Developing a Planning Research Agenda for Ireland

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Executive summary

This report sets out a framework for developing a research agenda for planning in Ireland with a focus on the kind of research in planning, encompassing both academic and applied research, which helps planners and policymakers to develop and revitalise Ireland's towns, cities and rural areas. The report suggests how this agenda could be promoted and supported by government, research institutions, planning schools and other organisations through the greater coordination and sharing of research activities, including via an Irish Planning Research Forum.

The approach is quite a deliberate one. Firstly, rather than duplicating the research efforts of other economic, administrative or environmental fields that are of interest to planning in an interdisciplinary way, it promotes an agenda that addresses the core concerns of planning itself. Secondly, it prioritises the kind of robust evidence and insightful enquiry needed to validate professional judgement within the planning discipline and to support sensible decision-making about places for the common good. A solid research agenda within our own field will also provide a solid basis for engaging with research outputs from other disciplines, to seek ways of joint working both as practitioners and as researchers, and to enhance the contribution of the profession at many levels.

This research agenda, outlined further below, is informed by:

- A review of national and international policy documents on priorities for planning;
- A survey of the research needs of the planning profession in Ireland;
- Current issues for planning in Ireland, based on post-Mahon reviews of planning, recent planning legislation and the on-going tasks facing the profession;
- The research being undertaken by planning schools and other key research organisations, and published in academic planning journals, particularly on day-to-day planning practice.

Based on this work, right across the planning profession there is a very strong appetite for research and for developing a strong evidence base for planning work. Apart from planning academics – who tend to be almost exclusively focused on academic research –planners in general place a high value on commercial research and locally-derived ad hoc research as well as on scholarly research to support their work. However, a number of crucial issues have emerged. Problems with poor dissemination of research outputs, lack of co-ordination and fragmentation of research efforts, poor validation and archiving of evidence and data and, for practitioners, a lack of access to academic planning journals are seen as genuine obstacles to effective research in planning.

Further, it is clear that research is needed for both the substantive aspects of planning (the main subjects and issues that planning has to deal with) as well as the procedural ones (the ways in which planning carries out its tasks). For the substantive topics, whilst it might be tempting to give priority to the more recent and prominent issues of the day, the focus needs to be on the more long-term and enduring issues in Ireland that have to be addressed in planning. In this real world context, a further balance needs to be struck between a research effort that explores the effectiveness of the current policy climate and one that provides an evidence base for influencing new policy directions. Indeed, this report also recognises that there is scope for certain types of planning research – more scholarly research, perhaps – that can proceed at arm's length from day to day practice and be more open-ended, 'blue-sky' and critical.

In reviewing the kind of planning research that is currently going on, while academic planning schools are active in pursuing research funding, it would appear that with greater opportunities in interdisciplinary research projects there is a dilution of research into core planning subject areas and issues. Also, an analysis of the international planning journals indicates that for various reasons planning practice is rarely a subject of scholarly enquiry and, even if practitioners had more easy access to planning journals, they would find little there to support their day to day professional work. This said, the outputs of organisations such as the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) are seen as being useful on many levels even though in spatial planning terms there would appear to be poor co-ordination in the setting of research priorities among these bodies. This is also a key issue for the funding of planning research generally and the research agenda should speak strongly to support agencies and a whole range of government departments.

This project also explored a range of current issues and topics that might help frame a planning research agenda for the medium term. For example, there are very particular requirements for addressing transparency and accountability in planning decisions in the post-Mahon era, the role of politics and civil society in addressing spatial planning and environmental issues and the importance of evidence to underpin planning as a field of ethical action. Another priority for research is to explore the relationships between planning, market behaviour, and employment led development along with the efficacy and viability of plan-making. There is a need for evidence-led decisions about land use generally and land availability as well as a range of research initiatives to support the work of the planning regulator. Other key research areas include the integration of spatial planning with national and regional priorities, the co-ordination of spatial and economic policy, the challenges of changing urbanisation and settlement patterns and the crucial contribution that planning must make to strategic decisions about infrastructure, water and waste, energy and landscape.

This report goes on to make recommendations about bringing forward a strong planning research agenda. It also identifies key drivers for developing and championing the agenda. These include the planning regulator, the regional assemblies, the planning schools, An Bord Pleanála and the professional planning institutes and a specially formulated agency or forum to identify priorities, secure funding, co-ordinate dissemination and to raise the profile of planning research among government departments, funding agencies and other organisations.

A research agenda for planning goes beyond the needs of planners. It could become a strategic initiative for tackling the key place-related challenges of the day; one that engenders confidence among communities, investors, politicians, members of other professions and all those who, along with planners, have a long-term interest in how places are managed, sustained and developed.

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Introduction

The purpose of this project is to set out a framework for how a research agenda in planning might support the work of planners in Ireland. The report is presented in six sections. Section 1 develops a broad framing of what the possible headings might be for a research agenda within our field. It is based on a reading of a selection of national and international policy documents on the priorities for planning and its research requirements. Section 2 presents the results of a survey about planning research among members of the profession. It reports on how planners engage with research and also on what planners see as their research priorities. This helps to refine the themes and topics for a research agenda.

In Section 3 the report goes on to summarise some of the planning research that is currently going on. There are two elements to this. The first includes an overview of the research work carried out by planning schools and other key research organisations. The second is an interrogation of key academic planning journals to see, in particular, how day to day planning practice is addressed in scholarly research publications.

The next step, in Section 4, gives a context in terms of the main planning issues of the day. It is based on key recent documents that set out the high level challenges facing planning in Ireland at the present time. It includes post-Mahon reviews of planning, the new requirements of recent planning legislation and the on-going important planning tasks facing the profession. This helps to prioritise and give a strategic focus to the initial themes and topics identified earlier. In Section 5, the report then discusses possible ways in which a research agenda can be brought forward in practical terms with pointers to the key sectors, actors and organisations that will be crucial to rolling out the research agenda in coming years. To conclude, in Section 6, the report draws together a summarised set of principles, issues and priorities for that might be addressed by a practical planning research for Ireland.

Section 1: Planning and research

1.1 The purpose of this project is to set out a framework for how a research agenda in planning might support the work of planners in Ireland. While it is recognised that planners (and others engaged in planning) require up-to-date and dependable information about a wide range of social, economic, political and environmental issues it is felt that a planning research agenda should focus deliberately on the need for research within the field of planning itself. In the area of energy efficiency, for example, whilst planners undoubtedly have an interest in the technologies associated with building methods and materials, a specific planning research agenda in when addressing energy might be more directly focused on questions about how appropriate land use mixes, densities and mobility improvements would make new or existing places more energy efficient and sustainable.

1.2 Following this principle, the agenda for research in planning could be framed in such a way as to complement – rather than duplicate – the research output of those other specialist fields which contribute to our understanding about the places, processes and contexts within which planning operates. In this way planning research can also make substantive contributions to emerging areas of cross-disciplinary interest (such as Marine Spatial Planning) which, to a greater or lesser extent, respond to issues that planning has engaged with for decades. It is also important that the planning research agenda for Ireland is championed at appropriate levels and so that can influence (and become embedded in) key national research priorities and funding streams such as Horizon 2020 and its successors.[1]

1.3 Therefore, whilst planning fulfils an important synthesising role in the cross-disciplinary world of public decision-making about the environment, the approach taken in this report is to see planning as having a set of specific disciplinary requirements for research, evidence and validation of its mission. The first step therefore is to set out an initial framework of subject areas and themes that a long-term research agenda in planning might be reasonably expected to address.

Framing the headings for planning research

1.4 Almost by definition, this step should be as much concerned with the long term and enduring issues that our discipline has to deal with as it might be with the more topical or urgent matters of the day. This is not to say that some of the more recent and prominent issues do not need special attention in the research agenda (see section 4 below in particular); rather that the agenda would support objective and sustained enquiry into the most important questions about places of all kinds and about how their spatial planning needs are to be addressed into the future. Also, it is important to make sure that both the substantive and procedural aspects of planning are included; that is to say that research in planning must address both the main subject areas that planning deals with and the ways in which planning carries out its tasks. The latter would include the relevant political and administrative contexts that planning operates in, the means of engaging with other actors / participants in planning processes, the methods of planning, and the scales and geographical settings of planning.

1.5 The initial lists of headings in this report were assembled by examining a selection of contemporary documents on planning from different countries and, in an informal way, identifying the most common themes and topics. In doing this, care was taken to ensure that the sources were grounded in planning itself rather than straying too far into the agendas found in those other fields

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[1] See for example, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (2013). Horizon 2020 EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) Ireland's Strategy and Target for Participation www.djei.ie/science/technology/strategypaper.pdf

that might have something to say about planning. This helps to focus attention on the core planning issues for planning research.

1.6 The sources were a selection of legislative, guidance and policy documents from Ireland,[2] the priorities of some existing research bodies,[3] planning research overviews from Britain, North America and New Zealand,[4] some international spatial planning overviews[5] and various texts or compendiums of planning research topics.[6] Table 1 below sets out the initial lists of subject areas and themes that were developed. Where possible, in order to make the task more manageable, similar topics and themes were amalgamated. Though alternative combinations could have been considered in some cases, it is felt that these initial lists present a reasonably clear picture of the scope of planning. They are not presented in any order of importance for now; prioritisation is a task for the overall planning research agenda at a later stage.

Table 1. Initial list of Key topics and themes for planning research

Key subject areas for planning research	Key thematic strands of planning research
Built Environment and Design	Futures, and very long-term planning
Climate and Hazards	Comparative practice: learning from Different Countries
Natural Environment and the Green Agenda	Governance, Politics, Local Government and Reform
Settlement networks and hierarchies	Probity and Ethics in Planning
Energy and Technology	Planning as a Profession
Housing and Residential quality	Engagement and Participation in Planning
Economy, Competitiveness, and Resilience	Education and the planning needs of young people
Workplaces, Industry, Agriculture and Business	Ethno-cultural, Immigration and Gender issues in planning
Landscape, Heritage and Tourism/leisure	Social Justice and Equity in planning
Healthy cities and environments	Demographics and the changing needs of populations
Infrastructure, Transport, Waste and Water	Planning Legislation and Regulatory frameworks
Sustainable Land Use	Planning at the Local scale
Rural issues and rural planning	Planning at the Regional scale
Cities, Cultural life and Regeneration	Planning at the National and Transnational scale
	Decision-making, Skills and Techniques in planning

1.7 In practical terms it is worth noting that there is a fairly strong co-relation between this list of subject areas and those matters for which objectives must be (or may be included) in statutory development plans in Ireland.[7] In addition, many of the themes identified here (e.g. the scales of planning and analysis of demographic change) also have an official basis in legislation and guidance.

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[2] Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government (1999, 2010, 2011, 2012c, 2013).
[3] Environmental Protection Agency (2013), Economic and Social Research Institute (2008), International Centre for Local and Regional Development (2012).
[4] www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/topics, Chess (2012), Auckland City Council (2013).
[5] ESPON - European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (2013), European Commission (1997), Global Planners Network (2006, 2008, 2012), Bohme et al (2011), Hoornweg & Freire (2013), World Health Organisation (1999).
[6] Association of European Schools of Planning/American Collegiate Schools of Planning (2013).
[7] Section 10(20) and the First Schedule of the 2000 Planning Act as amended.

Categories of planning research

1.8 It is felt that the scope of the term 'research' might need some clarification for the purposes of this report. Planning research certainly includes the kind of evidence that might inform the day-to-day work of framing planning policies and making planning decisions. This might be data and research material that is regularly and systematically assembled in official or semi-official settings (e.g. census information, spatial datasets, property data, planning decision statistics or land availability studies) as well as information that is gathered in ad hoc ways to support the particular planning task at hand (e.g. analysis of local land use patterns, stakeholder surveys or retail or traffic impact studies). It also includes scholarly or academic research - in both the soft or hard sciences - that analyses the performance or outcomes of planning processes, explores new conceptual ways of addressing planning issues and forms a robust critique of the both the profession and its relationship to wider society.

1.9 These research efforts generate outputs in a range of different formats which in turn are validated by different standards and norms (depending on the organisations, individuals and fields of knowledge involved). Also, the circumstances in which these outputs are held (time periods, levels of access by the public, and dissemination) vary widely. In the absence of a standard breakdown of research types that encompasses all of this work, some working categories have been used here.

Types of research

1.10 In this report, we make a general distinction between the following three types of valid research activity within in our field:

- *Academic research*: Scholarly, critical and exploratory research that is generally published in peer reviewed journals, monographs or text books;

- *Applied research*: Practice-focused, sector-based, context-dependent, ad hoc or official survey or data gathering exercises. This type of research tends to be published in official or semi-official reports, plans, supporting planning documents, bulletins or official statistics; or sometimes it is not published at all;

- *Commercial research*: Commissioned survey or research work generally carried out for private or public clients to provide data or evidence to support particular initiatives, projects or decision making processes. Often the outputs of this work become the property of the commissioning body and in many cases it remains unpublished.

Who carries out planning research?

1.11 Whist it is not suggested here that these categories should be a definitive structure for describing planning research, they are useful for emphasising the broad nature of what constitutes valid evidence for supporting planning and the work of planners; they have also been useful for seeking the views of practitioners (see section 3 of this report).

1.12 There is no clear relationship between these research types and the categories of people who carry it out; planning academics for example may be involved in all three types depending on the circumstances. For a planning research agenda though it is useful to have a reasonably clear idea about the kind of actors that are involved and their areas of expertise. Clearly, there is an important role for planning academics in this but research of various types is also carried out by planning or

multidisciplinary consulting firms, individuals – including planning practitioners or specialists – who carry out research tasks for state, semi-state or other public organisations as part of their day to day work and commercial organisations (such as professional market research companies, groups that survey property market and economic activity etc). The planning research community can reasonably be seen as being made up of various combinations of these actors either operating separately or in different combinations at different times.

Where, and in what formats, is planning research held?

1.13 The kind of evidence that might be sought out by those involved in planning activities can be found in a range of different sources and formats. It can come in the form of quantitative data outputs (e.g. statistics, financial data, modelling, numerical indicators etc); Spatial data outputs (e.g. land use surveys, GIS datasets, thematic mapping, spatial scenarios etc); Qualitative data outputs (e.g. policy reviews, document analysis, opinion surveys, interviews etc).

1.14 Scholarly research from the planning academy and other academics (found in g. peer reviewed journals, scholarly research projects, etc) is generally written up in consistent, fully referenced reports or papers designed to be open to critique and debate.

1.15 In many cases, however, the main sources of planning research are locally-generated, bespoke or applied pieces of work such as data gathered in the preparation of a development plan, or research carried out to support planning advice being offered to a client (e.g. a retail impact assessment or a viability report). This material may be difficult to track down (or in some cases it may be inaccessible to third parties). Often it is neither kept up to date nor archived for future comparison or validation.

1.16 Other, more systematically-gathered, evidence is held by official compendiums of various kinds (e.g. Central Statistics Office data, Governmental research reports, planning statistics from An Bord Pleanála or land, housing and planning data published by the Department of the Environment). This material is increasingly available online to the public and practitioners and in some cases it is also geo-referenced and suitable for further spatial analysis/enquiry.

1.17 Semi state, professional and non-governmental organisations such as the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), the Environmental Protection (EPA), Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI) also produce relevant research publications and data. National or European research projects or repositories such as the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON), the All Ireland Research Observatory (AIRO) and the Department for the Environment's planning portal MyPlan.ie are useful resources for certain kinds of planning work while commercial statistics and reports (such as property market bulletins, market research, and opinion surveys) provide a lot of relevant contextual information for planning.

1.18 In terms of how more formal research efforts are organised and how they might contribute to a planning research agenda, there is another distinction that is worth noting here. This is the distinction made by the planning writer Simin Davoudi (2006)[8] between 'contextual research' and 'enlightenment mode research'. Writing about evidence based planning (EBP) she explains that contextual evidence assumes that "the relationship between evidence and policy is unproblematic, linear and direct. It is assumed that either research leads policy and hence policy is evidence-driven; or research follows policy and hence research is policy-driven." On the other hand there is a "view of how research affects policy called the enlightenment mode. Here, rather than research serving the policy agenda directly, its benefits are indirect and sometimes take longer to be realised. The

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[8] Davoudi, S. (2006), Evidence-Based Planning, The Planning Review, 42:165, pp.14-24.

emphasis is not to produce "punchy policy messages", but to illuminate the landscape within which policy decisions have to be made." Clearly there is scope for open-ended critical research that is designed on its own 'blue sky' terms as well as more structured contextual research that has more immediate benefit to support policy-making and practice.

Section 2: Research needs of the planning profession

2.1 This section outlines the results of a survey about planning research among members of the planning profession in Ireland. It reports on the ways in which planners engage with research and on what they see as key research priorities. It was considered important to engage directly with practitioners in order to help gather information about the research needs of the profession, and to explore their views on the research environment. While it is not a comprehensive survey of all planning issues, it does give a flavour of what people feel is important in terms of research and practice.

2.2 The survey involved a number of steps of information gathering and included a structured approach to the development of a set of priorities for planning research. Following some questions and about their views on the existing research environment, respondents were asked to contribute to the development of a set of themes and principle to inform Ireland's planning research agenda.

Survey method and sample

2.3 To initiate this survey, an e-mail list was assembled of 292 planning professionals engaged in a practice, research or education in Ireland. This was derived from an initial list of known planners attached to planning authorities, consultancies and the planning schools which was then systematically expanded through our various local and professional networks. The survey questionnaire itself was issued to everyone on this list through the proprietary on-line platform SurveyMonkey. With assistance from the RTPI secretariat, links to the survey were also circulated to all RTPI members in Ireland. It was also disseminated through Facebook and LinkedIn planning contacts. This was considered to be the most efficient means of generating a broad set of responses from a cross-section of the planning community.

2.4 Although there is no precise figure for the overall sample size in an approach like this (because of duplication factors and unknown membership of social network sites), it can be assumed that the questionnaire reached some 300-400 people. In all, 181 full responses across all work sectors were received (see breakdown in table 2) and this is considered satisfactory for a study such as this.

Table 2. Breakdown of responses by the primary sector that respondents work in

Primary Sector of work	%	No.
Public Service	**46%**	76
Private Practice	**34%**	66
Academia	**13%**	23
Not applicable / not currently working	**3%**	8
Voluntary / NGO Sector	**2%**	4
Other	**2%**	4
Total	**100%**	181

2.5 The questionnaire (included in the appendix), in which all responses were anonymous, included a set of basic profiling questions together with a series of closed questions relating both to existing planning research and to future research needs. Options for including free text comments and suggestions were also included in the questionnaire design. The 16 substantive questions were grouped in such a way as to get a sense of: how planners use or carry out research; what sources of research they find most useful to support their work; what planning journals they find to be most relevant to their work; the adequacy of evidence and research information to support planning practice, how they would prioritise research topics for planning; what they see as the key themes for

a planning research agenda; and what their overall thoughts are about planning research in Ireland. The following paragraphs give a summary of how planners responded to these prompts.

How planners engage with research

Planners carrying out research

2.6 The majority of respondents across all sectors (65%) indicated that research forms part of their work. A half of all planners who carry out research as part of their work are involved in applied research while 42% are engaged in commercial (commissioned) research. Less than a third (29%) indicated that academic research formed part of their workload.

2.7 In terms of sectors, almost 70% of planners engaged in commercial research are based primarily in the private sector. Around half of those engaged in applied research are in the public sector and over a third (37%) of all planners in this sector carry out applied research. As expected, academic planning research is primarily carried out by those in academia and, interestingly, nearly a third of all planners who carry out research state that they carry out a mixture of commercial, applied and academic research (with the majority of these being based in academic planning world).

Planners commissioning or initiating research

2.8 Participants were also asked whether they commission or initiate planning related research, and if so who is this research carried out by. The majority of respondents (60%) answered that they do initiate or commission research as part of their work and, in turn, it is primarily colleagues within their own team or organisation who then carry out the research (70%). Around a half of planners who initiate or commission research appoint planning consultants to gather the relevant research data or evidence.

2.9 These results indicate clearly that research forms a significant part of the profession's activities. However, this is somewhat fragmented across three broad research communities: despite some cross over, academics appear to be mainly engaged in scholarly enquiry; consultants in private commissions and public sector planners in applied projects. Whilst this is not unexpected, it may suggest that there is a weak shared understanding of the purpose of research in planning and a lack of opportunity for planners to engage in a broad range of planning research activities. This is not to say that there is no desire for closer shared working across these groups; in fact the opposite impression comes across later in the survey.

Sources of research/evidence used by planners

2.10 The survey included a section on the sources of research and evidence that planners use in their work. A question about whether planners tended to find quantitative data, qualitative data or spatial data to be more useful in their work was inconclusive. It was noted in a number of responses that the choice of research format should to be determined by the research or planning problem at hand, and that a mixture of all three is required to establish a comprehensive research program in planning. This suggests that the planning discipline is both open to and comfortable with a range of research approaches and does not favour any particular methods of enquiry over any others.

2.11 Respondents were asked about the sources of research that they find most useful. They were provided with five options (see table 3 below), along with an open comment box to provide an option to suggest alternative sources. The table shows that the vast majority of planners ranked

both 'locally-generated or applied research'[9] and 'official statistics and information' as the sources of research most useful to them in their work (73% and 82% respectively). The other three categories – including academic research – achieved similar rankings (around 40%).

Table 3. Percentages of planners ranking the sources of research they find most useful

Sources of research used by planners	%	Of which are Academics	Of which are non-academics
Locally-generated, bespoke or applied research	**73%**	47%	77%
Official Statistics and Information	**82%**	56%	87%
Semi-state, NGO or professional publications	**55%**	34%	58%
National or European research projects or repositories	**41%**	26%	43%
Commercial statistics and reports	**38%**	13%	41%
Academic research	**40%**	78%	32%

2.12 When these responses are presented according to sectors that planners work in an interesting picture emerges. Planners in academia have a clear preference towards the academic research category (at 78%) and this is more than double that proportion of non-academic planners who consider this to be a useful source of research. In addition, the data shows that academic planners rated all other sources of research significantly lower than their non-academic counterparts with only 13% or academics stating that commercial research is of benefit.

Planning journals

2.13 The role of planning related academic journals was then investigated. Specifically, the survey examined how often planners consulted academic journals and the extent these were considered as being accessible to them. Provision was made for respondents to identify which planning journals, in their view, provide the most effective research to support or enhance the work of planners in Ireland. Planners were also asked how regularly they consulted planning-related academic journals.

2.14 As expected, planners who identified themselves as working primarily in the field of academia reported the highest use of planning related academic journals. More than three quarters of this group (77%) consult planning journals regularly while less than a fifth (18%) said they consult them only occasionally. Within the private sector and public sector the breakdown is different with the majority (over 80% in each case) saying they rarely or only occasionally consult academic planning journals. In the public sector more than half of all planners report that rarely use these journals.

2.15 It may be possible to explain this pattern simply by examining how easy it is for people to get access to scholarly journals in planning. While a full 95% of planners in academia report comprehensive access to planning related academic journals, well over three-quarters of planners in the private and public sectors (77% and of 86% respectively) indicate that they have limited or no access to such material.

2.16 In order to try to identify the planning journals that are considered most effective in supporting or enhancing the work of planners, respondents were asked to select a maximum of five preferred

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[9] Such as data gathered in the preparation of a development plan, research carried out to support planning advice for a client, etc.

journals from a list of 13 titles.[10] The most popular choices of planning journals were *Town Planning Review* (32%), *Environment and Planning A* (28%), *Planning Theory and Practice* (24%), *Planning Practice and Research* (24%). Of these titles, it is interesting that in our brief analysis of planning journals in section 3 later in this report (see table 7), both the *Town Planning Review* and *Planning Practice and Research* both show up as addressing day to day planning practice quite well when compared to other journals.

2.17 This section of the survey also allowed respondents to identify any additional journals that were not included in the list but which they felt were useful in supporting the work of planners. Of these free text responses, the main suggestions were *Pleanáil* (the journal of the Irish Planning Institute) and the *Irish Planning and Environmental Law Journal*. As indicated in Section 2 of this report, *Pleanáil* is a rich source of articles about Irish planning though it is not a formally peer-reviewed academic journal. The inclusion of the *Irish Planning and Environmental Law Journal*[11] (strictly speaking a law title rather than a planning one) is not surprising given the importance of law related issues in the day to day work of practising planners. Also of note is the fact that nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents indicated that they are not familiar with any of the planning journals listed.

Availability of research evidence for various planning activities

2.18 The final question dealing with how people engage with research asked respondents to rate the overall availability/sufficiency of evidence and research material that supports the day-to-day work of planners here. The responses – under different headings – are summarised in Figure 1 below.

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[10] The titles presented in the questionnaire include the 11 journals analysed in section 2 of this report with the addition of the *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* and *Land Use Policy*.
[11] Issued by the legal affairs publisher Roundhall.

Figure 1. Planners' assessment (% responses) of whether the available research material is sufficient to support various planning activities
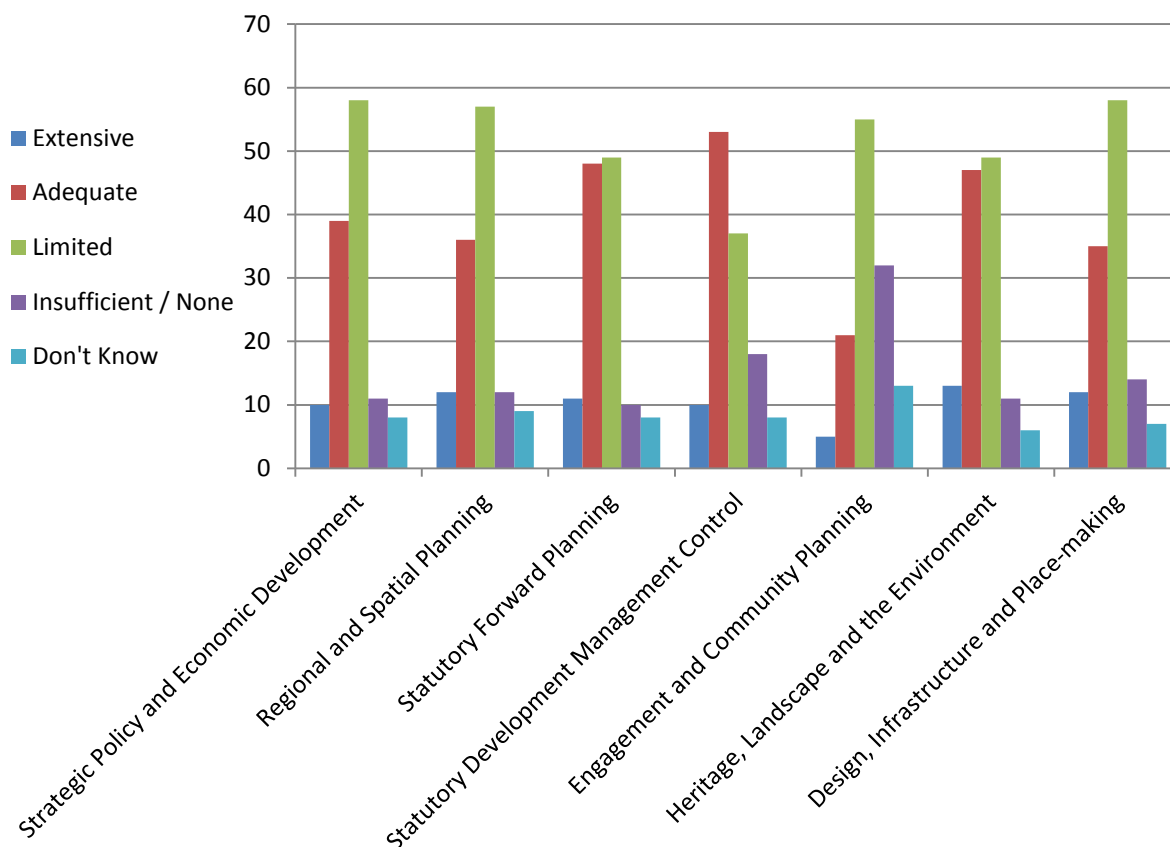
2.19 Significantly, the survey indicates that planners feel that the amount of research material available to support most of the listed planning activities in Ireland is currently inadequate. Only 3-10% of respondents felt that extensive research was available under the given headings and an average of 41% of respondents felt that only limited research information/evidence is available in Ireland for all of the planning activities listed. Three notable planning activities that are reported as having limited or insufficient research attention were Design, Infrastructure and Place-making (57%), Strategic Policy and Economic Development (55%) and Regional and Spatial Planning 55%. This is particularly interesting given the emerging priorities of government for the realignment of regional spatial planning, the formal integration of planning policy with economic performance and the infrastructure deficit. Section 4 of this report (current issues for planning research in Ireland) looks at these issues in greater depth.

2.20 Findings in relation to other individual planning activities are also interesting but, perhaps, they are difficult to explain fully. For example, 'Statutory Development Management and Control' is the only field which more than half of the respondents considered to be adequately supported by data/evidence. This could mean either that the situation is indeed satisfactory or that there is a sense that day to day decision-making in planning – rightly or wrongly – does not need a great deal of research investigation to support or validate it.

2.21 In relation to 'Engagement and Community Planning' the survey suggests that it is under-researched: over a quarter of respondents report that there is insufficient (or no) research currently available in Ireland to support it. Considering that deliberative and communicative planning practice is a dominant theme in scholarly planning circles this seems rather surprising and may warrant

further investigation. It may suggest a real mismatch between the research requirements of practitioners and the kind of theoretical investigations favoured by their counterparts in the academy.

2.22 In general terms, the results from this section point towards a serious deficit in the availability of research to support day to day planning efforts within the profession. It is a concern that so many respondents indicate that there was limited or insufficient supply of data/evidence for all sectors. This indicates a demand within the profession for research of suitable quality and breadth to support their activities in a range of sectors.

Planners' priorities for a research agenda

Key planning topics and subject areas

2.23 The survey asked planners to provide their opinions on the key planning topics and subject areas that should be given priority in a planning research agenda for Ireland. Respondents were asked to select five priority planning topics from the list of initial topics for the planning research agenda that was in identified Section 1 of this report. The 14 subject areas are shown in Table 4 below, ranked by the percentage of people who identified them as important.

Table 4. Importance of various subject areas for a planning research agenda (ranked by percentage of planners identifying them as priorities)

Rank	**Key subject areas** (in order of priority)	%
1	Built Environment and Design	48
	Economy, Competitiveness and Resilience	44
	Infrastructure, Transport, Waste and Water	42
2	Climate and Hazards	40
	Sustainable Land Use	39
	Energy and Technology	39
	Settlement Networks and Hierarchies	38
3	Housing and Residential quality	36
	Healthy Cities and Environments	36
	Cities, Cultural Life and Regeneration	36
4	Rural Issues and Rural Planning	30
	Landscape, Heritage and Tourism/Leisure	25
	Natural Environment and the Green Agenda	21
5	Workplaces, Industry, Agriculture and Business	9

2.24 The table shows that the results reflect a broad range of views regarding the topics that are considered as priorities for a planning research agenda. The built environment, economic resilience and infrastructure were generally seen as having the highest priority and, interestingly, these are also areas for which planners feel that there is limited availability of research at present (see Figure 2 earlier). Whilst there is an evident leaning towards these topics, most other topics were not poorly-supported. At the lower end of the priority scale were: Workplaces, Industry, Agriculture and Business (the lowest ranked topic); Landscape, Heritage and Tourism/leisure (identified as important by a quarter of respondents); and Natural Environment/the Green Agenda (21%). This latter point is difficult to draw conclusions from. Whilst it may be that many planners do not see them as important issues for planning, it may also be that people consider that research in these areas is adequately covered by other research disciplines and specialisms.

2.25 People were also given an opportunity to express their views on what other possible key planning topics might be addressed by a research agenda in planning. Although no new subject area emerged from this, the comments received were interesting. They referred to issues such as: research into the relationship between politics and planning; research into the way that planning decisions are made; research into the relationship between market choices and planning objectives; a general need for proper evidence based planning; and research into ethics and corruption. These comments reflect some of the cross cutting themes that were also addressed in the survey of planners (see below).

2.26 The results indicate a broad spread of opinions regarding planning research priorities, and this variation would suggest that no absolute consensus exists on what areas should be prioritised over others. In addition, it is likely that the broad range of responses reflect the immediate and/or urgent priorities of planners operating in a wide range of capacities and faced with a diversity of professional and applied tasks.

Cross-cutting themes

2.27 Planners were also asked about the kind of approaches to planning – cutting across all these subject areas – that could inform a meaningful planning research agenda. The survey question included the initial list of research themes identified in Section 1 of this report and asked people to rank all of them in terms of high, medium or low priority. Table 5 below gives an indication about how planners see the importance of these themes for research.

Table 5. Importance of various themes for a planning research agenda (ranked by percentage of planners identifying them as priorities)

Rank	**Themes** (in order of priority)	Priority (%)		
		High	Medium	Low
1	Futures, post-recession realities and very long-term planning	70	25	5
	Demographics and the changing needs of populations	57	39	4
	Governance, politics, local government and reform	55	40	5
	Planning at the regional scale	52	43	5
2	Decision-making, Skills and Techniques in planning	50	41	8
	Planning at the National and Transnational scale	49	42	8
	Planning Legislation and regulation: National and EU frameworks	46	44	9
3	Comparative Planning Practice: learning from Different Countries	42	47	11
	Planning as a Profession	40	39	21
	Engagement and Participation in Planning	40	51	9
	Planning at the local scale	40	52	8
4	Probity and Ethics in Planning	35	42	23*
	Education and the planning needs of young people	34	47	19
	Social justice and Equity in Planning	32	51	17
5	Ethno-cultural, Immigration and Gender issues in Planning	15	53	32*

2.28 The results seem to suggest that there is a degree of consensus here. From the top two ranks in the table, there is a strong sense that planning research should be concerned with large scale, strategic and universal questions around futures, demographic change, governance, legislative frameworks, and the capacity of planning to influence sound decision-making.

2.29 It is difficult to draw conclusions about the less popular themes; it may simply be that this reflects the way that some issues or lines of enquiry are quite specialised and, as such, resonate with only certain elements of the profession. Given the recent experience of planning in Ireland – in which serious ethical issues have arisen about relationships between public decision making and the common good[12] – it may be seen as surprising that the theme of 'probity and ethics in planning' does not rank especially high as a research issue. Indeed almost a quarter of all respondents (23%) explicitly state that it is a low priority. It is also interesting that the lowest ranking themes are 'social justice and equity' and 'ethno-cultural, immigration and gender issues in planning'. As these tend to carry significant weight in the world of contemporary planning theory, this may be further evidence of divergence between the academic and practitioner priorities of the planning discipline.

Other themes or principles for planning research

2.30 The questionnaire also invited respondents to make free text suggestions about any other themes or principles that might be included in a planning research agenda. A flavour of these responses is given under some general headings, and in no particular order, in Table 6 below.

Other suggested themes and principles for a research agenda in planning[13] *Table 6.*
Integration   • *Requirement for effective collaboration with other related professions;*   • *Promote spatial planning on the island of Ireland (collaborative border spatial analysis and cooperation);*   • *Shared services and integrative models of service delivery ('community planning') in the border region.*
Planning and the Economy   • *Use of Cost/Benefit analysis of alternative strategies e.g. low density v compact cities/towns;*   • *The impact of planning on economic growth, job creation and its ability to react to changing circumstances;*   • *The economic cost of the planning process and how inadequacies of the system can impact upon the cost of proving commercial, residential and industrial spaces;*   • *Issues related to property, land/site assembly, regeneration, planning gain, incentives, proactive development planning as opposed to reactive regulatory planning, smart growth strategies, land use and transport integration, travel behaviour change, the cost implications of bad/poor planning;*   • *Opportunities to stimulate economic growth in a sustainable plan-led manner;*   • *More explicit and disaggregated connections between policy aims and actual market behaviour, to include improved understanding of market behaviour in various settings.*
Urban Ireland   • *Developing a focus on the future role of Irish cities (outside of Dublin);*   • *Potential for networks of similar-sized cities;*   • *Building for living (housing forms that suit people, especially family-size properties in*

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[12] This is discussed further in Section 4 of this report: Current issues for planning research in Ireland.

[13] Based on free text comments in the questionnaire.

Other suggested themes and principles for a research agenda in planning[13] *Table 6.*
towns and city centres); • *The role of Business Improvement Districts in helping towns and cities compete with private shopping centres;* • *Role and importance of our towns and villages as part of the settlement network;* • *Vibrant main streets in city and town centres and vibrant retail environments;* • *Need for an emphasis on a broader approach to land use integration – where integration is facilitated it generally concerns 'mixed' use in urban areas which roughly translates as mixed commercial and residential uses. Little attention is given to mixed green/blue area usage such as combining water attenuation areas with parkland and biodiversity enhancement.*
Planning for a healthy society • *Planning and Health - with a focus within on the concept of enhanced wellbeing;* • *The walking community;* • *Considering the issue of planning for diversity;* • *The planning needs of older people.*
Resilience and planning • *Tackling the lack of understanding of climate change and climate science within the profession;* • *Planning in relation to the impacts of climate change such as flooding; Flood Risk areas should be re-evaluated for possibly prohibiting new development proposals and designing engineering solutions for flooding;* • *Enhancing the skills of planners in preparing resilient, ethical plans for communities and towns in a global/corporatist economy.*

Other suggested themes and principles for a research agenda in planning
***Table 6** contd.*

Core planning principles

- *Promoting the idea of planning as a practical, common-sense skill incorporating and balancing between the 3 E's of environment (ecological and human-centric), equity, and economy;*
- *Need for a return to core planning principles – with a deep concern for place, folk and work – rather than lurching from trend to trend and diluting the main planning message;*
- *Focus on the important rather than the urgent. The priority should be research that helps to improve the quality of decision-making in the interests of the common good.*
- *Planning Education – is it fit for purpose?*

Planning with infrastructure

- *Considering impacts of new agendas in environmental legislation and the interaction between planning authorities and Irish Water;*
- *Addressing planning for waste management in Ireland, and dealing with the plethora of legislation and policy, which is mostly unclear and contradictory;*
- *Planning for Ireland's energy needs – to include a comprehensive review of current statutory and non-statutory policy and research with a view to bringing clarity to this complex area;*
- *Integration of green infrastructure and ecosystem services into spatial planning as a tool for climate change mitigation and adaptation, supporting biodiversity networks, creating functional spaces, reducing flood risk and supporting long term sustainable development;*
- *Examining the constraints of Strategic Infrastructural Development and coordination with National and Regional Planning Policy;*
- *Improved integration of land use and transportation planning with an emphasis on economic sustainability;*
- *Explaining backbone infrastructure requirements to inform debates;*
- *Need for focus on planning participation in development of infrastructural projects.*

Political and administrative structures for planning

- *Examining planning processes such as Part 8s and the issue of conflict of interest in local government;*
- *Funding of local government and the impacts on spatial planning, in particular its dependence on commercial rates, development contribution schemes?*
- *Strengthening strategic and regional planning; executive powers at regional level; Three regional bodies could replace many County Councils to deal with rural planning and infrastructure;*
- *Town Centre Management; in a more urbanised society town centre management is crucial yet we have abolished town councils in favour of expanded roles for County Councils.*
- *Encouraging meaningful local government reform;*
- *Promoting ethics in planning;*
- *Evidenced based planning and decision making, incorporating the notion of corporate governance within planning, and auditing the plan making process;*
- *Education of Local Representatives on the role of Planning.*

Practical research

- *Enabling tools for district and local level research e.g. retail impact, environmental impact assessments;*
- *Provision of datasets that can be used in the preparation of local planning policy;*
- *Absence of objective quantitative research on the impact of planning decisions. Very little objective monitoring and analysis of decisions;*

- *Monitoring of implementation i.e. the consequences of actual decision making. To what extent are planning applications implemented as proposed. To what extent are conditions actually complied with? How accurate are environmental impact assessments?*
- *Promoting evidence based approaches to plan making;*
- *Examining Ireland's distinctive settlement history, especially at the lower end rural - e.g. clachan, village forms etc. as an alternative to the one-off housing pressures in rural areas.*

Environmental protection and management
- *Planning and urban design in Ireland;*
- *biodiversity, protection of the natural environment and planning policy and practice landscape characterisation at national level to inform regional and local strategies;*
- *Reuse of derelict/unfinished structures;*
- *Design understanding, Urban design analysis;*
- *Cohesive Approach to Improving the Public Realm.*

Additional comments from planners

2.31 The final section of the questionnaire invited people to add some general comments about planning research in Ireland. The results of this section produced some interesting and detailed responses with some insightful observations and suggestions about the research agenda. The following paragraphs draw out some of the main points made and include a small sample of key quotations.

Communicating research

2.32 There were a number of comments about the ways in which research is conducted and specifically about the challenges associated with communicating research outputs and the need to improve the way research outputs are disseminated. In addition, respondents commented on the importance of forming research projects in a way that can effectively influence policy and practice.

- *"Planning jargon is a massive barrier in facilitating participation in the planning process."*
- *"(Research) should be as relevant as possible to local government and communities they serve. Please not too academic. The good work that third level does is poorly distributed. Partner with local authorities on research projects."*
- *"There is a pervasive view within universities that if they can't do research then nobody else can. I have commonly found an attitude of 'problem seeking' when exploring research opportunities"*
- *"Addressing the 'areas for further research' identified in EPA studies. There must be follow through on academic research on whatever aspect you focus on"*
- *"On a daily basis, there will be few with the time to read a review of literature, so if you want impact, it is important to consider how 'concepts' can actually work or be integrated into the work of an everyday planning officer."*
- *"Planning research journals should be readily available in a central resource, perhaps something that (universities) could look at, would be happy be pay an annual fee to access this information from one source. It is critical that any research output is set within the political & cultural realities of its receiving audience."*

A stronger research focus for the discipline of planning

2.33 A number of respondents put forward robust arguments in favour of the profession asserting a stronger research focus and to develop a more confident and persuasive voice with a strong foundation of evidence and inquiry. It was suggested that planning in Ireland had been damaged and

undermined by recent events and that the profession would benefit from research that supported its core principles. This indicated an appetite within the profession for a much stronger research effort.

- *"The priority for planning research should be on finding sustainable paths for recovery with a strong focus on re-vitalising our towns and cities."*
- *"Planning embraces and mingles with so many other professions that it needs to be given a higher priority as opposed to being considered as a negative aspect of development when it really is a driver and delivery vehicle."*
- *"There is a need for greater integration of land use planning with planning of other sectors, most particularly transportation policy, economic policy and housing policy."*
- *"Land use planning thinking in Ireland is too heavily influenced by thinking in England, the Netherlands and other regions of Europe with very high population densities. Greater attention should be focused on countries with settlement patterns more similar to Ireland such as NZ, Australia, Scotland and Norway."*
- *"Broadly speaking there is little emphasis on preparing solid evidence for planning policy decisions in Ireland".*

The funding of planning research

2.34 The issue of how planning research is funded was raised frequently and with some suggestions offered in respect of advancing a research agenda.

- *"In order to further the development of planning research in Ireland it is imperative that planning institutes and others work to ensure that planning research topics are included within the headline topics for major funding agencies, IRC, EPA etc."*
- *"The potential for Government Departments to fund planning related research might …be explored. A policy statement (on) the need for planning related research might be used to leverage and lobby for research funding. In other areas of policy some funding is set aside to encourage research - including PhD and post-doctoral research on important topics".*
- *"It is very difficult for small planning departments to adequately resource research and we tend to rely on consultants. The development possibly of joint research topics between counties may be a solution"*
- *"I'm curious in relation to the statement: a planning research agenda for Ireland. Whose agenda? Who will fund this or carry out the research?"*
- *"In comparison to the jurisdictions in the UK, planning research in Ireland is poorly served. This was the position when there were substantial funds spent on planning and other consultancy work during the 'boom' years and has significantly deteriorated in the wake of the recession."*

Other issues for planning research to address

2.35 Some of the respondents used this section to present suggestions about particular issues that planning research ought to address, and included proposals to focus on both the processes associated with planning as well as its outcomes in real world settings. It ranged from specific recommendations about individual topics to broader observations on what direction research in planning needs to take.

- *"More on the ground survey work of attitudes of people towards the quality of planning in place-making, amenity service provision, quality of life in a variety of residential settings."*

- *"Research into the long-term effectiveness of regulating through planning conditions the occupancy of new housing in rural and urban areas, based on 'local need' criteria-including the regulation of the short-term use of holiday homes."*
- *"A review of the effectiveness of local authority developments under XI of the 2000 Planning Act/PART 8 of the P&D. Regulations 2001 – the quality of the developments compared to private developments, level of adherence to Development Plan policies and standards, level and effectiveness of public participation."*
- *"Planning enforcement-an examination of whether it should be removed from the regular court system and placed within an alternative form of tribunal of inquiry."*
- *"The scope of integrating the building regulations, fire regulations with planning legislation and empower local authorities to become proper all-encompassing building control authorities."*
- *"Appropriate Rural Planning – balancing the needs of rural communities with overall sustainability. Extent of rural one-off development…has far exceeded the planned levels. Disconnect exists between policy and implementation and this presumably affects the overall country"*
- *"The big research issues derive from big global questions: the shift to the urban age, population increase, ageing & migration, dealing with difference & diversity, sustainability & resilience, impact of new governance in more neoliberal times. Planning has to ask itself what are the socio-spatial dimensions of these issues, and how can it make a distinctive contribution to knowledge production in this area."*
- *"Following on from above I would like to see some research on the benefits/drawbacks of planning. Just what does it contribute to the improvement of society in physical social/economic terms? The economic impact of development management decisions and their social consequences are very often entirely unknown."*
- *"Planners should take a lead in this area rather than being limited by what is gathered by other disciplines and fields. Much research is about planning rather than in planning i.e. outsiders' commentaries or views rather than informed learning from participants and their stories / data."*
- *"I graduated from Dublin in 2006 and almost my entire class of 50 people work outside Ireland with little to no prospect of returning. This places a huge gap on the future of the planning industry within Ireland, when those who move forward to retirement leave and there is no one to replace them."*
- *"The SEA process is suffering from the curse of post-rationalisation of pre-determined conclusions. This renders the consideration of 'alternative scenarios' as little more than an exercise in 'straw man' production. I'm aware that the EPA are currently investigating ways to correct this, but more cogent continuing professional development (CPD) rather than another set of guidance is what is required".*

The quality of research

2.36 The issue of research quality emerged in a number of the contributions. Some of the respondents suggested that much planning relied upon poor quality evidence, weak methods and needed to be supported by a much stronger research base than is currently available.

- *"My issue with much planning that has taken place in the past decade is that it's best on very little data (or crude data in some cases), and more on hunches and conventional wisdom. For example, strategic assessments that you would see 5 or 10 years ago indicating happy face/sad face as to whether something was achieved by a plan — ridiculous".*
- *"… the planning profession has produced too many policies that are so general that they are banal (We support fuzzy puppies! Well, who doesn't really?), or that are "unicorns and*

rainbows" -- nice ideas but without any practical checks on what it would take to achieve them". …planning needs more practical number crunching (guided by the opinions and stories of the community and experiences elsewhere), with such number crunching serving as a check as to whether solutions will work or not"

- *"Changing the planning mind set towards holistic planning for sustainable development rather than single element focus, i.e. 'economic', 'social' or 'environmental' Use of GIS in informing land use decisions.*
- *Collaborative planning – considering Dutch models of community involvement, rather than the current tokenism – instilling community ownership/ stewardship for their areas."*
- *"There is a dearth of official applied research in relation to planning in Ireland. This is one of many reasons as to why policy is often generalised and reactionary and the planning system may be regarded as weak"*
- *"The continued easy availability of one-off housing further reduces urban potential by a significant factor. All of this has generally been based on car dependence. Official statistics confirm these trends, despite a raft of well-intended policy and guidance".*
- *"I would particularly like to see this area of research developed i.e. urban efficiency/smart growth/regeneration – what has worked here and/or elsewhere – what could be done here, what would the cost/benefit be and what could the outcomes be...It is impossible for a practitioner to comprehensively address these issues, but they are central if we are not to slip back into a 'business as usual' scenario."*
- *"Planning research results can often quickly become out of date e.g. population projections (both spatial and quantitative) and retail expenditure projections within Ireland have been shown to fluctuate greatly and become rapidly out of date."*

Institutional structures for planning research

2.37 A number of respondents addressed the institutional and organisational dimensions of facilitating an enhanced research agenda for planning in Ireland and discussed ideas about how to deliver and organise research.

- *"An Foras Forbartha was disbanded over 30 years ago. There is a need to replace this with a body which will carry out planning research."*
- *"The need for more inter-disciplinary research collaboration across academia in these islands as part of a more global research networking."*
- *"Recognition that the academy is an important but not exclusive site of knowledge production, and that strategic partnerships for knowledge exchange are needed with many other relevant stakeholders in civic society."*
- *"Dissolution of An Foras Forbartha has not been addressed there is a need for independent research to inform policy and practice across many areas of planning – travel and transport, settlements demographics, end user surveys, retailing, rural areas ,recreation and access to the countryside and coast, adequacy of and importance of water resource protection policy. Also, reviews of planning practice/performance in each planning authority to inform future approaches."*
- *"While studying for my Masters in Town Planning, it was extremely easy to source planning journals, research and academic material. As a practicing planner it is more difficult and restrictive. Also there is limited sharing of information between local authorities. This access and sharing of information should be something that is reviewed and examined."*
- *"Re-establish An Foras Forbartha! Planning research in Ireland in my opinion is the preserve of academics…(which)… does not influence the decision making process….This can only be rectified by the establishment of a planning body or agency at national level who can inform and influence the formulation of national policy. This must also be supported by regional and*

county level research. Far too often planning guidelines and policy formulated by the DECLG is applied directly at local level. There needs to be a greater understanding of and application of national policy locally. Not just the replication of stock standards and policy requirements."

Research needs of planners in Ireland: Some concluding remarks

2.38 In summary, it is clear that the planning profession has a high regard for research and indeed that – in one way or another – research forms a significant part of the work that planners do. There is no sign that the need and appetite for research and evidence to guide the work of planners has diminished.

2.39 The headline finding from this section of the report is that the survey points towards a serious deficit in the availability of research to support day to day planning efforts within the profession. It is a concern that so many respondents indicate that there was limited or insufficient supply of data/evidence for all sectors.

2.40 Generally though planners have an open and flexible approach to research. They consider that quantitative, spatial and qualitative data are all important for planning work. Because many planning tasks rely on a variety of data types and evidence, planners – by and large – seem to be comfortable drawing on applied, academic and commercial research outputs in different combinations as the need arises.

2.41 This survey also confirms however that the gap between academic research and practice remains wide. It suggests that planners in academia have a preference towards academically classified material while non-academic planners rank its usefulness at the lowest level. Worryingly, this suggests that there are two distinct research communities, producing research not for each other but for their own purposes. Of planners in practice in Ireland fewer than 1 in 10 said that they consulted academic journals more than occasionally and over three quarters have limited or no access to planning journals. This raises questions about the effectiveness of academic planning research and the degree to which it is likely to penetrate practice and inform policy-making.

2.42 In some ways none of this is unexpected. Krizek et al. (2010, p.461) suggest that the academy-practice divide reflects entrenched positions based on different views on the source of the problem: "The divide between research and practice is wide in the field of planning. Practitioners yearn for researchers to do a better job in making their findings applicable to day-to-day situations; conversely, researchers yearn for practitioners who can find time to read and incorporate their research outcomes".[14]

2.43 Having said that, it would be misleading to suggest that the difference in priorities between practitioners and academics is the primary issue facing a planning research agenda. Practitioners are more likely to look to consultants or in-house teams to satisfy much of their immediate evidence-gathering needs. Their demand for research appears to be instantaneous, highly practical and applied, and perhaps it is reasonable not to expect the academy to respond to these needs. Yet for all that the research is still valid and the academy needs to take account of it. Indeed, the problem with transferability of findings may also extend to sources of data/evidence other than that produced by the academy. Access to locally-generated, bespoke, or applied research – which is either unpublished, of limited availability and/or not organised systematically – is also likely to be problematic (though not explored specifically in this survey).

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[14] Krizek K., Forsyth A. and Slotterback C. S., (2010), Is There a Role for Evidence-Based Practice in Urban Planning and Policy?, *Planning Theory & Practice*, pp.459-478.

2.44 On the whole it is important to point out that members of the planning profession – both practitioner and academic – have serious concerns that the planning research effort as a whole is ineffective and lacks both focus and impact. In terms of a research agenda, planners feel that planning research should orient itself to the key concerns of the planning discipline. The research evidence to support planning should be robust and of the highest quality so that it enhances the capacity of planners to act authoritatively and with confidence. There is also a strong sense that the outputs of planning research must be communicated more clearly and more widely among participants in planning processes. It should also be well co-ordinated and funded with proper structures in place and well defined priorities that aligned it to policy making at the highest level.

Section 3: Overview of the current situation

3.1 In this section, we draw attention to two particular types of existing resources in planning research: the applied work of the planning schools and other selected research units; and an examination of how planning practice is addressed in academic planning journals. Whist it is not intended to be an authoritative statement of the state of play of planning research in Ireland, it gives a flavour of the current situation.

Planning schools

3.2 The planning schools – those that are accredited by the professional planning institutes – are an intrinsic part of the planning discipline here in Ireland. In many cases a substantial proportion of their teaching staff and researchers are drawn from the planning profession and the ethos of the accredited programmes places a strong emphasis on the value of planning research, evidence-based practice and the academic credentials of planning as a learned profession.[15]

The Planning School at University College Dublin

3.3 UCD has the largest cohort of planning researchers of the planning schools in the Republic of Ireland (www.ucd.ie/gpep/research). With specialists in fields such as planning and environmental law, spatial governance, rural planning property and community/civil society, the school covers a wide range of topics in its research effort. Its outputs are published widely in academic journals and commissioned research reports. It is affiliated to two relevant interdisciplinary research bodies: Urban Institute Ireland (www.ucd.ie/uii) and UCD Earth Institute (www.ucd.ie/earth).

The Planning School at Queens University Belfast

3.4 The scholarly output of planning researchers at QUB has a long track record of high quality research and its outputs are found in a wide range of international planning journals and reports. The University's Institute of Spatial and Environmental Planning,[16] which is an important research centre in the field of planning covering a wide variety of subject areas, has over 14 research staff and a strong cohort of PhD and post-doctoral researchers.

The Planning School at Dublin Institute of Technology

3.5 The DIT planning school,[17] embedded in the school of spatial planning and transport engineering, is closely aligned to the fields of environmental management, urban design and spatial planning. The research work of its Futures Academy contributed to debates about future spatial configurations for Ireland. Other research outputs work have looked at issues such as changing workplaces, the future of Irish Gateway towns and cities, and the Dublin-Belfast corridor.

The Planning School at University College Cork

3.6 Established in 2006, the primary focus for the UCC Centre for Planning Education (http://mplan.ucc.ie) has been on professional education in planning. With an academic staff chiefly drawn from planning practice, it is currently expanding its research profile in a number of practice-related areas including: spatial planning at the metropolitan and regional level; housing policy and

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[15] See for example the Education Guidelines of the Irish Planning Institute and the criteria for 'effective planning schools' of the Royal Town Planning Institute.
[16] http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/TheInstituteofSpatialandEnvironmentalPlanning/
[17] https://www.dit.ie/spatialplanningtransportengineering/environmentandplanning/

community needs; planning for local government reform; land use and employment; the relationship between landscape policy and planning; and an evidence base for sustainable settlement policies in planning.

The Planning School at the University of Ulster

3.7 The research work of the University of Ulster planning school is co-ordinated through the Centre for Research in Property and Planning (www.rpp.ulster.ac.uk/). In keeping with the school's close ties to the surveying profession, the research output has an interdisciplinary focus covering property and real estate issues, the development and investment climate, as well as housing, regeneration and other planning/transport topics.

Other research organisations

3.8 It is acknowledged that university researchers in other disciplines – outside the planning schools – also explore topics and processes relevant to and about planning. However, because the focus of this report is on research within the field of planning itself, it is reasonable to identify the planning schools are the key third level stakeholders in planning research here. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the contributions to planning-related research of other key organisations.

3.9 Even though it is not a planning school, the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Research (NIRSA) has recently carried out a lot of important research work on spatial planning in Ireland (www.maynoothuniversity.ie/nirsa/). As well as its well-publicised work on unfinished housing estates and other topical issues, NIRSA's contribution to planning research also extends to being the Irish focus for ESPON and the development of the All Ireland Research Observatory (AIRO) http://airo.maynoothuniversity.ie/

3.10 The reports, seminars and working papers of the International Centre for Local and Regional Development ICLRD (http://iclrd.org/) have become an important research resource for planning in Ireland. A north-south partnership with a US dimension, its work in relation to cross-border planning issues and community/political engagement in planning is notable. Based in Co. Armagh, the centre's contribution to the AIRO initiative is also significant.

3.11 The research remit of the national Economic and Social Research institute (www.esri.ie/) is a very broad one which, though not incorporating a specific planning strand, is a rich repository of evidence and research project about the economic and social life of the country. Along with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – which supports a range of projects and studies relevant to planning – it is considered to be an important support agency in the implementation of a research strategy for planning in Ireland.

Planning journals and day-to-day planning practice

3.12 In this part of the report we analyse a selection of English-language planning journals to gauge the extent to which day-to-day planning practice is found in peer-reviewed scholarly outputs. Whilst it is not an exhaustive analysis of how the planning academy addresses planning practice, it does give a general sense of how it is valued as a subject for research enquiry. The output of planning journals has systematically been studied before (such as for evidence of how American and British authors dominate the literature, or how the various journals achieve 'ranking' credentials for scholarly work). The journals used in two of these articles – Webster et al. (2006) and Stiffel et al.

(2007)[18] – were the starting point for compiling our list of journals for examination. Highly specialised titles which would not be expected to address current practice (such as those that deal with planning history, planning education or exclusively with advanced planning theory) were omitted and the list was narrowed down to the eleven titles[19] shown in see Table 7.

Table 7. Number of articles in selected English language planning journals January 2006 – December 2012 inclusive

Selected planning journals 2006 -2012	All items	Academic articles
Environment and Planning A	1333	1105
Environment and Planning B	577	409
European Planning Studies	691	583
International Journal of Urban and Regional Research	647	417
International Planning Studies	196	133
Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning	184	137
Journal of Planning Literature	125	64
Planning Perspectives	258	158
Planning Practice and Research	241	210
Planning Theory and Practice	243	144
Town Planning Review	290	213
TOTAL	4785	**3573**

Method of analysis

3.13 A database was prepared of titles and abstracts for all items in a seven-year period of these journals (2006 to 2012 inclusive). By omitting editorial material, opinion pieces and reviews, this initial list of 4,785 items was narrowed down to 3,573 academic papers to become our study sample (table 2). Analysis then consisted of interrogating both titles and abstracts with word searches for relevant key words or combinations of words. To begin with, simple searches were made for the terms 'practice', and 'Ireland'. More detailed searches were then carried out for terms that associated with day to day planning practice.[20] A summary of some of the results are shown in Table 3.

3.14 Not surprisingly, the international planning journals do not address planning issues in Ireland to any great extent. Only 37 papers out of the full sample (3,573) mention Ireland in the title or the abstract (table 8). The subset of academic articles that relate to 'day to day planning practice' (see below) includes only a slightly higher proportion of articles about Ireland but this still represents only 1% of the total. While this is not to say that the scholarly learning found in these journals is not

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[18] See for example Webster, C. (2006), Ranking Planning Journals. Editorial. *Environment and Planning B* vol. 3 pp. 485-490; and Stiffel, B., & Mukhopadhyay, C. (2007), Thoughts on an Anglo-American hegemony in planning scholarship. *Town Planning Review* 78 (5), pp. 545- 572.

[19] Other journals such as *Cities* and *Urban Studies* also address planning topics but they were omitted here as they belong to the broader discipline of geography. Following on the survey of planners (section 3) it is suggested that future analysis of this kind might consider including *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* and *Journal of Land Use Policy.*

[20] The terms used for this analysis were: 'permission', 'land use', 'zoning', 'development control', 'guidelines', 'statutory', 'plans', 'enforcement', 'regulation', 'planning authorities', and 'settlements'. Clearly this is not an exhaustive list (excluding for example planning at higher spatial scales) but they are considered to represent the kind of key activities that most planners in Ireland are involved in on a day to day basis.

relevant to planning in Ireland, it does point to the need for a specific outlet for Irish academic research in the field.

Table 8. Number and percentage of articles that relate to day-to-day planning practice or to Ireland (percentages rounded to nearest whole number)

|	Academic articles	Day to day planning practice		Ireland	
Planning journals 2006-2012	No.	No.	%	No.	%
Environment and Planning A	1105	90	8	11	<1
Environment and Planning B	409	70	17	0	0
European Planning Studies	583	56	10	10	<1
International Journal of Urban & Regional Research	417	49	12	2	<1
International Planning Studies	133	31	23*	2	<1
Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning	137	19	14	3	<1
Journal of Planning Literature	64	9	14	0	0
Planning Perspectives	158	27	17	0	O
Planning Practice and Research	210	49	23*	3	<1
Planning Theory and Practice	144	26	18	6	<1
Town Planning Review	213	52	24*	0	0
TOTAL	**3573**	**478**	**13**	**37**	<1

Planning practice

3.15 A simple word search of the word 'practice' in the titles and abstracts of these papers shows that it turns up in just 108 (or around 3%) of cases. This is not the full picture however. By searching for the common terms that we would associate with the day-to-day work of planners (who are overwhelmingly involved with planning applications and development plan policy) we find that the figure is significantly higher. The key finding here is that 478 articles – representing 13% of the total – address some aspect of day-to-day planning practice.

3.16 This percentage varies somewhat across the various publications with just under a quarter of articles in *Town Planning Review*, *International Planning Studies* and *Planning Practice and Research* (24%, 23% and 23% respectively) dealing with day-to-day practice in some form or another. Without a more detailed analysis of all of these academic papers it is difficult to assess whether this is an unacceptably low figure or not for such an applied and practice-focused discipline as planning.

3.17 Of the articles that do look at planning practice, a quick look at the breakdown of search terms representing day-to-day practice (see Figure 2 below) gives an idea of where the emphasis lies. The terms 'land use' and 'regulation' appear most frequently (they occur in 29% and 33% or practice related research papers respectively) with some quite crucial areas of work for practitioners (e.g. development control, planning permission and enforcement) barely registering. Indeed these three latter categories together are found in only 31 out of over 3,500 academic planning articles in the full sample for this seven year period.

Figure 2. Percentage of occurrence of various subjects in journal articles dealing with day-today planning practice
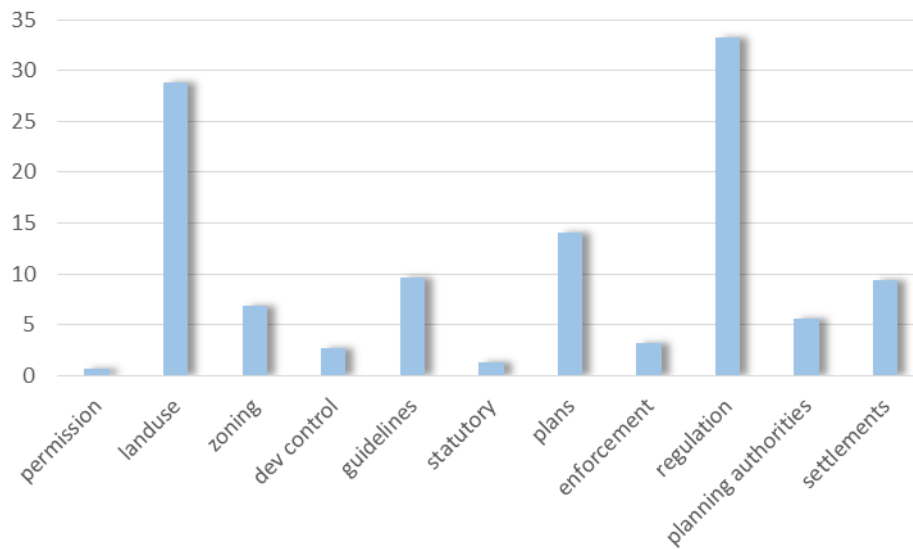
3.18 In summary, this short analysis suggests quite clearly that practice is not a key focus for planning academics and that many of the planning journals examined here may not be significant resources for the kind of research support that practitioners need. This is examined further in section 3 below.

Pleanáil

3.19 It is also worth acknowledging here that The Irish Planning Institute has published its occasional journal *Pleanáil* since 1982 and, to date 20 editions have appeared (with two student editions in 2013 and 2014). Over the years, *Pleanáil* has become a rich repository of reviews, case studies, opinion pieces and research articles covering a wide range of topics that are relevant to planning practice in Ireland.[21] Though it does provide an outlet for research work in planning, this is not a peer-reviewed publication and as such it lacks the kind of ranking credentials that are the key metrics for academic researchers.

Journals and the planning academy

3.20 This brings into focus the question of exploratory research and the priorities of academic researchers. Career planning scholars are increasingly assessed (for career progression purposes and benchmarks of research excellence) by indicators such as these (Ellis, 2010) and so they generally seek to publish in ranking journals regardless of the disciplinary field they belong to. In this scenario, planning researchers, in order to be published, have to conform to the ethos and editorial mission of publishers that may not be familiar with (or interested in) the kind of planning discourses or issues that a research agenda in planning would be grounded in. For the same reasons the prospects for a solid trance of practice focused research to emerge in such journals are also weak.

3.21 However, as outlined in section 1 of this report, it is important to remember that the role of the planning academy is also to critique practice and to query the purpose, nature and form of inquiry as a whole within the discipline. Its mission is not solely to support practitioners and policy makers in their work. Academic research is considered also to be a reflective instrument that challenges policy

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[21] Irish Planning Institute (2007), CD Archive of Pleanáil: Journal of the Irish Planning Institute. Vols. 1-16. IPI, Dublin.

and policy makers and does not take the view that value consensus is necessary for useful research. According to Weiss (1977)[22], instead of fulfilling a demand-led approach, this 'enlightenment model' suggests that "research provides the intellectual background of concepts, orientations and empirical generalizations that inform policy". Indeed decision makers often believe that it is a good thing to have "controversial research, challenging research, research that makes them rethink comfortable assumptions" (Weiss, 1977, p. 324).

3.22 This understandable diversity of expectations within the policy-making, academic and practitioner communities regarding the purpose and role of research is explored further in section 3 of this report which in a general way examines the research needs of people within the profession.

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[22] Weiss, C. H. (1977), Research for Policy's sake; the enlightenment function of social research. In Miyakawa, T (ed.) (1999) 'The Science of Public Policy – Essential readings in policy sciences'. Routledge, pp.314–325.

Section 4: Current issues for planning research in Ireland

4.1 As outlined in section 1 of this report, the priorities for planning research in Ireland – both in terms of the substantive issues involved and the procedural mechanisms at play – must focus on the long term and enduring challenges that planning has to deal with. Based on the findings of recent documents that set out the high level challenges facing planning in Ireland today, this section sets out, in a pragmatic way, to frame some of the key issues that are driving official planning concerns.

4.2 The context for this, in many respects, is the sense that planning in Ireland has experienced a "perfect storm" since the beginning of the 21st century. A phase of unparalleled economic and population growth led to extreme pressures for change in the built environment and posed particular challenges for achieving balanced levels of spatial development. The all but complete collapse of the construction industry and housing development in particular following the subsequent recession exposed gross levels of over zoning in development plans which were only in part explained by the economic collapse. Evidence from the Mahon Tribunal showed that certain elements of our decision-making processes had been corrupted with a strong sense that speculation and personal gain had been placed above the public good. These upheavals have brought into question the relationship between political life, environmental priorities and social justice. Though these breakdowns were specific rather than systemic they have shone a spotlight on how planning works in Ireland and on the particular need to strengthen the evidence base so that planning decisions can not only be more rationally informed but that they also can be seen as such by society in general.

The Mahon tribunal and its aftermath

4.3 Planning was just one of the eight issues investigated by the Mahon Tribunal [23] and whilst the criticisms of the planning system should not be underestimated it did suffer considerably by association with the other issues addressed by the Tribunal. In the end the Tribunal's recommendations for the planning system were generally focussed on ways to improve transparency and accountability within the system (Ch. 18, pages 2543-2545). Specific proposals – amongst others – were to establish an independent national regulator, to strengthen regional oversight, to establish a more formal status for national planning guidance, and a range of more detailed proposals to improve the transparency of both plan-making and development management. The majority of these recommendations have been acted on[24] although some, including the appointment of the Regulator, are still to be implemented.

4.4 Two other contemporary reports are important to mention from the point of view of how planning processes operate at the local level. These are a review of the planning system published by An Taisce (2012)[25] and an official 2012 report[26] into the activities of six planning authorities. Whilst the An Taisce report had a broader remit and challenged the objectivity of the Planning Review report in some aspects, both of these reports (along with an independent review of the official report in 2013)[27] address the quality of planning decisions and the transparency and consistency of officer's reports and member's decisions. Though these particular issues are in some respects still

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[23] Mahon (2012) Executive Summary paragraph 1.05.

[24] Dept of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2012c), Official response to the Final Report Recommendations of the Mahon Tribunal pages 2-3).

[25] An Taisce (2012), State of the Nation: A Review of Ireland's Planning System 2000–2011.

[26] Dept of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2012a). Planning Review Report. Dublin

[27] Van der Kamp (2013), Independent evaluation of the Planning Review Report June 2012. Report to the Minister of Housing and Planning.

unresolved, they highlight the importance of having appropriate research evidence to support day to day planning practice. Indeed the latter investigation is the subject of an even more recent report (McCabe Durney Barnes, 2015) which makes clear recommendations to the Minister thus further highlighting the need for research based oversight and review of decision-making in planning.

The recession

4.5 The An Taisce report highlighted the amount of over-zoning that had occurred in the early years of the 21st century and drew attention to what it called "poor quality development, reckless over zoning, chaotic sprawl and ghost development" a situation confirmed in respect of over-zoning and vacant housing estates by the government's own figures. Whilst this issue was exposed in an extreme way by the collapse of the construction sector in the recession, it was not caused by the recession; rather it is evidence, in many instances, of dysfunctional practice in decision-making. On the other hand, examples of incomplete or abandoned housing developments are not in themselves evidence of erroneous planning decisions. In many cases the locations, housing mix, proximity to services and design were quite appropriate and decisions were properly based on local housing and social needs; the problems instead were related to temporary constraints on bank lending and development finance.

4.6 The other significant issue exposed by the recession is the collapse of the financial contributions derived from the construction industry but secured by the planning system. The acceptance that betterment in land values arising from the planning system should be, at least in some way, recouped is well established internationally. There are few "perfect" systems but again in the early years of the 21st century the system in Ireland could have been said to have worked well in delivering developer contributions in respect of infrastructure and social and affordable housing. In a booming market significant funds were being raised with little opposition from the market. The system has to a great extent collapsed and across the board previous requirements have been relaxed. Not surprisingly these contributions are now viewed as significant break on the revival of the construction industry rather than a reasonable redistribution of betterment value derived from the operation of the planning system. This has left a large deficit in the funding available for infrastructure development.

4.7 For the time being, government is quite clear that re-starting the construction industry and supporting economic growth has priority over the capture of betterment values arising from the operation of the planning system. This situation is not surprising and is reflected in the response to the recession in other jurisdictions. What is not yet clear is the likely attitude to developer contributions for infrastructure and social and affordable housing when and if the development industry regains its ability to make significant contributions to this public investment. In 2006 developer contributions to public infrastructure derived from planning permissions totalled €670m by 2011 this had dropped to €82m. Whilst this drop can readily be accounted for in the steep drop in development and therefore the demand for infrastructure it does provide an indication as to the likely costs of servicing development. Whether this level of private contribution (or taxation) will ever be recovered and the levels of public investment that will be needed to service growth in the future will be an important issue in the future.

New legislation and core strategies

4.8 The main legislative response to the Mahon Tribunal and the recession was the Planning and Development Amendment Act 2010. The new Act introduced development plan Core Strategies which are intended to:

"…provide an integrated approach to national, regional and local planning issues, which will help to bring about:

- A more rational, evidence based approach to the identification of future development land requirements,
- Greater co-ordination and cost effectiveness in delivering essential physical and social infrastructure; and
- Better conditions for investment and economic recovery."

– and these aims succinctly combine the Tribunal's recommendation for rational evidence based planning with the delivery of economic recovery.

4.9 Core strategies[28] were produced ether as amendments to existing plans or incorporated into new plans that were under preparation. The speed with which Core Strategies were produced was commendable the degree to which they used a clear evidence base to transparently deal with the over zoning of land was less commendable. Over-zoning remains an issue in many areas. What is clear from research carried out by the UCC Centre for Planning Education and Research (O'Neill, 2014)[29] is that continuing research data and advice is still needed to not only correct the immediate effects of the problem but also to identify both the underlying shortcomings that allowed it to happen and any other factors that could lead to future unsustainable decision-making. While overall population and household projections in different cities and counties may now tally quite well with regional and national figures, the real effects in terms of the sustainability of the proposed settlement networks and the distribution of growth (including jobs and homes) within and across administrative boundaries are far from clear.

The planning regulator

4.10 While the regulator is not yet in post, the heads of a new Planning and Development Bill to confirms duties, resources and organisational arrangements for the regulator whose office will:

- have responsibility to check on the quality of forward planning decisions;
- have functions regarding planning research, education and investigation;
- have responsibility to review and assess all forward planning functions by local authorities– such as the drafting of city and county development plans;
- have the power to advise the Minister to reject or overturn part or all of a plan where it is not up to scratch.

The Office would be staffed and resourced, in so far as possible, by staff taken on secondment or on a permanent basis from An Bord Pleanála. When announcing the decision the Minister said:

"Evidence based, proper forward planning is essential for our country's future. We need to ensure that the decisions we take regarding local and regional development facilitate sustainable development and enhance the lives of our citizens and the communities in which we live."

There is clearly more detail to be announced regarding how the Regulator will go about her or his duties and how these functions will dovetail with the oversight roles of the new regional assemblies

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[28] Grist, B. (2012), Development Plans, Core Strategies and Planning Compensation. *Irish Planning and Environmental Law Journal,* 19**,** 77.

[29] O'Neill, C. (2014), "A Review of Ireland's Core Strategy Provision and the Prospects for Reform", Centre for Planning Education and Research UCC.

(see below) but there is the potential for these arrangements to herald a new era of rigorous, research- and evidence-based practice particularly in respect of forward planning.

The new regions

4.11 In October 2012 changes to the regional organisation of Ireland were announced. The previous eight regional authorities and two regional assemblies will be replaced by three regional assemblies supported by tree regional authorities. The departmental report setting out these changes[30] stated the following:

> "The most important specific function performed by regional authorities is the adoption of statutory Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) and oversight of their implementation in the statutory development plan process at local authority level, as provided in Planning legislation. Otherwise, regional authorities do not have executive, regulatory or service delivery functions. The principal purposes of RPGs are –
>
> - to link the planning process at city and county level to national strategic spatial planning policies under the Government's National Spatial Strategy (NSS) with a view to achieving balanced regional development and proper planning and sustainable development, and
> - to coordinate the development plans of local authorities and their approach to the level and distribution of future employment, housing and retail development and environmental considerations." (DECLG, 2012b)

The report went on to identify other planning related roles for the new Assemblies:

> "Regional authorities are also involved in a range of co-ordination type projects, networks and studies, acting with, or on behalf of, their constituent local authorities and other bodies, with the general objective of facilitating the development of cost-effective regional approaches to various areas of policy."

These proposals are, not surprisingly, very similar to the ill-fated arrangements in England which were abolished by the incoming coalition government in Britain in 2010:

> "Today I'm revoking regional plans with immediate effect – hammering another nail in the coffin of unwanted and an unaccountable regional bureaucracy." (Pickles, E July 2010 Press release by Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government)

4.12 It will be important that Ireland learns the lessons and acknowledges the severe political tensions that can arise from strong regional planning and policy development. This is particularly relevant to the regional allocation of resources and the spatial distribution of opportunities for and to restrict development. To date the Ireland's spatial policies have been able to point to growth and development as a universal panacea for the problems at all points of the settlement hierarchy it is not unreasonable to anticipate that new national and regional policy manage and in some cases ration in the national benefit. All these actions when seen together herald a significant change to the planning regime in Ireland with more oversight, more reliance on sound data and more transparency of process. As the political rhetoric always emphasises, this will require more consistency, clarity and evidence in planning practice and will define the priorities of much planning research.

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[30] Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government October (2012b), Putting People First Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Stationery Office, Dublin.

Integrating spatial and economic policy

4.13 The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government's 2012 report "Putting People First" (DECLG, 2012b) also announced the coupling of spatial and economic policy at a regional and local level. The report states that in future "Local authorities will adopt an economic development plan in conjunction with the overall City/County Development Plan to guide economic development action. The local economic development plan will align with, and form an implementation mechanism for, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy". This proposal reconfirms two aspects of the emerging agenda. Firstly, linking spatial and economic policy and secondly consolidating the hierarchical structures or both spatial and economic planning. One aspect of this consolidation that is not addressed is the development of the skill sets which will be required to bring these two agendas together at local regional and national level.

Urbanisation and settlement shrinkage:

4.14 Much less emphasised is the unresolved nature of the relationship and status of urban and rural policy. Ireland shows steady but clear trends of urbanisation. Having maintained a strong rural character throughout the twentieth century the urbanisation of the territory is not emphasised indeed some might argue that Ireland lacks comprehensive or effective urban planning policies compared with comparatively extensive concerns for the rural areas. Ireland's planning response to settlement shrinkage and population decline is to stem the tide of decline rather than to manage it. This situation in microcosm is similar to that being experienced by many developing countries to some extent this understandable but simplistic responses to rural decline compromises the development of appropriate spatial policy which to a degree accentuated some of the problems associated with the boom and following recession. A consensus approach seeing settlement growth as a universal rather than modulated phenomenon leads to aspirational rather than rational policy.

4.15 The linking of spatial and economic policy will prompt concern about the links between urbanisation – or at least urban concentration – with economic growth. Whilst conclusive links will continue to be debated there is general recognition of the relationship between the scale and nature of urban areas with economic growth. This will in turn generate questions as to the optimal distribution of population and the balance between urban and rural Ireland and the policies that will best lead to more evenly spread prosperity.

Water and energy

4.16 Water has not previously been a major policy concern for Ireland. With a few exceptions, shortages or concerns about water quality have been rare and river management has been calmly controlled. However, that has begun to change and three major interventions are now in hand. Flooding events which were considered to be manageably infrequent are now seen to threaten many areas. All the significant urban areas in Ireland are coastal or built around major watercourses (or in many both). Flooding and river basin management is now a serious concern and much significant work has begun tackling the immediate problems and to some extent developing long term solutions. The response which has been to carry out extensive Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management studies led by the Office of Public Works are now beginning to move to major implementation phase. These precautionary works will have a significant impact on many towns and cities in the country.

4.17 The objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) are to protect all high status waters, prevent further deterioration of all waters and to restore degraded surface and ground

waters to good status. The Environmental Protection Agency is leading a major programme to achieve this ambitious target by 2015.

4.18 In respect of water and sewerage development the recession precipitated the restructuring of the water industry. Following strong prompting by the IMF and EU as part of the financial "bail out" Ireland has effectively privatised its water services, this combined with the significant deficit in water infrastructure means that in the near future the new organisation Irish Water will be a very significant determinant of spatial planning and the precise location where development takes place. The scale of this project cannot be underestimated. For example, in the 28 plan locations identified for housing in the Draft Cork County Council Development Plan 2013, 23 of the locations are constrained to some degree by the lack of programmed water infrastructure development. There is little to suggest that this situation is not reflected elsewhere in the state.

4.19 So the effects of climate change, the interventions of the EU to secure high quality water surface and ground waters and the effectively privatised provision of water supply and sewage management when combined will have significant bearing on the future spatial development and environmental quality of the country. Coordinating these different but linked initiatives will require a strong evidential base to the emerging policy.

4.20 Again as elsewhere Ireland is grappling with the spatial planning of energy and resource development. Two overriding issues prevail; the development of renewable energy resources is creating difficult planning issues in both the construction of new facilities and also in the transmission of the energy source. The Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland (May 2014)[31] identifies three specific issues with clear spatial dimensions that need to be considered:

- How increasing shares of renewable electricity can be integrated to the Irish electricity grid while at the same time meet increasing electricity demand
- What needs to be done to improve the planning process of energy infrastructure in terms of empowering stakeholders and increasing efficiency for project developers?
- Is Ireland's electricity and gas infrastructure – including, but not limited to, interconnection – sufficiently developed for Ireland to be able to achieve the benefits of European market integration at least cost? How should Ireland continue to improve electricity and gas interconnections in the context of this integration and its security of supply policy objectives? What additional steps could be taken to facilitate this improvement?"

Investment in major energy infrastructure will be a key national priority in coming years. The recent public outcry at the potential impact of new grid transmission infrastructure and the on-going challenges to renewable generation investment will be an important spatial planning issue in the coming years.

Landscape

4.21 The planning system is the vehicle of choice for implementing various national policies and strategies and the State's obligations under various international instruments (such as the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directives and the Birds and Habitats Directives) have been fulfilled by making appropriate provisions in planning legislation. A recent example of this – which is likely to have significant research component for planning in the near future – is the formal recognition of the European Landscape Convention in the 2010 Planning and Development (Amendment) Act. This places an obligation on all planning authorities to broaden the way they examine landscape issues

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[31] Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (2014), The Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland .

beyond the traditional focus on special or high quality landscapes. The National Landscape Strategy Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2014, 2015) develops this further and places a particular responsibilities on the planning system for implementing it.

4.22 In terms of the planning research agenda this raises a particular set of challenges, not least in the sense that while landscape is an area of interest for a whole range of disciplines from the humanities, the social sciences, the environmental sciences and the law, there is little to suggest that there is genuine cross-disciplinary understanding of how day to day decisions about landscape can best be made for the common good. For example, the very real questions of how to reconcile national priorities for providing energy infrastructure (including power lines and renewable energy projects) with local the aesthetic or cultural considerations and visual impacts are crucial issues for planning and planning authorities. It can also be divisive and complicated for communities and for investors, especially where there is no clear policy framework at a local level to balance these competing demands. Whilst there is quite a rich research environment for examining cultural, ecological or geo-physical layers of landscape within different disciplines (or indeed for the technical and scientific aspects of energy generation and transmission) it is at the interface of these areas of interest that planning comes into its own with a very particular set of research needs and priorities to support effective decision-making.

Conclusions

4.23 This section has drawn out some of the more prominent issues that need special attention in planning today. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list - and the issues are inevitably characterised by a short and medium term timescale – they are a strong reflection what could be described as the current planning agenda in Ireland.

Section 5: Steps towards a planning research agenda

5.1 In identifying the scope of a planning research agenda for Ireland a question of equal concern is how this agenda might be delivered. To address the question of delivery in a comprehensive way would require consideration of matters beyond the remit of this report but there are a number of issues which will directly influence the delivery of the research agenda and consequently its success. Some of these issues are universal and some specific to Ireland; we consider that both will be relevant to the delivery of a future planning research agenda and it is worth drawing attention to them here.

The research to practice gap

5.2 One consistent message emanating from our survey of planners is that there is both a real and perceived gap between the planning research community and practitioners. This gap is not exclusive to Ireland - nor to the planning discipline – but it has long been apparent: in a regularly quoted article from 1997, E. R. Alexander (1997) stated that: "…for as long as I can remember people have bemoaned the divorce between planning theory and planning practice".[32] Explanations for the gap and suggestions as to how it might be overcome have been discussed both in academic papers (Davoudi, 2006) and by the RTPI (Ellis, 2010). Improved communication and staff transfer between practice and the academy are the usual recommended solutions but it is clear from this study that the gap persists and is a matter for concern. There is even a suggestion that the gap is widening as the academy is drawn away from local applied research and as transfers between practice and the academy become harder to secure.

5.3 Dr Geraint Ellis in the conclusions to his report for the RTPI on "The Future of the Planning Academy" indicates that significant changes have occurred in both the planning academy and planning practice:

> "The main report highlights the substantial changes that have occurred in both higher education and planning practice over the last twenty years. Most of these changes have placed increasing pressure on the academic-practitioner relationship, particularly the changing composition of the academy, the capacity of the academy to work on professionally-related issues and the perception of the academy held by the wider profession. Above everything else, the project underlines the importance of viewing the planning academy as an intrinsic part of the planning profession, rather than an eccentric fringe group or contract supplier of education services. There is a strong feeling amongst both practice and the academy that the relationship has begun to break down and that there is a need to reconnect and increase dialogue between them."(Ellis 2010)

5.4 One of the most interesting points to come from our work is that the demand and respect for research from the world of planning practice has not diminished and, though it is particularly difficult to measure, one could argue that applied, local research and ad hoc is alive and well even though it is less likely to be carried out in an academic setting. Armed with that conclusion it could reasonably be assumed that the practice to academy gap has not necessarily diminished levels of planning research but rather that planning research in its widest sense is no longer the exclusive domain of the academy. On the other hand, research carried out in the context of practice is not peer reviewed (or often it is not even publically challenged). Neither is it gathered systematically

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[32] Alexander, E. R. (1997), A mile or a millimetre? Measuring the planning theory – practice gap. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design,* 24(1), pp.3-6.

(once it has served its purpose it is often not kept publically available) nor is it analysed, validated or offered for testing in comparative studies.

5.5 There are other issue specific to Ireland which also affects the general role of research and public policy in Ireland. Frances Ruane, Director of the ESRI in an article on "Research evidence and policymaking in Ireland" points out that:

> "To understand how greater use might be made of research in the future, it is helpful to ask why, given the potential contribution from research, so little use has been made of it in the past, and specifically in the decade 1998–2008. Policy in this period was dominated by the programme for government agreed by coalition partners and by the social partnership framework. Major policy issues were decided in settings where there was great pressure to obtain consensus and huge media attention. The focus was on the decision-making process (the winners and losers) at the expense of the content of the agreement. A decision from such a process could come to be implemented even if there had been no prior analysis or rigorous costing undertaken. This meant that some policy decisions did not involve the policymakers at all, and their role in the process was simply to implement and evaluate." (Ruane, 2012)[33]

5.6 So in Ireland there is grounds to assume that we have gone through a period where gathering evidence in order to achieve consensus was more important than identifying dependably tested evidence (see also Lunn and Ruane, 2013).[34] There is also the sense that state agencies might not be able to introduce and maintain some level of "quality control" in these matters. Talking again about the period leading up to 2008 Ruane said:

> "Another institutional factor impacting on the use of research was the balance in analytical expertise between the civil service and the wider public service. Whereas in most countries policy details are designed by specialists within government departments, in Ireland the specialist knowledge became fragmented across a growing number of specialist agencies, and in some cases within private sector consultancies. As a consequence, many government departments had little specialist knowledge or resources to analyse and develop policy. This further reduced the likelihood of research being used, with the research agenda falling between agencies and departments. This often led to potential for duplications and omissions, a problem that will be reduced in the future if departments implement coherently their data and research strategies" (Ruane, 2012)[35]

5.7 Given the present staffing levels of qualified planners in the Department of the Environment there seems little serious hope in the short term that they alone could embrace this role of custodians of planning research. Yet, as Prof Rob Kitchen of NUI Maynooth points out, much of the intention behind the 2010 Planning and Development Act was to make Development Plans more evidence based, transparent and internally consistent:

> "The key challenge for evidence-informed planning in Ireland is to ensure that future plan preparation and decision-making is informed by a continuous monitoring of spatial development trends and assessments of need and future development prospects. Within this context, the spatial planning research community can provide external and independent expertise, acting as a 'critical friend'; facilitate access to spatial datasets and analytical tools and assist in concept and strategy development. Spatial planning researchers, will, however,

[33] Ruane, F. (2012), *Research evidence and policymaking in Ireland,* Administration, vol. 60, no., pp. 119-138.

[34] Lunn, P., & Ruane, F. (eds.) (2013), *Using Evidence to Inform Policy,* Dublin, Ireland: Gill & Macmillan.

[35] Op cit.

> also to continue to push the boundaries, asking difficult questions and querying established assumptions."

> "The introduction of core strategies for City/County Development Plans and the requirement for consistency across the spatial planning hierarchy should serve to increase the capacity of the spatial plans in this regard. It is evident, however, that a key part of the challenge rests at the interface between planning practice and political decision-making." Kitchen (2012)[36]

Kitchen, understandably still frames the issue around the relationship between practice and the academy but perhaps most tellingly goes on to say:

> "Open forum discussion at recent events hosted by NIRSA and ICLRD has highlighted the significant challenges involved in changing mind sets and gaining acceptance for more sustainable, evidence-informed approaches to land-use zoning." Kitchen (2012)

5.8 Perhaps the real issue then is not about who does what but that at its core evidence based planning is an issue of mind sets and what we need is a reinvigorated desire to see sound data, rationality and reason at the heart of public policy. In a more international context Krizek et al. (2010) state:

> "One of the most problematic sticking points for EBP [Evidence Based Planning] is the question of whether there is a general willingness to use evidence, particularly if it contradicts entrenched positions…there may be a lack of the resources of interest and will." (Krizek et al. 2010)[37]

This carries certain echoes of the experience of An Foras Forbartha – the National Institute for Physical Planning and construction research – which was regularly mentioned in the free comments sections of our planners' survey. An Foras, which was set up just as the first Local Government (Planning and Development) bill was enacted in the early 1960s and disbanded little more than two decades later, produced clear, objective research reports on various planning topics. These included a famous 1976 report[38] that raised concerns about the sustainability of urban-generated rural housing and, though authoritative on the subject, it was never formally published. Individual housing in rural areas remains a touchstone 'wicked' issue in Irish planning with little or no sign of a firm policy framework emerging in response to the consistent research findings and evidence (Scott, 2010). This pattern is well understood by planning theorists who explore the ways that power responds to rational arguments in planning practice with suggestions that decisions, rather than being based on evidence, are often post-rationalised to fit the preferred narrative of the decision maker (Flyvbjerg, 1998).[39]

5.9 So there is a gap between planning research and practice in Ireland, as there is in many other countries but whilst this must be of concern of equal need for attention is the need to encourage an appetite for public and planning policy to be transparently derived from sound independent research and supporting evidence.

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[36] Kitchin, R., Walsh, C., (2012), Supporting Evidence-Informed Spatial Planning in Ireland: A Research Perspective, Pleanáil, Journal of the Irish Planning Institute Issue 18: Autumn 18 pp. 75-89
[37] Krizekk, K., Forsyth, A., and Slotterback, C. S. (2010), Is There a Role for Evidence-Based Practice in Urban Planning and Policy?, Planning Theory & Practice, pp.459-478.
[38] An Foras Forbartha (1976), Urban Generated Housing in Rural Areas. Unpublished report. AFF Teoranta: The National Institute for Physical Planning and Construction Research. Dublin.
[39] Flyvbjerg, B. (1998), Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice. University of Chicago Press.

Principle: *Who carries out the research is less important than the qualities and value of the research. Academic research should not lose sight of the practicalities and applied practitioner research should be verifiable, where possible public and robust.*

The scale of Irish planning research

5.10 Ireland will be a small contributor to global planning research and so consideration needs to be given to how Ireland might maximise its contribution – and also benefit from – international planning research whilst not losing sight of the need to foster distinctly Irish research. It would appear that planning researchers in Ireland are constrained by two factors. Firstly, there is no significant single source or focus for research funding in the planning field. This again is not a problem which is exclusive to Ireland; recent rounds of EU funding at best see planning as a subordinate issue that might be included in some wider study but not as an issue in its own right.

5.11 Academically this may not be perceived as a major problem but for practice it can make planning research seem obscure and irrelevant. Secondly, there are no internationally recognised learned journals based in Ireland so as a small country, researchers if they are to gain that all important international profile, need to write on topics which will be attractive to the international planning research audience and to editorial committees of high ranking journals in other fields. This again curtails the interest both in "native" Irish research and in research that is primarily grounded in planning issues.

5.12 As already mentioned our survey did show considerable interest and respect for research and most importantly there is recognition that, in the course of planning practice, much "day to day" research was being carried out in support of plan making and development management decisions. There is neither framework to capture, store or review this research nor any significant obligation for practitioners, public and private to contribute this research to the greater understanding of planning in Ireland.

5.13 Recognising that evidence and research is too often just used to deal with next most immediate task at hand, efforts need to be made to build up agreed best practice and to share effective solutions.

Principle: *One resource efficient national intervention in terms of planning research would be to monitor, manage and co-ordinate locally derived research. Establishing formats and standards and intervening to require data gathered at the public expense to be consistent, shared, and available and quality controlled.*

Resources for planning research in Ireland

5.14 Funding resources for Irish planning research are likely to remain limited. Aspirations to revive a state funded Irish planning "think tank" along the lines of the much missed Foras Forbartha, offer an obvious solution but would probably not be supported in the present climate. The most obvious reason would be one of funding but the idea of solving problems by organisational solutions is also now less favoured. A more modulated approach is needed. In a formal sense, the state should recognise that planning, as an important function of civil and civic society, needs authoritative theoretical and evidential support and that some of the failings of recent years can be traced back to a lack of effective independent scrutiny and timely provision of evidence in this field.

5.15 This has implications well beyond the day to day work of carrying out the statutory requirements of the planning acts and regulations. Government decisions across a whole range of other departments and units can have significant place-specific impacts all across the country. Yet, while proofing mechanisms are in place to address some impacts of these decisions (such as Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment) there is no systematic investigation into the effect on actual cities, towns, districts, and rural communities or the knock-on effects in terms of crucial questions about where jobs, housing and services are provided. This applies to decisions in sector based areas such as health, education, tourism, rural development, energy and enterprise support where dependable spatial planning evidence is rarely drawn upon to help achieve integrated and sustainable solutions for different places.

5.16 A key factor in implementing a planning research agenda for Ireland would be to seek ways of embedding these place-based, spatial questions across all areas of public policy and research. In this sense, planning is particularly well placed to integrate and co-ordinate research activity and evidence in ways that add value to individual sectoral efforts which may not have as powerful an impact when acting alone. This would not need significant amounts of additional funding rather what is needed is a cross cutting, spatial planning and place-focused re-alignment of the research strands and themes from existing programmes such as those set out in Horizon 2020.

5.17 Referring back to Davoudi's two categories of how research might influence policy[40] – in direct ways through 'contextual' research for policy or in indirect ways through the 'enlightenment' mode often favoured by academics – there is also a clear need for an alignment among all sectors of the planning research community. More resources could be identified if public and private practice and academia were associated with some strategic guidance platform for planning research. This could encourage the research community to not only expose weaknesses - something it does quite well – but also direct attention to practical solutions and to instil debate about longer term (contextual) reorientation to guard against future failings.

Principle: Changes already committed to the organisational structure of planning delivery in Ireland in respect of the Planning Regulator and the new Regional Planning Bodies could assume responsibilities for the promotion, collection and coordination of evidence and applied research.

Principle: These, together with the planning schools, An Bord Pleanála, the professional institutes and other research bodies could convene a planning research steering group or council. Its brief would be to establish priorities, to guide both theoreticians and practitioners in carrying out applied and contextual aspects of planning research.

Internationalisation of planning research

5.18 Academic research is increasingly international in its scope and practice. Whilst engagement with successful international research projects will be good for the Irish planning academy it is not necessarily going to address the needs of Irish planning practice. Against a significant rise the volume of academic research in recent years must be set questions about the sustainability of this growth, the quality of the research and the benefits and downsides of its globalisation. Vincent–Lancrin in a report for the OECD on globalisation in higher education[41] states that:

> "…academic research has become more internationalised in many respects over the two past decades. International academic mobility, international collaboration, international

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[40] Davoudi, S. (2006), Evidence-Based Planning, The Planning Review, 42:165, pp.14-24.
[41] Vincent-Lancrin, S. (2009), Higher Education to 2030 volume 2 Globalisation, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, OECD, pp.145-173.

influence of science, and funding from abroad have all increased …international competition and international rankings set a new context for countries and institutions". (Vincent-Lancrin, 2009)

5.19 Whilst in academic circles the increasing internationalisation of research is seen as inevitable and generally beneficial change, for a small country and in a small academic discipline this change might not be universally beneficial. Research to serve and enlighten planning practice in Ireland may need to be somewhat parochial. Not all planning issues will depend on or benefit from wider comparison and some issues may well be distinctly Irish. These research areas are going to struggle for international funding and will not necessarily bring with them international academic interest. Whilst our relationship with EU funded research may not suffer so much from this non Irish focus on the premise that the EU has a significant influence on Irish planning practice and legislation it will not always be ideal for Irish planning to be viewed through an international or EU lens.

5.20 Andreas Faludi in his report on European Spatial Research and Planning (2008)[42] cites another relevant criticism of international research programmes: in this case the ESPON 2006 Programme which was said to have "created more added value for the scientific community than for practitioners and policy makers." Whilst he comments that this criticism was not surprising it does highlight the potential pitfall of funding streams serving the demands of the researchers more than the subject area.

Principle: Scoping and supporting research topics that are peculiarly important to Ireland should be national priority. Special attention should be given to assessing how appropriate the research evidence is to the Irish situation.

The Interdisciplinary nature of planning research

5.21 As planning practice is increasingly seen as an interdisciplinary function so too is academic planning research. This has a tendency to dilute the core planning voice. Academic planning research has benefited greatly from interdisciplinary perspectives and the professional make-up of the planning academy reflects this diversity. If planning is to preserve a distinct disciplinary character, special effort needs to be made to engage practitioners in planning research.

5.22 Again the concept of interdisciplinary planning research has much to merit it and to some degree reflects the nature of the practice as is persuasively spelled out in the recent RTPI Planning Horizons report on future proofing society:[43]

> "Planning operates at many spatial scales, creating and implementing long-term frameworks for economic, social and environmental development which support the sustainability and cohesion of communities. To do this, planning is necessarily inter-disciplinary and integrated in its approach, making connections between issues (for example, housing, transport and demand for public services), understanding how decisions will cumulatively impact on places, and managing competing interests in the wider public interest in an accountable and transparent way." (RTPI 2014)

5.23 But does an interdisciplinary approach require interdisciplinary research? Is planning practice necessarily destined to always join other disciplines in order to deliver its research? How do we prevent essential planning ideas and learning from becoming fragmented, uncoordinated or without validation? As a relatively small discipline with a comparatively weak identity, planning research is

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[42] Faludi, A. (ed.) (2008), European Spatial Research and Planning. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
[43] Royal Town Planning Institute (2014), Planning Horizons no.2, Future-Proofing Society. RTPI.

rarely seen as an entity in its own right in the large national and international funding programmes (see above). Planning generally has to attach itself to some wider brief proving useful but with possibly slightly off target research outputs.

5.24 When strong themes of modern planning theory (such as those associated with collaborative and deliberative practice) tend to identify planning as an essentially coordinating process that brings little that is specific to the table – other than the ability to host the event and mediate what goes on there – it is probably not surprising that others take this situation to allow them to assume that planning research is to be done by others rather than planners. This leads to a preponderance of research *about* planning as oppose to research *in* planning. The RTPI report "The Future of the Planning Academy"[44] identified this issue from a slightly different standpoint:

> "A key dimension here is the staff recruitment policies of planning schools, which are now dominated by research performance, with professional experience and RTPI membership being low priorities when looking for new staff in all but a few schools. This may mean that in 10-15 years many planning schools may struggle to have any professional representation amongst their staff." (Ellis et al., 2010)

5.25 So if there is a tendency to see planning research opportunities increasingly marginalised to operate with interdisciplinary structures the staffing of the planning academy is also changing in response to this view that planning – and certainly planning research – no longer exists in its "pure" form but is essentially a compound with a variety of contributing elements. If planning research can only exist in an interdisciplinary environment significant elements of planning practice are not going to be served by an effective research community.

Principle: Priority should be given to research into the core concerns of planning practice and theory and the importance of these needs to be communicated widely among funding agencies government departments and all relevant agencies.

The importance of knowledge transfer

5.26 Our survey of the profession demonstrates there is a universal problem of how research is disseminated and used by the profession. Our survey of Irish planners does not indicate that there is a lack of appetite for research or in that research is not being carried out. It does however suggest a frustration that the two activities are not as integrated as they could be. In particular, attention needs to be paid to how knowledge is transferred between research and practice.

5.27 In disciplines where the acceptance of evidence based policy and practice is more developed concern is moving on to consider the efficacy of knowledge translation and transfer. Research is being carried out into the nature of the transfer, whether voluntary or coercive, the actors who are engaged in it, and some approaches to assessing the effectiveness of the transfer. This situation is probably some way off in respect of planning but not to consider the challenges of effecting the two-way transfer of research and practice between academics and practitioners would be self-defeating. An important part of the research agenda for Ireland should involve consideration and improvement of the mechanisms for knowledge transfer.

5.28 The health professions and researchers have for a number of years been developing the theory and implementation of evidence-based practice and so has been at the forefront of research about the dissemination of research. Whilst there are quite fundamental differences between evidence

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[44] Ellis, G., Murtagh, B., and Copeland, L. (2010), The Future of the Planning Academy, Queen's University, Belfast, report for the Royal Town Planning Institute.

based health interventions and planning interventions they have identified some simple questions that need to be considered. The questions can be summarised as: what needs to be transferred?; to whom and by whom?; how and what are the hoped for effects?

5.29 These are very practical questions that we need to consider but also help to frame research investment. This would not be intended to diminish the scope of research but rather to be clearer about its purpose, consciously acknowledging that when implementing the planning agenda we need to concern ourselves with the balance between instrumental and contextual research.

Principle: Dissemination of planning research needs to be supported and made a duty of all publically funded research.

Some consequences of evidence-led practice

5.30 One area where Ireland could develop internationally relevant practice would be to explore and develop more rigorous methodologies for monitoring the efficacy of planning policy. This would focus on identifying what works and establishing quick and effective ways of disseminating effective or contested practice.

5.31 At present Irish Development Plans are not subject to consistent external challenge. The 2010 Planning and Development (Amendment) Act emphasised a new concern for a robust evidence base and a more solid and consistent logic to plan-making but with little in the way of mechanisms or capacity to scrutinise or encourage this. Increasing the demand for an "instrumental" evidence base requires an equivalent increase demand for planning research. Some disciplines and areas of professional practice have begun to adopt a more comprehensive evidence based approach to their practice, using random control testing (RCT) to assess and guide practice. This is most developed in the medical and health professions. At what point if ever planning could engage with RCT is not for discussion in this paper however planning research could learn much from the experiences of professional areas where RCT has been adopted.

5.32 Goldacre and others (2012)[45] in their report for the UK Cabinet Office have promoted the approach of "Test-Learn-Adapt" to the development of public policy. They show a range of benefits researching "what works". Arguments are made that this de-professionalises otherwise complex areas of work and focusses on ends rather than understanding. However they argue persuasively that:

> "With the right academic and policy support, RCTs can be much cheaper and simpler to put in place than is often supposed. By enabling us to demonstrate just how well a policy is working, RCTs can save money in the long term - they are a powerful tool to help policymakers and practitioners decide which of several policies is the most cost effective, and also which interventions are not as effective as might have been supposed. It is especially important in times of shrinking public sector budgets to be confident that public money is spent on policies shown to deliver value for money." (Goldacre et al., 2012)

In many respects planning could move in this direction with better analysis of how well policies and practice worked. This would entail a much more precise identification of intended outcomes and some careful thought as to how they might be measured. These are complex issues to pin down but they reflect ambitions that have been common in the rhetoric surrounding planning policy for some time.

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[45] Goldacre, B., Haynes, L., Service, O., and Torgerson, D. (2012), Test, Learn, Adapt: Developing Public Policy with Randomised Controlled Trials, UK Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team.

5.33 In Ireland the Chief Executive of a City or County is required to review progress with the Development Plan. Section 15(2) of the Principal Act[46] states:

> "the manager of a planning authority shall, not more than 2 years after the making of a development plan, give a report to the members of the authority on the progress achieved in securing the objectives (of the plan)."

Chief executives' reports under this section are increasingly substantive but can still be characterised as a record of successes rather than an open and honest appraisal of progress. Robust research learns at least as much from failures as it does from research. Some of the planning research deficit identified in our planners survey could be bridged by overhauling the nature and rigour of the obligations on planning Authorities' to systematically and measurably assess the effectiveness of their policies.

Principle: Planning practice offers clear opportunities for evidence based research. The development and deployment of an appropriate form of random control testing of the implementation of policy should be supported.

Conclusions

5.34 The delivery of an Irish planning research agenda will be dependent on a range of practical issues. Though the availability of resources will clearly be central to success, other factors are equally important. Rather than continuing to place emphasis on the long identified and seemingly intractable practice research gap, more emphasis needs to be placed on the recognition and development of research being an integral part of planning practice. One opportunity that arises from the shift in emphasis and organisational arrangements set out in Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government's 2012 report "Putting People First"[47] is the coupling of spatial and economic policy at a more local level. The report states that, in future:

> "Local authorities will adopt an economic development plan in conjunction with the overall City/County Development Plan to guide economic development action. The local economic development plan will align with, and form an implementation mechanism for, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy".

The learning and development of policy that will be required to fulfil this brief will need extensive support from research and the collection of appropriate evidence. This will be a major opportunity to revamp the quality and use of research and evidence to inform planning policy.

Principle: If Irish planning could, over the coming years develop a demonstrable reputation for being evidence led and researched backed, it would have developed attributes which would attract international research attention.

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[46] Law Reform Commission(2013), Administrative Consolidation of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2013 (Revised August 1st 2013). Dublin, Ireland.
[47] Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government October (2012b), Putting People First Action Programme for Effective Local Government, Stationery Office, Dublin.

Section 6: Summary and recommendations

6.1 This study into a planning research agenda in Ireland has sketched out in broad terms the nature of existing planning research here and a sense of what members of the planning profession see as its purpose and priorities. It has also framed some of the important planning issues of the day (in relation to how they might inform the priorities of a research agenda) and discussed how such a strategy for research in planning might be delivered.

6.2 This final section presents, in the form of two tables, a summary of the findings/recommendations of the study. The first, Table 9, sets out a set of five key principles around which a research agenda might be formulated and delivered. It speaks both to the users and the producers of planning research as well as to all those with an interest in delivering a coherent, effective and relevant research effort in this important field. To conclude this study, Table 10, sets out an initial framing of where the priorities for the research agenda might lie.

Principles of a planning research agenda

Table 9. Annotated summary of recommended principles for a planning research agenda

A PLANNING RESEARCH AGENDA: **Key principles**	Comments
1. The primary goal of a planning research agenda is to ensure that sufficient and appropriate evidence and data is available to support the work of planners in the pursuit of proper planning and sustainable development in Ireland.	In spite of various problems of misalignment, fragmentation, and poor dissemination the value of planning research is highly regarded right across the profession and this needs to be built upon in co-ordinated and creative ways. If Irish planning could, over the coming years, develop a demonstrable reputation for being evidence led and researched backed, it would have developed attributes which would attract international research attention.
2. Informed by the key concerns of both the contextual needs of planning practice and the exploratory and theoretical concerns of the planning academy, the planning research agenda needs to be promoted widely in the public sphere.	Priority should be given to research that addresses the core concerns of planning itself. Given the important spatial dimension of most investment dimensions and public policy in Ireland, this in turn needs to be communicated widely among funding bodies, government departments and all relevant agencies. Scoping and supporting research topics that are peculiarly important to Ireland should be national priority. Special attention should be given to assessing how appropriate the research evidence is to the Irish situation. Whilst it is important to prioritise the research effort within planning itself, it is also important that planning practitioners and academics continue to engage with, influence and draw upon the research contributions of

A PLANNING RESEARCH AGENDA: **Key principles**	Comments
	those other disciplines which also concern themselves with place-making and environmental decision-making for the common good.
3. Framing the on-going priorities for the planning research agenda – and then promoting it – is the joint responsibility of a number of agencies in the public, professional and academic sectors.	The office of the planning regulator, the regional assemblies, An Bord Pleanála, the planning schools, and the professional planning institutes – together with the Department of the Environment and other agencies – are in a good position to work jointly on framing the priorities for planning research. These bodies could come together initially as loosely formulated **Irish Planning Research Forum** to identify priorities, co-ordinate dissemination and raise the profile of spatial planning research. Crucially, it is important that a high level forum such as this could then be established formally and charged with the task of engaging with – and influencing – the national research agenda including Horizon 2020 and its successors.
4. Planning research of all kinds should be verifiable and robust, and all research funded by public agencies should be in the public domain. The impact of planning research becomes significant only when it is well disseminated among the main actors in the planning field	The planning research agenda should recognise that academic, applied and commercial research in planning are all crucial components of evidence led planning in Ireland. Academic research in planning should be more closely aligned to the needs of practice and its outputs should be more easily available to the practitioner community. The longer term value of applied, locally derived and ad-hoc research in all planning topics should also be recognised and – especially for publicly funded work - structures put in place to make this more accessible. The exploratory, critical and 'blue-sky' research that the planning academy excels in should be encouraged and supported as a component of the research effort within our discipline. Co-ordinating and disseminating planning research of all kinds could be an important role for the Irish Planning Research Forum (managed perhaps by subsidiary secretariat in the planning regulator's office or the planning schools). Seeking ways for key

A PLANNING RESEARCH AGENDA: **Key principles**	Comments
	bodies such as the EPA and ESRI to align with the planning research agenda is also an important task. There is a clear demand for a peer-reviewed spatial planning journal for Ireland and steps should be taken in the short term to set up the terms of reference for this. The planning schools and planning institutes have a particular role to play in this.
5. Who carries out research in planning, or who holds the evidence, is less important than the quality and relevance of the research produced. Producers of planning research of all kinds should aim to pool their outputs in a common repository.	The Irish Planning Research Forum (suggested above) could also have a particular role in holding a repository of research outputs and projects as a focal point for researchers and users of planning research. This could include establishing formats and standards and intervening to require data gathered at the public expense to be consistent, shared, and available and quality controlled. Planning practice offers clear opportunities for evidence based research. The development and deployment of an appropriate form of random control testing of the implementation of policy should be supported. The planning schools should be encouraged to be champions of the planning research agenda. For those schools accredited by the RTPI, their relationship to the planning research agenda should form part of their reporting for annual partnership Boards.

Priorities for a planning research agenda

6.3 Table 10 below presents, in no particular order of importance, an initial framing of some of the key priorities for a research agenda in Ireland at the present time. Given that the focus for this study is on the kind of research that would support the work of planners, the emphasis for the most part is related to planning practice. This is not to say that planning related research across all of the topics, subject areas and themes set out at the beginning of this report is less than valid in any way. Indeed, as set out in principle 4 above, a robust planning research agenda would recognise that "academic, applied and commercial research in planning are all crucial components of evidence led planning in Ireland"; that it would recognise the value of locally driven ad hoc enquiry into all planning topics and that the "exploratory, critical and 'blue-sky' research that the planning academy excels in should be encouraged".

Table 10. Suggested priority areas for a planning research agenda

Topic	Suggested lines of enquiry for planning research
The Post-Mahon climate for planning in Ireland	*To support and investigate transparency and accountability in planning decisions.* *To increase understanding of the relationship between politics, civil society and decision-making processes in planning.* *To support objective and rational consideration of governance structures and arrangements taking into account spatial relationships and environmental quality.* *To investigate and explore the ethical dimensions of planning with respect to the imperative of working for the common good*
Post-recession realities and the contribution of planning	*To increase understanding about the relationships between planning, land values and market behaviour.* *To support decisions about the appropriate locations for employment- based development, commerce (including retail) and economic infrastructure.* *To investigate the efficacy of plan-led growth and the economic benefit of implementing planning guidance.* *To support the objective of building in economic, social and environmental resilience to planning decisions.* *To monitor and assess the outcome of planning decisions including completions, compliance and cumulative impacts*
Evidence-led decisions about land use, viability and land supply	*To support decisions about appropriate and sustainable settlement networks and hierarchies for Ireland.* *To support decisions about the availability of residential land – quantities, locations and timing – and the degree to which it responds changing community needs.* *To support planning and decision making about the sustainability and re-generation of Cities and Town centres and brownfield land.* *To support decision making about viability and resilience of plans, strategies and planning initiatives* *To ensure that the scale, quantity and locations of development lands identified in development plans is consistent with strategic objectives for settlement hierarchies.*
The office of the planning regulator	*To establish an evidence base for determining the 'soundness' of development plan policies.* *To support elected members and their advisors in making appropriate decisions in plan-making at city/county level and at local area plan level.* *To establish and monitor appropriate indicators and assessment protocols that would support Ministerial endorsement of statutory plans.* *To establish evidence baselines and criteria for monitoring the achievement of the planning and development objectives in adopted statutory plans.* *To develop and evidence base for consistent auditing of development plans and policies*
New national planning framework and the new regions	*To strengthen the evidence base for monitoring and guiding the implementation of the national planning framework and regional planning strategies.*

Topic	Suggested lines of enquiry for planning research
	To support planning work on the resilience of rural towns and villages in the face of pressure for uncoordinated scattered development.
	To support cross-disciplinary understandings about the integration of land use, transportation, and infrastructure with the provision of services across all government sectors including health, education, enterprise support, tourism, energy and others.
	To support the integration of various spatial scales of planning
	To establish an evidence baseline for developing spatial planning responses to key demographic changes and trends, including ageing populations, migration, the needs of young people and the health and environmental effects of various settlement policy scenarios .
Integrating spatial and economic policy	*To explore cross disciplinary research that integrates physical planning priorities with national, regional and local economic development objectives.*
	To investigate synergies between locational or spatial characteristics with opportunities for growth and economic development.
	To support brave and robust decision making about priority locations for infrastructural and economic investment.
	To investigate the long term economic costs associated with scattered and un-coordinated patterns of settlement and development.
Urbanisation and settlement shrinkage	*To support a re-appraisal of the role of cities and larger towns as strategic drivers of population and economic growth.*
	To investigate the conditions under which cities and metropolitan areas make wise spatial choices about sustainable urban futures (as a counterweight to the research agenda of the technological focus of 'smart cities' within existing spatial patterns).
Water and wastewater	*To investigate the integration of planned settlement networks and policies with the priorities and mission of Irish Water and other utilities*
	To support the co-ordination of flood risk management, river basin management and the protection of water quality with national imperatives for facilitating development and meeting social and economic needs at strategic locations.
	To investigate the land use policy implications of moving towards a green infrastructure led approach to wastewater treatment and attenuation.
Energy	*To provide evidence for making clear and authoritative decisions about meeting strategic energy requirements in such a way as to ensure a high degree of certainty for stakeholders and the public at local project level.*
	To investigate the cumulative strategic benefit of individual renewable energy projects in terms of the economic, landscape and environmental costs of generation and connection to the national grid infrastructure.
Landscape	*To support robust decision making in relation to landscape issues in the planning arena taking into account European Landscape Convention and the National Landscape Strategy*
	To strengthen the evidence and knowledge base for all landscape

Topic	Suggested lines of enquiry for planning research
	'layers' so that participants in debates about landscape issues can be more effective when taking part in formal planning processes
	To investigate the relationship between the quality of urban and rural landscapes, open spaces and the public realm with economic investment, resilience and the vitality of places.

6.4 In conclusion, we are mindful that the ultimate test of how effective a research agenda in the planning field might be depends on whether or not the research and evidence tends to strengthen the hand of those who engage in the contested arenas in which planning operates. The following quotation from the planning theorist Bent Flyvbjerg encapsulates the scale of what lies ahead and, perhaps, challenges us in Ireland as to whether we can afford *not* to have a solid planning research agenda in place for the future:

> "Kant said, 'The possession of power unavoidably spoils the free use of reason'. We may expand on Kant by observing that the possession of more power appears to spoil reason even more…The absence of rational arguments and factual documentation in support of certain actions may be more important indicators of power than the arguments and documentation produced. Power knows that which Nietzche calls 'the doctrine of Hamlet' i.e., the fact that often 'knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion'" (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p.229).

6.5 On the other hand, taking into account the likelihood that people in the planning profession understand these power struggles all too well from their real world experiences, it is also worth recalling - from section 3 of this report – the fact there is an obvious appetite within the profession for a much stronger research effort. Indeed we have seen persuasive arguments here that a strong foundation of evidence and enquiry – such as that promoted by a planning research agenda – can enhance the important and authoritative voice of the planning profession in Irish public life.

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About the research

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Further information

The report is available on the RTPI website at: www.rtpi.org.uk/planningresearchireland

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