concept that culture is the norms and aesthetic/ritual practices in a broad sense. The understanding of culture is manifested in patterns of communication and interpretation and culture is “there”, a given, which shapes perceptions and modes of interpretation. Maintenance of a culture and to retain its force requires social actors as individuals and/or groups to interpret the culture and socially interact. Culture in totality is difficult to comprehend and for analytical purposes has been divided into patterns or pieces. In order to gain an insight into culture, as a force of power; a bridge has to be built between the micro and macro level (Engelstad, 2009:214).

Commencing at a local level, Bourdieu (Haugaard, 200:247) moots that “habitus” is a form of tacit or unspoken knowledge among a social group. As different social groups promote their habitus a struggle occurs to create a prestige and status. Once the dominant group defines their particular habitus as “civilized” and superior to other social groups, habitus becomes “cultural capital” as such it becomes a resource to maintain a social position.

Cultural capital then utilises symbolic capital e.g. branding, that can transfer creditability of a culture into another culture, not just at a local level, but also on a global scale (Engelstad, 2009). For example in the post-war era of the 1950’s mass media played a significant role in the promotion of symbolic capital, commodities such as soft drinks, jeans, perfumes and watch brands have become known world-wide (Engelstad, 2009).

As a result of expanding western wealth and consumerism, the culture industry developed as a major industry providing role models for large numbers of people resulting in the aesthetisation of everyday life on an unprecedented scale (Engelstad, 2009:230). By the 1980’s and 1990’s culture soon became a vehicle utilised to regenerate and re-imagine post-industrial cities that had experienced decline.

The European Union enacted policy, to enable the establishment of cultural programmes that made significant investment and resources available to member states (Mooney, 2004). However in some cases, the promise of revitalisation through such cultural programmes did not occur on the scale predicted. Those who were seen to benefit most were the developers
and investors rather than the local people. The structural inequalities that existed prior to the regeneration programme, more or less remained intact. This suggests that culture policy does not necessarily refer to the culture of the locality, but instead is linked to capitalism (Mooney, 2004).

The expansion of Western consumerism was seen to be aided by the tradition that corporate business interests would have had more access to global governance structures compared to civil society organisations (Clarke, 2003). The use of mass media in addition to spreading symbolic capital plays a pivotal role in directing and selecting information for public consumption and shaping perceptions and evoking core values (Engelstad, 2009). The commercialisation of the mass media and public spaces is seen to have constrained the opportunities and freedom to exchange ideas at will (Haugaard, 2009) and is viewed by some as neo-colonialism (Mayo and Thompson, 1995).

The Western influence is seen to infiltrate the daily lives of adults and children on a global scale. Some non-western citizens, like some western citizens, may become passive and readily embrace what is presented for consumption without question. On the other hand some resist the domination of the western culture and openly reject it to maintain their own culture (Engelstad, 2009).

Feminists offer the following analysis, that globalisation as a process, has attempted to reproduce gendered divisions that feminists’ movements have sought to repudiate for the last century (Korieh and Okeke-Ihejirika, 2009). Western and North American developed gender theories are seen as part of the hegemonic process of the neo-liberal agenda. The language used to describe countries in Africa and South Asia as “Third World” creates a picture of the “third world women” categorised by their gender, as poor, uneducated, tradition bound, domesticated and sexually constrained (Fennell and Arnot, 2009).

A new feminist research agenda seeks to redress this imbalance and promotes the concept of the Northern theories (Western and North American) and Southern theories (African and South Asian). As the uncritical importing of liberal individualising models of development into the so called “Third World” or “Developing Countries” may have negative effects on communities and undermine the existing position of women (Nnaemeka, 2004). These critiques have led to a more radical Gender and Development (GAD) approach to gender analysis by the United Nations (Fennell and Arnot, 2009).

Similarly, Serpell and Jere-Folotiya (2008) express concerns about Western childhood development programmes that are imported into non-Western contexts. Although these programmes are acknowledged as being provided in good will, these may not be compatible with the cultural psychology of a child. A long-term outcome of these interventions is seen as the undervaluing of existing competencies of the child and the systems that support that child. It is these basic everyday systems where resilience protective factors referred to as “ordinary magic” are seen to be embedded. It is when these systems become undermined that poses the biggest threat to the well-being of children (Masten, 2001:236).

To prevent the loss of valuable indigenous knowledge that has supported children to grow up positively within their own cultural context, it is feasible to suggest that it would be mutually enriching if a systematic and consciously aware dialogue between indigenous and modern knowledge is enhanced and maintained to promote long-term sustainability (Fennell and
Arnot, 2009). To enable such a dialogue to develop between varying cultural groups, to share knowledge, a cultural sensitivity will be required (Husain, 2006).

**CULTURAL COMPETENCY**

Husain (2006:170) suggests working in a culturally sensitive way requires a cultural competency framework. This framework comprises of three interlocking components; 1) cultural knowledge; 2) cultural awareness; and 3) cultural sensitivity. Organisations that wish to enhance their ability to work with culturally diverse groups need to gain a familiarity with the background of the community they will be working with. This includes the history, patterns of behaviour, norms, values, beliefs and processes of migration and settlement. Husain (2006:171) states that cultural knowledge, by itself runs the risk of stereotyping communities and implies that a culture is static, which may result in the provision of inappropriate services.

The second component of cultural competency is cultural awareness, which occurs simultaneously with the development of cultural knowledge. This involves continuously challenging the idea that culture is static, but also to guard against the view that one cultural practice is better or superior to another at an organisational and individual level. This is achieved through on-going reflective practice, that questions assumptions, values, practice and leads to an awareness of others and opens up alternative possibilities (Husain, 2006:175). Finally, cultural sensitivity is the ability to act on the knowledge and awareness to inform changes in practice, develop skills and strategies to work with cultural differences. At organisational level it concerns the customising of services to reflect diversity between and within cultures. At individual, practitioner level, there are three requirements; 1) openness to the complexities of people’s lives; 2) to actively facilitate participants to relate their opinions, experiences and views plus their desires for the future; and 3) it is equally important not to assign judgement values (good/bad; right/wrong) to cultural differences.

The intersection of these three components leads to cultural competency (Husain, 2006:172). The process of integrating knowledge about individuals and groups of people and transforming it into specific standards, policies, practices and attitudes to provide a quality of service, that responds to identified needs and leads to better outcomes. To ignore the importance of cultural competency, in whatever domain, runs the risk of developing inappropriate services, which may contribute to the perpetuation of existing inequalities. In addition, it is feasible to suggest that services developed in this way also run the risk of undermining the way communities provide sources of resilience and in the long-term may worsen the situations of people that are already experiencing inequalities.

**RESILIENCE**

Resilience as a concept is not confined to the study of childhood development. It is also associated with other domains e.g. psychiatry, economics and as such lacks a universal definition. It has been described in a variety of ways, including 1) the constellation of characteristics of children that despite being born and raised in disadvantaged circumstances grow into successful adults; 2) demonstrating competence when under stress, and 3) positive functioning indicating recovery from trauma (Canavan, 2008). A common thread that is associated with each of these descriptions is that resilience occurs in the presence of adversity.
(Ungar, 2008). Resilience is a strength-based approach that focuses upon positive outcomes (Mohaupt 2008).

Seccombe (2002) argues that resilience as a strength-based approach can soften the image among the wider population of the lived experience of some youth, families and communities that face poverty, inequality and discrimination. In addition, resilience encourages individuals, families and communities to manage with what they have rather than to seek social change. Seccombe (2002) states the consequence of this process are that systemic inequality becomes palatable to wider society. Secondly, this inequality is uncontested by those experiencing it, as they become de-politicised. Therefore resilience cannot be explained without a power dynamic.

As Masten (2001) rightly outlines that when studying resilience two fundamental judgements are made: 1) what is a risk? and 2) what is a good outcome? Ungar (2007) relates that resilience as a western construct occupies the dominant theoretical standpoint. Based upon western understanding of normative child/youth development this will influence how risk and outcome is defined. Ungar (2006:55) proposes these western definitions may be inappropriate in different cultural settings and defines resilience as:

Both an individual’s capacity to navigate to health resources and a condition of the individual’s family, community and culture to provide these resources in culturally meaningful ways.

He and his colleagues (2007:288) argue that resilience studies have not adequately understood people’s culture as a determinant of resilience. Therefore resilience research studies need to be:

Sensitive to culturally embedded definitions of positive development found in both western and non-western countries and among indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

Use of a culturally sensitive approach is associated with the human interpretive or participatory research paradigm (Tudge, 2008). In the case of a resilience study the process should create a space to facilitate not only the participation of children and young people, but also adults to contextualise the study by locally defining risk and resilience factors. This is important as resilience protective factors are seen to be embedded in all of the systems of a child’s life. By applying an ecological resilience approach in a culturally competent way, a child’s life may be considered holistically, but importantly incorporate indigenous knowledge from the outset of the research.

The facilitation of young people to participate in this way is seen to fulfil a child rights to express their views under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). However Evans and Prilleltensky (2005:407) highlight that although young people may be facilitated to participate in different settings, which is seen to develop competencies at the micro level and enables resilience within the individual. The social structures that probably contributed to their marginalisation and exclusion will probably remain intact.

Evans and Prilleltensky (2005) moot that the wider environmental and social factors will probably undermine and overwhelm the gains the child or youth obtained at the individual level. A potential exists to magnify positive individual outcomes by building into the structure of the experience a reflective component. There is also some evidence that young
people can benefit from viewing the broader society in a critical manner to consider the barriers that families and communities face and who controls the services that they require (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2005:409). By working in this way young people can develop a sense of control and making a difference in things that matter. This can build self-efficacy and as a young person matures they may expand their competencies in adulthood through social and civic affairs (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2005).

**BRIDGING THE MACRO AND MICRO LEVELS**

The building of a bridge between the macro and micro level of culture appears to be fraught with tensions. It is an ongoing challenge to balance efforts to influence governance structures at a global level and to work with groups at local and national level (Clark, 2003) Dialogue between these levels is seen as an essential element to achieve this balance. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2008:7) mission statement clearly defines its role in facilitating such a dialogue:

As a specialised agency of the United Nations UNESCO contributes to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information

In the UNESCO Medium-term strategy (2008-2013) it accords priority to African sub-Saharan countries, gender and youth as development themes. Zambia is one of the sub-Saharan countries, as an example, the context is outlined and an explanation of the practical application of an ecological resilience research that is culturally competent is provided.

**ZAMBIA**

Zambia last conducted a census in 2000. At the time the official national population was 9,885,591 (CSO, 2000:28). The Central Statistic Office (CSO) estimated by 2006, based on rates of population growth, this figure would increase to 11.7 million people, with a rural and urban population distribution of 65 per cent and 35 per cent respectively. Of this total, 57 per cent of persons are below nineteen years of age (MSYCD, 2006). This population is divided among nine provinces, and 73 different ethnic groups with distinct traditions and customs. English is the official language, but there several other main languages such as Bemba, Lozi, Tonga and Nyanja and different dialects which are associated with each.

**INTERNATIONALLY LEVEL**

Zambia has ratified seven United Nations International conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). As a Nation it is participating in the promotion the MDG's and as a member of the African Union, Zambia has signed the African Youth Charter (2006).

Zambia has been included in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries and is eligible for debt relief under the G8 initiative. The Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility conducted a first report in 2009 (International Monetary Fund, 2009) Zambia had met most of the agreed indicators up to the first half of 2008. But three unexpected shocks occurred that impacted
upon the country's economic performance: 1) a surge in food and fuel prices, which were exacerbated by a poor domestic harvest, resulting in the increased cost of food which caused the inflation target of 7 per cent to be exceeded; 2) the demise of President Mwanawasa and the political transition that led to the election of President Banda in October 2008. This was seen to delay decisions regarding the 2009 budget and implementation of the first PRGF review, and 3) the global financial crisis, which has resulted in a decline in GDP and a depreciation of the Zambian Kwacha against the US dollar.

NATIONAL LEVEL

At a national level many of the international conventions are yet to be domesticated into National legislation. As a result the right to education, health, clean water and sanitation for many Zambian citizens is yet to materialise (Caritas Zambia, 2008). Although the government made progress on some human rights issue, specific human rights violations by state agents were reported by both the local media and non-governmental organisations (Caritas Zambia, 2008:10). Despite efforts to counteract corruption at all levels of government it remains an issue and is seen to undermine democracy (JCTR, 2009).

The Country’s Fifth National Development Plan (2006) outlines a decline in the national poverty rate from 40 per cent in 1998 to 36 per cent in 2004. There is evidence of the development of a rural and urban division as poverty is prevalent among rural communities. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is having a devastating impact upon the Country, exacerbating the poverty already being experienced by millions of Zambians. Adult women and young women are more likely than their male counterparts to be infected with HIV, have lower levels of education and access to employment and are more likely to experience exploitation (FNDP, 2006).

The National Child Policy (2006) acknowledges that the majority of Zambian children, (defined as persons below eighteen years of age) suffer poverty, hunger, inadequate accommodation, exposure to abuse, illiteracy, lack of basics, like clean water and sanitation, and they are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.

This policy outlines the rights of the child and regards children as the building block of the nation. As such they deserve special attention and recognition at all levels of society (MSYD, 2006). The policy clearly states within in its guiding principles (2006:22):

……enhancing participation of children in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The policy recognizes the participation of children in national development as a fundamental right and therefore imperative

The daily reality for some children is a struggle for food, lack of physical comforts and limited psychological support, as they are left to cope with grieving the deaths of immediate and extended family members as a result of HIV/AIDS. Some children become orphaned and may even take on the responsibility of being a head of household. In these households it is likely that everyone has to work just to survive. One of the most vulnerable groups are the street children (those who live, work, eat and sleep on the street) and for them (Kelly, 2008:66)
The high-sounding commitments of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child must sound particularly hollow

Under the African Youth Charter (2006) the right to participate in all spheres of society must also sound equally hollow to marginalised children, if they are even aware that they have this right.

As a right, those working with young people should endeavour to ensure this right is upheld. A culturally competent approach to underpin the development of resilience research has the potential to fulfil a child’s right to participate. By the research process facilitating their participation in the design, monitoring and evaluation and encourage individuals to critically engage with matters that affect their lives has the potential to magnify the benefits that they may derive from the process. By including adults, parents and representatives of both statutory and non-statutory organisations a holistic view of the realities of children lives can be developed: what supports them and what places them at risk. As an approach it can incorporate indigenous knowledge into the research from the outset.

In the Zambian context, cultural competent research needs to ensure that local languages are provided, literacy levels are considered, and cultural norms e.g. young people traditionally do not give their opinions in the presence of elders, unless asked. Therefore it is necessary to create a space where young people feel safe to express their opinions and views, but a mechanism also needs to be developed that enables the sharing of this information with adults. The inclusion of statutory representatives in the research enables a two way flow of information, into the research, but also back into the respective Ministries. Finally, UNESCO as a global structure has accorded priority to Zambia and youth, by submitting the research into this organisation, it has the potential to be shared among its network. It may inform policy or heighten awareness of the benefits of applying a culturally competent approach and essentially children and youth views are presented at an international level.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the world is witnessing rapid social change on an unprecedented scale. The Knowledge Society indicates economies and societies are being organised differently than in previous eras. At a global level sustainability has become a significant issue for humankind, but the expansion of modern knowledge is seen to undermine indigenous knowledge that provides sources of resilience to support children and youth to develop positively within their cultural context. This paper has explored some of the linkage between globalisation, policy, culture and resilience and the impacts upon children and youth. It concludes by suggesting the adoption of a culturally competent approach to underpin the development of resilience research studies, which facilitates participation and encourages individuals, children, youth and adults to critically engage with matters that affect their lives, has the potential to contribute to the sustainability agenda.
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ASSESSING SEXUAL MINORITY MEN’S NEEDS: 
AN EXAMINATION OF RESEARCH AND POLICY

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ABSTRACT

There has been a growing awareness and concern about the burden of ill health experienced by men in Ireland. The case for an increased focus on men’s health is compelling; on average, Irish men die almost five years younger than women do, and have higher death rates at all ages, and for all leading causes of death (National Men’s Health Policy, 2008). The current National Men’s Health Policy (2008) highlights the importance of improving men’s health through promotional and marketing strategies. However, the recommendations made throughout the current policy fail to consider the health of sexual minority men in any detail. Research shows that sexual minority men are at higher risk for poor mental health outcomes. Sexual minority men concurrently experience stressors from identifying as a member of a minority group (sexual minority) and pressures to endorse hegemonic standards of masculinity. These issues appear to be major contributing factors to many of the health related problems experienced by men in Irish society. Recommendations for future policy and research will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, there has been an increased awareness and concern about the burden of ill-health men in Ireland experience (McEvoy & Richardson, 2004; Richardson, 2004). Male life expectancy is almost 5 years lower than female life expectancy (Central Statistics Office, [CSO], 2006) and men in Ireland have higher death rates for most of the leading causes of death across the lifespan (CSO, 1996-2005; 2003; 2005). What men do, their behaviour, and their relations with others, have an impact not only upon themselves but on the people around them. Hence, men’s health is a social issue, with implications for all society and the communities in which they reside (White, 2002).

In December 2008, the Department of Health and Children in Ireland published the world’s first National Men’s Health Policy (NMHP; Department of Health and Children, 2008). The aim of this policy is to achieve optimal health and wellbeing for all men in Ireland. The role of gender and masculinities on men’s concept of health; their knowledge, beliefs and attitudes to health, illness and health practices and the barriers that Irish men perceive in accessing health services were explored in this policy. This policy recognises the importance of supporting men to become more active agents and advocates for their own health. This initial attempt to promote the health and wellbeing of men in Ireland is an important and much needed document. However, it is characterised by a substantial omission: health issues pertinent to sexual minority men receive insufficient attention.
CURRENT POLICY DEFICITS

The NMHP is directed at a heterosexual population. For example, the NMHP details the caring influence of women on men’s health. Another demonstration of this heterosexism is the under-representation of sexual minority men in the development of the policy; only 1% of men included were gay. The NMHP does recommend that vulnerable groups of men need to be supported through policy. The vulnerable groups referred to include men from lower socio-economic groups, men with low incomes, men who live in rural areas, men with low educational attainment and young men (aged 18-35 years). As a result, many of the programmes and services recommended in the policy are targeted at men falling into these designated categories. Although the paper acknowledges sexual minorities (e.g., “Whilst the focus will be on the caring influence of women on men’s health, this is not to negate the significance of same-sex relationships in terms of gay/bisexual men’s health, although there is less evidence in the literature to support this” (Department of Health and Children, 2008, p. 75), it fails to consider the health of sexual minority men in any detail. Consequently, the principal aim of this policy, which is to “[support] all men to take greater responsibility for their own health,” is unrealised. A governmental policy is needed for the country. Many communities of men in Ireland are vulnerable to health inequalities and it is important, therefore, to recognise the needs of different sub-communities of men in order to develop suitable practice and policy (Banks, 2004).

MINORITY STRESS

In Ireland, stress has been identified as a significant threat to men’s health (Richardson, 2004). Approximately 31% of men in Ireland ‘regularly’ or ‘constantly’ experience stress and almost 20% of men are either ‘somewhat’ or ‘completely’ ineffective at managing stress (Richardson, 2004). Epidemiological research has revealed numerous mental health burdens among sexual minorities, in comparison to heterosexuals (Cochran, 2001). In addition to the mental health needs and challenges facing all people, sexual minorities are at a heightened risk of psychological distress because of the stresses associated with being a member of a minority group (Cochran, 2001; Cochran & Mays, 2006; Cochran, Mays & Sullivan, 2003). A meta-analysis conducted by Meyer (2003) found that sexual minorities are 2.50 times more likely to have a lifetime history of mental disorder compared with heterosexuals, and twice as likely to have a current mental disorder. One Irish study (Mayock, Bryan, Carr, & Kitching, 2009) found that, generally, Irish sexual minorities have higher levels of alcohol consumption, recreational drug use, smoking and a higher incidence of obesity and eating disorders than among the general population. The sample in this study was also found to have a high incidence of anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidality.

The term minority stress is used to describe the mental health consequences of stigmatisation and marginalisation of minority groups such as sexual minorities (Meyer, 1995). Meyer’s (1995, 2003) minority stress theory explains how societal stressors influence mental health disparities in sexual minorities. As Meyer (2003) stated, a fundamental assumption of this theory is that minority stress is “unique—that is, minority stress is additive to general stressors that are experienced by all people, and therefore, stigmatized people require an adaptation effort above that required of similar others who are not stigmatized” (p. 676). Just as general life stressors are believed to exceed an individual’s ability to cope (Dohrenwend, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), stigma creates numerous unique demands (Herek & Garnets, 2007; Miller & Kaiser, 2001; O’Brien & Major, 2005; Pachankis, 2007) that have
been shown to be particularly stress-inducing. In turn, these additional stressors are hypothesized to explain disparities in rates of health problems among sexual minorities (Hatzenbuehler, 2009).

Meyer (1995) identifies internalized homonegativity (or internalized homophobia), expectations of stigma, and experiencing prejudicial events (e.g., violence) as sources of stress. Internalized homonegativity represents an internal form of stress; it is the described as the extent to which gay men internalize the antigay attitudes of the larger heterosexual society (Meyer, 1995, 2003). Internalized homonegativity has been linked to eating disorders (Williamson & Hartley, 1998), risky sexual behaviour (Meyer & Dean, 1998), greater substance use (Meyer & Dean, 1998), and suicidality (Remafedi, French, Story, Resnick, & Blum, 1998). Expectation of stigma is defined as experiences that produce the individual’s anticipation that he (or she) will be rejected and discriminated against by others in society because of his or her sexual orientation (Meyer, 1995, 2003). Among sexual minorities, sensitivity to status-based rejection is predictive of both adverse physical (Cole, Kemeny, & Taylor, 1997) and mental (Hatzenbuehler, Nolen- Hoeksema, & Erickson, 2008; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002) health outcomes. Experiencing prejudicial events includes experiences of verbal and physical violence due to a person’s sexual orientation (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009). This includes experiences of victimisation and discrimination. Meyer’s (1995, 2003) minority stress model has been useful in explaining a number of health outcomes in gay male populations, including suicidality, depression, substance abuse, body image problems, and workplace problems (Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Jenne, & Marin, 2001; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999; Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005; Meyer, 1995; Waldo, 1999).

With respect to victimization, studies that compare heterosexual and gay samples document higher rates of victimization among LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) adults (Corliss, Cochran, & Mays, 2002; Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison, 1999). One study used a comparison sample of the heterosexual sibling(s) of LGB participants (Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005). There was a higher prevalence of various forms of victimization among the LGB participants, including both sexual assault and physical abuse. Youth studies have found similar results (Russell, Franz, & Driscoll, 2001). Incidences of peer victimisation are related to multiple adverse health consequences, including suicide risk (Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods, & Goodman, 1999; Russell & Joyner, 2001). Mayock and colleagues’ (2009) findings demonstrate the levels of harassment sexual minorities experience in Ireland. Approximately 80% of respondents had been verbally abused because of their LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) identity, 40% were threatened with physical violence, 25% had been punched, kicked or beaten, 58% reported the existence of homophobic bullying in their schools, over half had been called abusive names related to their sexual orientation or gender identity by fellow students, and 40% had been verbally threatened by fellow students.

Perceived discrimination has been shown to be predictive of multiple forms of mental health problems in sexual minorities, including anxiety (Herek et al., 1999), psychological distress (Hatzenbuehler, et al., 2008), and substance use disorders (McKirnan & Peterson, 1988, 1989). Between groups studies also have demonstrated greater discrimination among sexual minorities relative to heterosexuals. For instance, analyses of population-level data have shown that gay men earn 10%–32% less than similarly qualified heterosexual men with the same job (Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007). Importantly, research with probability samples has found increased exposure to discrimination experiences among LGB participants relative
to heterosexuals; when discrimination was statistically controlled, the association between psychopathological outcomes and sexual orientation was significantly attenuated (Mays & Cochran, 2001). Concealment is another type of minority stressor identified by Meyer (2003). Being gay is a stigma that can be concealed. There are numerous ways in which concealment has been related to negative mental health outcomes; hyper-vigilance, social isolation, and threat of discovery (Pachankis, 2007).

MASCULINITY

Undoubtedly, the concept of masculinity is central to any discussion on men’s health and ways to improve men’s health (White, 2002). Masculinity refers to all those qualities and activities that convey a sense of “maleness” to an individual (Philaretou & Allen, 2001). Men act and think the way they do because of concepts of masculinity they learn from their community (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1994). Much of the theoretical work on masculinity focuses on the concept of hegemonic (traditional) masculinity. It is widely accepted that multiple masculinities exist (Connell, 2005) because, although hegemonic masculinity is the dominant ideal in a culture, not all men can or do endorse it (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity represents the form of masculinity endorsed by the dominant group in any given culture, and represents authority and power (Connell, 1987). It is socially dominant in that it subordinates femininities, as well as other types of masculinities. Men are active agents in constructing and reconstructing dominant norms of masculinity (Courtenay, 2000). In many Western countries, hegemonic masculinity is embodied in heterosexual, well-educated, European American men that occupy a higher socioeconomic stratum. In particular, heterosexuality is seen as the dominant and exclusive categorization of male sexuality (selective rules are imposed in regard to acceptable sexual practices) (Courtenay, 2000; White, 2002). Activities that are used by men to construct and reconstruct masculinity include language (Perry, Turner, & Sterk 1992; Crawford, 1995); sports (Connell, 1992; Messner & Sabo, 1994); sex (Vance, 1995); crime (Messerschmidt, 1993); and work (Connell, 1995). Crawford (1995) highlights health beliefs and behaviours as one strategy individuals use to negotiate their social surroundings.

Abiding by the standards of hegemonic masculinity can have dangerous consequences for men’s psychological functioning (Courtenay, 2000; Goldberg, 1976; Harrison, Chin, & Ficarrotto, 1992; Pollack, 1998). Men are more likely to engage in risky health behaviours (i.e., increased risk taking, self-destructive behaviour, and less concern about personal health) as a result of trying to live up to these societal standards of hegemonic masculinity (Courtenay, 2000). Health-related beliefs and behaviours that are utilised in demonstrating hegemonic masculine ideals include emotional and physical control, the denial of weakness or vulnerability, attempting to appear strong and robust, a high sex drive, dismissal of any need for help, aggression and physical dominance (Courtenay, 2000). For example, a man who refuses to take sick leave from work; insists that he needs little sleep; or boasts that drinking does not impair his driving is demonstrating dominant norms of masculinity (Courtenay, 2000). It is well recognised, in Ireland (Richardson, 2004) and internationally (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; White & Johnson, 2000), that men are often hesitant to seek help and continue to present late in the course of an illness (Richardson & Carroll, 2009). Mahalik, Burns, and Syzdek (2007) found that men who scored higher on an index of masculinity reported lower frequencies of health promoting behaviour. Charmaz, (1995) found that men with chronic illness often tried to hide their illness. An executive hid his dialysis treatments by telling others he was away attending meetings; a patient with diabetes found he could not
manoeuvre his wheelchair and lunch tray, so he would miss lunch and risk coma rather than asking for help (Charmaz, 1995). The influence of masculinity on health behaviours has also been shown to persist over time. One longitudinal study found that beliefs about masculine standards was the strongest predictor of risk taking behaviour (i.e., cigarette smoking, high-risk sexual activity, alcohol use and drug use) two and a half years later, when certain psychosocial factors were controlled (Courtenay, 2000). Similar findings also have been identified in Ireland. Richardson (2004) found that only 38% of men (aged 18 and over) ‘always’ adhere to speed limits while driving, while 15% and 52% of men do not always wear seat belts while travelling in the front or back of a car, respectively. In addition, 56% of men report using sunscreen ‘infrequently’ at best, but men aged 18-29 and less educated men were more likely to expose their skin to the harmful effects of the sun (Richardson, 2004). By engaging in such behaviours, cultural standards of hegemonic masculinity are reinforced: asking for help is a feminine act, and health and safety are irrelevant for powerful men (Courtenay, 2000; Robertson & Williamson, 2005).

Gay men’s experiences reflect both being gay and being men (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2005). Many men are exposed to society’s dominant hegemonic discourse but because of their social circumstances they may experience it differently (i.e., not all men will, or even can, endorse these standards) (Connell, 1995, 2005). Therefore, some have to find alternative methods of endorsing masculine ideals and validating themselves as men. Factors which will influence a man’s ability to display hegemonic masculine standards are his ethnicity, age, social class, and, the focus of this paper, his sexuality (Courtenay, 2000). As heterosexuality is a key aspect of hegemonic masculinity, gay and bisexual men may attempt to compensate for their lack of heterosexuality by putting themselves in danger or by engaging in physically dominant behaviours (football) (Courtenay, 2000). One man described how he played football to validate his status as a man: “I really hated football but I played it because I though it would make me more of a man” (Fellows, 1996, p. 40). Another way some gay men may try deal with the traditional masculine norms is through demonstrating what is termed protest masculinity (Connell, 1995). By having a large number of sex partners (increasing their chances of contracting sexually transmitted infections) and engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse, a man can be described as demonstrating protest masculinity: “Real men ignore precautions for AIDS risk reduction, seek many sexual partners, and reject de-pleasing the penis. Abstinence, safer sex, and safer drug use compromise manhood” (Levine, 1998, pp. 146–147). In an Irish sample, one in two (50.3%) of all men who had sex with a man in the last year engaged in unprotected anal intercourse (McCartney, Bader, Donlon, Hickson, & Quinlan, 2009). Other research has shown that gay men hold stronger traditional masculine standards than heterosexual men. Initially, this may seem contradictory; however, the endorsement of these ideals can be seen as a way for gay men to prove to others that they are still “real” men, in spite of their sexual preferences (Courtenay, 2000; Diaz 1998).

RECOMMENDATIONS

While positive efforts have been made to advance the health status of LGBT people throughout the Health Service Executive (HSE), this paper highlights that there is a need to devote greater attention to this specific group. In order to meet the HSE objective of providing health and personal social services for everyone living in the Republic of Ireland, it is essential that sexual minority men’s health needs are appropriately met through both mainstream and targeted services.
Given the role social and structural factors (e.g., prejudicial attitudes and discrimination) have in the aetiology of mental health outcomes in the LGB community, it is clear that interventions are needed at a societal level (Hatzenbuehler 2009; Link & Phelan, 2001; Meyer, 2003). Future policy should include a plan for stigma reduction and for the elimination of prejudice and discrimination towards sexual minorities. Research demonstrates the importance of efforts to eliminate homophobia both within the mental health community and in society in general. Meyer (1995) argues for an advance in “an ideological agenda that promotes social change toward a more egalitarian society” (p. 52). Part of this agenda is to promote attitudinal and policy change in order to create a society that provides equal rights and privilege to minority sexualities (Meyer, 1995). Such efforts may reduce minority stress for gay men, potentially leading to better health outcomes. One strategy suggested by Mayock and colleagues (2009) is to further promote the police services in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland as LGBT-friendly and supportive of dealing with homophobic incidents. Society also plays an important part in the hegemonic discourse of masculinity. Interventions should be aimed at challenging society’s standards of masculinity, with a particular focus on the issues pertinent to sexual minority men.

Interventions also are needed at the individual level. A future policy on sexual minority men’s mental health would have implications for practitioners such as clinicians, counsellors, and physicians, working with gay men. Practitioners should be aware of how factors such as minority stress and masculine standards might relate to or inform the treatment of problematic health behaviours (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009). Understanding the impact of minority stress and homophobia and relations to potentially self destructive behaviour is an important association for practitioners to consider in their interventions and treatment planning (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009). Practitioners might explore their patient’s experiences of being a man and how their concepts of masculinity might be enacted in unhealthy ways (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009). Interventions could aim at possibly modifying men’s masculine related cognitive schemas (see Mahalik, 1999). As well, practitioners should also be aware of their own heterosexist biases when working with sexual minority clients (Brown, 1996; Cochrane, 2001). For example, some studies suggest that physicians often assume that gay men are heterosexual (by making reference to a girlfriend or wife) which, in turn, “shuts down” channels of communication (Beehler, 2001; Eliason & Schope, 2001). The patient becomes reluctant to discuss health issues that are perceived (sometimes erroneously) as gay specific (Cochrane, 2001). Sensitivity training may be valuable for preventing such situations with practitioners. Practitioners who are aware of these factors that influence gay men’s health will be better equipped to meet the needs of these men and help improve their wellbeing (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009).

In conclusion, this paper highlights the multifaceted social context that sexual minority men experience as it relates to health behaviours associated with an array of psychological and physical health concerns. Sexual minority men concurrently experience stressors from identifying as a member of a minority group (sexual minority) and pressures to endorse hegemonic standards of masculinity; these appear to be major contributing factors to many of the health related problems experienced by men in Irish society3. For a future policy on men’s health to adequately address this group’s health concerns through health-promotion work, a multi-faceted view of gay men’s health is required.

A national policy on men’s health which includes vulnerable groups of men, such as sexual minority men, offers a framework and strategy to the Health Industry with a direction based
on best practice models that can improve the health and wellbeing of all men. Policy change will ultimately lead to better health outcomes for sexual minority men.

NOTES

1. The term “sexual orientation” has numerous definitions, including self-identification (gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender), sexual behaviour, and sexual attraction. The term sexual minority encompasses these various definitions and refers broadly to individuals who have a sexual orientation that is non-heterosexual (Hatzenbuehler, 2009). This term is used throughout the article, except in the discussion of specific studies in which authors have used another term. The focus of the current manuscript is sexual minority men; gay, bisexual, and men who have sex with men. The term ‘men who have sex with men’ is used to describe all men who are sexually active with other men, regardless of how they identify themselves (Parker, Khan, & Aggleton, 1998). Transgender individuals were not included in many of the studies which are being presented here. Any policy on men’s health must examine the rates, types and causes of health-related problems for this specific sub-population, but this is beyond the remit of this paper.

2. As in many countries, there is no exact data about the size and composition of sexual minority communities in Ireland (Aaron, Chang, Markovic, & LaPorte, 2003; Bradford, Ryan, Honed, & Rothblum, 2001).

3. It is important to note, that many members of the LGBT community in Ireland live happy and healthy lives and do not evidence greater risk for psychopathology (Cochran et al., 2003; Savin-Williams, 2001).

REFERENCES


TRANSPORT, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND AGEING IN PLACE: RELEVANCE FOR POLICY MAKING

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ABSTRACT

There is increasing evidence that ageing in place influences the health and well-being of older people and that ageing is ‘emplaced’ within a house, community and wider socio-economic context (McHugh 2003, Popey et al 2003). The majority of older people in Ireland prefer to age in place and to remain in the familiar environment of their own home and community. In view of increasing health care cost and changing demographics the importance of ageing in place as an alternative to institutional care is well recognised (Wiles 2005). Older people are not a homogenous group. The ‘younger old’, those aged 65-80 years of age lead busy, active lives are actively engaged in the community and have wide social networks. They construct and reconstruct their identity by being actively engaged in community activities and they dis-identify with ‘being old’. On the other hand, for the ‘older old’, people aged 80 years and over, a sense of disengagement can occur due to physical decline, decreased independence, mobility issues and loss of social networks (Noone 2008). The relationship between the built environment and health is suggested to be of particular importance for older people who generally conduct most of their daily activities in their local communities (Krause 1998). Lack of integrated transport policies and poor neighbourhood design can further compound the isolation and social exclusion experienced by older people (Brown & Mason et al. 2008; Richard & Gauvin et al. 2008; Noone 2008; Humphreys 2007; McDonagh 2006; Treacy & Butler et al 2004; Leyton 2003). Enabling older people to live in their own homes and in their own communities is a complex issue that requires interdisciplinary policy and practice development so that older people’s evolving social and care needs can be recognised and addressed. This paper argues that the potential exists to link the concept of social capital, ageing in place and public transport policy as an interdisciplinary research and policy development area and as a means of enhancing the health and well-being of older people.

INTRODUCTION

Ireland over the last ten years has undergone a process of economic, cultural and social change especially in relation to economic growth and accumulated wealth. During the 1990’s Irish living standards grew to a point where the country was viewed as one of the richest in the world with the fourth highest gross domestic product per capita in the world (Kuhling & Keohane 2007). Coupled with this economic prosperity there has been major social and cultural change which as suggested by Kuhling & Keohane (2007: 1) resulted in the transformation of Ireland from a pre-modern, peasant rural community to a postmodern, high-technology urbanised society. The perception of Ireland as having strong economic growth and prosperity conflicts with the reality of rural older people many who are socially excluded, isolated and lonely (Treacy & Butler et al 2004; Murphy & O’Shea et al 2007; Noone 2008). This situation is compounded by a lack of basic services such as transport and closure of local shops and post offices (McDonagh 2006). Not all people have benefited positively from the accumulated wealth of the Celtic Tiger. I suggest that in some ways it has resulted in a ‘disconnect’ between older people and life. Older people’s connectedness to place and sense
of belonging so vital for well-being (Noone 2004) is being eroded by the negative aspects of social transformation such as traffic congestion, poor infrastructure, inequity and inequality of services, lack of transport, lack of access to health services (Noone 2004; Noone 2008) and poor attention to neighbourhood design (Leyton 2003). Richard & Gauvin (2008) highlight that engagement in social activities seem to be particularly beneficial to older adults and that staying connected is associated with positive health outcomes on a variety of health indicators and promotes better health physically and mentally (Kawachi & Bergman 2001; Kawachi 1999; Berkman 1995; Kaplan 1988; House & Lundis et al 1988). Leyton (2003) suggests that the way in which communities and neighbourhoods are designed and built impact on social capital and also physical and mental health. Leyton (2003) argues that people who live in walkable mixed use neighbourhoods are more likely to know their neighbours and to be involved socially. It is also suggested that the contextual factors relating to the quality of neighbourhood including positive identification and attachment to place are important factors that influence level of social capital (Humphreys 2007). This paper argues that lack of policy and planning in the way communities are designed and built as well as lack of integrated transport policies further isolates older people, especially the ‘older old’ and those living in rural areas. There is an urgent need for greater attention to the planning and design of the built environment at neighbourhood level to include not only housing but the social environment, walking environment, services, amenities and transportation. The New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020 titled Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future (Department of Transport 2009) highlights the need to improve quality of life and accessibility to transport for everyone and in particular, for people with reduced mobility and those who experience isolation due to lack of transport. Greater interdisciplinary policy integration is warranted so that the spatial strategy which focuses on public planning and investment on “people, place and potential” (Department of the Environment and Local Government 2002:10) is integrated with environmental, housing and health promotion policies for older people. In this way, local planning and transport policies can enhance spatial mobility and connectedness of older people, thus facilitating ageing in place.

Corcoran & Share (2008:2) share the view that “a fundamental aspect of our humanity is the need to belong, to have a social identity”. Simmel (1971) suggests that a person’s subjectivity is shaped by the interaction of multiple belongings and this includes not only interaction between individuals but also between people and their environments. Corcoran (2004:3) comments on the fragility of belongingness in the contemporary world arguing that social forces “fracture, fragment and individualise people and that ties that previously bound us together unravel”.

Leyton (2003) advocates greater attention to be paid to the built environment. This is built on the premise that some neighbourhood designs enable community connectedness while other designs do not. Based on a large survey of 750 households in Galway and its suburbs this study sought to examine the relationship between neighbourhood design and social capital. Findings indicate that an important relationship exists between neighbourhood design and individual social capital. People who live in a walkable mixed use neighbourhood are more likely to know their neighbours and to be more involved socially. In contrast many areas of modern car dependant housing estates that were created during the Celtic Tiger demand for housing do not have parks or sidewalks and hinder the opportunities for social engagement and individual social capital. Mixed use pedestrian oriented neighbourhoods where restaurants, shops and local amenities are a short walk away provide better opportunities for the building of social capital than modern, car dependant suburbs.
SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital is a conceptually complex and contested term with a myriad of definitions. This leads to a lack of conceptual clarity and many different approaches to measurement. Definitions are generally made up of three elements. These include: norms, values and attitudes based on trust and reciprocity, networks both formal and informal and consequences of social capital (Newton 1997). Social capital can be understood as a community resource (Putman 1995: 67), defined as “features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”. Bourdieu (1986) on the other hand focuses on resources that accrue to an individual as a result of membership of social networks. The definition for Bourdieu (1986:248) includes the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network or institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition”. Much debate centres on whether social capital is a source or an outcome. Krishna & Shrader (1990) view it as a source and include both formal and informal networks and trust and reciprocity in the definition. As an outcome it is linked to social support (Portes 1998), influence and control (Portes 1998), social cohesion and sense of community (Ellaway, Macintyre & Kearns 2001) and involvement in civic engagement and voluntary work. Social capital can be viewed as both a consequence and producer of social cohesion. Its focus on relationships underpins the importance of social capital to social cohesion. Putman (2000) argues that at the level of the community, quality of life can be enhanced if active participation in community occurs. Lochner et al. (1999) suggests that engagement of older people in community-based organisations has benefits for social cohesion and social capital within communities. However it is also important to take into account that not all social networks are positive and therefore can be used against social cohesion as well as enhancing it.

There is some consensus, for analytic purposes that three dimensions of social capital exist: bonding, bridging and linking social capital (Humphreys 2007). Stone et al (2003) posit that bonding social capital concerns closed networks, such as family and friends, bridging social capital allows people to access multiple networks, and linking social capital is created through networks with those in authority who have power or are useful in obtaining resources. Social capital is overall concerned with the health and social gains obtained from social interaction, social participation, mutual assistance and trust and it has been linked to social connectedness in the area of health and well-being (Putman 2000).

It as been used extensively in academic and policy discussions in relation to deprived neighbourhoods (Forrest & Kearns 2001:2130) and it is argued that benefits accrue when neighbourhoods are not solely defined as spatial territories but also as a series of “overlapping social networks”. And yet overall, there is no agreement as to what specifically constitutes social capital. DiFilippis (2001:782) describe it as “an elastic term with a variety of meanings” and that it is “prone to vague interpretation and indiscriminate application” (Forrest & Kearns 2001:2137). Humphrey’s (2007) argues that a more sophisticated understanding of social capital is required from a spatial context in terms of how it is influenced by people and place, particularly older people, prior to deployment as a policy tool.

An issue in relation to social capital concerns the extent to which older people view themselves as being part of the community. Forrest & Kearns (2001:2130) describe neighbourhoods as important sources of social identity. Older people's conception of the place they live may be conditioned by the geographical boundary but it may also be formed
by differences in perceptions of economic standing and culture. The concept of Age Friendly Communities emphasizes the inclusion of people in communities. An aspect of social inclusion concerns enabling access to informal networks of friendships and family. This can be aided by the provision of public transport, increasing accessibility by increasing walkways and enhancing the local environment where people live. It needs to be recognised that mobility has a social element to it and transport policies have to include the social element as well.

A spatio-cultural thinking in Irish planning is evident in the spatial strategy document but this to date, has not been an explicit research focus (The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020: People, Places and Potential 2002). McHugh (2003) argues that a spatial perspective is warranted in the area of older peoples’ research because the relationship between older people and the spaces and places that they inhabit “illuminate deeply-ingrained societal attitudes and values”. Community studies with older people indicate that a strong emotional attachment both to home and the surrounding community exists (Phillipson, Bernard et al. 2001). In fact, Rowles (1978:200) suggest that feelings about spaces might represent “a universal strategy employed by older people to facilitate maintaining a sense of identity within a changing environment”.

AGEING IN IRELAND

Population ageing is an international phenomenon. However, the experience varies between countries. Though Ireland’s population is ageing, in comparative terms it is a relatively young country. Just over 11 per cent of the population of Ireland are aged 65 years and over. This amounts to 436,000 people living in Ireland today. Demographic projections for the period up to 2021 predicts a substantial increase in the population aged 65 years and over from current levels up to 698,000, an increase of approximately 60% (National Council on Ageing and Older People 2004). It is estimated that older people in 2021 will account for approximately 15% of the population. The largest increase will occur in males but in absolute terms older women will outnumber men. In line with trends in other advanced countries, the older age group of 80 years and over will experience the largest increase. The number of Irish people aged 80 years and over is projected to increase from 100,583 in 2002 to 137,000 in 2021 and to 323,000 in 2036. By 2036 it is projected that there will be more older people than younger people in the population (Central Statistics Office 2004). These demographic changes present challenges to communities and societies in terms of planning and neighbourhood design, transport policies and provision of community based services to respond to the changing needs of older people.

The National Council on Ageing and Older People in a position paper in 2005 called for the integration of The Age-friendly Society concept in Ireland which advocates the inclusion of people of all ages in society (NCAOP 2005). Policy makers in Ireland have in recent years become more attuned to the desire to age in place but the reality is that the provision of transport, health and social services at community level is often limited and inadequate. Ageing in place is frequently referred to in the literature but the concept denotes a policy ideal rather than a complex process of interaction between the older person and their environment. I argue that potential exists for the inclusion of ageing in place and social capital for the promotion of health and well-being of older people in their neighbourhoods. But to do this, adequate and integrated planning and transport policies are needed that integrates transport, environment, housing, local authority and local groups. This includes
the provision of a rural transport scheme to be extended to all rural areas, local bus service in towns that is free and flexible to the needs of older people, adequate parking facilities in local towns to enable older people to park near post office, banks and shops, availability of free and designated parking spaces specifically for older people in all car parks, increase in pedestrian crossings and the creation of friendly open spaces and walkways with seats and flowers to enable older people to rest and engage in social interaction.

Kenny & Finn (1997:18) argue that traditionally transport policy in Ireland is “dated, incomplete and only looking at the macro picture” with no clear policy for how either rural or urban people without private transport can mobilise. No integrated policy of transport provision exists for those who are dependant or carers of dependants. Within this context, spatial mobility is an important component of aging in place. Linking it to social capital from a policy perspective has benefits because social capital is concerned with the advantage that individuals and communities can gain from social participation, mutual assistance and trust (Currie & Stanley 2008). Rural Ireland has become very car dependant. Recent closure of local shops and post offices necessitates older people to travel to larger towns to collect pension and carry out shopping. Putman (2000) suggests that there are negative links between car dependence and the development of effective social capital. The centralisation of health services further emphasises the need for adequate transport infrastructure to enable older people to access health care. For older people who have access to a car, the expense of maintenance, poor roads, long tiring journeys to urban areas and petrol costs further impede the ability of many older people to access health services, further impacting on their health and well-being. This situation applies not only to older people who live in rural areas but also those in urban settings where car dependence is the norm.

CURRENT POLICY

A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020 emphasises the need for sustainable travel, the alignment of spatial and transport planning to stop urban sprawl and urban generated one off housing. The policy stresses the need to reduce travel demand and car dependency and to radically improve public transport service. To have increased investment in cycle and walking initiatives, improve the interface between physical planning process and transport requirement and to reduce exclusive reliance on the private car to meet travel requirements in urban and rural areas (Department of Transport 2009). Previous policies such as The National Development Plan 2000- 2006 (Department of Finance 1999), The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 (Department of Environment and Local Government 2002) and A Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland, a White Paper on Rural Development (Department of Agriculture and Food 1999) stress the importance of transport and the impact it has on the well-being of people. Previous policies emphasised the importance of increased road construction so that better competitiveness could be achieved. Priorities were given to car owners at the neglect of the development of public transportation. An increase of 72% in the total number of vehicles licensed occurred from 1996 to 2006 (Department of Transport 2009). This has negatively impacted on localised traffic pollution, increased greenhouse gas emissions, impacted on public health issues in particular chronic disease, as well as increasing dependency on imported oil.

The National Spatial Strategy for Ireland (2002) is a twenty year planning framework designed with the purpose of achieving a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between regions. It proposed to bring:
This strategy is national in that it is designed to guide policies and investment. It is spatial in that it is concerned with the location of people and it is strategic in that it offers a broad, long term comprehensive twenty year plan for achieving more balanced development. “The remarkable economic, social and physical progress of recent years has established a platform upon which policies can be put in place to ensure that more balanced development is achieved within a well-planned spatial structure of attractive, competitive and innovative places” p 10. It also highlights the importance of sustainable development that combines the dynamic economy with social inclusion. It states that through the National Spatial Strategy with its focus on economic, social and environmental issues and on the interlinks between them that it aims to pursue economic development.

This strategy is very visionary but it does not include details on how it is to be implemented. One of its areas of action was to contribute to the evolution of spatially integrated communities in both urban and rural areas”. Yet, there is no substantial proposal on how this is to be achieved or implemented. McDonagh (2006) suggests that the government is stating that the rural environment is to be respected and that development in rural areas is to take place in a sustainable manner and yet infrastructural developments which are being pursued by government often negatively impact on quality of life and fail to improve older people’s accessibility or mobility. The Environmental Protection Agency in a State of the Environment Report (2008) state that a 378% increase in housing completions occurred between 1990 and 2006 (Environmental Protection Agency 2008). This has impacted negatively on the environment not least in terms of changes to land use but also increased urbanisation, increased traffic flows, and the need for increased infrastructure such as housing, water supply, sewerage and waste management facilities. This unsustainable land use change can impact negatively on human health and have a harmful effect on water, air, soil and biodiversity. It can also conflict with land use and planning.

Scott et al (2007) suggests that the trend towards unsustainable development that occurred in Ireland placed the developers gain before the public good. Land was purchased for housing development without any provision of amenities, parks, or community centres. This policy was actively supported by government and the banking sector through the provision of attractive tax incentives and the granting of large loans to property developers.

Mahon & Fahy (2009) from survey data of four communities in Ireland report that even though residents were largely satisfied with their residential location, problems arose in relation to traffic and inadequate provision of services and facilities especially public transportation. McDonagh (2006) suggests that in terms of new road development, the National Roads Authority had an over concentration on new road construction without adequate debate as to the social implications of such development. This implies a conflict between policies and a lack of recognition that inadequate public transport is a factor in the marginalisation of people in society.

One successful and worthwhile scheme was the Rural Transport Initiative which was introduced in 2002 with the overall aim “to encourage innovative community based initiatives to provide transport services in rural areas, with a view to addressing the issue of social exclusion in rural Ireland, which is caused by lack of access to transport”. (Department
Five million Euro was provided with the objective of promoting and supporting the development of innovative, community based public transport pilot projects for older people. It was funded under the National Development Plan 2007-2013, by the Department of Transport (at a cost of 4.5 million in 2005) and specifically targeted the needs of rural and more isolated areas of the country. In 2005, the service generated more than 650,000 passenger journeys. This scheme was set up as a pilot transport initiative and was based on community led organisations, the use of local knowledge and expertise and collaboration between voluntary and community groups and statutory bodies. Despite being evaluated very positively it is only operational in pilot rural areas and has not been extended countrywide. Within the current economic downturn it is envisaged that initiatives like the rural transport scheme will remain underfunded and underdeveloped, further impacting on the lives of older people who live in rural areas. Also of concern is the omission of older peoples’ transport needs from the New Smart Travel Policy (2008:62) and a lack of committed funding under the investment in Transport 21 which states that the government provides an investment of 34 billion euro up to 2015. Of note however, is that “the funding of the Policy will be a matter for decisions by the Government in the light of prevailing economic and budgetary parameters”. It aims to progress cycling and walking policies, but again it states that “schemes relating to school and workplace mobility will be progressed” (Department of Transport 2009). Sadly, there is no mention of the needs of older people anywhere in the policy.

In a study conducted on Loneliness and Social Isolation Among Older Irish People Treacy & Butler et al. (2004:227) found that lack of access to either a car or public transport increased older people isolation and reduced or prevented travel to shops, day centres or visits to family and friends. When asked to estimate their travelling distances to amenities such as banks and post office and to ascertain their current access to transport. 43.8% (n=298) reported that they had access to a car, 17% (n=116) reported that they had access to public transport only and a further 11.7% per cent reported that they had no access to any mode of transport, most of who lived in rural areas. This study highlighted that the older old, older women and older people living in rural areas were most of risk of social isolation due to transport lack.

Data from an ethnography study conducted with a purposeful sample of 15 older people over the age of 80 years, living in a West of Ireland rural community highlighted that lack of transport was a major contributing factor to loneliness which impacted negatively on sense of well-being). As Katie, a 92 year old lady living alone aptly told me

“I’ve no way of going to town so I don’t get out…sure I’ve no one to bring me”.

Sean, aged 84 and living alone, described how his life changed when his neighbour died because he no longer had a lift to the local pub.

“I used to be going to the pub there now with a man years ago, a neighbour used to leave me up, and that neighbour would go to bingo and when they’d come back from bingo, he’s come back again around 11o’ clock and fetch me and bring me back, that was working for a long time, but that man is dead now and he was younger than me, so that finished when he died” (Sean, aged 84 years) (Noone 2008).

Acknowledging that social isolation is an issue for older people the question remains as to what can be done to alleviate this issue. Findlay (2003) reviews the empirical literature published over the last 20 years on the effectiveness of interventions that addresses social isolation amongst older people. These include telephone support service, gatekeeper
programmes, teleconferencing, support groups, service provision such as moving to a community retirement village, and internet usage. The Gatekeeper programme commenced in the USA in 1978 and is used successfully in Canada. This model identifies socially isolated older people and connects them to support services. It uses non-traditional referral sources and it facilitates the local community to assist the vulnerable older adult; it also opens lines of communication between agencies and builds community capacity because it is a community-driven project. In relation to support groups, research indicates that women are more likely to join groups than men and that these groups include educational and friendship and empowerment programmes and discussion group. For some older people moving to retirement villages has shown positive benefits. Yet the results revealed that although many interventions have been implemented worldwide, there is very little evidence to show that they work. This is mainly due to lack of programme evaluations or lack of reporting of successful programmes.

A systematic review conducted to determine the effectiveness of health promotion interventions targeting social isolation among older people was conducted by Cattan & White et al. (2005) where quantitative outcome studies between 1970 and 2002 in any language were included. Findings from this review indicate that educational and social activity group interventions that target specific group can alleviate social isolation and loneliness among older people. The effectiveness of home visiting and befriending seemed unclear from the review.

A growing body of evidence also suggests that redesigning neighbourhood as a means of promoting visibility and interaction has health benefits and has the potential to enhance the physical functioning among older Hispanic people (Brown 2008). The importance of place and community where people live has a key role in shaping health and health related behaviours. It is also suggested “that social capital varies from place to place and that such variations are relevant for explaining variations in health” (Nogueira 2009:133.).

CONCLUSION

Age-friendly and inclusive environments can improve the health and well-being of older people and reduce the risk of social isolation. Literature indicates that the quality of neighbourhoods and the layout of physical infrastructure can impact on mobility, social connectedness, independence and well-being. There is a growing literature that contextual conditions in place of residence as well of human characteristics influence health variations and quality of life (Curtis & Southall et al. 2004; Humphreys 2007). Yet, little is understood about how complex interdependent processes of place and place attachment impact on older people’s well-being. Targeted transportation policies can enhance the connectedness of older people and increase individual social capital. I argue that there is an urgent need to integrate interdisciplinary research using the concept of social capital, transport policy, neighbourhood planning and design to facilitate ageing in place.
REFERENCES


WORKPLACE STRESS, SLEEP LOSS AND WELL-BEING: IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

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ABSTRACT

Sections of society increasingly experience regular sleep loss due to the demands of modern lifestyles, greater work pressure, and psychosocial stress. While the performance and cognitive related deficits associated with sleep loss are well established, evidence suggests that insufficient sleep, particularly in work contexts, may have additional direct effects on both an individual's physical and psychological functioning. Often thought of in terms of medical parameters, sleep loss (especially chronic sleep loss) is very much a psychological and psychosocial problem: its direct precursors are primarily factors relating to behaviour, personality, and environment; while its impact is felt in terms of behavioural, emotional, and social outcomes. As such, the growing trend toward chronic partial restriction of sleep is becoming recognized as a public health problem and a pertinent issue relating to occupational and public health policy debate in the sustainable communities' domain.

Work stress related sleep problems, such as difficulty initiating and maintaining sleep, reduced quality/quantity of sleep, and excessive daytime sleepiness are associated with adverse effects on well-being, social functioning and quality of life, according to numerous studies covering the general population. The direct effects of such problems, as well as comorbidity with other substantial public health problems such as obesity and depression, can have a profound economic and social impact. Such effects relate to various indicators of public health, from direct impact on physical health and related health care utilisation, to individuals daily social and emotional functioning. As it appears to be the case that individuals suffering from sleep loss are less productive, have an increased health care utilisation and a decreased quality of life, research which investigates sleep and its health correlates aims to aid policy formation regarding provision of effective support and change necessary for such individuals.

INTRODUCTION

The need and demand for clear scientific evidence to inform and support health policymaking processes are greater than ever. The World Health Organisation’s (WHO) “The Solid Facts” document sets out a policy driven research agenda on how psychological and social influences affect adverse health outcomes (Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003). The investigation into psychosocial determinants of health is concerned with key aspects of people’s living and working circumstances and their lifestyles. It is also concerned with the health implications of economic and social policies, and the benefits that investing in health policies can bring. Our current understanding of psychological factors suggests ways that the social environment can have a powerful influence on health.

While the current economic climate has resulted in much concern over the appropriate provision and financing of health services, it remains a priority to ensure that the nature of the
services provided is based on the best scientific evidence regarding service effectiveness and in the process, incorporating current understanding of key social and psychological factors that make people ill and in need of medical care in the first instance.

Policy and action for health need to address both psychological and social determinants of health, combating causes of ill health before they can lead to problems. This is a challenging task for both decision-makers and public health advocates. It is now recognised that individuals’ social and psychological circumstances can seriously damage health over longer terms. Chronic psychological stress, in both occupational and life contexts, appears to undermine health. In particular, chronic loss of sleep, resulting in suboptimal sleeping patterns, has been associated with negative mental and physical health outcomes. As trends toward reduced sleep duration and quality become increasingly more common in society, particularly in occupational contexts, research is needed to investigate the impact of sleep loss on both psychological and physical well-being, importantly, in the context of policy formation. Psychosocial factors and their influences on health are active areas of research and the following paper sets out the mechanisms linking psychological stress, particularly occupational related stress and sleep disruption, to ill health and the policy implications of such associations in terms of public health protection.

STRESS AND HEALTH

When social scientists refer to psychological stress they usually make reference to a psychological state which encompasses both the external environment and the individual’s internal response to this environment. In this sense, stress refers to the outcome of an interaction between an organism and the demands placed on it by the environment, or put succinctly, we may define psychological stress as the state arising when the individual perceives that the demands placed on them exceed (or threaten to exceed) their capacity to cope, and therefore threaten their wellbeing (Martin, 1997). When these environmental demands (referred to as “stressors”) imposed by events surpass a person’s ability to cope, they elicit both psychological and biological reactions (referred to as the “stress response”). Stressors can be physical as well as psychological, however, as Martin (1997) again notes, within our definition of stress lies a crucial concept – one’s experience of stress depends on our individual appraisal of both the demands we experience and our capacity to cope with them. Individuals differ considerably in their responses to identical stressors, depending on factors that are unique to them, including personality, physical health and their social environment. Additionally, the quality of the stressors themselves can have significant bearing on the level of the resultant stress response; one important feature is the duration of the stressor. As one would expect, prolonged (chronic) stressors tend to inflict greater damage to health compared to short-lived (acute) stressors. Individuals who have supportive social relationships are known to be less vulnerable to the health related detriments linked to lifestyle stress (Uchino, 2006), and psychological intervention and supportive health policy which encourages a positive social support structure can act to promote important psychosocial stress “buffers”, working to reduce the harmful health impacts of a maladaptive stress response.
HOW DO PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS AFFECT PHYSICAL HEALTH?

The term “allostasis” describes the process by which living organisms maintain biological homeostasis during environmental or physiological challenges (McEwen, 2000). These physiological coping mechanisms involve diverse systems within the body including the autonomic nervous system and cardiovascular, metabolic, and immune systems, serving to protect the body from internal or external stress. For some individuals, a maladaptive stress response can develop, because of genetic predisposition, environmental factors or if the normal stress response occurs frequently and the individual does not adapt to a repeated stressor of the same type (Brotman et al., 2007). Such repetitive build-up of stressors/stress responses has been referred to as “allostatic load” (Mathe, 2000). Being in a state of constant activation (as in a chronic fight/flight response to threat) or in a chronic state of helplessness and giving up, decreases our adaptability (allostasis) and renders us more susceptible to a wide variety of stress related disorders (Vingerhoets and Perski, 2000). Studies have demonstrated that stress is associated with varied detrimental health outcomes from upper respiratory infection (Cohen et al., 1999) to exacerbation of autoimmune disorders (Stojanovich and Marisavljevich, 2008). There is also a consistent relation between chronic psychosocial stress and coronary atherosclerosis (and atherosclerotic risk factors) while related disorders of what is termed the “metabolic syndrome” (a combination of medical disorders that increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease) have been associated with several indices of chronic psychological stress, two indices of particular note being occupational-related stress and sleep deprivation (Brotman et al., 2007).

One form of chronic stress an individual may encounter, namely chronic loss of sufficient sleep, is known to have potential hazardous repercussions for health and well being. While the impairment of cognitive functioning associated with sleep deprivation is well established (Van Dongen et al., 2003, Barger et al., 2005), data suggest that insufficient sleep may have additional adverse effects on diverse health regulating systems, from cardiovascular, metabolic and immune functioning, in addition to having a negative impact on an individuals social and emotional function (Mullington et al., 2009). Short sleep durations also have the potential to result in increased exposures to waking physical and psychosocial stressors (Gangwisch et al., 2006) and in adult life, our working environments are one of the most significant settings relating to individuals’ daily stress exposure.

STRESS AND THE OCCUPATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The psychosocial work environment, with relevance to health, is defined by the interaction between a persons cognitions, emotions and behaviours and the material and social work context (Marmot and Wilkinson, 2006). The nature of work has undergone significant change in recent decades. Jobs are increasingly becoming defined by more mental and emotional demands. According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work work-related stress is one of the biggest health and safety challenges that we face in Europe. Stress is the second most frequently reported work-related health problem, affecting 22% of workers from EU member states (in 2005), and the number of people suffering from stress-related conditions caused or made worse by work is likely to increase. Studies also suggest that stress is a factor in between 50% and 60% of all lost working days (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, September, 2009).
Occupational stress can be defined as the interaction of work-specific conditions and individual characteristics where (negative) physical and/or psychological consequences occur in response to a stressor, when the requirements of the job do not match the perceived capabilities, resources or needs of the worker (Chang et al., 2006). When the worker perceives an imbalance between demands and environmental or personal resources, this can cause a number of possible reactions. These may include physiological responses (e.g. increase in heart rate/blood pressure), emotional responses (e.g. feeling nervous or irritated), cognitive responses (e.g. reduced attention and perception, forgetfulness), and behavioural reactions (e.g. aggressive, impulsive behaviour, making mistakes). When people are in a state of stress, they often feel concerned, less vigilant and less efficient in performing tasks (Barling et al., 2005). When stress reactions persist over a longer period of time (chronic stress), they may develop into more permanent, less reversible health outcomes, the result being long-term consequences both for the individual (high blood pressure, affective disorders, alcohol dependence) and for the industry (impaired performance/productivity and increased absenteeism/turnover). Stress occurs in many different circumstances, but is particularly strong when a person’s ability to control the demands of work is threatened. Importantly, as noted by the European foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions (2007) the stressful experience is intensified if no help is available from colleagues or supervisors at work. Therefore, social isolation and lack of cooperation increase the risk of prolonged stress at work. Conversely, a work environment with supportive social relationships, contribute to workers’ well-being and health. A health impacting work factor of particular note is the increasing practice of work during ‘non-standard’ working hours, including shift and night work, both recognized as significant risk factors for health, safety and social well-being (Costa, 2003).

SHIFT WORK AND SLEEP PROBLEMS

Research suggests that there is significant morbidity associated with shift work exposure. Most prominently, shift work is associated with both increased difficulty sleeping and with increased sleepiness during waking hours (Akerstedt, 1995). While reduced wakefulness during waking hours has clear safety and productivity repercussions, shift workers are also at increased risk for a variety of adverse health outcomes, including cardiovascular disease, with chronic loss of sufficient sleep proposed as a possible pathological mechanism. This is of distinct relevance given the fact that the European Working Conditions Surveys (EWCS) which documents recent patterns in mental health at the workplace report that in the period from 2000-2005, while some stress related indices decreased (i.e., work irritability) work-related sleep problems remained constant (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2005). However, shift work is not the only occupational factor related to occupational sleep disturbance. Studies in both the US and some EU states have documented that parameters of job stress, such as high job demands, low job control, high job strain that is defined by a combination of high job demands and low job control, and low social support at workplace are associated with an increase in sleep problems (see Nakata et al., 2004). This interaction of work stress and sleep disturbance not only has a detrimental impact on physical health but also impacts the individuals social functioning. For instance, for couples in which one or both members of the dyad engage in shift-work, the association between sleep and relationship quality may be particularly strong because of shift-workers heightened risk for sleep deprivation and dysregulated social rhythms which may limit opportunities for positive social interactions with the spouse or partner (Troxel et al., 2007). It is also clear from interdisciplinary published works in the psychological, medical and
sociological literature that sleep problems of one partner in a couple can create sleep problems for the other (e.g. Armstrong et al., 1999). Sleep loss also affects emotion regulation, frustration tolerance and cognitive functioning which could in turn lead to more negative relationship interactions and social functioning (Kahn-Greene et al., 2006). Thus, disturbed sleep linked to occupational environmental stress may contribute to unhealthy social and relationship functioning by impairing emotion regulation and cognitive function in addition to influencing physiological stress mechanisms leading to physical ill health.

SOCIAL SUPPORT AS MODERATOR IN THE STRESS-ILLNESS LINK

Social support has a positive effect on many different aspects of both physical and mental health and the evidence that social support is beneficial (and social isolation damaging) to health is now considerable (Marmot and Wilkinson, 2006). Social support is generally used to refer to a general perception that others are available and desire to provide assistance should the individual need it (Pierce et al., 1996). More formally, social support in the social sciences refers to a multidimensional construct with distinctions made between “structural support”, describing the size, type, density and frequency of contact with the supportive network surrounding an individual, and “functional support”, which refers to the apparent benefit provided by that structure (Lett et al., 2005). Functional support can further be categorized as available (referring to potential access to a particular type of support from the environment) or enacted (referring to the manifestation of available support in the form of actual support received from others) (Tardy, 1985). This definition emphasizes perceived social support, which has consistently been associated with various positive health outcomes and appears to be more important than received social support (Cohen et al., 2004). Two theories have been developed to explain the role of social support in health status: (a) “main effects” suggest that the positive effects of support, or lack thereof, have direct effects on an individuals health status and (b) the “stress buffering hypothesis” suggests that support helps to moderate the impact of acute and chronic stress on health.

In the field of Health Psychology, most laboratory based testing of social support and its health function is derived from the social support reactivity hypothesis (Lepore, 1998), which asserts that social support enhances health prospects by preventing or attenuating harmful physiological responses to stress. Social support has the potential to operate on both an individual and societal level to foster social cohesion (the existence of mutual trust and trust between sections of society) and associated contributions to individual and community wide health. As an example of applied use in an occupational environment, a well known occupational stress model by Karsek and colleagues, the demand-control model, in which job stress or “strain” is thought to result from high job demands and low personal control resulting in increased risk of stressful experience and subsequent physical illness, was adapted to include social support as a buffer against occupational stress (Karasek et al., 1981). In this context, social support refers to both emotional support (involving for e.g., trust and social cohesion between colleagues) and instrumental social support (involving the provision of work-related resources and assistance). When tested on workplace populations, results indicate that when initiatives are implemented to stimulate support (from work colleagues and from supervisors) high social support level results in fewer symptoms of stress related ill-health than those with low social support in the workplace (Theorell et al., 2001).
COMPATIBILITY OF PRESENT RESEARCH AND CURRENT POLICY AGENDAS

According to the Irish “Summary of injury, illness and fatality statistics”, in 2004 and 2005 “stress, depression, anxiety” had the second highest rate in the illness category affecting 6.5 illness cases per 1,000 workers in 2005, and 6.0 in 2004 (Health and Safety Authority, 2007). Data from the Occupational Injury Benefit (OIB) scheme run by the Department of Social and Family Affairs show that 1.7% of all claims in 2006 were related to occupational stress. On a European level, in terms of cost to the European economy, studies suggest that between 50% and 60% of all lost working days have some link with work-related stress (Cox et al., 2000). This represents cost in terms of both human distress and impaired economic performance. A conservative estimate of annual costs of work-related stress, accounting for the sum of both direct and indirect health costs, in the EU nations is in the region of 20 billion Euro (Dunham, 2001). Such high prevalence and attributed health costs lead the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work to set up the “European Risk Observatory” through which they identified and explored emerging occupational safety and health risks and associated areas for emerging policy provision. These reports, issued by an expert group representing 13 Member States of the European Union, the USA and International Labour Organisation (ILO) detailed a “forecast” of emerging psychosocial risks which, they feel, will come to prominence in the years ahead.

They identify certain key areas of risk. Firstly, they propose that as a consequence of an ageing population and higher retirement ages, ageing workers may be more vulnerable to the hazards resulting from poor working conditions than younger employees. Secondly, of increasing relevance over the coming years, and especially relevant to psychosocial health, as job instability, forced mobility and unemployment become more prevalent, such an unstable labour markets result in increases in workers’ feelings of job insecurity, which augments the level of work-related stress and may have a negative impact on workers’ health. In addition, work intensification, related to the reduction in jobs and job insecurity, suggests that some workers, particularly those employed in new forms of employment or in highly competitive fields, may fear being monitored more closely for efficiency and output and, as a result, tend to work longer hours to finish tasks and sleep less without proper compensation or social support. Finally, the experts stressed that all of the changes in work organisation mentioned above may lead to higher pressure on workers which could spill over into private life. The resulting overall representation of the coming years, both in Ireland and at European level, is one of increased risk of stress related health impacts due in no small part to changes in work structure as a result of economic upheaval, the result being a potentially poor work-life balance and resulting detrimental effects on worker’s health and well-being.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Work-related stress is not specifically mentioned in European legislation. However, the “Framework agreement on work-related stress” (Monks et al., 2004) was signed by the EU social partners. Its objective is to provide employers and workers with a framework to identify, prevent and manage problems of work-related stress. The framework emphasises that if stress at work is tackled, efficiency and occupational health and safety can be improved, resulting in economic and social benefits for companies, workers and society as a whole. Additionally, the agreement sets out a range of measures that employers could use to tackle the issue of work-related stress, either individual or collective, or both. Employers may want to use specific targeted measures, or they may want to put into place an integrated stress
policy containing both preventative and responsive measures. Importantly, it is suggested that external expertise should be called upon.

Social science research which focuses on the psychosocial underpinnings of occupational stress is keenly placed to inform policy provision relating to the prevention and reduction of such stress. It is anticipated that scientific expertise in the examination of psychosocial stress in the workplace can facilitate (a) the provision of key stress indicators in our workplace communities which can be used in the identification of stress at an individual level (i.e. subjective factors and perceived lack of support), (b) elucidate moderators to the stress-illness link (i.e. social support) (c) affect greater overall social cohesion between work colleagues and (d) promote more adaptive functioning in our workplaces, with a vision of sustaining a healthful and productive workforce in the challenging work climate of the years ahead.

European and national statistics presented here indicate that stress at work is a growing problem for a significant number of our workers, affecting both work absence and productivity, generating costs for enterprises and the wider community, with fundamental subsidiary effects for both employees and their dependents. As such, informed policy development that addresses work-related stress is integral to the concept of sustaining communities regarding provision of effective support and change necessary for affected individuals, benefitting both employee and wider family functioning and well-being. Policy makers, social partners and relevant stakeholders have been called upon to take action on stress related well-being in the workplace and this protection and promotion of employee health should be considered an essential task of employment policy based on the application of a knowledge base derived from scientific research on psychosocial stress risks.

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