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Dublin's neo-liberal agenda & entrepreneurial planning

L'agenda néo-libéral de Dublin et l'aménagement entrepreneurial

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From the late 1980s, the growing influence on the Irish government of neoliberal ideas (Thatcherism and Reaganomics) became reflected in a range of policies which sought to give increasing importance to market relationships. It was reflected in the sale of state assets, the privatization of state agencies, and engagement with capital under Public-Private Partnerships for the provision and/or the management of infrastructure (e.g. roads, schools, light-rail) and the sub-contracting to the private sector of services which had traditionally been state-operated. Urged by the national government to 'modernise' its operations, Dublin City Council enthusiastically embraced neoliberalism and adopted an entrepreneurial planning agenda in a project to re-create Dublin as a 'can-do' city, the better to market it as a place in which to do business. This became manifested notably in urban regeneration policies.

This paper reviews the impact of key policies which have altered significantly the way in which planning operates in the city. It reviews in particular the impact of key elements of urban regeneration policy: Integrated Area Plans (IAPs) and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in social housing regeneration.

IAPs have been described as '*localised planning mechanisms that aim to develop a holistic approach towards achieving social, economic and environmental goals, translating broad planning aims into locally-focused implementation strategies, providing for the integration of public, private and community sectors to create a collaborative effort towards holistic regeneration*'. Their in-built formal structures for community involvement proclaimed a new era in participation, stressing planning's co-ordinating functions and its interactive role with respect to private-sector interests, public interventions and local communities. The paper seeks to assess the impact of such claims in a climate wherein city planning became re-forged into a strategic process that guided urban development according to agendas set by urban 'boosterism' lobbies, business and real-estate interests. It suggests that the prevailing climate of neo-authoritarian civic entrepreneurialism effectively corrupted the espoused intentions of IAPs. Increasingly, inner-city working-class communities came to view them as serving a pro-development agenda with little attention to community priorities or needs, while operating effectively to incorporate protest and stifle local objections.

Simultaneously, the regeneration of Dublin's run-down social-housing stock has increasingly involved the use of PPPs. These deals involve a private-sector partner redeveloping the land under which accommodates a social-housing scheme. A (negotiable) proportion of the new dwellings are returned to the local authority for use as social housing while the remainder (usually a far higher proportion) are sold by the developer at a profit. This is viewed by the state as a "no immediate cost" model. However, the enormous value of the land given to the private developer can be viewed as an "asset-stripping" process in which both the state and poor households on social-housing waiting lists lose out heavily to property capital.