

Throwing out the baby with the bathwater? Contemporary Irish approaches to EU Cohesion Policy.

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This paper examines the Irish experience of Multi-Level Governance and partnership in the context of effective local governance and development. It demonstrates that whilst there has been significant success in Ireland's operationalization of both Multi-Level Governance and partnership approaches, much of the associated policy learning has taken place outside the formal institutions of local government. In many cases, the Managing Authorities for successful cohesion and development initiatives have been independent partnership companies, funded by EU regional policies, with the support and approval of the Irish government, but outside its own formal remit. Using Bache's (2008) framework for the analysis of Europeanization, Multi-Level Governance and Cohesion policy, the paper finds that Europeanization has resulted in a reorientation of domestic policies, practices and preferences in the Irish case, but the consequence has been the creation of Multi-Level Governance Type II not I (Borzel and Risse, 2003). The governance changes that have occurred have been ad hoc and messy, and central government's response to them has been short-termist and financially expedient. In the current climate of financial crisis, these are the very organizations that are now first in line for funding cutbacks. This raises concerns about the sustainability of knowledge transfer impacts from Irish Multi-Level Governance and partnership projects within the formal system of Irish government.

MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE – A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

This study uses Bache's (2008) framework for analysis of multi-level governance and cohesion policy, which is an adaptation of Risse, Cowles and Caporaso's (2001) study. Bache (2008: 15-17) adapts Risse *et al's* definition of Europeanization, defining it as 'the emergence and development of EU policies, practices and preferences' which lead – as a consequence of adaptational pressures and mediating influences – to a 're-orientation or reshaping of politics in the domestic arena', resulting in a form of Multi-level governance. This model (see fig. 1) has four elements.

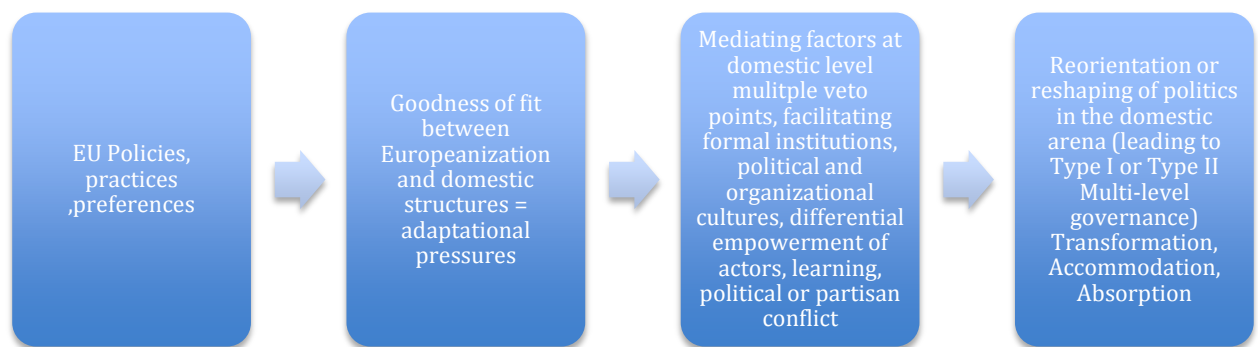


Figure 1: Europeanization and domestic change
Source: Bache, 2008: 17

Defining Europeanization

In order to test for the 'Emergence and development of EU policies, practices and preferences', in Irish approaches to regional policy, the study uses Radaelli and Bulmer's (2004: 4) definition of Europeanisation, where:

Europeanisation consists of processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies.

Using this approach, the analysis illustrates that the effects of Europeanization on national institutions may be either direct and/or formal, relating to the institutional structures, processes, procedures and conventions of government; or indirect and/or informal, concerning the shifting patterns of norms, values and identities that together comprise 'the national system' (Bulmer and Burch, 1998). It is this 'new-institutionalist leaning' definition of Europeanization that enables a full examination of domestic changes in terms of the 'policies, practices and preferences' outlined in the framework for analysis.

Explaining the adaptational pressures

Most accounts of adaptational pressures leading to Europeanization tend to stress the 'goodness of fit' or conversely, the degree of 'mismatch' in institutional and policy design between member state/EU approaches to policy. These concepts are especially important element for assessing the Europeanization impact on Irish regional policy. Briefly, it would appear that the literature offers two views of its significance: those who think that a degree of mismatch between EU and domestic policies is *always* a precondition for domestic adaptation (Borzal and Risse, 2000; Risse *et al.*, 2001); and those who think that its

significance varies depending on the policy (Radaelli and Bulmer, 2004). Of the former, Borzel and Risse (2000) argue that some degree of misfit presents the state with adaptational pressures and that where there are some facilitating factors, such as actors or institutions, responding to these adaptational pressures, Europeanisation is likely to occur. Similarly, Risse, Crowles and Caporaso (2001) suggest that in order to produce domestic effects, EU policy must be somewhat difficult to absorb at the domestic level. If the policy of the member states fits well with the EU policy, there will be little impact or change. Alternatively, if the member state has a policy which was wholly different from the EU policy, it may be almost impossible to adapt to it. In consequence, they argue that the effect of Europeanisation will be most marked in cases where the 'goodness of fit' is moderate.

This 'mismatch hypothesis' is qualified by Radaelli and Bulmer's (2004) suggestion that adaptational pressures only exist in certain policy cases and conditions. The importance of mismatch, they argue, is most significant where EU policy authority is dominant – in areas such as environmental policy, for example, where EU policy has imposed a model or a template of how a state should go about putting a policy into practice. In areas where states retain primary responsibility for policy, such as social policy, they argue that the pressures for change produced by mismatch are much weaker. By contrast, in areas where the EU acts only to 'facilitate co-ordination' of member state policies - where national governments are the key actors, decisions are subject to unanimity and the supranational institutions have very weak powers – if Europeanisation occurs, it is likely to be much more voluntary and non-hierarchical.

In consequence, Radaelli and Bulmer (2004: 7) argue that the 'mismatch hypothesis' does not hold with patterns of governance such as 'facilitated coordination' and that in these cases, Europeanisation 'hinges on horizontal mechanisms of governance rather than on the vertical imposition of models coming from Brussels' (Radaelli and Bulmer, 2004: 11). Together with de la Porte and Pochet (2002) and Mosher and Trubek (2003), they argue that the major impact of this mode of policy making is at the ideational level so that common benchmarks and common vocabulary materialise, and in 'areas previously impenetrable to Europeanisation, 'communities of discourse' with their own vocabulary, criteria and belief systems are emerging' (Radaelli and Bulmer, 2004: 11).

Mediating factors

Bache (2008: 16-17), following Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001: 6), identifies five key mediating factors that determine the impact of Europeanizing influences at the domestic level. First, *multiple veto factors*, refers to the (new) institutional structure of domestic politics and the suggestion that the more dispersed power is within the domestic arena, the more likely it is that adaptational pressures from the EU will be slowed or even blocked. These may be ameliorated to some extent, however, by the a second set of mediating factors in the form of

facilitative formal institutions that may empower domestic actors to bring about change or counter-act veto elements. The third mediating factor, *political and organizational culture*, refers to the prevalence – or absence – of consensus or cooperative oriented decision-making policy contexts. Fourth, the *differential empowerment of actors* refers to the notion that Europeanization depends to a large extent on the redistribution of resources within the domestic arena, in a manner that facilitates a re-orientation towards EU policies, practices and preferences. Fifth and finally, *learning* is identified as a mediating factor in terms of the process of policy learning and adaptation of policy activities that begins to redefine actors interests and preferences in a way that supports Europeanization. To these original five, Bache (2008: 17) added a sixth mediating factor, *Political partisan conflict*, designed to account for the transformative outcome of general elections in the British majoritarian electoral system, which may have significant impacts upon the prospects for Europeanization depending on the dominant value structure of the elected government.

Re-orienting or re-shaping domestic politics

In an attempt to categorize the domestic responses of EU member states to Europeanizing forces, Bache (2008) borrows three concepts from Borzel and Risse (2003: 69-70), which describe the adaptive strategies deployed by member states to Europeanizing forces: transformation; accommodation; and absorption (see table 1).

Table 1. Categorizing domestic response to the EU

<i>Category</i>	<i>Features</i>	<i>Degree of domestic change</i>
<i>Transformation</i>	States fundamentally change existing policies, practices, and/or preferences or replace them with new ones	High
<i>Accommodation</i>	States adapt existing policies, practices and/or preferences without changing their essential features	Modest
<i>Absorption</i>	States incorporate EU policies, practices, and/or preferences without substantially modifying existing policies, practices and/or preferences	Low

Source: Bache, 2008: 12

These different adaptive responses result in variable degrees of domestic change that may be correlated to Type I or Type II Multi-level governance (see table 2). Type I multi-level governance reflects a more federal or quasi-federal arrangement, in which dispersion of authority is clearly de-limited. Type II multi-level governance describes ‘governing arrangements in which the jurisdiction of

Table 2. Types of Multi-Level Governance

<i>Type I</i>	<i>Type II</i>
General purpose jurisdictions	Task-specific jurisdictions
Non-intersecting memberships	Intersecting memberships
Jurisdictions at a limited number of levels	No limit to the number of jurisdictional levels
System-wide Architecture	Flexible Design

Source: Bache, 2008: 27

authority is task-specific, where jurisdictions operate at numerous territorial levels and may be over-lapping' (Bache, 2008: 27). Bache (2008: 29-20) notes that whilst type I MLG refers increasingly to more formal devolution of powers; type II is altogether more messy and ad hoc, 'capturing the complex array of quangos, agencies, and partnerships' that may overlap in the spaces in between and below more formal levels of government.

IRELAND 1987-2007: THE CO-EVOLUTION OF MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIP

Generally speaking, 'the period since 1987 is widely seen as the era of partnership' in the Irish state (O'Donnell, 2008). The genesis of this period can be attributed to a number of developments at European, national and sub-national levels of government, which together made partnership possible.

At European level, the signing of the Single European Act (SEA) in 1987, which provided for the Single Market, also paved the way for a number of reforms to EC regional policy. In addition to incorporating the explicit objective of economic and social cohesion into the EEC Treaty (Title V), a new article (130b) was inserted enabling the European Investment Bank to support the objectives of cohesion as laid down in articles 130a and 130c of the SEA. The Act was accompanied by a review of Community financing, and a reorganisation of the Community's Structural Funds,¹ embodied in the Delors I agreement (CEC, 1990; Scott, 1993). The European Commission, in pursuing the commitments made to solidarity in the SEA, began a general review of the aims and methods of Community policies related to economic development. In consequence, the 1988 reform of the structural funds introduced *partnership* as a key principle in the management and delivery of EU regional policy. New objectives and rules of practice were established for financial intervention by the Community.² This administrative

¹ Criticisms of the EC's early attempts at regional development focused on their piecemeal approach (funding individual projects as opposed to programmes), poor targeting - in the first ten years 22% of ERDF spending occurred in countries which had a GDP per capita above the EC average, and the degree of national control over ERDF spending (Wise and Gibb, 1993:217).

² The European Commission sought to develop, in all structurally funding projects, the principles of concentration, programming, partnership, monitoring and evaluation, and additionality (the principle that EC funding should be in addition to, and not instead of, alternative national funding). For a detailed discussion of each of these principles, see McAleavey, 1992:14-21

overhaul, together with increased resources, further advanced the practice, in operation since the late 1970s, of linking Community intervention to regionally-based, multi-annual strategic programmes. In attempting to respond to sequential EU Structural Fund reforms, Irish governments were obliged to reorganize policy processes, giving greater voice to a wide range of stakeholders identified by the reforms. This, combined with the change of attitude at national level to government and policy-making, facilitated a change in the structure and style of government, which has been characterized as a move towards ‘new governance’ (Adshead & Quinn, 1998).

At national level, the period since 1987 was one in which Ireland had left the sterling zone, was seeking to participate in European monetary and macroeconomic convergence, inflation was low, the openness of the economy was being greatly deepened and activist fiscal policy was both out of fashion (internationally) and out of the question (in Ireland) (O’Donnell, 2008; see also, Kearney *et al*, 2000). The first Social Partnership arrangement of 1987 began when the then Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, called together representatives from business and trades unions in an attempt to solve the economic crisis (Adshead, 2011). Despite their differences, government, trades union and business leaders were bound together by a shared consensus over the need to tackle the economic crisis and in terms of resources they all had something to contribute (tax restraint, wage restraint and working hours respectively). More importantly, all could deliver their members into the agreement because all participants could see some benefit from it.

In addition to a broader political environment that was becoming more amenable to ‘government by partnership’, throughout the 1990s there was a growing consensus that the local government structure in Ireland was ‘inadequate, over-burdened, and unable to respond to local needs’: this was paralleled by ‘an increase of alternative local representation, activism, and community groups filling the vacuum and carrying out development work’ (Adshead & Quinn 1998). Together, these trends served to reinforce each other, so that coupled with the acceptance of the need to improve sub-national structures, was an enormous increase in local development activity, exemplified by diverse activities emerging from different organisational backgrounds. Some were community-driven,³ some were motivated by funding opportunities from EU programmes and initiatives related to local development⁴, while other community or enterprise activities were fostered by government initiatives⁵ such as the creation of County Enterprise Boards (see: McInerney and Adshead, 2010).

³ Such as the Community Development Projects and Local Development groups, operationalised by the Global Grant for Local Development—a form of assistance provided by the ERDF and ESF, and managed by an independent intermediary, Area Development Management (ADM) Ltd, now known as POBAL.

⁴ Examples of these are NOW (New Opportunities for Women), LEADER (Liaisons entre actions de développement de l’économie rurale), and LEDA (the Local Employment Development Action programme). For details of others, see CEC (1994).

⁵ Including county childcare committees, local sports partnerships, partnership-based urban and rural regeneration processes, and local and regional drugs task forces.

In 1996, the publication of the *Better local government* (BLG) White Paper marked a significant watershed (Government of Ireland, 1996a). Prior to the White Paper, the local social partnership landscape was populated principally by non, or less, state-centred partnership structures and processes. After the White Paper, the foundation was laid for a gradual evolution towards stronger state-centred partnership processes, in recognition of the need for greater organizational coherence amongst the complexity of partnership structures that had grown up from the ground. The purpose of this cohesion effort was to induce a 'radical shake-up' of the delivery of community services, which involved both an expansion of territorial areas of responsibility and, in rural areas, a merger of the corporate entities that deliver the various area-based programmes at local level.

The remainder of this section provides a chronology of these developments, in order to give the necessary empirical detail for the analysis that follows in the next section.

CASE STUDY: REGIONAL POLICY EVOLUTION IN IRELAND

1988 Structural Funds reform

In 1988, the negotiations resulting in the reform of the EC Structural Funds presented a 'mixed blessing' for the development of Irish regional policy. Irish negotiators believed that if the more prosperous Eastern region, especially Dublin, were evaluated in isolation from the rest of the country; it might well be excluded from the benefits of the Regional Fund. Furthermore, the Community's developing competition policy would more than likely prevent the state from giving out industrial development grants or investment inducements. Whilst the negotiations cemented Ireland's successful bid for a lion-share portion of structural funding, this came at the price of treating Ireland as a single region. Nevertheless, as a consequence of the reforms, the Irish government was obliged also to set up a seven '*sub-regions*', (sub-regions because under EC funding criteria, the whole island of Ireland is treated as a *region*), in order that they might contribute to the preparation of a four-year National Development Plan (NDP) being submitted to Brussels.

1989 submission of National Development Plan.

In fact, the development plan submitted in 1989 was based on a national programme rather than a regional one and the input of regional groups was regarded by central government as a largely 'cosmetic exercise' in order to satisfy EC funding criteria (Coyle, 1990:11). Rees notes that: 'The government had no intention of engaging in a lengthy dialogue with local actors. The priority was to create a national plan, designed to ensure Ireland's Structural Fund receipts' (Rees, 1992:141). The primary objective of the NDP was to achieve improved competitiveness and efficiency in the Irish economy, by tackling problems arising from peripherality, inadequate infrastructure and low population density

(O'Donnell and Walsh, 1995). Although the NDP did not include the promotion of *regional development* as an objective, (it was mentioned only in the section dealing with objectives for industry, though no specific measures were outlined), the promotion of specific measures aimed at *rural development* did succeed in establishing a framework for future policies.⁶ This, together with the desire to make the best use of Structural Funding - through attempts to coordinate development activities and to avoid duplication of efforts or costs at local level - did contribute to pressures for change that had already built up elsewhere in the system.

Even though the NDP did not address itself specifically to the issue of Irish regional development, it was obliged to acknowledge the operation of a variety of programmes, initiatives and pilot schemes as part of regional consultation exercise, so that by the time the second National Development Plan was introduced, a discernable shift of emphasis was apparent. The new principles of programming, partnership, concentration and additionality, (as well as the later adoption of subsidiarity in the Maastricht Treaty), drew attention to the need for inclusiveness in decision-making and implementation of development policy.

1988-90 introduction of the Pilot Area Programme for Integrated Rural Development

This pilot programme was the first attempt to apply the principles of integrated rural development in a systematic way. Administered by the Department of Agriculture and Food, the general objective of the programme was to improve employment opportunities, earning potential, quality of life and sense of community identity among people in rural areas (O'Malley, 1992). The emphasis was on encouraging viable private and community sector enterprises based on the full utilization of the abilities and talents of local people.

Twelve sub-county areas were chosen, each of which had between 6,000 and 15,000 inhabitants. A rural development coordinator was appointed to each area to act as 'animator', stimulating and co-ordinating local effort and facilitating linkages between local groups and various statutory agencies. Animators were not intended to be leaders or initiators and their first task was to assemble a 'core group' of local leaders. Each core group had the responsibility for deciding on local development priorities and ensuring their implementation. As there was no special fund for the programme, apart from a small amount for technical assistance, the core groups and the animators took on a brokerage role in their approach to the mainstream funding sources (Walsh, 1995:5). Another important feature of the programme was an emphasis on shared learning through workshops and other forms of networking. This approach was followed by the LEADER initiatives (Liaisons entre

⁶ The Operational Programme for Rural Development (OPRD), under the 1989-93 Community Support Framework, was intended to 'maintain and strengthen rural communities' and 'improve the quality of life and foster a sense of community identity among people living in rural areas'. It included sub-programmes on the diversification of the rural economy, small and community enterprises (SCES), rural infrastructures, R&D and marketing in the food industry, and support for the development of human resources in the field of education and training for agriculture, forestry and fisheries.

actions de développement de l'économie rurale) for the period 1991-94, which gave locally-based integrated development strategies a new lease of life.

1991-1994 LEADER initiatives

Intended to find innovative solutions to development that incorporated different sectoral measures and that might also be used as a future model for all rural areas. Accordingly, in March 1991, the European Commission (through its Irish intermediary body - the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry) invited local groups to prepare and submit 'integrated' business plans for their areas. Thirty-four groups submitted and following negotiations with the Commission, sixteen were selected, covering areas representing 61% of the land area of Ireland and almost 30% of the population (Kearney, Boyle and Walsh, 1995:ii). The success of the LEADER model encouraged a similar approach in urban areas.

In 1990, the National Economic and Social Council highlighted the problem of long-term unemployment and advocated a specialised government programme, directed specifically towards localised area-based responses (ABR), so that local people might be empowered to direct development towards specific local needs and priorities (NESC, 1990:74).

1991 Area Based Response (ABR) initiatives

Under the government concordat entitled *Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP)*, an area-based response (ABR) to long-term unemployment was established on a pilot basis as 'an integrated approach designed to implement a community response in particular local areas to long-term unemployment and the danger of long-term unemployment' (Government of Ireland, 1991b). Twelve ABR areas were selected (eight urban and four rural), each with a board of directors comprising six directors from the local community, six from the social partners, and six from the state agencies in the area.

1992 EC Global Grant to Ireland

In September 1992, following negotiations with the Irish government, the European Commission established the Global Grant for the period 1992-95, comprising a 64% contribution from the ERDF and 36% from the ESF. It was valued at IR£8 million and was to be administered by Area Development Management Ltd (ADM), an intermediary organization established for this purpose in October 1992 (Haase, McKeown and Rourke, 1996:6). The Global Grant continued to support the twelve area-based partnerships set up under the government's *Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP)*, as well as a number of other small-scale, local development groups.⁷ The condition of support

⁷ 28 other local community groups, as well as the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group (DTEDG), a self-help group for Dublin-based Irish travelling communities, also received assistance.

⁷ In 1996, in its reorganization of governmental responsibilities, the new *Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrat* government relocated the Local Development Liaison Team to the Department of Tourism, Recreation and Local Development

for all projects was the submission of 'an integrated area action plan drawn up in consultation with such other local groups and bodies, public agencies and local representatives of the social partners, as the eligible body sees fit. This plan will set out the basic strategy whereby it seeks to achieve its objectives of economic and social revitalization in its area' (CEC, 1993b: Art.4).

1993 creation of County/City Enterprise Boards (CEBs)

Intended to develop local enterprise and development and organized according to a partnership model that includes representatives of public agencies concerned with enterprise development, the private sector, farming, trade union and community interests and elected members of the local authority. The Executive Manager of the Local Authority is also a member.

1993 extension of the operation of PESP and Global Grant area-based partnerships

Government recognized 33 designated areas of disadvantage (adding an extra 11 urban and 10 rural areas). All allocations made under this programme are conditional on the presentation of an integrated socio-economic plan that has been mediated through local representative structures and prepared jointly by local community groups and agencies involved in development. The objectives and conditions of this programme are the same as those pertaining to the first Global Grant, covering the period 1992-95.

1994-1999 second National Development Plan

The second National Development Plan, submitted to the European Commission in October 1993 for the period 1994-1999, included a specific Operational Programme devoted to Local Urban and Rural Development (OPLURD). The government presented OPLURD as a 'key element' in the strategy of the plan, 'building upon the experience gained from the implementation of initiatives stemming from EC actions' (Government of Ireland, 1995:12). The inclusion of a structured local development programme in the National Development Plan was not only a major innovation in national planning, but also an important political response to demands from local and regional interests that the spirit of partnership as envisaged in the 1988 reform of the EU Structural Funds was not being fully addressed in Ireland (Walsh, 1995:13). The seven regions from the first NDP were replaced by eight as a consequence of recommendations made in the Barrington Report (1992) on reform of local government. These authorities were to coordinate public services in their region and advise on the implementation of the NDP (Callanan, 2003: 435).

Since much of the substance of the Operational Programme was derived from the experience of previous and in some cases on-going development initiatives, it is fair to argue that OPLURD's main purpose was to legitimate such practice and formalise their incorporation into the presentation of an over-arching National Plan. In

essence, OPLURD did not *introduce* regional policy to Ireland: it simply *recognised* and *promoted* those development strategies that were already in existence and attempted to support their implementation within a coherent national framework.

1995 Rainbow government reforms

In 1995, the 'rainbow' government highlighted its commitment to local development through the establishment of a 'Local Development Liaison Team' - a small group of civil servants seconded to the *Taoiseach's* Office with special responsibility for improving the coordination and cooperation between local development actors and agencies across Ireland.⁸ The Local Development Liaison Team was designed to support the operation of County Strategy Groups (CSGs) in every county, reflecting the government's desire to ensure that local development actors and agencies worked as effectively as possible together. Following a change of government in 1996, CSGs were dropped in favour of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs). Carrying out a broadly similar role to the CSGs, SPCs were established for all major service areas in each local authority. Their membership is comparable to that of the CSGs, with the addition of a local council member to support the broader inclusion of public representatives.

1996 Government White Paper *Better Local Government*

In terms of local governance, the white paper addressed itself to two main areas, the first dealing with enhancing democracy, primarily through measures to enhance the role of local elected representatives in policy making, and the second relating to the wider role of local government, particularly the co-ordination of existing local development activities. These objectives were served by a re-organisation of the local authority committee structures, leading to the formation of Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs), and through the establishment of a multi-agency coordination structure, the County/City Development Board (CDB). In effect, pre-existing local development governance networks continued to function, but they were required to do so in closer cooperation with the local state apparatus.

The establishment of County/City Development Boards (CDBs) in each of the 29 county councils, and in each of the 5 major cities, was designed to bring about an integrated approach to the delivery of both State and local development services at local level. Each CDB is required to prepare and oversee the implementation of a ten year county/city Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development, which provides the template guiding all public services and local development activities locally; in effect bringing more coherence to the planning and delivery of services at local level. All thirty-four Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development have now been published (and are available at: <http://www.cdb.ie/strat.htm>).

⁸ In 1996, in its reorganization of governmental responsibilities, the new *Fianna Fáil/ Progressive Democrat* government relocated the Local Development Liaison Team to the Department of Tourism, Recreation and Local Development

Alongside these, other local governance arenas also emerged. For example, after the BLG white paper, national legislation on the provision of Traveller accommodation was enacted, introducing for the first time a participatory dimension into this area of local authority responsibility and leading to the establishment of Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACC) in all city/county local authorities (Government of Ireland, 1998, Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act). Later, in 2001, following the conclusion of the fourth national partnership agreement, the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF)*, the *Revitalizing Areas through Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID)* programme was introduced to address the particular needs of disadvantaged communities in 45 urban areas. Other similarly formalized mechanisms were also created, including County Childcare Committees, Local Sports Partnerships, Territorial Employment Pacts and local and regional drugs task forces. A common characteristic of all of these mechanisms was that they were established by the state and, in effect, participation in them was to be by invitation from the state, marking the inception of formal processes of participatory democracy at local level – albeit (central) state-sponsored local participatory democracy.

1998 Ireland is divided into two EU NUTS II regions

In July 1997, the European Commission published *Agenda 2000*, the EU blueprint for the future strategic direction of the European Union (CEC, 1997). Informing the document were two important factors. First the need to make financial provision for the envisioned enlargement of the EU and second, the need to address calls from substantial net contributors to the EU budget to reduce their contributions. For Ireland, this news was compounded by its remarkably successful rate of economic growth since 1993, which meant that the state's GDP per capita, expressed as a proportion of the EU average, had now breached the 75% ceiling set for regions to qualify for full Objective One status in the allocation of EU Structural Funds. The Irish government was anxious that the areas covered by at least some of the recently established eight Regional Authorities might still qualify for funding. According to the geographical scales which *Eurostat* - the EU's research office for census and survey data - uses for statistical purposes, the eight regional authorities were classified at NUTS III level (the acronym NUTS is derived from 'Nomenclature of Territorial Statistical Units' used by *Eurostat*). At least three of these regions, the Border, Midlands and West (the BMW group), had GDP per capita below the 75% Structural Funds threshold (O'Leary, 1999).

Brazening out significant opposition from political parties, long-time campaigners for devolution, would-be members of the new regions and a very cynical European Commission, in November 1998, the government divided Ireland into two NUTS II regions for statistical purposes: the BMW group qualifying for Objective One status; and the remaining Southern and Eastern Region qualifying as an Objective One area in transition (Boyle, 2000). The rationale for this 'overnight conversion' to regionalization was clearly enounced by the Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevy, when he explained that 'the government's objective in this round of Structural Funds will be to secure for Ireland the optimum level of funding' (*Dail Debates*, 29:4:98).

2000-2006 third National Development Plan

In an attempt to illustrate its commitment to regional cohesion, the third NDP included 'balanced regional development' as one of its four core objectives, and established two regional assemblies as the designated managing authorities for the two Regional Operational Programmes (in the two recently created NUTS II regions). It also committed to the production of a National Spatial Strategy (NSS) within a short time-frame. The NSS was intended to develop a detailed spatial blueprint, which would serve as the basis for long-term co-ordination of major public investment decisions, following the advice from a report by the Economic and Social Research Institute (Fitzgerald *et al*, 1999). Arguably, in consequence, the 2000-06 NDP 'was weak in its spatial application, specifying indicative expenditure forecasts at NUTS II (Regional Assembly) level that were not always adhered to' (Moynan, 2011: 69). A mid-term review of the third NDP noted the heterogeneity of regional performance within the two Irish regions and the persistent disparities in regional output and productivity (Fitzgerald *et al*, 2003). Still 'the achievement of the NDP objective of reducing disparities within and between regions was not explicitly addressed in the evaluation' (Moynan, 2011: 70).

2002-2020 National Spatial Strategy

Prompted by several reports (NESCM 1997; Fitzgerald *et al*, 1999; CEC, 1999), the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) sets out a framework within which gateways, hubs, other urban centres and rural areas can act together to realize more balanced regional development (DEHLG, 2002) and calls for improved spatial planning to achieve this ambition. Still, however, it was noticeable that in its early years, the NSS did not operate in tandem with the extant NDP (Moynan, 2011: 69). The mid-term review of the third NDP noted that: 'the measures in the Regional OPs were not tailored to meet specific regional needs; there were no measures in place to build critical mass in designated gateways and hubs; and that the selection criteria (for regional OPs) were not taking account of the NSS' (Moynan, 2011: 70). Until the NSS is given a higher recognition in other investment and public policy decisions, its impact will remain limited.

2007-2013 fourth National Development Plan

The fourth NDP attempted to address the dissonance between the NSS and the previous NDP with, amongst its seven general goals, one goal aiming to integrate regional development within the NSS framework (NDP, 2007: 57). Although this NDP addresses many of the weaknesses of its predecessor in terms of coherence with the NSS, other government difficulties (in terms of financial crisis and recession) will likely hamper its implementation. Moreover, this NDP sets a precedent in that it no longer provides the primary strategic basis for the determination of investment priorities for EU co-financing. These are now addressed separately in the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF, 2007) and detailed in the three Operational Programmes included within it. Because of this separation, the Irish government is no longer obliged to specify indicative NUTS II level allocations in the NDP and have chosen not to do so. The absence of

clear measurable objectives for regional policy and of specified regional investment targets severely constrains the means of evaluation the regional impact of the NDP (Moylean, 2011: 75).

National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) 2007-2013

Under the 2007-2013 round of Structural Funds, both NUTS II regions in Ireland are in the 'regional competitiveness and employment objective' (formerly Objective 2). Ireland is set to receive €901m, a reduction of 76% on the €3.8bn allocation over the 2000-06 period (Moylean, 2011: 75). The NSRF provides the strategic framework for the funds deployment, allocated via the two Regional OPs. In addition, an ESF co-financed OP is to be implemented with ringed fenced NUTS II allocations (Moylean, 2011: 76).

ANALYSIS

In this section, the four elements of the framework for analysis of Multi-level Governance, Europeanization and an examination of Irish regional policy are applied to the case study material. The first section identifies the evidence for Europeanization and finds that it did occur. The second section outlines the particular mismatch and accompanying financial incentives that made for positive adaptational pressures. The third section, examines the happy coincidence of mediating factors that were unusually supportive of Europeanizing influences. Finally, the fourth section examines the longer-term impact of all of these changes in the Irish case and points to multi-level governance type II as the outcome.

Did Europeanization occur?

Looking at Ireland's experience of EU structural funding and cohesion policies, it is clear that, using Radaelli and Bulmer's (2004: 4) definition of Europeanization, the emergence and development of EU policies, practices and preferences did occur in terms of: regional policy construction; diffusion; and institutionalisation.

Policy construction

Clearly the policy architecture associated with regional development and cohesion policies in Ireland has changed dramatically since 1988. The overarching instigation of successive National Development Plans was a new and unprecedented approach to policy in Ireland – shifting the emphasis from annual budgeting to strategic, multi-annual planning involving regional consultation. The development in the first NDP of seven NUTS III regions, then eight NUTS III regions in the second NDP and the creation of a regional tier in the two NUTS II regions created in the third NDP, appear to point to a significant re-calibration of national policy architecture. Certainly the creation of the two NUTS II regions in the third NDP obliged the government to design a more spatially oriented NDP with the additional commitment to the creation of the National Spatial Strategy. The third NDP was the first to commit the Irish government to two *regional*

Operational Programmes, in addition to the other three – and more usual – *sectoral* programmes (Environment and Social Infrastructure; Employment and Human Resources; Productive Sector, see: NDP 2000-06).

The regional OPs were designed to deliver local and regional development of: infrastructure, enterprise, agricultural and rural development, as well as targeted initiatives for social inclusion. Still, however, when the mid-term review, carried out in 2003 (Fitzgerald *et al*, 2003), noted a significant under-spend in both regions, it was probably a reflection that these regions did not have the necessary institutional and organisational capacity to deliver and implement regionally differentiated programmes. Membership of the Regional Authorities and Regional Assemblies consists of local authority elected officials: there is no regionally elected tier of government in Ireland and no commensurate regional administration. The regionalization of Ireland was at best superficial and the state remained dominated by the long-standing centralized system of national programming. This view is almost certainly confirmed by the current and widespread view, that given the reduction in EU funding and the current financial crisis, the future of Regional Assemblies after the fourth NDP 2007-13 has run its course, may well be called into question.

Policy diffusion

Notwithstanding the continued dominance of centralized government, it is nevertheless clear that many of the formal and informal policy rules, styles and ‘ways of doing things’ which were originally adopted to satisfy EU structural funds criteria have since been adopted by Irish policy makers. The revised five principles of the Structural Funding criteria: programming, monitoring, control, evaluation and partnership had a significant impact on Irish policy-making.

Programming meant that funds had to be disbursed and managed through multi-annual programmes, grouping together projects instead of funding them individually on an annual basis. This naturally entailed a greater degree of forward planning and strategic organization. *Monitoring* required periodic reporting on the implementation of funded projects to optimize their deployment. *Control* meant that the EU now sought more transparent and accountable systems of accounting rules and reporting for project delivery. *Evaluation* meant that any EU funded project would require three evaluations during the programming period: ex-ante, mid-term and ex-post. Finally, *partnership* placed a requirement for consultation between all policy stakeholders in the preparation, financing, monitoring and evaluation of structurally funded programmes. During the period of the first NDP, all of these principles were new to Irish policy making. Yet, the second NDP makes explicit references to ‘building upon the experience gained from the implementation of initiatives stemming from EC actions’ (Government of Ireland, 1995:12) in the area of local development.

Consultation with policy stakeholders (though often criticised as being inadequate or ill-thought out) is now a routine part of Irish policy processes. This is most clearly reflected in the institutionalization of partnership approaches (discussed below) but also evident in a significant change of culture regarding policy planning

and evaluation. McCarthy (2002: 140) notes that EU requirements for evaluation altered policy practice and resulted in the establishment of Evaluation Units in a number of departments. Commenting on this one department official noted that prior to the EU involvement, 'evaluation was not a word in the dictionary of national government departments' (McCarthy, 2002: 140). This view is substantiated by Hegarty (2003: 3), who notes that until our engagement with EU structural funding 'there was little prior tradition of formal evaluation of public expenditure programmes in the Irish public administration', whereas 'it is [now] clear that the requirements of the EU regulations have helped promote an evaluation culture and capacity in Ireland (Hegarty, 2003: 13).

Policy institutionalization

At national level, Social Partnership refers to a governance process where representatives of employer organisations, trade unions, farmers and - from 1997 - community and voluntary sector (ie the 'Social Partners') worked in common institutions with government to deliberate about economic and social policy⁹. Between 1987 and 2009, all Irish economic and social policy was conducted within the framework of 'Social Partnership', referred to by O'Donnell (2008: 73) as a form of 'negotiated governance'.

Partnership governance became the established *modus vivendi* for Irish policy making, supported by developments within and outside the state and reinforced by a recognizable set of norms and values (Adshead 2011). Though typically this governance shift was interpreted as an attitudinal and value shift *in favour* of partnership, still the involvement and approval of less well-established 'social partners' from the community and voluntary sector was mixed. Social partnership clearly worked for those amongst whom there is a shared vision and a shared understanding of the process and its objectives (Adshead, 2011). For others, who did not enjoy this same synergy of perspectives but who saw participation in partnership processes as important, the tangible benefits were less immediate (Adshead and McInerney, 2008). According to O'Riain (2008: 179):

the extensions of social partnership itself have been damaged by the withdrawal, and subsequent exclusion, of some sections of the community and voluntary sector from partnership processes at the national level and the reassertion of central authority over the local partnerships (for example, in the reconstitution of Area Development Management Ltd around a model of service delivery rather than community empowerment and the sidelining of the Community Workers' Cooperative).

Eventually, the internal contradictions of national level Social Partnership, together with the external impact of recession, combined to bring to a close the system of national concordat. But this did not end the policy approach of partnership that was now widely pursued in many other areas of governance.

⁹ National Economic and Social Council, National Economic and Social Forum and The National Centre for Partnership and Performance, all of which are constituted under the umbrella of the National Economic and Social Development Office and the institutional arrangements to negotiate and monitor national agreements.

At local level, the growing enthusiasm for partnership structures, which developed in parallel with national level Social Partnership led to the growth of a wide range of partnership structures. The consequences for changes to Irish governmental systems were two-fold. On the one hand, the fact that partnership was being simultaneously promoted in variety of government levels and policy arenas meant that its impact was widely felt across the Irish system of government. On the other hand, this widespread experience of partnership served to reinforce a broader paradigm shift in organization of public policy (which has subsequently been interpreted as an attitudinal and value shift in favour of partnership). As a result it is possible to conceive of the institutionalizing of partnership approaches in Ireland (O'Donnell, Adshead and Thomas, 2011). Still, it has been noted that this institutionalization is a process whereby we are seeing a gradual convergence of various partnership approaches into one generalized model (Adshead and McNerney, 2008). The irony of course, is that this model, which was in many ways fostered by EU policy approaches designed for broader social inclusion, is now often criticized in local contexts for being exclusionary and detrimental to genuine participatory democracy. That is to say that Irish policy approaches are now sometimes characterized by a 'partnership template' without the necessary institutional capacity to support genuine partnership approaches (McInerney and Adshead, 2010).

What were the adaptational pressures?

The degree of 'mismatch' in institutional and policy design between Irish and EU approaches to cohesion was conspicuous in the first round of structural funding: equally conspicuous was the Irish government's willingness to adapt to the revised Structural Funding criteria. Significant EU funding provided the impetus to Irish government to adapt to EU policies, practices and preferences.

Show table

Ironically, however, even these changes did not fundamentally alter the centralized nature of the state. The need to develop a *single* National Development Plan for Brussels meant that the Department of Finance maintained its pivotal role in the Irish administration system, 'now reinforced by the European Commission's recognition of its role as the national managing authority for Structural Funds' (McCarthy, 2002: 140). Nevertheless, compliance with EU funding conditions was equally forthcoming at the sub-national level of governance and adaptation was enthusiastically facilitated by the range of sub-national actors and institutions that were keen to use the opportunity afforded by a variety of EU programmes for economic and social development.

The plethora of local urban and rural community partnerships, facilitated by policy developments at sub-national level testifies to the enormous appetite for local initiatives in Ireland. Moreover, 'the stark choice between increasing irrelevance and a reinvention of its role, led local Irish local government to embrace new ways of supporting regional development through cooperative

relations with a range of development agencies empowered to deliver services and carry out tasks that local government could no longer manage single-handedly' (Adshead, 2002: 156). In short, there were a range of actors and institutions, both willing and able to adapt to EU policy processes and procedures in exchange for developmental capacity they could only dream of without considerable EU structural funding.

By the time of the second and third National Development Plans, the degree of mismatch was considerably reduced: EU formal and informal 'ways of doing things' had become 'standard operating procedures' and the incentives for further policy adaptation were limited. In consequence, we see that by the time of the fourth National Development Plan, there is some decoupling of national and EU policy approaches evidenced in the separate establishment of the NSRF. The Irish policy landscape is left with a common vocabulary and discourse of partnership, but - with no substantive governance reforms and reduced Structural Funding - limited institutional capacity to deliver it (McInerney and Adshead, 2010).

Mediating factors

In an examination of the five key mediating factors that determine the impact of Europeanizing influences at domestic level, we can see that the configuration of Irish policy interests and environment was unusually supportive of Europeanizing influences.

multiple veto factors

This refers to the institutional structure of domestic politics and the suggestion that the more dispersed power is within the domestic arena, the more likely it is that adaptational pressures from the EU will be slowed or even blocked. From the Irish perspective, the fact that the state was highly centralized and that power was not well dispersed throughout the state diminished the potential veto points. Moreover, those actors and institutions outside of central government, that might act to slow the process, were equally happily engaged within it. This level of consensus is possible in a small state, with a political and historical predisposition in favour of Europe.

facilitative formal institutions

In the absence of dispersed power within the domestic arena, the government (and within that, the Department of Finance) was able to exercise a strong directive control over the deployment of structural funds. The instigation of National Development Plans to facilitate their disbursement is evidence of the willingness of Irish governments to create the kinds of institutions necessary to facilitate European approaches to policy. The creation of other regional units exemplifies their willingness to act to the letter - if not the spirit - of EU programming criteria and create the necessary institutions to deliver EU programmes.

political and organizational culture

In addition to a highly expedient approach to governance organization (in order to avail of significant EU funds), there was undoubtedly in Ireland a political culture characterized by a positive consensus towards the EU and an equally positive consensus towards 'government by partnership'. These combined to create a political and organizational culture that was highly adaptive to EU policies, practices and preferences.

differential empowerment of actors

It could be argued that for Ireland, the large Structural Funds transfers, combined with the Irish government's willingness to put up the matching funding to avail of the maximum EU funding gave a 'positive sum' character to EU policy approaches. Notwithstanding the conspicuous differential empowerment of actors between central and local levels of government, still all could count themselves better off by participating in EU programmes.

policy learning

Taken together, the overall positive attitude towards EU programmes and projects, in the context of a broader pro-EU environment, combined with a facilitative disposition to the creation of new policy architecture and processes, meant that the policy environment was very supportive of policy learning. The range of projects and the levels of funding meant that EU approaches to policy, practices and preferences were positively endorsed by the broadest range of actors in a wide variety of institutions: this greatly facilitated policy transfer from the EU to domestic level and meant that policy learning was a continual and reflexive process throughout each of the subsequent rounds of EU structural funds.

Has there been a re-orienting or re-shaping domestic politics?

Using Borzel and Risse's (2003) categorization of domestic responses to the EU, an examination of Irish cohesion policy since the first revised structural funds deployment in 1988 suggests a *transformative* effect in the early years, when both the initial degree of 'mismatch' and consequent degree of domestic change was high. Over time, however, as EU approaches were mainstreamed, there was clearly an *accommodation* of existing policies and practices, without changing their essential features: the state remained highly centralized, but new styles of policy making that were much more in tune with EU approaches began to emerge. In other words, an accommodation was reached between the EU and Irish domestic policy approaches, where the degree of change necessary to implement successive rounds of structural funds – compared to that necessary at the outset – was modest. In the latest round of funding, no changes were required at the domestic level and the Irish state could easily *absorb* EU cohesion policy, practice and preferences.

Over time, as both the financial incentives and the degree of mismatch reduced, there was a commensurate decrease in adaptational pressure. The extent of change in Irish policy architecture was minimal (and possibly subject to reverses in regionalism), but still common discourses of partnership and planning

remained, pointing to subliminal changes in communities of discourse and emergent belief systems and criteria about the praxis of policy – as might be expected in a case of Europeanization that ‘hinges on horizontal mechanisms of governance rather than the vertical imposition of models coming from Brussels’ (Radaelli and Bulmer, 2004: 11).

The fore-going case study and analysis clearly demonstrates that Europeanization has occurred. But what has been the consequent re-ordering of domestic politics?

Multi-Level Governance Type I or II?

In the Irish context, the designation of the whole island of Ireland as a single region worked to buttress the centralized power of the state and it is even argued that successive structural funds programming increased the centralization ‘as central departments increased the reporting requirements of local authorities’ (McCarthy, 2002: 145). The regional changes that were made, and might be pointed to as evidence of increasing devolution of authority, were *ad hoc* and clearly not deeply institutionalized. It was possible to introduce seven NUTS III regions, change them into eight, disband them and then introduce two new NUTS II regions, whose longer-term future is already regarded as vulnerable. This is not the kind of system-wide differentiated policy architecture, which is expected to occur on foot of a significant devolution of powers envisaged in Type I Multi-Level Governance.

Instead, the Irish case exhibits far more clearly the ‘more messy and ad hoc’ arrangements associated with Type II Multi-Level Governance. On the one hand, clear that partnership has become default policy mode, widely accepted. Since the mid 1980s we have witnessed a relatively high level of policy co-ordination has been achieved between a wide range of policy actors including the European Union, state-sponsored agencies and institutions, the national Social Partners, as well as local communities and groups. On the other hand, there is no permanent, formalized system of co-ordination between these groups. The entire policy structure of the EU sponsored Operational Programmes are designed to last only as long as the Community Support Framework that funds them. There is, therefore, no guarantee that this level of integration will continue, though the fact that it has been achieved so successfully to date may also reflect the organizational advantages that Ireland enjoys as a consequence of its relatively small size and population compared to other European states. Still, without central government support, it is not clear how long this level of policy integration could endure.

There has undoubtedly been a proliferation of quangos, agencies and partnerships that often overlap in the spaces in between and below more formal levels of government, which has led some to talk of the creation of a ‘governance mire’. Taken together, these arrangements have added a degree of complexity to Irish sub-national government, which was already referred to by Irish commentators as ‘an administrative jungle’ (Chubb, 1992). This jungle may, however, be about to be cleared. Following the economic crisis of 2008/9 and the extraordinary unravelling of Irish governmental capacity, the Irish state

engaged in a slash and burn budget exercise that either completely culled or critically cut back many local governance projects. Added to this, the widespread association of national level Social Partnership with economic mismanagement, has curbed the contemporary Irish appetite for partnership approaches in central government. Nevertheless, a number of successful sub-national initiatives still survive. If they are able to maintain themselves in the current policy climate, they are the best evidence for Europeanization in Ireland.

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