

Transitions to sustainable rural development in Ireland: Waving goodbye or saying hello?

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Paper presented at the Environmental Citizenship: Trans-disciplinary conversations on transitions to sustainability, UCC, 5th-6th September 2013

Sustainable Rural Development Paradigm: (Ensuring the Future (1999); Food Harvest 2020, CEDRA (2012)

(Source: Deirdre O' Connor 2012)



Rural Social and Economic Trends:

The **proportion of people below the poverty line was higher in rural areas** (18.8% in rural areas compared with 14.2% in urban areas in 2011) (*Walshe & Harvey, 2013*)

Basic deprivation levels rose in both urban and rural areas, but with a **slightly higher rate of increase in rural areas** (+46% in rural areas compared with +40% in urban areas over the period 2009-2011) (*Walshe & Harvey, 2013*)

The construction downturn and the moratorium on public sector recruitment have contributed to the reduction in employment levels and employment opportunities in rural locations (*Walshe & Harvey, 2013*)

'loss of construction and traditional industries' rural areas have 'reverted to their earlier pattern of decline and that future growth will be more urban-driven' (Morgenroth, 2012)

'Impacts' of the recession continue to reshape rural area and reinforce long-run trends (*Meredith, 2013*)

192% increase in number of rural unemployed compared with 114% (urban) (2011 figures) (O' Donoghue, 2013)

Performance Rural Policy – Ireland (adapted from Walshe and Harvey, 2013:45)

Field	EU27	Irish	Metric
Organic Farming	4.7%	1.1%	Organic Acreage
Biomass Crops	2.5%	0.2%	Share Devoted to Biomass Crops
Nature Protection Areas	12.1%	5.6%	% special protection areas
Renewables from agriculture	9.6%	3.3%	Acreage agriculture in renewables
Renewables from forestry	49.3%	29.2%	Acreage produced for renewables

FH2020 Targets

(smart, **sustainable** economy?)

- 50% increase in the volume of milk production
- 20% increase in cattle output value
- 20% increase in sheep/lamb output value
- 50% increase in pig output value
- Export target of €12billion
- Increased volume and value of production

Currently:

82% of Irish farmland in pasture

10% rough grazing

8% in crops

Paradox

- **Ongoing Issues of Water Quality** (contamination of ground and surface waters)
- Ireland – **Highest GHG emissions per capita in EU (linked to current cattle stocking levels)**
- **Food Imports** – 2011 Ireland imported €5 billion of food while food as a % of merchandise imports doubled between 2000-2010 (*high rates of growth in dairy up 9% to 0.5b*)
- Food industry is predominantly urban based with 53% of jobs located in urban areas (2006)
- Commercial farming will continue to concentrate in particular areas – what about the non commercial areas?
- (2012) a sample of 472 farmers nationwide. When asked about their preferred development strategy, 38% said their preferred option was to develop and expand their farming business while 58% expressed a preference for combining farm work with an off-farm job. **Just 2% of farmers expressed a preference for setting up a diversified farm-based business.**

Encouraging and Facilitating Short Food Supply Chains (Moroney et al., 2013)

- Irish agriculture predominately commodity and export oriented, limited domestic market
- **But** increased consumer interest in provenance, authenticity, traceability (Bord Bia Research)
- Added to push and pull factors for producers;
 - *Push factors*: declining income and/or inability to compete within conventional model; search for a different model; entrepreneurial drive
 - *Pull factors*: opportunity to add value and maximise returns; greater independence and control; improved market knowledge; social benefits
- **BUT** very limited traction with 'ordinary' Irish farmers (see Meredith and Macken-Walsh research)
- Perceived **over-regulation of the artisanal/small-scale food sector**
- The prevailing culture of Irish farming appears to remain firmly oriented towards *commodity production and conventional sales*
- SFSC activity increasingly recognised and supported by statutory and local/rural development actors (**LEADER – Sustainable Rural Development Paradigm**)
- Irish Government **Putting People First** (2012) – Local Government Reform – implications for LEADER strategies

Concluding Thoughts:

- Productivist discourse around the future of Irish agriculture: seems to crowd out genuine aspirations for sustainability
- Scaling up for cost reduction at the expense of the environment (landscape, habitats, water quality)
- Intensification benefits prime agricultural regions; but what about the less-favored areas & their rural communities?
- Reform of local government – implications for area based local rural development strategies?