

Spatial Strategies: experiments  
with scale and scope but are they  
delivering?

David Counsell

# Outline of talk

- Outline of research project
- Rescaling and rescoping of planning
- Soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries
- Case study: Cork Area Strategic Plan
  - Strategic intent
  - What actually happened
- Conclusions and lessons learnt

# Background

Based on a research project funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council  
'Integrated spatial planning, multi-level governance and state rescaling'

- Initially focused on spatial planning post-devolution in the UK
- Extended to include Ireland to explore the cross-border dimension of integration and as a comparator
- Results published in the book *The New Spatial Planning: territorial management with soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries* ( co authors Haughton, Allmendinger and Vigar)

# Methodology

- Research methodology focused on ‘governance lines’
- Rather than looking at planning at one particular scale we explored it across scales and also across sectors
- Interviewed 147 people in two stages:
  - Firstly national actors
  - Secondly in six case study areas

# Case Studies

- England – Leeds City Region
- Ireland – Cork Area Strategic Plan
- London – Thames Gateway
- Northern Ireland – The North West (Derry/Letterkenny ‘Gateway’)
- Scotland – the Central Belt
- Wales – NE Wales, SW Cheshire sub-region

# Rescaling and rescoping of planning

- Exploring the emergence of new scales of planning – both statutory and informal scales
- Also the much debated shift from regulatory planning to the broader concept of spatial planning
- In particular we were interested in the emergence of informal scales of planning which we termed *soft spaces* which often have *fuzzy boundaries*

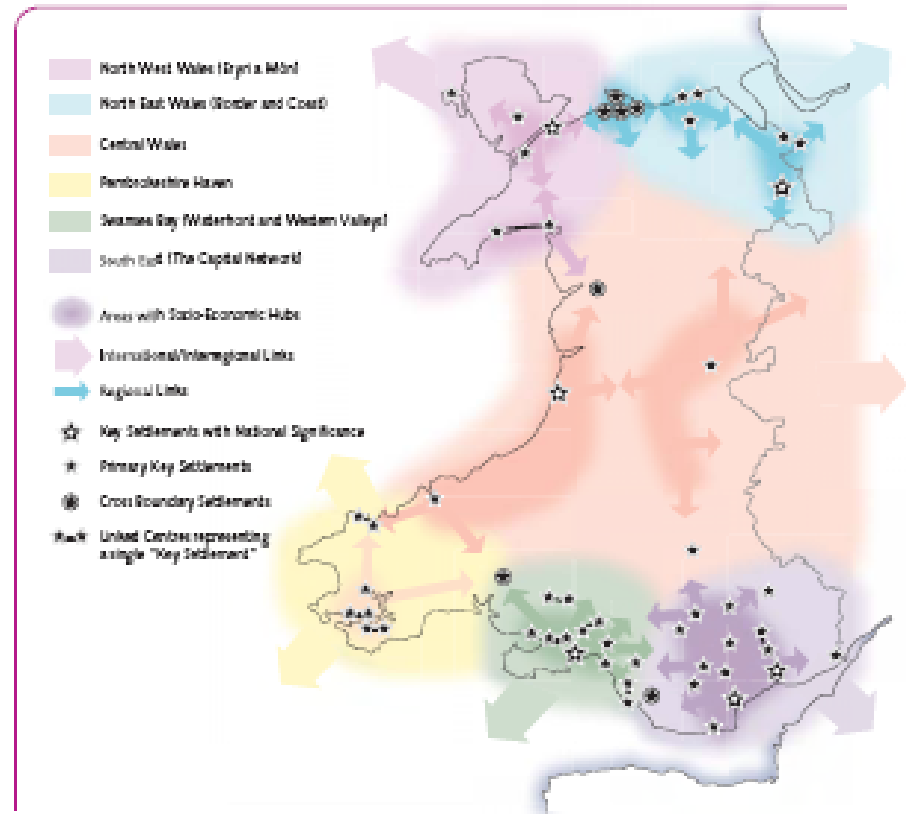
# Rescaling of planning: soft spaces

- The in-between scales of strategy and delivery – the spaces where there are no regulatory requirements or responsibilities for planning.
- Examples of soft spaces include: mega-regions, sub-regions, city-regions, cross border regions, growth areas.
- The (re-)emergence of ‘soft spaces’ alongside the tactical use of ‘fuzzy boundaries’ can be related to working patterns which might better reflect the real geographies of problems and opportunities.
- A way of undertaking planning outside the lengthy and often confrontational statutory processes

# Fuzzy boundaries: Wales Spatial Plan

- In Wales the Assembly Government defined its planning sub-areas with fuzzy boundaries
- It argued that this reflected real life – human activity doesn't stop at artificial boundaries
- But not all are functional spaces e.g. central Wales
- And this approach was problematic to some – are we in or out?
- Over time these are becoming less fuzzy

The National Vision



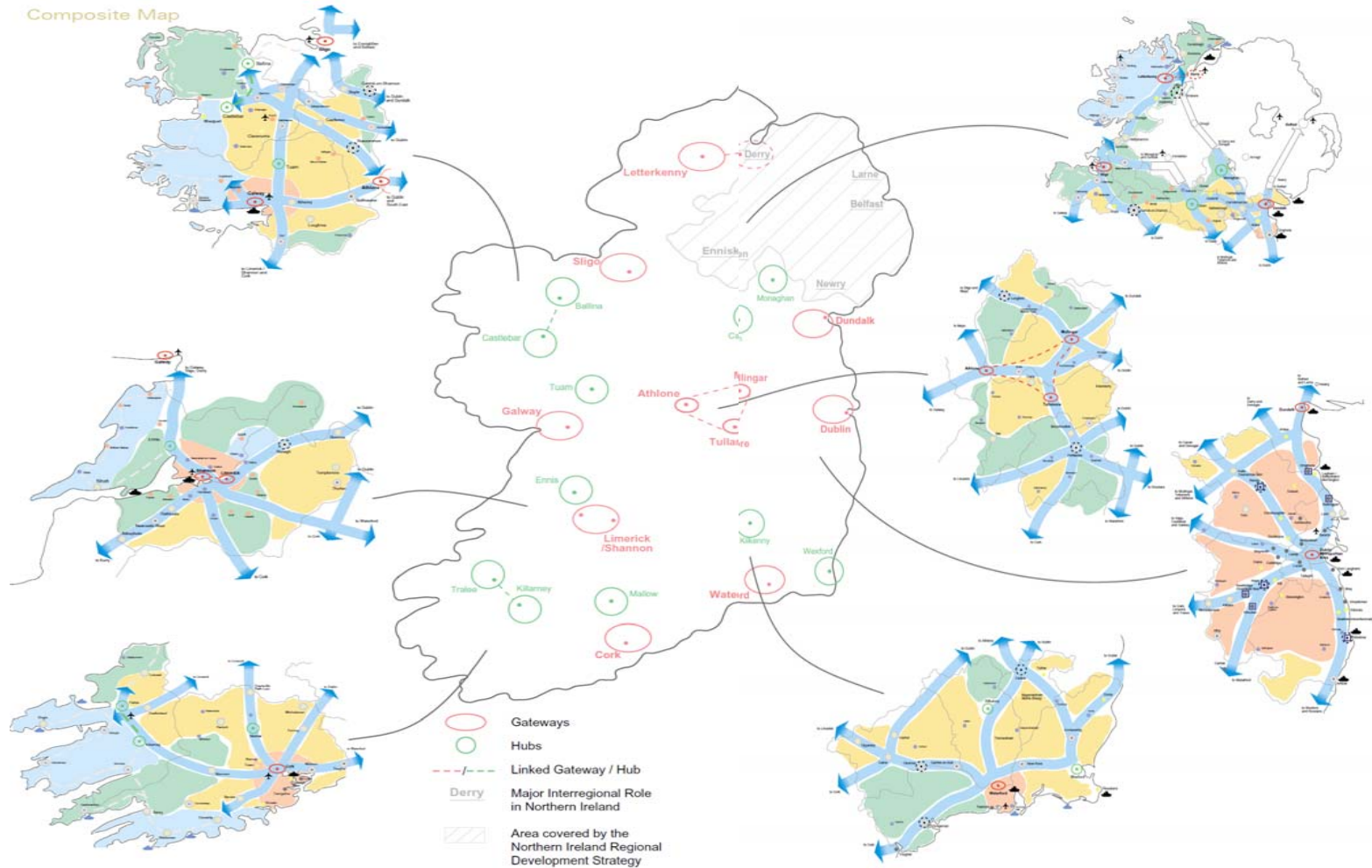


# Fuzzy boundaries: some views

You've got to realise why the boundary was drawn where it was.... It's not to fit where the bodies are... it's to fit where the complex opportunities are... So no.... the boundaries don't map with anything (interview, civil servant B)

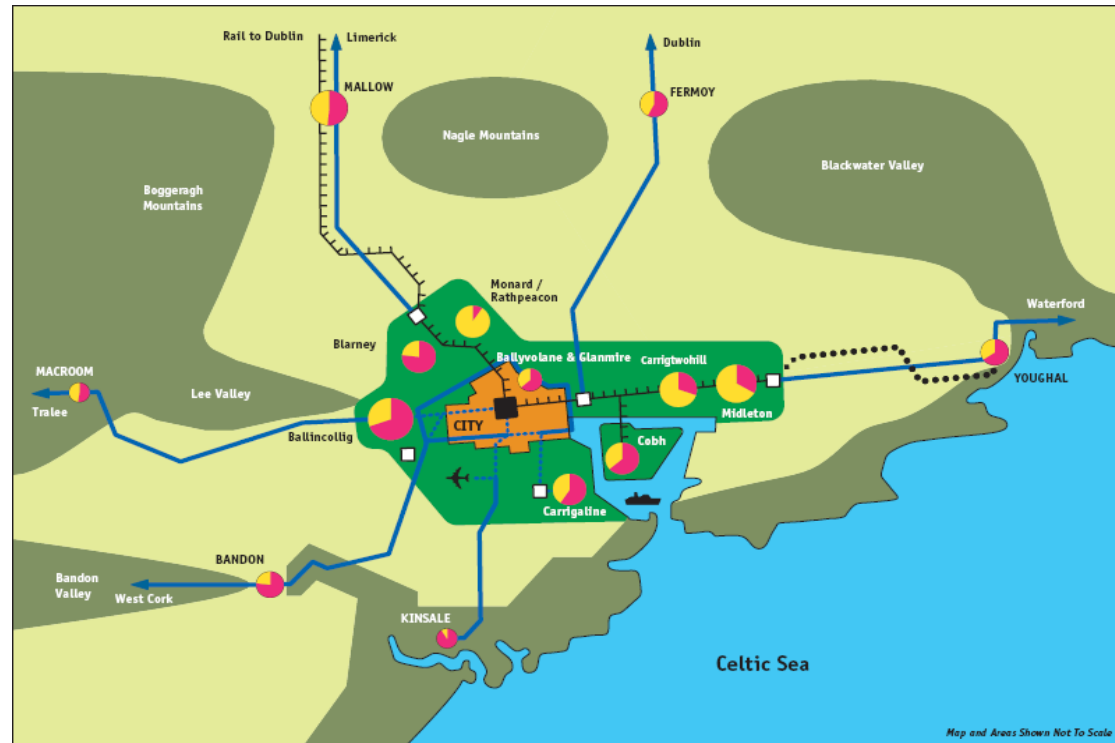
“The Spatial Plan areas are not defined by administrative boundaries. This enables partners to work together on common issues in a flexible way, and some may be involved in more than one Spatial Plan Area Group.” (WAG 2008, pp. 28-29).

# Ireland: National Spatial Strategy



# Soft spaces: Ireland – Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP)

- Non statutory plan for the Cork City Region – within 45 minute drive
- Governance – joint committee of Cork City and Cork County Councils
- Original plan agreed in 2001, Update in 2008



# CASP: some key proposals

- Rebalancing growth – to the North and East
- Re-opening the rail line to Midleton
- Improved commuter services between Cobh and Mallow
- Higher density development around public transport interchanges
- Compact high density development in the city focusing on Docklands
- Compact 'sustainable' development in the ring towns



# The influence of CASP

- Although a non-statutory plan, CASP has been very influential in policy terms
- Its approach to growth in Cork was adopted in the National Spatial Strategy
- It was incorporated into Regional Planning Guidelines for the South West Region
- Its strategy formed the basic policy framework for the county and city development plans
- Widely promoted by the Irish Government as a model for integrated spatial planning at the city region scale

# But what about the delivery of the spatial strategy?

Whilst the changes in the scope and scale of planning might have resulted in the creation of better strategy documents the implementation of spatial strategies remains a vexed problem for reasons such as:

- Non-alignment of policy making and investment decisions – although there were some signs that this might be improving – the Irish National Development Plan pre-recession reflected delivery of the NSS,
- Continuing competition for investment and growth between ‘partners’. Can we expect independent local administrations to work altruistically for the greater good of the city region for example?

# What has happened in Cork?

- the 2008 Update acknowledged that the CASP strategy is not currently being achieved partly because too much growth has been permitted outside the metropolitan area
- The strategy was to concentrate growth in the city/docklands and along the rail corridor
- In fact most growth has taken place in the surrounding rural areas and the city has continued to decline
- The Docklands has failed to take off and its viability is now being questioned

### Summary of Progress on CASP Forecasts by Region - Population

Area	CASP 2000	2006 Indicative Implied Projection	Actual 2006 Population	Difference - Actual- Projection
Cork City	123,810	128,719	119,522	-9,197
Rest of Metropolitan Cork	127,700	149,366	153,019	3,653
Ring Towns and Rural Areas	93,590	98,916	105,055	6,139
<i>Of which:</i> Rural Areas	53,560	52,269	61,428	9,159
CASP Total	345,100	377,000	377,596	596

*Source: Indecon Analysis of CSO data and CASP targets*



# Returning to governance

- Can a strategy like CASP be delivered under the present governance arrangements for the city region?

“well, we have a joint committee of city and county that meets every so often... but it’s not a body that has a huge amount of authority... of power... it just talks about areas of common interest” (local government officer 2009).

- Whilst it appears that the city and county can reach consensus at a strategic visionary level when it comes to the detail, decisions are sometimes at odds with this.
- This suggests we need more formalised institutional arrangements for city regions such as city mayors

# Conclusions 1

- There is growing reliance on interventions at scales other than those of statutory planning systems as planners work within multi-layered, and sometimes fuzzy scales of policy and governance arrangements.
- We do not have a single new model rather a series of experiments about how planning operates within constantly evolving governance systems for place making at all scales.
- There has been more success in producing well received spatial strategies than in delivering the proposed spatial development

# Conclusions 2

- The recession and changes in the political landscape have put brakes on some of this experimentation .
- In Cork the recession creates a particular dilemma for the County Council
- In England, changes in political attitudes towards planning are leading to uncertainty about the future scope and scale of planning