



What can Ireland and England learn from one another's rural planning policies?

Ireland and England face similar challenges in rural housing policy but have taken different approaches in managing these, with very different results.

What are the research findings?

Research has shown that, while in Ireland:

- Land is tied up with cultural identity, independence and individual rights.
- The planning system aims to stimulate development.
- Planning controls tend to be perceived negatively as colonial.
- Powerful lobbies portray development control as attacking personal rights.
- The interests of individuals are given primacy over societal needs.
- Rural images of the countryside are populated by small farm owners.

By contrast, in England:

- The planning system is designed to control, particularly in rural areas, and to contain urban development.
- Rural imagery focuses on landscape, the visual and the picturesque.
- Powerful lobbies mobilise to prevent development in rural areas, portrayed as “concreting over the countryside”.
- Planning policies have reinforced a rigid separation between urban and rural spaces.
- Housing in rural areas is unaffordable on medium and low incomes.

Results of these policies are:

- A proliferation of dispersed housing in the Irish countryside during the boom years, which remains affordable.
- A pro-development ethos in Ireland prone, in some cases, to corruption.
- Restrictions on rural housing development in England, even during the boom years, driving up house prices and excluding local buyers.
- The focus on conservation makes the English countryside attractive to middle-class incomers who can afford high prices, resist development and so force house prices higher.

Implications for future policy are:

- There is a need to address the shortage of affordable rural housing in England and the lack of social housing in both Ireland and England.
- In England a less rigid regime would enable more young people and a wider social mix to live in rural areas.
- Effective spatial planning at regional and local level could promote better village developments in Ireland.
- Although they are necessary, planning reforms alone are not sufficient to address the challenges in either country.

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