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Planning Policy - A Time for Re Appraisal"

National and Regional Demographic
Trends

by

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Introduction

In preparing this address I have availed of the opportunity to draw together some simple figures on long term trends in the distribution of the population of Ireland by region and type of settlement. Much of the material contained in this paper is very straight-forward and calls for little commentary. Its value lies, I hope, in making available a broad perspective on past developments against which our successes and failures in regional planning should be evaluated. Towards the end of my paper I shall make some comments on this topic, and in conclusion I shall present some tentative data on the implications of past trends and policies for the future.

National Population Trends

The broad picture is very familiar. The century-long decline in population was arrested in 1961, where a low point of 2.818 million was reached. Since then very substantial growth has occurred, and by 1976 our population was higher than at any time since the early years of this century. In a brief period Ireland has changed from being the only major geographical area in Europe with a declining population to being the country with by far the fastest population growth rate in Western Europe.

A key feature of this transition has been the reversal of the tradition of heavy net emigration, which declined steadily after 1961 and became a net inflow after 1971. The rate of natural increase, on the other hand, has remained relatively stable in the region of 1 per cent throughout the period 1951-76, despite fairly sizeable changes in marriage and fertility patterns (Keating, 1976).

The components of national population change are set out in Table 1 for the period 1926-75. The dominant influence of net migration on population change should not obscure the importance of the rate of natural increase, which rose significantly after 1946*, and in the absence of emigration

* The sharp increase in this rate after the 1936-46 period may be due in part to a significant under-registration of births in the years before 1942: cf Hughes, 1977, p. 11.

now implies a population growth rate of over 1 per cent per annum.

Table 1

Components of Population Check
1926-76

	Average Annual Change		Average Annual Natural Increase		Average Annual Net Emigration	
	(000)	Rate ^(a)	(000)	Rate ^(b)	(000)	Rate ^(b)
1926-36	-0.4	-0.1	16.3	5.5 ^(c)	-16.7	-5.6
1936-46	-1.3	-0.4	17.4	5.9 ^(c)	-18.7	-6.3
1946-51	+1.1	+0.4	25.5	8.6	-24.4	-8.2
1951-56	-12.5	-4.2	26.9	9.2	-39.4	-13.4
1956-61	-16.0	-5.6	26.4	9.2	-42.4	-14.8
1961-66	+13.1	+4.6	29.3	10.3	-16.1	-5.7
1966-71	+18.8	+6.5	29.6	10.1	-10.8	-3.7
1971-76	+36.8	+12.0	34.6	11.3	+2.2	+0.7

(a) per 1,000 population at start of period

(b) per 1,000 average population during period

(c) There are grounds for believing this rate is underestimated prior to 1942. See Hughes, 1977. This implies that emigration is also underestimated.

Sources: Census of Population 1971, Vol. 1, Table XI; Labour Force Survey, 1975, Preliminary Results; Reports of Vital Statistics 1971-76.

Regional Trends

In Table 2 the broad evolution of population by region since the foundation of the State is presented. The population of the East region has grown in each intercensal period since 1926, although between 1951 and 1956 this growth was very slight. It is interesting to note growth occurring in the South West and Mid-West after 1961, and in the South East and North East after 1966. The low point of population in the Midlands appears to have been reached by 1971. Population decline in the period 1971-75 was limited to the West, the North West, and Donegal, and in these regions was at a greatly reduced rate.

Perhaps more significant than the absolute level of the regions' population is their share in the national total. The apparently inexorable rise in the East's share is very striking. It is important to note that the arresting of population decline in regions such as the South West or the Mid-West did little more than stabilise their share of national population; the East's share in the total has grown at much the same rate before and after 1961, which was the watershed in national population trends. The decline in the North West's share of national population was if anything faster in the 15 years after 1961 than in the preceeding 15 years.

Regional Urban/Rural Trends

In Table 3 the regional totals by aggregate urban and rural areas* are set out. It may be confirmed from these figures that the national urban population has grown uninterruptedly since 1891. However, until 1961 this growth in the national urban total was apparently almost exclusively due to the growth of the urban population of the East region, and even between 1966 and 1971, of the increase of 137 thousand in the national urban population over half (77 thousand) occurred in the East region.

An important trend revealed in Table 3 is the gradual slowing down in the decline of the population of the rural areas. Between 1966 and 1971 the population of the aggregate rural areas declined by only 32 thousand of which 16 thousand was due to redefinition of "urban areas". This is a marked contrast with the loss of almost 100 thousand between 1956 and 1961, virtually none of which was due to a redefinition of boundaries. It is most interesting to note that since 1961 the population of the rural area of the

* The Census uses the terms "aggregate town" and "aggregate rural" areas to designate centres with population of 1,500 and over, and the rest of the country. The "rural areas" thus defined are a statistical concept which is not identical with the administrative "rural districts" used in the maps appearing below.

TABLE 3: POPULATION OF AGGREGATE URBAN AND RURAL AREAS, BY REGION, 1951-1971

(THOUSANDS)

Census of	NATIONAL TOTAL		EAST		SOUTH WEST		SOUTH EAST		NORTH EAST		MID WEST		DONEGAL		MIDLANDS		WEST		NORTH-WEST		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
1951	2,960	1,272	1,688	703.1	185.3	185.6	282.3	113.1	227.7	58.1	132.4	83.4	196.2	10.1	121.4	52.9	205.2	51.3	250.7	14.9	86.9
<u>1956</u>	2,898	1,285	1,613	715.0	183.4	186.7	272.0	112.7	220.3	59.1	123.9	83.5	187.3	9.7	112.4	53.8	196.1	50.3	238.3	14.2	79.7
1956	2,898	1,287	1,611	717.0	181.4	187.6	271.2	113.6	219.4	57.5	125.5	82.0	188.7	9.7	112.3	54.6	195.3	51.9	236.7	12.9	81.0
<u>1961</u>	2,818	1,299	1,519	731.1	175.3	188.4	258.5	111.5	208.4	56.1	115.0	81.8	179.0	9.8	104.0	54.5	184.8	52.8	220.4	13.1	73.9
1961	2,818	1,307	1,512	735.5	170.8	187.8	259.1	111.7	208.2	56.1	115.0	83.8	177.0	11.3	102.6	54.9	184.4	51.3	221.9	14.4	72.6
<u>1966</u>	2,884	1,419	1,465	815.0	174.2	200.0	252.4	115.9	203.6	57.8	111.4	92.9	171.9	11.4	97.2	56.7	177.8	54.5	209.4	14.8	67.0
1966	2,884	1,445	1,439	826.4	162.8	203.0	249.5	117.6	201.9	59.8	109.4	94.5	170.3	13.6	94.9	58.2	176.3	56.5	207.4	15.1	66.7
<u>1971</u>	2,979	1,556	1,423	892.0	170.2	217.0	248.6	125.3	203.3	65.0	108.8	102.8	167.1	14.8	93.5	61.8	170.6	61.0	197.8	16.0	62.7
1976	3,162																				

The following are the national urban and rural figures since 1841:

	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1926	1936	1936	1946	1951
URBAN	1,100	1,131	986	934	932	888	911	942	959	1,055	1,099	1,161	1,227
RURAL	5,429	3,980	3,416	3,119	2,938	2,581	2,311	2,197	2,013	1,914	1,869	1,794	1,733
TOTAL	6,529	5,111	4,402	4,053	3,870	3,469	3,222	3,139	2,972	2,969	2,969	2,955	2,960

Figures for 1841-1936 are based on the urban/rural areas as defined in the Census of 1936.

Figures for later years are based on urban/rural areas as defined in the Census of the year underlined in the Table.

East region region has actually increased on the basis of boundaries at the later census. Between 1966 and 1971 the same was true of the South East region, and virtual stability was reached in the rural areas of many other regions. However, the decline in the rural population of the Midlands, the West, and the North West continued at a significant rate. The cessation of the decline in urban population in the western regions after 1961 combined with a continuing decline in their rural population implies that urbanisation (that is, the proportion of the total population living in towns) is proceeding at a rapid rate in these regions. For example, 24 per cent of the West region now lives in towns, compared with only 17 per cent in 1951.

The growing share of the East region in national population is not merely due to its highly urbanised population structure. This may be confirmed from Table 4, which shows that the East region has increased its share of both national urban and national rural population since 1951. The only other areas whose share of urban or rural population has grown appreciably since 1951 are the South West (rural) and South East (rural).

Using the administrative Rural Districts as the basic geographical unit, maps showing intercensal population change since 1956 have been prepared. In the period 1956-61 almost all the growth in population in Rural Districts was confined to the immediate neighbourhoods of Dublin and Cork. By 1966-71, however, considerable population growth was recorded in the Rural Districts throughout the eastern third of the country and in much of the south.

The continuing loss of population throughout major areas of the West, North West, North East and Midlands emerges very clearly from these maps. The south eastwards movement of the population centre of gravity implied by these trends is an important feature of long term Irish population trends.

TABLE 4

Share of each region's urban and rural population in national
totals (%)

	1951	1956	1961	1966	1971
EAST					
URBAN	55.3	55.6	56.3	57.4	57.3
RURAL	11.0	11.4	11.5	11.9	12.0
SOUTH WEST					
URBAN	14.6	14.5	14.5	14.1	13.9
RURAL	16.7	16.8	17.0	17.2	17.5
SOUTH EAST					
URBAN	8.9	8.8	8.6	8.2	8.1
RURAL	13.5	13.7	13.7	13.9	14.3
NORTH EAST					
URBAN	4.6	4.5	4.3	4.1	4.2
RURAL	7.8	7.7	7.6	7.6	7.6
MID-WEST					
URBAN	6.6	6.5	6.3	6.5	6.6
RURAL	11.6	11.6	11.8	11.7	11.7
DONEGAL					
URBAN	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.0
RURAL	7.2	7.0	6.8	6.6	6.6
MIDLANDS					
URBAN	4.2	4.1	4.2	4.0	4.0
RURAL	12.2	12.2	12.2	12.1	12.0
WEST					
URBAN	4.0	4.0	4.1	3.8	3.9
RURAL	14.9	14.8	14.5	14.3	13.9
NORTH-WEST					
URBAN	1.2	1.2	1.0	1.0	1.0
RURAL	5.1	4.9	4.9	4.6	4.4
TOTAL					
URBAN	100	100	100	100	100
RURAL	100	100	100	100	100

The figures for 1951 are based on the boundaries as of 1956. All other figures are based on the boundaries as defined in the relevant Census.

Based on data in Table 3.

The study of regional population changes would be more meaningful if we could use data based on employment cores and commuting hinterlands, such as the Standard Metropolitan Labour Areas (SMLA) used in British studies (Hall et. al., 1973). Given the high proportion of rural households where an economically active male car-owner is present, the Census statistical concept of "aggregate rural areas" is increasingly inadequate. This concept is based on clusters of residences and takes no account of commuting patterns, although data on commuting patterns are collected. At least for the major population centres (Dublin, Cork, Limerick-Shannon, Galway, Waterford) it would be very informative to attempt to delineate the SMLA.

Distribution by Size of Settlement

Probably more revealing than a simple urban/rural dichotomy is the trend in population by size of settlement. Once again, however, the Irish data suffer from the limitation of being based exclusively on residence and taking no account of commuting patterns.

Table 5 presents a summary of trends since 1951. The most striking showing is the steady increase in the proportion of the national population living in the Dublin conurbation up to 1966. After 1966, the rate of increase in this proportion slackened and since 1971 the proportion appears to have fallen. Taken in conjunction with the data on the East region in previous tables, this finding suggests that the population of the East region excluding the Dublin conurbation (as defined for Census purposes) has grown very rapidly indeed, from 154 thousand in 1951 to 365 thousand in 1975. It is interesting to note the growth of other cities and towns over 3 thousand population. Between 1966 and 1971 the population of this group of towns grew at an annual average rate of almost 4.5 per cent, much faster than that of any other size of settlement. If this growth rate has been sustained since 1971 their population would have reached 535 thousand in 1975, equal to 17 per cent of the national total.

MAP 2: RATE OF CHANGE OF POPULATION OF RURAL DISTRICTS, 1961-66.

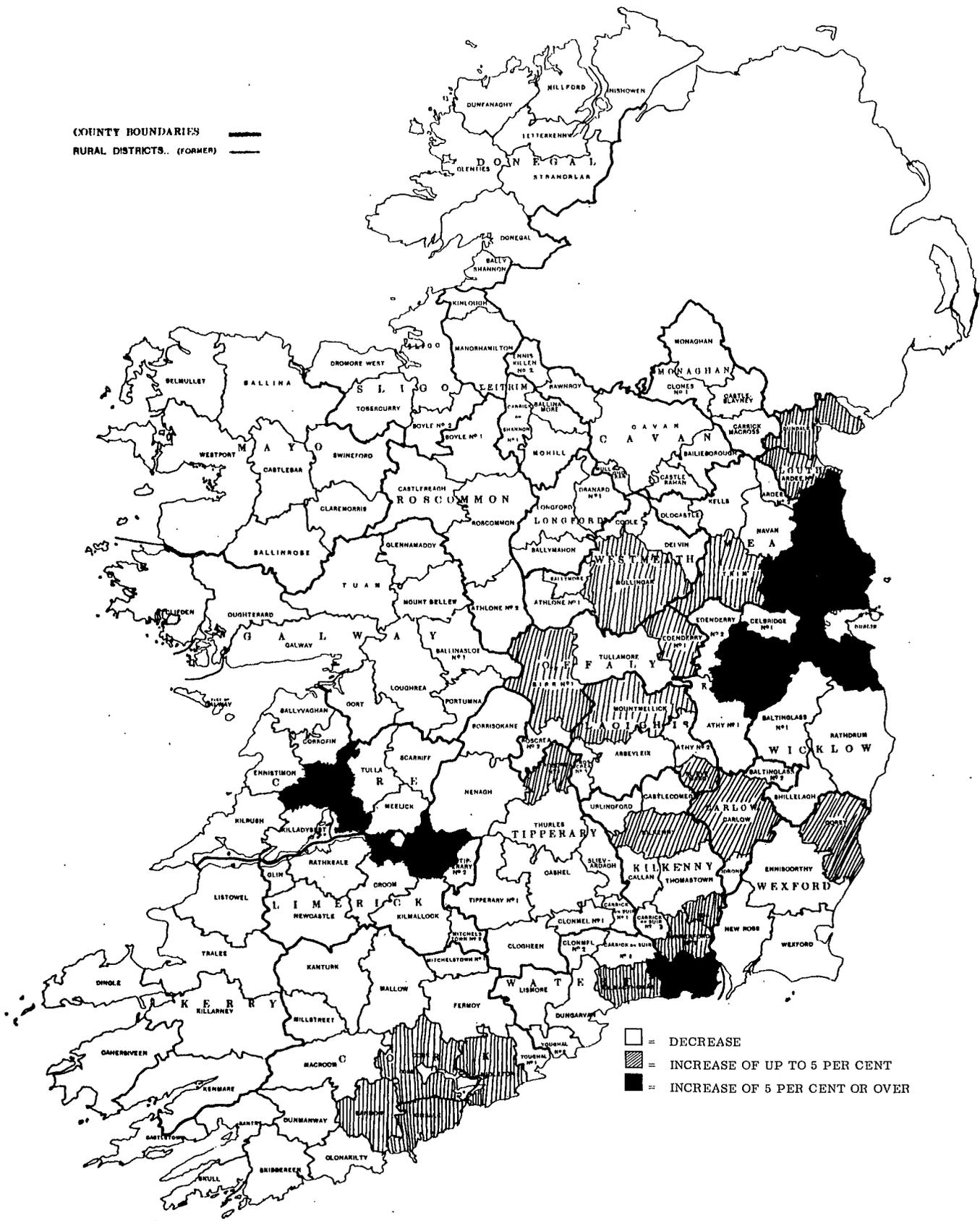


TABLE 5

Distribution of Population of Size of Settlement^(a)

1951-75

	1951	1956	1961	1966	1971	1975 (est)
Dublin, Dun Laoghaire and Census Suburbs						
Population (000)	634.5	649.3	663.4	735.0	778.1	778
Share (%)	21.4	22.4	23.5	25.5	26.1	24.9
Other County Boros and Census Suburbs						
Population (000)	191.5	195.0	195.6	213.2	231.1	n.a.
Share (%)	6.5	6.7	6.9	7.4	7.8	
Other Towns 3,000 and over						
Population (000)	303.8	337.0	335.7	363.6	450.9	n.a.
Share (%)	10.3	11.6	11.9	12.7	15.1	
Towns and Villages 200-2,999						
Population (000)	257.1	309.3	314.1	317.0	289.5	n.a.
Share (%)	8.7	10.7	11.1	11.0	9.7	
Open Country ^(b)						
Population (000)	1,573.7	1,485.6	1,309.4	1,255.2	1,228.5	n.a.
Share (%)	53.1	51.3	46.5	43.5	41.2	
Total Population (000)	2,960.6	2,898.3	2,818.3	2,884.0	2,978.2	3,127

(a) Population of settlements based on boundaries for Census purposes at the time of the Census in question.

(b) Includes villages with less than 200 population. In 1971, the population of 23 villages with less than 200 population but more than 50 inhabited houses was excluded from the country population. This population has been added into the 1971 country population for the purposes of this table on the assumption of an average of 150 persons per village.

Certainly, the various pieces of evidence presented in the foregoing tables and maps suggest that Ireland is moving in the same direction as North America and Western Europe in regard to settlement patterns. The old metropolitan areas are declining in density and their formerly rural hinterlands are rising in density. A process of "counter-urbanisation" is now underway (Berry, 1976), with enormous implications for land use and the cost of providing infrastructure. This reversal of a tendency that has been dominant since the industrial revolution towards concentration at high densities, has been made possible by the spread of car ownership and improved communications. These developments make it possible to combine the benefits of low density residential patterns with these of relatively easy access to major population centres for specific economic and cultural activities.

Dynamics of Population Change.

Migration has always received a great deal of attention in Ireland, due to the steady loss of population through emigration. The role of migration in redistributing population within the country has received less attention, a notable exception being Geary and Hughes' 1970 paper. The 1971 Census shed new light on the process through the "usual residence last year" question. A summary of the one-year moves within Ireland 1970-71 is presented in Table 6. It may be seen that all counties of the East region plus Cork, Waterford and Clare gained population through internal migration. On a regional basis, however, only the East recorded a net gain. These figures become more meaningful if converted to rates, as in Table 7. The relatively substantial net inflow of females from the rest of Ireland to the East region is striking, as is the relatively high net outflow of females from the Midlands and Northwest to other regions (mainly the East).

TABLE 6

ONE-YEAR INTERNAL MIGRATION BY REGION 1970-71

County and Region	MALES			FEMALES			TOTAL		
	IN	OUT	NET	IN	OUT	NET	IN	OUT	NET
DUBLIN	4,266	3,427	+839	6,239	3,839	+2,454	10,559	7,266	+3,293
KILDARE	909	600	+309	843	622	+221	1,752	1,222	+ 500
MEATH	678	483	+195	697	592	+105	1,375	1,075	+ 300
WICKLOW	797	548	+249	848	587	+261	1,645	1,135	+ 510
EAST REGION			+1,592			+3,041			+4,633
CORK	1,310	1,098	+212	1,146	1,197	-51	2,456	2,295	+ 161
KERRY	331	432	-101	356	574	-218	687	1,006	- 319
SOUTH WEST			+111			-269			- 158
CARLOW	199	290	-91	241	360	-119	440	650	- 210
KILKENNY	315	384	-69	344	532	-188	659	915	- 257
TIPP. S.	283	516	-233	349	524	-175	632	1,040	- 408
WEXFORD	408	498	-90	441	651	-210	849	1,149	- 300
WATERFORD	559	422	+137	639	495	+144	1,198	917	+ 281
SOUTH EAST			-346			-548			- 894
CAVAN	221	312	-91	264	375	-111	485	687	- 202
LOUTH	422	414	+8	459	530	- 71	881	944	- 63
MONAGHAN	182	248	-66	190	272	- 82	372	520	- 148
NORTH EAST			-149			-264			- 413
CLARE	479	465	+14	547	495	+ 52	1,026	960	+ 66
LIMERICK	702	933	-231	840	1,073	-233	1,542	2,006	- 464
TIPP. N.	425	471	-46	340	555	-215	765	1,026	- 261
MID-WEST			-263			-396			- 659
DONEGAL	265	370	-105	260	409	-149	525	779	- 254
LAOIS	274	340	-66	311	418	-107	585	758	- 173
LONGFORD	162	261	-99	164	261	- 97	326	522	- 196
OFFALY	335	467	-132	345	498	-153	680	965	- 285
ROSCOMMON	243	316	- 73	277	422	-145	520	738	- 218
WESTMEATH	463	536	- 73	451	656	-205	914	1,192	- 278
MIDLANDS			-443			-707			-1,150
GALWAY	765	796	-31	818	928	-110	1,583	1,724	- 141
MAYO	300	551	-251	375	749	-374	675	1,300	- 625
WEST			-282			-484			- 766
LEITRIM	124	194	- 70	136	259	-123	260	453	- 193
SLIGO	255	300	- 45	317	418	-101	572	718	- 146
NORTH WEST			-115			-224			- 339

Source: 1971 Census of Population. Vol. XI

Table 7: Net Population Gain from One Year Internal Migration, 1970-71,
Rates/1,000 Population

Region	Males	Females	Persons
EAST	+3.1	+5.5	4.4
SOUTH WEST	+0.5	-1.2	-0.3
SOUTH EAST	-2.1	-3.4	-2.7
NORTH EAST	-1.7	-3.1	-2.4
MID-WEST	-1.9	-3.0	-2.4
DONEGAL	-1.9	-2.8	-2.3
MIDLANDS	-3.6	-6.4	-4.9
WEST	-2.1	-3.9	-3.0
NORTH-WEST	-2.8	-6.0	-4.3
TOTAL	0.0	0.0	0.0

Based on data in Table 6.

TABLE 8

Estimated Annual Average Net Migration of Dublin Population by three birthplace categories, 1946-61 and 1961-71

	1946-61	1961-71
Males		
Born in Dublin	-3, 531	-1, 854
Born elsewhere in Ireland	+1, 211	+1, 945
<u>Born outside Ireland</u>	<u>+ 465</u>	<u>+ 862</u>
All Birthplaces	-1, 855	+ 953
Females		
Born in Dublin	-3, 434	-2, 127
Born elsewhere in Ireland	+1, 337	+2, 004
<u>Born outside Ireland</u>	<u>+ 404</u>	<u>+ 912</u>
All Birthplaces	-1, 693	+ 789

Source: J. G. Hughes and B. M. Walsh, "Long and Short-term Migration Flows in Ireland and Their Determinants", Forthcoming, ESRI.

Of course the net gain by the East region from internal migration needs to be interpreted carefully. As Geary and Hughes pointed out in their 1970 study, a net inflow to Dublin from the rest of Ireland conceals a very substantial net outflow of the Dublin-born from Dublin. This analysis is updated in Table 8. The net inflow to Dublin from all categories of population 1961-71 was due to a substantial net outflow of the Dublin-born, an almost equal net inflow of those born elsewhere in Ireland, and a significant net inflow of those born outside Ireland.

It is probably more useful, however, to concentrate on a simpler type of analysis, such as is presented in Table 9. This highlights the importance of the East region's high rate of natural increase in accounting for its rapid rate of population increase since 1966. Of the 154 thousand increase in the East region's population since 1966, only 14 thousand has been due to net migration, and almost all of this occurred since 1971. The population growth rates of the East region, at 1.4 per cent between 1966-71 and 1.85 per cent between 1971-75 are extremely high by European standards. The fastest growing regions of Britain (East Anglia and the Southwest) grew at less than one per cent annually between 1961-71, and are now growing at much slower rates.

An extraordinary reversal of migration patterns since 1971 in some regions other than the East is apparent from Table 9. Although the migration estimates are tentative, they suggest that three other regions experienced net in-movement at a rate equal to or higher than that of the East region, namely, the South West, the South East, and the Mid-west. On the other hand, the loss of population due to migration from Donegal, the West, and the North west continued at much the same rate as prior to 1971.

Table 9

Components of Population Change by Region 1966-71 and 1971-75

	1966-71						1971-75					
	Pop. change over period		Natural Increase		Net Migration		Pop. change over period		Natural Increase ^(c)		Net Migration ^(d)	
	000	Rate ^(a)	000	Rate ^(b)	000	Rate ^(b)	000	Rate ^(a)	000	Rate ^(b)	000	Rate ^(b)
EAST	73.0	14.3	72.6	14.2	+0.4	+0.1	80.8	18.5	67.4	15.3	+13.4	+3.0
SOUTH WEST	13.2	5.8	19.1	8.3	-5.9	-2.6	31.3	16.4	18.5	9.6	+12.8	+6.6
SOUTH EAST	9.1	5.6	15.8	9.7	-6.7	-4.1	20.4	15.2	14.4	10.6	+ 6.0	+4.4
NORTH EAST	4.5	5.3	7.6	9.0	-3.1	-3.7	3.2	4.6	6.9	9.8	- 3.7	-5.3
MID WEST	5.0	3.7	12.0	9.0	-7.0	-5.2	15.2	13.8	11.9	10.7	+ 3.3	+3.0
DONEGAL	-0.2	-0.4	3.2	5.9	-3.4	-6.3	-1.3	-3.0	3.1	7.2	- 4.4	-10.2
MIDLANDS	-2.0	-1.7	9.4	8.1	-11.4	-9.8	2.6	2.8	7.8	8.3	- 5.2	-5.6
WEST	-5.2	-4.0	7.7	5.9	-12.9	-9.8	-1.7	1.6	7.8	7.6	- 9.5	-9.2
NORTH WEST	-3.2	-7.9	0.7	1.8	- 3.9	-9.7	-2.6	-8.4	0.9	2.9	- 3.5	-11.3
TOTAL	94.2	6.4	148.2	10.1	-53.9	-3.7	148.8	12.3	138.6	11.4	+10.2	+0.8
TOTAL excl. East	21.2	2.2	75.6	7.9	-54.3	-5.7	68.0	8.8	71.2	9.1	- 3.2	-0.4

(a) Annual average rate of change per 1,000 initial population

(b) Annual average rate per 1,000 average population

(c) Excess of births over deaths assigned to region in 1971-74.

(d) Calculated as a residual of the change in population less the natural increase

Data on natural increase for the years 1971 to 1974 kindly provided by Dr. M. Ross

The importance of natural growth in the East is the most important lesson to be taken from Table 9. Its importance derives from the fact that government pronouncements on regional policy have never gone beyond the aspiration of limiting each region's growth to its rate of natural increase. Although the gap narrowed somewhat after 1971, the rate of natural increase in the East 1971-75 was more than 50 per cent higher than in the rest of Ireland, in some regions of which natural growth is very low due to extreme imbalances of population structure. Thus, a successful "no migration" policy implies that the East region will continue to increase its share of national population. This point can be illustrated more accurately by considering some tentative regional population projects which have been made available to me by Dr. M. Ross (Table 10). According to these projections, curtailing each region to its own natural growth rate would still allow the population of the East region to rise by 170 thousand in the period 1976-86, while the share of national population in the region would rise to 38 per cent.

Policy Issues or Where Will all the People Go?

At its crudest, regional policy is concerned with the allocation of population between regions. Of course, other issues, such as differentials in income and unemployment, are important, but there is a natural fascination with shifts in the distribution of population. Earlier in this paper we have traced the major shifts in population between Irish regions since 1926. The dominant trend was the growth in the Dublin region's share of the national total. This trend has vast social and political, as well as economic, implications. It is most interesting to note that this trend continued after 1971, despite the sharp set-back to Dublin's industrial base during the recent recession, and despite the dramatic narrowing of the gap in living standards between Dublin and the rest of the country revealed by the county income data for the years 1965-73.

Table 10

Regional Population Projections, 1981 and 1986, on assumption of no
internal or external net migration

Region	Estimated Population 1976	Projected Natural Increase 1976-81	Projected Population 1981	Projected Natural Increase 1981-86	Projected Population 1986
	(Thousands)				
East	1,163	83	1,246	89	1,335
South-West	502	23	525	24	549
South East	354	18	372	19	391
North East	178	9	187	9	196
Mid-West	289	15	304	15	319
Donegal	107	4	111	4	115
Midlands	236	9	245	9	254
West	258	10	268	10	278
North West	76	1	77	1	78
Total	3,162	171	3,333	181	3,515

Based on forthcoming study by Dr. M. Ross

Since 1966 there has been a remarkable growth in medium-sized towns (with population over 3,000), and their share of the national population is growing very rapidly. This strengthening of the urban based appears to have been fairly widely spread between regions, although the East region contains 19 out of a total of 70 towns over 3,000 population.

In as much as there is a national policy with regard to regional growth, its goal from Buchanan onwards would seem to be the curtailment of the Dublin region to its own natural growth rate. Table 10 presented the results of a simple projection exercise based on the assumption (i) of a national total of 3.5 million in 1986 (following Keating), and (ii) that all regions grow at their projected natural growth rates (that is, net internal and external migration is zero). The most striking aspect of the results is, once again, the continued upward trend in the share of the East region, which reaches 38 per cent in 1986 under these assumptions.

One of the key issues in regional planning is whether this projected growth rate for the East region is "too high": Will a population of 1.3 million in 1986 be "too large"? Is 38 per cent of the national population "too much"? Economic considerations are of great importance in trying to answer these questions, especially the issue of the costs of providing infrastructure in settlements of different sizes and under different growth rates. But there are also key political and social choices and decisions to be made, and if they are not made then the forces of inertia or "trends" will decide the matter.

In fact the room for manoeuvre is very small. If the East region is to grow at less than its natural rate, then in the absence of emigration the growth in other regions will have to be very rapid. This emerges clearly from the tentative calculations presented in Table 11. (Incidentally, this Table illustrates the very rapid growth that appears to have occurred in the urban regions outside the East between 1971-76). If East's growth were to be curtailed to one

Table 11

Illustrative Regional Growth Options: Population in thousands

	1966	1971	1976	1986 Scenario	
				A	B
EAST	989.2	1,062	1,163	1,334	1,247
NON-EAST					
URBAN	604	664	(769)*	961	1,028
RURAL	1,291	1,253	(1,230)*	1,220	1,240
TOTAL	1,895	1,917	1,999	2,181	2,268
STATE	2,884	2,979	3,162	3,515	3,515

* There are no figures on the urban/rural split of the population in 1976. These are guesses and assume a slowing down in the rate of decrease of rural population.

Scenario A for 1986 allows the East region to grow at its natural growth rate, which results in an increase in its share of national population.

Scenario B holds the growth of the East region to half its natural growth rate and redistributes 87 thousand Dublin residents to other urban centres. The share of the East region in the national total falls back to its 1971 level, the population of other urban centres grows at an annual average rate of 3 per cent, which is the same as the rate apparently recorded between 1971 and 1976.

half its natural increase between 1976 and 1986 (Scenario B), the urban areas of the rest of the country will have to increase by one third in this decade. This implies an annual average growth rate of 3 per cent. (In fact, these areas appear to have achieved this growth rate since 1971).*

It seems obvious that neither Scenario A or B represents an easy option. The demands on infrastructural investment and the threat to the environment of our cities and towns from population and income growth rates of the orders of magnitude now in prospect are going to be extreme.

In conclusion let us look at the East region in a little more detail. It seems that the population of the Dublin area as defined in the 1971 Census stabilised between 1971 and 1975 so that all of the growth occurring in the East region is occurring outside Dublin city and its older suburbs. If the population of the Dublin area in fact stabilises at 780 then the population of the rest of the East region will have to grow from 383 thousand in 1976 to 554 (Scenario A) or 467 (Scenario B) in 1986. The former outcome implies a growth rate of 3.75 per cent annually, the latter 2 per cent. Thus one of the key issues regarding the allocation of Ireland's population growth over the immediate future relates to the capacity of the East region outside the Dublin area to absorb population increase at close to 4 per cent annually.

*Table 11 assumes that the population of rural areas fell by 20 thousand between 1971 and 1976. This may be conservative in view of the slowing down in the decline in the agricultural labour force after 1971.

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