

## **E-NEWSLETTER**

### **ISSUE 14, OCTOBER 2013**

Welcome to the fourteenth issue of the Regional Studies Association (RSA) e-newsletter. This e-newsletter serves as a way for the Irish Branch of the Association to highlight conferences, events, publications and other developments of interest in the broad regional policy area. Contact details are included below.

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## 1. About the Association

The Regional Studies Association is a learned society interested in regional development, policy and research. The Association carries out a range of activities including:

- publishing a journal, newsletter and books;
- organising conferences and other meetings; and
- establishing and maintaining a branch and international section network.

It has an international membership of individuals, corporate organisations and students. The Irish Branch was formed to provide a forum to discuss regional issues in Ireland.

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## 2. News

### **NEW DIRECTORS TAKE THE HELM AT NUI MAYNOOTH'S NIRSA AND NCG**

#### ***National Institute of Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA)***

There have been changes in the management of the National Institute of Regional And Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) at National university of Ireland, Maynooth. Outgoing Director Professor Rob Kitchin has been awarded a prestigious ERC grant to pursue an extensive programme of research on the 'Programmable City'. After eleven and a half years at the helm Rob has decided to invest himself full time in his ERC grant, which will be based in NIRSA. Incoming Director Professor Mark Boyle notes:

'We are all indebted to Rob for building one of the leading social sciences research institutes in Ireland. Rob leaves NIRSA in a very strong position, with two data platforms (All Ireland Research Observatory, and the Digital Repository Ireland/Irish Qualitative Archive), Espon contact point work, two ERC awards (Profs Kitchin and Sean O'Riain), and the Irish Social Sciences Platform (ISSP)' The immediate goal is to continue to build upon the strengths of these pillars.'

Prof Boyle's research interests are in the fields of diaspora centred development and urbanisation processes in Ireland. Prof Boyle was appointed Director of NIRSA on Sept 1st 2013

#### ***National Centre for Geocomputation (NCG)***

The National Centre for Geocomputation at NUI Maynooth is delighted to announce that appointment of Professor Chris Brunsdon as Director. Professor Brunsdon (currently at the University of Liverpool) assumes this position following the departure of Professor Stewart Fotheringham to St Andrews university. A pioneer of and world expert in Geographically Weighted Regression (GWR) Chris will join forces again with the NCGs Martin Charlton and Dr Tim McCarthy to build on the NCGs profile as the principal centre for Geocomputation and spatial analyses in Ireland, combining a strong focus upon fundamental research and partnerships with industry. Prof Brunsdon will take up his post on Jan 1st 2014.

### 3. Upcoming Events

<b>Regional Studies Association</b> <small>THE GLOBAL FORUM FOR CITY AND REGIONAL RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY</small>	<b>REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION IRISH BRANCH</b>
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The Irish Branch of the Regional Studies Association and  
Waterford Institute of Technology invite you to

## The Role of Universities in Regional Development

### A One-Day Conference

Room G17, Health Science Building,  
Waterford Institute of Technology, Waterford

**Wednesday 30 October 2013, 09.00-16.30**

Opening Address  
**Prof. Tom Boland**, Higher Education Authority

Keynote Speakers  
**Prof. Paul Benneworth**, Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS),  
University of Twente, The Netherlands.  
**Prof. David Charles**, European Policies Research Centre, School of Government  
and Public Policy, University of Strathclyde (*Speaker Sponsored by SERA*).

**Registration fee: 50 Euro including lunch.**

Online Registration at: <http://rsa-ireland.weebly.com/register.html>  
For conference updates see: <http://rsa-ireland.weebly.com>  
For further information: [chris.vanegeraat@nuim.ie](mailto:chris.vanegeraat@nuim.ie)



LABOUR MARKET TRANSITIONS OF YOUNG UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE IN IRELAND PRE AND POST THE RECESSION AND RELATED FINDINGS FROM THE OECD ECONOMIC SURVEY OF IRELAND 2013

**Date:** Thursday 21 November 2013, 1 pm.

**Venue:** The ESRI, Whitaker Square, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin 2.

Speakers: Elish Kelly (ESRI), Seamus McGuinness (ESRI), Philip O'Connell (UCD), David Haugh (OECD), and Alberto Gonzalez Pandiella (OECD). Please note that this seminar will take place at 1pm on Thursday 21st November. Details will be available nearer the time. All welcome. No booking required.

GROWING UP IN IRELAND ANNUAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE

**Date:** Wednesday 27 November 2013 (9am - 5pm)

**Venue:** Croke Park Conference Centre, Dublin

Growing Up in Ireland is the national longitudinal study of children. It follows the development of almost 20,000 children. It is made up of an infant cohort of over 11,000 children and their families who were first interviewed when these children were nine months old, with a follow-up interview at three and five years of age. In addition, the study includes a cohort of 8,500 older children who were recruited into the study when they were nine years old and re-interviewed at 13 years of age.

The conference will be opened by Frances Fitzgerald T.D., Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, who will launch the latest in a series of Growing Up in Ireland Key Findings on the lives of 5-year-olds and their families. These will be based on data collected between March and September of this year (2013).

RSA ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2014

**Date:** 15<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014

**Venue:** Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Business, Izmir, Turkey

The 2013 RSA Annual International Conference will take place in Izmir, Turkey from 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> June 2014. The conference theme is: *Diverse Regions: Building Resilient Communities and Territories*.

For further information, please contact Elizabeth Mitchell:

[elizabeth.mitchell@regionalstudies.org](mailto:elizabeth.mitchell@regionalstudies.org)

**If you have a submission or suggestion on any upcoming events, seminars, presentations or conferences and would like them to be included in a future edition, please email the RSA Secretary**

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## 4. Funding Opportunities

### SFI SPOKES PROGRAM 2013

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) has recently launched the SFI Spokes Programme 2013. This programme is a vehicle to enable the addition of new industrial and academic partners and projects to a SFI Research Centre, so allowing the Centre to expand and develop in line with new priorities and opportunities. This will ensure that the Research Centre retains its ability to do cutting edge research and its industrial relevance, and so enhance its sustainability. The Spokes programme also provides a vehicle to link together, in a meaningful and relevant way, different Research Centres.

The Spokes Fixed call will be an open competition for a planned amount of funding from SFI's budget, with a fixed deadline for applications. A minimum budgetary contribution of 30% will be required from industry, which can be composed of both in-kind and cash contributions; the cash contribution must be a minimum of 10% of the total award size, in line with the cost-share criteria of the main Research Centres call. The deadline for submission of proposals for the fixed call is 8th November 2013 13:00 GMT. There is no pre-proposal stage.

The Spokes Rolling call will remain open, with no closing date (until further notice), to allow Research Centres to apply for funding at any time for new collaborative research projects with an industry partner(s). To apply for a Spokes award under the rolling call mechanism, the industry partner(s) must make a minimum 50% cash contribution to the research programme.

For further details see: <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/open-calls/sfi-spokes-programme-2013.html>

**If you are aware of, or your organisation is responsible for the administration of, funding opportunities and you would like them to be included in a future edition, please email the RSA Secretary**

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## 5. Publications of Interest

### Research Papers

Annual Business Survey of Economic Impact 2011, Forfás, July 2013

Business Expenditure on Research & Development (BERD) 2011/12, Forfás, CSO, August 2013

Ireland's Competitiveness Performance 2013, Forfás, May 2013

Monitoring Ireland's Skills Supply - Trends in Education and Training Outputs 2013  
EGFSN, July 2013

Making it in Ireland: Manufacturing 2020, Forfás April 2013

O'Keefe, B., van Egeraat, C. and O'Riordain, S. (2013) Putting People First: Reforming Local and Regional Government in Ireland, *Regions*, 290.

Research Prioritisation: Framework for Monitoring Public Investment in Science, Technology and Innovation and 14 Action Plans, Forfás July 2013

State Investment in Research & Development 2011 – 2012, Forfás August 2013

Social Enterprise in Ireland: Sectoral Opportunities and Policy Issues, Forfás, July 2013

Walsh, J. van Egeraat, C., Martin, T. O'Doherty, D. and McDevitt, J. (2013) *Mid-East Region Economic Action Plan*, Wicklow: MERA

Van Egeraat, C. and Gleeson, J. *Meath Economic Baseline*, Meath: Meath County Council

### **Forthcoming (2013)**

Brady W. and O'Neill, C., Local Government Reform in Ireland: An Opportunity for Metropolitan Planning

Breathnach, P. Regional governance and regional development: implications of the action programme for local government

De Vries M. and Sobis, I., Consolidation in local government: An international comparison of arguments and practices

O'Riordain S. and Van Egeraat C., New Regional Governance in Ireland: Perspectives and Challenges

Shannon L. and Van Egeraat C., Regional governance and bottom-up regional development in the Border Region and county Cavan

Special Issue on New Regional Governance in Ireland, *Administration* 61(3) Scheduled for December 2013

Tomaney, J., Pike, A., McCarthy A., and O'Brien, P., Regional governance and economic development in England

Walsh C. and Williams, B., City-regional governance and metropolitan-hinterland relations: An international perspective on the Dublin city-region

Ó Broin, D. and Murphy, M. (2013) *Politics Participation and Power*

Irish democracy is facing a crisis. Trust in public institutions, politicians and policy-making is at an all-time low. The collapse of the Irish economy and the nature of the political response have shattered many citizens' belief in the efficacy of politics. This book argues that meaningful public participation is central to the development of a new approach to democracy in Ireland. By reviewing the current state of public participation in Ireland across a range of policy areas and offering a critical examination of both the discourse and practice of participation as well as degrees of equality in opportunities for participation, the book highlights how many public policy processes are perceived to lack legitimacy, why these perceptions exist and how this can be addressed. *Politics, Participation and Power* offers an insightful account of the dynamics of participation and suggests why many citizens' experiences have been frustrating as well as transformative. It ultimately argues for a strengthening of the Irish public sphere. This book will be essential reading for students of politics, sociology, local development, public administration, public policy and spatial planning and offers important insights for those directly engaged in developing participation initiatives in Ireland.

**If you wish to have a recently published book/paper listed in this section of future newsletters, please e-mail details formatted as above to the RSA Secretary**

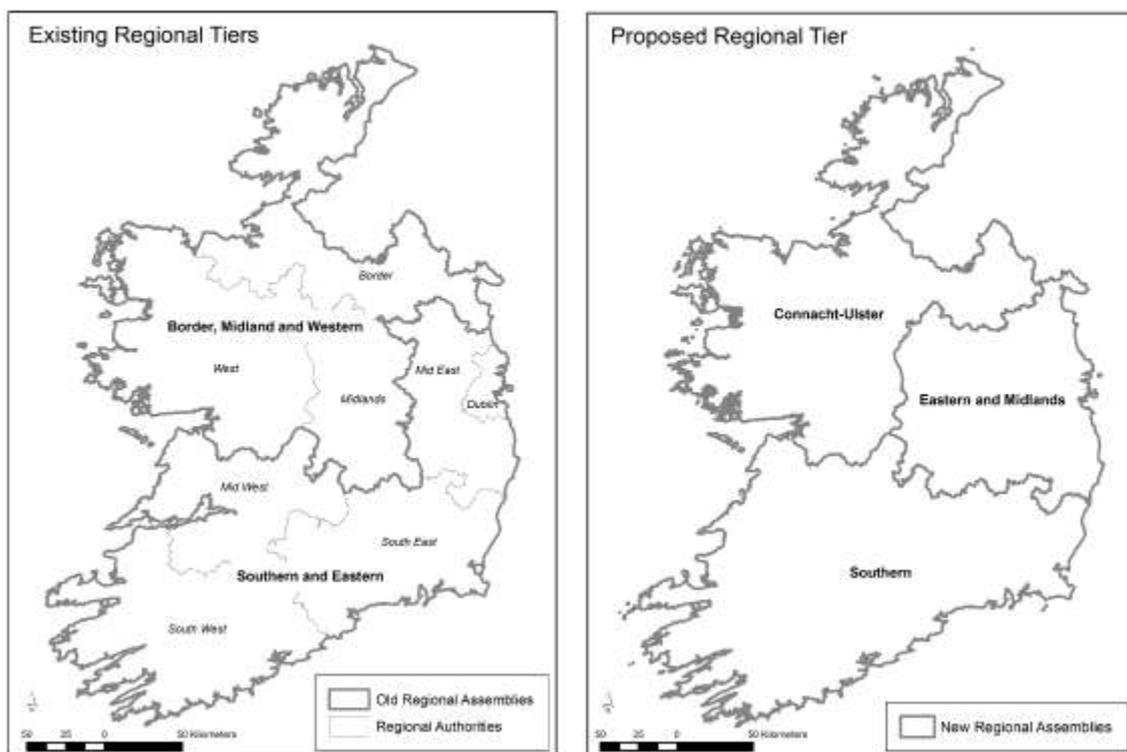
## 6. SPECIAL FEATURES

### “Putting People First – Reforming Regional and Local Government in Ireland”

Brendan O’Keefe, Chris van Egeraat, and Seán Ó’Riordáin

Ireland, which is one of the most centralised states in Europe (ESPON, 2006) is currently embarking on a programme of radical reform of the regional and local tiers of government. In October 2012, the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government Mr. Phil Hogan T.D. was joined by An Taoiseach (Prime Minister) for the launch of a reform document ‘Putting People First – Action Programme for Effective Local Government.’ This policy document contains some of the most radical reforms of sub-national government ever advocated by an Irish government. It proposes to rationalise Ireland’s two regional assemblies (NUTS II) and eight regional authorities (NUTS III) to form three new regional assembly areas (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Existing and Proposed Regional Assemblies**



Source: Van Egeraat and Foley (2012)

It is envisaged that the new regional tier of government will have responsibility for the formulation of economic and spatial strategies, functions in relation to EU programmes and oversight of local authorities. The local tier is also going to be subject to considerable changes. The number of elected councillors will be reduced by 60%, mainly due to the abolition of all eighty Town Councils – the smallest units of local government in Ireland. Changes at the county level will see councillors elected in newly-created municipal (sub-county) districts, and these districts are to become the main units of local spatial planning.

‘Putting People First’ also proposes changes in the way in which local development is delivered, as LEADER and Local Development Partnerships are due to have their geographies

and functions aligned with those of county and city councils. This process would involve the establishment of mechanisms to give local authorities a planning and oversight role over local development – a prospect that has raised anxiety in Ireland’s vibrant community and voluntary sector.

Few will doubt the need for reform of sub-national structures in Ireland, and the radical nature of Minister Hogan’s proposals has been widely acknowledged. However, much debate and several questions have emerged regarding the logic of the re-configured regional geography, the adherence to county delineations at local level and the lack of a devolution timeline or targets that would see central government departments and agencies divest themselves of specific powers. In order to bring some light onto these issues and to look at ways in which reforms might proceed, the RSA (Irish Branch) organised a one-day symposium at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, which was addressed by Minister Hogan and a range of experts from academic, policy-making and implementation bodies.

In his address to the delegates, Minister Hogan stated that the objectives of the proposed reforms were to position local, community and micro-enterprise functions in local government, to improve governance and oversight, increase the focus on customer service and to give confidence and credibility to local government. He declared that the reform proposals would “re-launch the regional dimension” and he acknowledged that heretofore Irish regions had lacked sufficient powers. Minister Hogan asserted that the new regions would be involved in strategy and co-ordination, and not in delivery, and that they would focus more on economic development. He stated that the planning system ought to be a catalyst for regional economic development, and he announced that his Department would soon introduce a roadmap for a successor to the National Spatial Strategy. The Minister also noted that while the government had been advised (Mahon, 2012) to provide for directly elected regional authorities, he did not believe that the people wanted another tier of political representation, and he cited the popularity of the government’s decision to reduce by eight the number of TDs in Dáil Éireann (members of the national parliament – from 166 to 158) and the mooted abolition of the second chamber of parliament (Seanad Éireann / Senate).

The RSA symposium was also addressed by a number of leading Irish and international experts. Opening the event, Vice President of NUI Maynooth, Prof. Jim Walsh spoke of the need for inter-regional collaboration, particularly in order to address the needs and development potential of areas at the periphery of regions. He emphasised the need for planning to pay attention to contemporary functional boundaries. His comments were echoed by Dr. Chris van Egeraat of the Department of Geography, NUI Maynooth and Chair of the Irish Branch of the RSA, who welcomed the proposals that regional authorities would have an augmented economic development role, underpinned by a legal framework. He questioned the appropriateness of the proposed regional boundary delineations, and suggested that more functional variables might have been considered.

Prof. John Tomaney of the University of Liverpool noted that there are parallels between the ‘Putting People First’ document and the UK government’s promotion of ‘new localism.’ He cited the UK Localism Act of 2011, which abolished regional authorities in England and emphasised the role of communities in delivering local services. Prof. Tomaney outlined how in the past decade, and particularly since 2010, inter-regional disparities within England, which has very weak regions, have increased, while devolved parts of the UK (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) have been more successful in promoting development. Both he and Prof. Michiel De Vries (Radboud University, The Netherlands) underscored the need for regional authorities to act as a vital link between the central and the local. In addition, Prof. De Vries focused on dynamics at the municipal tier. Drawing on a wealth of case studies, he observed that the ‘up-scaling’ of regional and local government is very much in fashion, and is usually motivated by a desire on the part of central government to reduce costs. This is clearly evident in Ireland, and Prof. De Vries’ concluding recommendations resonate in the Irish context: only up-scale if you can afford it and if there is an acknowledged need; be aware of the short-term negatives and only up-scale if you are motivated by long-term gain.

Dr. Proinnsias Breathnach of NUI Maynooth provided a comprehensive overview and critique of Irish economic development policy, which due to its historical emphasis on FDI and little regional differentiation, had a dampening effect on local development, as communities came to expect that jobs would come, rather than grow through indigenous enterprise development. International best practice over recent decades and successive independent evaluations of regional policy have however advocated the need for place-based strategies underpinned by endogenous approaches that focus on city-regions and networked spaces. While there are elements of new regionalism in the European Spatial Development Perspective and the National Spatial Strategy, these do not appear to be reflected in 'Putting People First.' Dr. Breathnach noted that the proposed regional structures have not been provided with mechanisms for mobilising local actors, are not focused on city-regions and lack a dedicated timetable for devolution. The merits of a city region focus were also articulated by Dr. William Brady, University College Cork, who used the case study of Metropolitan Cork to illustrate the importance of administrative boundaries reflecting those of functional territories.

The symposium was also addressed by two experienced practitioners. Mr. Stephen Blair, Director of the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly spoke about the need to work out the practical arrangements pertaining to the proposed structures. He drew attention to the status of existing regional planning guidelines and the need for arrangement to ensure completion of the implementation of existing strategies. Similar sentiments were expressed by the CEO of Shannon Development, Dr. Vincent Cunnane, who pointed out that the proposed regional delineation would not be conducive to inter-urban networking. Drawing on four decades of experience in the Shannon Region, he noted the need to distinguish between 'market-facing' and 'citizen-facing' roles in public bodies, and he questioned if local authorities had the necessary skills and capacity to deliver 'market-facing' functions and to work across regional boundaries. The symposium delegates concurred with Dr. Cunnane that the abolition of Shannon Development would lead to a depletion of expertise.

The delegates welcomed how the publication of 'Putting People First' had stimulated wider public debate on regional development and governance in Ireland. Some expressed concern that the reduction in the number of elected councillors would lead to a democratic deficit, while others stated that the document should have been more explicit and extensive in terms of functions that ought to be devolved from central government to regional and local authorities. Delegates also expressed concerns that the proposals in respect of local development could stifle creativity, innovation and volunteerism. Delegates noted the importance of an all-island approach to achieving balanced regional development and they called for more progress on cross-border collaboration, and for specific approaches to enabling the Border Region to overcome its historical peripherality. Some private sector delegates welcomed the abolition of the town councils, which they claimed were too small and ineffectual. However, most of the delegates and experts noted that, while there was unevenness in the distribution of town councils that needed to be addressed, the up-scaling of local authorities would result in sub-national government in Ireland deviating even more from the European norm.

## **References**

Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2002) Ireland's National Spatial Strategy. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (2010) Putting People First – Action Plan for Effective Local Government. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

ESPON – European Spatial Planning Observation Network (2006) Governance of Territorial and Urban Policies from EU to Local Level. Luxembourg: ESPON

Mahon, A. (2012) The Final Report of the Tribunal of Enquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Van Egeraat, C. and Foley, R. (2012), New Regional Assemblies Announced, blog post, <http://irelandafternama.wordpress.com/2012/10/16/new-regional-assemblies-announced/>

## **REVIEW OF THE RSA REGIONAL ECONOMIC RESILIENCE ONE-DAY CONFERENCE, MILLENIUM HALL, CORK (22 FEBRUARY 2013)**

In light of the global economic crisis, the resilience of regional economies to economic shocks is a highly relevant research topic with important policy implications. Regional resilience is defined in many different ways, but among these definitions are as the ability of a system to resist the onset of a crisis and the ability of an economy to rebound following a shock. In order to explore the issue of regional resilience and to look at the implications of resilience for policy makers, the RSA (Irish Branch) organised a one-day symposium in Cork Millennium Hall, which was addressed by a range of experts from academia and policy-making and implementation bodies.

Two distinguished key note speakers addressed the event, Professor Ron Martin (Department of Geography, University of Cambridge) and Dr. Adrian Healy (Cardiff University). The conference heard from Professor Martin who began by describing a theoretical framework of resilience. He noted that there are a number of lenses through which resilience can be viewed. One of which suggesting that resilience is multifaceted, entailing regions' ability to resist the onset of the crisis, recover following the crisis and restructure its industrial composition. Professor Martin then outlined a number of economic crises in the UK as examples of shocks and regional responses. Using a variety of indexes, measuring the impact of the crisis and subsequent recovery, he described how recessions in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s differed, comparing these to the current economic crisis. He highlighted the impact of shocks on employment within regions and whether these shocks persisted in the long run.

Dr. Healy's address focused on the actions policy makers at a European, national and regional level can take to make countries, regions and cities more resilient to economic shocks. He highlighted that we can learn from previous crises to assess how differing economic structures respond to shocks. The focus of the presentation was on the impact of crises on employment and unemployment in Europe. He noted that employment recovery was strongest in Baltic, central Europe and some Scandinavian states while the weakest recovery rates were in Ireland, Spain, Greece, Portugal and Bulgaria. He noted that a number of factors can contribute to the resilience of regions such as the prevailing endowments of physical capital and human capital, the sectoral structure of an economy and governmental structures among others.

A paper by Justin Doran and Professor Bernard Fingleton placed the Irish situation in an international context by analysing the resilience of countries to the 2008 economic crisis. They noted that Ireland's experience has been similar to other peripheral European countries, with GDP being negatively affected and with the possibility of a hysteretic effect being observed. Professor Edgar Morgenroth analysed the resilience of Irish regions to the crisis using employment data from Irish censuses prior and post 2008. This gave insight into the changing employment characteristics within the country at District Electoral Division. He highlighted that most regions suffered negative employment shocks, but that the magnitude of the effect varied substantially across Ireland.

Adrian O'Donoghue provided insights into how Ireland's Gateway and Hub cities are performing throughout the crisis. He described the design of a development index which provided insights into how these Gateways and Hubs have grown and changed over recent years. Dr. Chris Van Egeraat, Proinsias Breathnach and Declan Curran outlined the impact of inward investment on the resilience of Irish regions to the economic crisis. The focus was on employment in both indigenous and foreign owned businesses. Shift-share analysis was used to identify the varying contributions of both to resilience in Ireland. They noted that there was substantial variation across sectors, regions and ownership in the resilience of employment to the crisis. They also provided case study evidence on a number of specific firms.

A paper by Jonathan Hall, Will Brady, and Clara O'Neill outlined how a well developed planning system can build resilience. Using historical examples such as the coal industry in the UK, he

outlined how best practice policies could be developed and how these might contribute to regional resilience. This was followed by Dr. Eoin O’Leary who discussed the implications of the crisis for Irish regional policy. He focused on the role of European cohesion policy and the upcoming smart specialisation directives, discussing the potential impacts of these on Irish regional performance.

Following the presentations there was a panel discussion on the day’s presentation, where questions were taken from the floor with panel members responding. Once the panel discussion concluded the South West Region Profile report was launch by Cllr. Pat Leahy, Cathaoirleach of the South West Regional Authority. The conference was well attended by individuals from academia and local authorities.

*Papers have been submitted for publication in a special issue of Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society.*

Justin Doran, UCC

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## **7. Regional Policy: What’s New?**

### **UPDATE ON NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY**

*By Niall Cussens, Planning Inspectorate. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government*

To assist plans for developing a successor National Spatial Strategy (NSS), Ministers' Hogan and O'Sullivan have established a scoping group consisting of:

- Mr Jim McKinnon former Chief Planner for Scotland;
- Mr Sean Dorgan former CEO IDA Ireland; and
- Dr Berna Grist UCD and former member of An Bord Pleanála.

Members of the group are expert in national and international spatial planning, in regional economic development and implementation of planning policy.

The Group is to prepare a concise scoping report on the principles on which a successor NSS can be built, by end 2013, which will inform proposals to Government thereafter for a roadmap to develop a successor strategy.

## **PROGRAMME TO REVITALIZE LIMERICK REGENERATION AREAS UNVEILED BY MINISTER JAN O’SULLIVAN**

THE roadmap for one of the State’s largest capital programmes was unveiled on Friday September 27th 2013, with the publishing of the Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan. The plan envisages one of the largest capital programmes and largest regeneration programme in the State, and includes €253m investment on physical, €30m on social and €10m on economic programmes

The 500 page document, which was launched at Thomond Park, is the first time the Limerick Regeneration programme has a clear and deliverable plan. It is focussed on the three key pillars – Economic, Physical and Social - of the programme that will revitalise the communities over the next ten years by raising standards of living, opportunity and health and wellbeing for all residents of the regeneration areas.

The Framework Implementation Plan has been drawn up over a 12 month period and is very much evidence based, drawing from the previous four years of analysis and research on the ground across the regeneration areas. The Framework Implementation anticipates an average of €28m per annum invested over the term of this Government and beyond, with the funding drawn from the exchequer, European funding, the voluntary housing sector and the private sector. The plan will also dovetail with the Limerick 2030 Economic Plan designed to revitalise the city and countywide economy.

Source: <http://www.environ.ie>

## **MINISTER HOGAN ANNOUNCES WORKING GROUP ON CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Phil Hogan, T.D. announced on 26 September 2013 the setting up of a working group on citizen engagement to make recommendations on more extensive and diverse input by citizens into the decision-making process and to allow for facilitation of input by citizens into decision making at the local government level.

Minister Hogan stated: “Putting People First – the Action Programme for Effective Local Government’ identifies the need for Local Government to build strong relationships with and gain the interest of local people and to provide for better engagement with citizens. The commitments set out in Putting People First on citizen engagement, and the overall scope of the reforms, are deep and wide. They encompass ideas such as participatory budgeting, petition-related rights, plebiscites, and regular town/area meetings. Given this, it would be important that citizen engagement is addressed not just as an ‘add-on’ to a new community-focussed role for local government, but also addresses core areas such as promoting higher voter turnout at elections, issues around local services, budgeting, local charges and should operate in a way that increases understanding on the part of the public generally of local government, how it operates and what it does.”

The working group, which will be chaired by Fr. Sean Healy of Social Justice Ireland, will report to the Minister within the next six to eight weeks. It’s aims are to make recommendations that provide for: (i) more extensive and diverse input by citizens into the decision-making process at local government level; and (2)the facilitation of input by citizens into decision making at local government level.

Source: <http://www.environ.ie>

## 8. Contacting the RSA Newsletter

If you have any queries regarding the newsletter, or any comments, suggestions or submissions for future editions (incl. details on upcoming events, publications of interest, job vacancies), please email the RSA Secretary

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## 9. Membership of the RSA

Membership of the Association is open to all individuals and organisations with an interest in the analysis and development of regional policy.

The benefits of membership include nine issues of the international journal *Regional Studies*, four issues of *Regions: The Newsletter of the Regional Studies Association* (overall body), three issues of *Spatial Economic Analysis*, discount on other Routledge publications, access to Association events, and ability to participate in any local branch or section activities.

Membership is based on the calendar year. For the year 2014, membership costs are: Individual £85 (€101); Student £40 (€47); Associate Membership £65 (€77); Corporate £175 (€208). Further details and application forms can be found on the RSA international website: [www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk](http://www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk).

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## 10. Current Irish Committee Members

The current RSA committee for 2013 are: Chris Van Egeraat (NUIM - Chairman); Patrick Collins (NUI Galway – Hon. Secretary); Micheál Collins (TCD); Edgar Morgenroth (ESRI); David Hogan (Shannon Development); David Meredith (Teagasc); Ronnie O’Toole (NIB); Sean O’Riordain; Philip O’Connor (Dublin Employment Pact); Finbarr Brereton (UCD); Simon Conry (National Transport Authority); Jamie Cudden (Dublin City Council); Celine McHugh (Forfas); Deiric O’Broin (DCU); Damian Thomas (NESC); Brendan Williams (UCD); Declan Curran (DCU); Jim Fitzpatrick; Dieter Kogler (UCD); Justin Doran (UCC); William O’Gorman (WIT);

The following are the contact details of the Association: RSA Chairman Chris Van Egeraat: [chris.vanegaeraat@nuim.ie](mailto:chris.vanegaeraat@nuim.ie); RSA Secretary Patrick Collins: [p.collins@nuigalway.ie](mailto:p.collins@nuigalway.ie)

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## 11. Joining/Leaving the RSA (Irish Branch) Mailing List

If you wish to have your details added to, or removed from, the RSA mailing list, please e-mail the RSA Secretary. The RSA updates its mailing list approximately once every six weeks.

A pdf copy of this newsletter is available on the RSA website at <http://www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/international-networks/international.asp>