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Looking After the Best Interests of Dublin Must be Top Priority

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Opinion & Analysis

Vision of inclusive republic was Higgins's parting shot

BY DAVID COUGHLIN
The late Taoiseach, Charles J. Haughey, was a man of many parts. He was a politician, a statesman, a man of letters, a man of action, a man of faith, a man of courage, a man of conviction, a man of principle, a man of integrity, a man of honour, a man of respect, a man of dignity, a man of grace, a man of mercy, a man of compassion, a man of kindness, a man of love, a man of peace, a man of justice, a man of truth, a man of wisdom, a man of faith, a man of hope, a man of charity, a man of generosity, a man of hospitality, a man of friendship, a man of brotherhood, a man of sisterhood, a man of humanity, a man of God.

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Watchdog not balanced on hospital closures

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Looking after best interests of Dublin must be top priority

A new style of dynamic manager is needed to live in the city and ensure it is properly run

WE NEED to stop ignoring Dublin. And let's be clear: what is good for Dublin is very good for Ireland. In no way is that an anti-rural statement. Far from it.

Dublin and its associated region, especially the industrial ring just outside the M50, is the engine which keeps Ireland moving. Monies generated here enter national coffers to run regional hospitals, develop rural tourism, fund local authorities to maintain their areas, protect our water, wildlife, beautiful landscapes and much, much more.

Gross value added is a measure of the value of final goods and services produced in a region. In Dublin, this figure in 2008 was €52,649 per person, or 45.3 per cent more "added value" than the State average.

The Dublin region is where more profits are made, more jobs are created and more income is generated. All this means more money to tax, spend and distribute across the country.

Companies choose to locate in Dublin for reasons of workforce availability, the presence of universities, transport links, communications infrastructure, to locate near other similar companies, and quality of life to attract workers, especially those from abroad.

As urbanisation in Ireland increases – currently about 62 per cent – more will live in the eastern region in and around Dublin, and more high-value companies will locate here, and the cycle will continue and intensify.

This is all good news. Really.

Across the world, cities are supported as repositories of culture, centres of idea-generation and innovation, and sites of large-scale economic activity. So why do politicians and policymakers continue to neglect Ireland's capital city and economic engine? Why do they insist on promoting a politically motivated state of competition between Dublin and the rest of Ireland instead of a state of symbiosis? Partly this is due to a culture of anti-intellectualism in Irish politics where TDs and ministers prefer to listen to anecdotal grassroots "evidence" rather than reasoned, informed, rational analysis from even their own experts such as the ESRI and CSO.

Partly it is due to putting local votes first and nothing seems to get votes like thwarting the success of Dublin. Politicians frequently seem to forget they are there to run the country, not just their constituency.

So, what needs to change?

Firstly, Dublin needs to be recognised in policy and politics as the most important economic location in Ireland. It sustains us.

Instead of stifling the growth of Dublin, politicians should find ways to allow the rest of Ireland to benefit from this growth, to work in conjunction and symbiosis with the region and not in competition.

Administrative boundaries – mere lines on a map – limit this work, with individual counties competing against each other and Dublin for jobs, instead of combining their strengths at a regional resource (not administrative) level to grow and sustain themselves.

Quality of life is vital. Workforces are international, mobile, educated, demanding. To attract workers here, we need to have a liveable, affordable, accessible, permeable, fun city with culture, arts, food, literature, theatre, and proper on-time intra- and inter-city transport.

And to create this, Dublin itself needs to change the way it is managed. Times have changed but practices have not. Dublin city now needs a manager with a proven urban ethos to run and improve the city, a person who will live in the city, cycle in the city, who will engage with its social, economic and transport problems on a daily basis. It must also surely be hard to understand the city when you live somewhere else, as some of Dublin city's managers do.

Instead of promoting yet another internal public sector candidate, wouldn't it be interesting to bring in a Rudy Giuliani or Amsterdam's current mayor, Eberhard van der Laan, when he finishes his term, on a five-year contract to manage the city?

Currently, neither administrators nor politicians are keeping up with a changing Dublin. Old ways will no longer suffice, as traditional practices no longer provide answers to modern problems.

Ultimately, if we fail to recognise Dublin's role in the successful and sustainable future of Ireland, then we will have neither. The engine of Dublin now stretches from Louth to Wicklow, and out to Westmeath. It is a huge area with nobody looking after it. But we ignore this engine at our peril. If we look after Dublin, in the end it will look after us. All of us.

Lorcan Sirr and Conor Skehan lecture in the College of Engineering and the Built Environment at Dublin Institute of Technology. *Dublin's Future: new visions for Ireland's capital city*, edited by Lorcan Sirr, is published by The Liffey Press.

LORCAN SIRR
and **CONOR SKEHAN**