Irish Business and Society: Governing, Participating and Transforming in the 21st Century

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Irish Business & Society

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Edited by
John Hogan
Paul F. Donnelly &
Brendan K. O’Rourke
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GILL & MACMILLAN
‘Irish Business and Society presents the best of Irish social science, neatly packaged around themes of governance, participation and transformation. Many of these original chapters are brilliantly crafted, and while they show an Ireland slipping off a time of rapid growth, themes of hope abound in enterprise, social and economic partnership, civil society, social inclusion and Europeanization. Read it through for a clear view of what makes today's Ireland click, and sometimes splutter.’

Jon Van Til, Professor Emeritus of Urban Studies and Public Policy, Rutgers University, USA

‘This very stimulating book of essays brought me right back to this quote from Tom Stoppard's Arcadia: “It makes me so happy. To be at the beginning again, knowing almost nothing. ... It's the best possible time to be alive, when almost everything you thought you knew is wrong.” There is a real sense from these essays that, once again, Ireland is at a turning point, in business, society and public governance.’

Peter Cassells, Chairman, National Centre for Partnership and Performance; Chairman, DHR Communications; former general secretary, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)

‘Irish Business and Society succeeds in drawing an excellent, multidimensional perspective on Ireland from some of our most perceptive academic commentators as we seek to address the role of business in our society in the twenty-first century. It comprehensively addresses the various themes relevant to Irish business and society in one coherent volume and should be required reading for all citizens seeking to improve their understanding of modern Ireland. Its economic and social analysis of the “Celtic Tiger” is particularly insightful, reminding me of George Santayana’s quote: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” This book successfully holds that mirror up to our societal structures and institutions in a way that should enable us to learn and develop as a society.’

Jim Barry, Chief Executive, NTR plc; member of Council of Patrons, Special Olympics Ireland; board member, The Ireland Funds
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Oireachtas’, examined the attitudes of Oireachtas members to corrupt scenarios. The research was based on surveys, interviews and observation undertaken during 2007/2008, when she worked in the Seanad. Other research interests include public sector accountability structures, interest groups and lobbying.

Nicola Timoney, PhD, is an economist lecturing at Dublin Institute of Technology. She originally qualified with a BA in political economy and national economics and an MA from University College Dublin. With the assistance of a French Government scholarship, she studied for a Diplôme des Études Approfondies at Université de Rennes, and then a Doctorat en Économie Publique at Université de Droit, d'Économie, de Sciences Sociales de Paris. She lectures on a variety of topics in economics, including introductory economics, economics of health care, international trade, labour economics and international business. She has presented seminars to trade union groups, student societies, and to returned development workers. She participated (in 2000) in an EU-funded specialist programme of training for civil servants in Laos in preparation for membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Her recent focus of study is the labour market in Ireland, and the topic of migration.

Michael Ward, PhD, is Head of the Department of Food Business and Development at University College Cork and Director of the UCC Centre for Co-operative Studies. Michael grew up on a dairy farm in Monaghan, and has researched, taught and published extensively in the fields of co-operative organisation and management. He has been the recipient of public funding, e.g. from the Royal Irish Academy, Stimulus and the EU Septimus programme, as well as numerous relevant consulting assignments, e.g. Waterford and Glanbia Co-ops and Údarás na Gaeltachta. Special care has been taken to disseminate the findings of his research. He has also been active in developing successful new postgraduate and distance education programmes in the fields of co-operative organisation, food marketing and rural development, courses that have benefited from the findings of his research and that of his colleagues in the Centre for Co-operative Studies.

Geoffrey Weller, PhD, is a postdoctoral researcher interested in how individuals engage as volunteers in civil society. His most recent work focuses on how young adults construct themselves as volunteers through discursive identity work and the use of social capital. He received his PhD from the College of Business of the Dublin Institute of Technology in 2009. Before entering academia, he worked in public relations for Leonard Cheshire Disability and the Work Foundation and was a journalist with the BBC.
The chapters comprising this section look at a number of areas of relevance to the making and unmaking of a period that has become ubiquitously known as the Celtic Tiger: changes in the labour force over the past twenty years; the power of vested interests in Irish politics and the process of economic policy making; the emergence and evolution of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA); the enterprise discourse that has dominated how we talk and think about business and its relationship with society; the politics of welfare in Ireland; and the failures of the Irish economic experiment and some possible remedies to bring about change.

Chapter 1, by Nicola Timoney, looks at labour and employment in Ireland in the era of the Celtic Tiger. Seeing the outstanding feature of this era as the expansion of the labour force, the chapter provides an overview of key developments in the Irish labour market over the period 1988 to 2008. It examines the size and composition of the labour force, considers the rewards to labour by way of the minimum wage, the distribution of income, and the issue of internationalisation and competitiveness of labour costs, and explores the experience of social partnership. The chapter closes by discussing some of the major challenges facing the labour market in the near future.

Moving to Chapter 2, which deals with the political economy of policy making in Ireland, Frank Barry argues that the power of vested interests and the particular characteristics of democratic electoral systems frequently lead to policy decisions that operate against the interests of society as a whole. The chapter examines decision making in some of the now widely acknowledged policy errors of the boom period. However, this chapter also considers how ‘political cover’ has enabled a number of beneficial historical policy changes to be achieved. This analysis provides some suggestions as to how decision-making processes might be reformed to secure more advantageous outcomes in the future.
In Chapter 3, Paul F. Donnelly traces the evolution of the IDA through the lens of path dependence theory. The story charts the IDA's creation within protectionism in 1949 and its subsequent evolution in an environment of free trade. The chapter follows the IDA's emergence as the state's pre-eminent industrial development agency, its re-creation as a state-sponsored organisation and the growing political, institutional and monetary resources afforded it in return for delivery on objectives. However, the increasing reliance on foreign investment to meet targets, at the expense of indigenous industry, eventually surfaces as a challenge in the early 1980s and culminates in the IDA being split into separate agencies in 1994.

Another important element of process in policy making is the language a society uses for talking about business, and Chapter 4 examines how this both facilitates and constrains how business is done. Brendan K. O'Rourke describes and analyses a dominant way of talking and thinking about business, called 'enterprise discourse'. This form of business discourse relies heavily on seeing all organisations as best when following the mythology of how it is imagined that small, but fast-growing, private enterprises are run. An understanding of enterprise discourse, its features and a sense of it as a discourse dependent on the historical circumstance in which it emerged is useful.

Mary P. Murphy, in Chapter 5, looks at the politics of Irish social security policy over the period 1986 to 2006. Offering a case study of the Irish social welfare policy community, and curious about why the Irish social welfare system has developed in a different direction from that of other English-speaking countries, the chapter asks whether a relative absence of Irish social welfare reform can be explained by examining the politics of welfare. ‘Policy architecture’ is offered as a way of framing an examination of how the general Irish political institutional features interact with the institutions and interests of the Irish social welfare policy community.

Finally, pondering whether the Irish economic experiment is doomed to fail, in Chapter 6 Bill Kingston begins by arguing that the global banking disaster has hurt Ireland more severely than other developed countries because, from the foundation of the state, government intervention progressively became the characteristic way of running the country. Seeing the crisis as delivering proof that intervention does not work, allied with the vagaries of an electoral system that results in constrained and weak governments and a civil service that cannot be held accountable for what it does, or fails to do, the chapter makes a case for dismantling much of the state apparatus supporting, and puts forward some interesting alternatives to, intervention.
The chapters in this section deal with the issues of governance, regulation and justice. They examine Irish corporate governance, corporate social responsibility, white-collar crime, political corruption and the regulation of lobbying, as well as looking at the Celtic Tiger from a social justice perspective. Each of these chapters provides the reader with a particular theme that has been of growing public concern over the past decade. That the various topics overlap to some extent highlights how closely linked a variety of aspects of Irish society are, and provides this section of the book with a resulting synergy. In particular, this part of the book challenges the reader to appreciate the more general themes that run throughout its six chapters, encompassing aspects of openness, accountability, transparency and equality.

Chapter 7, by Niamh Brennan, provides an overview of corporate governance in Ireland. The chapter begins with a discussion of the definitions of corporate governance, as well as describing the internal and external mechanisms of such governance. The role of boards of directors, and theories explaining those roles, are considered. In order to provide an insight into the corporate governance research being conducted in Ireland, fifteen academic papers with an Irish focus are analysed by reference to theoretical perspective, governance mechanism studied, research method adopted and results obtained. This provides the reader with an overview of the range of research currently being undertaken into how businesses in Ireland are governed.

Rebecca Maughan focuses on the issues of corporate governance that fall under the rubric of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Chapter 8. In recent decades, CSR has become a focal point for public attention and academic research. First, the concept of CSR and some of the most prevalent theories used to explain and understand CSR are considered. CSR in practice is then discussed, with an
emphasis on current, as well as historical, practice and reporting in Ireland. Emergent areas of CSR research are also highlighted, and the final section of the chapter calls attention to CSR and private family firms as an important, but under-researched, area.

In Chapter 9, Roderick Maguire concentrates on how the law deals with the increasingly significant problem of white-collar crime. The chapter discusses the varieties of white-collar crime, and the historical and contemporary reactions to it in the legislative and political spheres. Explanations of the concept, and how it has been dealt with in the courts, are examined. The chapter looks at crimes perpetrated by employees in the course of their employment, as well as crimes perpetrated by businesses themselves.

Gillian Smith examines the issue of political corruption in Ireland in Chapter 10. She argues that, since at least the late 1980s, corruption has been a feature of Ireland's political landscape. As Ireland struggles to cope with failures in the national banking system, it appears that the failures of governance implicated in the current economic crisis have many parallels with past scandals. The chapter examines the structural and cultural factors in Ireland that inhibit the effectiveness of anti-corruption legislation and the importance of moral costs in reducing corrupt behaviour. Of particular interest is the chapter's provision of a unique insight into the attitudes of members of the Oireachtas to corrupt activities, and what this might mean for efforts to reduce corrupt behaviour in the future.

Taking another angle on the politics-business nexus, Chapter 11, by Conor McGrath, examines the issue of lobbying regulation from an Irish perspective. The chapter discusses the current absence of a law regulating the activities of lobbyists in Ireland, despite the fact that the lobbying industry here has been growing over the last two decades and that there has been a spate of major scandals centred on the relationships between politicians and business interests. This chapter considers how interest groups and lobbying operate in the Irish political context, it examines the proposals that have to date been put forward for lobbying regulation, and suggests what any future legislation might require of the industry.

Finally, in Chapter 12, Connie Ostwald provides a social justice perspective on the overall state of contemporary Ireland. This chapter discusses the fact that, although Ireland has recently been transformed by an economic boom, the level of income inequality remains a serious issue. The chapter analyses the results of this dramatic economic growth through a Rawlsian social justice lens, using Rawls' set of four 'primary goods' to analyse the impact of economic growth on Irish society: rights and liberty; equality of opportunity; income inequality; and the bases of self-respect. Using Rawls' principles of justice, including his 'Difference Principle', the chapter concludes that social justice was compromised during the Celtic Tiger period.
The chapters comprising this section are concerned with the fact that business is done, policy making is performed, and disputes are resolved with people and groups who have contributions to make, rights to respect and emotions to manage. The contributors here examine the resulting partnerships and participations at various levels, in various settings and from a variety of perspectives.

John Hogan, in Chapter 13, analyses the politics of partnership at the national level. From the late 1950s, when the trade union movement was invited into the policy-making process by a government desperate to revive a sclerotic economy, to the emergence of partnership at the national level in response to the crises of the 1980s, the chapter examines how economic crises have led to changes in the trade union movement’s influence on public policy.

Emerging from the framework of national social partnership agreements was the policy of enterprise-level partnership, which sought to extend the new-found levels of co-operation that had developed between the social partners at national level to the level of the local firm. In Chapter 14, Kevin O’Leary compares the competing employee voice strategies offered by human resource management on the one hand and the trade union movement on the other. Enterprise-level partnership as a third option is reviewed and its development is considered.

Chapter 15, by Jesse Norris, analyses four forms of partnership governance focused on combating social exclusion on a local area basis. The four forms – open method of co-ordination, County/City Development Boards (CDBs), Area Partnerships (APs), and the Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID) programme – have all had positive effects on substantive policies and policy-making processes. However, they have also failed to bring about transformations in social inclusion policy or governance. The chapter argues that a more sophisticated governance architecture, and the abandonment of a conflict-averse approach to partnership, would improve effectiveness.
In Chapter 16, Olive McCarthy, Robert Briscoe and Michael Ward examine the co-operative approach to doing business and the structural characteristics of co-operatives. In Ireland, there is a range of very successful co-operative businesses in agriculture, finance, housing and community development. The authors argue that the co-operative approach holds out the promise of giving people, and society in general, ownership and control of the ways in which their needs are met.

Helen Chen and Patrick Phillips, in Chapter 17, explore the relationship between managers’ emotional intelligence and conflict resolution in the workplace. Evidence from their own empirical work suggests that generalising too quickly that managers have to be disagreeably tough to succeed may underestimate the need for mastery of the emotions. They argue that in-depth analysis of the utility of particular components of emotional intelligence in specific situations is needed, if the potential of the approach is to be realised.

In Chapter 18 Mary Faulkner provides a guide to the complex regulatory framework and associated fora governing employee–employer relations. This offers a picture of the legal rights and duties that allow workplace partnerships and participation to be built, but that also constrains them and acts as the final resort when they fail.

The multidimensional nature of participation and partnership is revealed in this section of the book. The authors here have provided important challenges and insights for readers. These challenges and insights are needed as, whatever partnership arrangements are used, Irish business and society face a future requiring both co-ordination and co-operation between its various constituents.
What unites the chapters in this section of the book is the general theme of borders, be they between Ireland and the European Union (EU), Ireland North and South, those that distinguish Ireland culturally in the realm of tourism, or the borders of migration. Indeed, the picture that emerges is one of borders that have become more permeable, but that could just as easily become unyielding should circumstances alter. In this context, readers will encounter chapters dealing with the Irish debate on the Lisbon Treaty, and whether the Irish wished to be ‘in’ or ‘out’ of Europe, the Europeanisation of public policy in Ireland, and the evolving relationship between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Migration also comes into focus from two different perspectives: the move from economic migration towards lifestyle migration for those with international careers; and the risk the Irish economy faces through recession-induced net emigration. Finally, coming from the perspective of tourism development, we have a chapter that looks at capitalising on cultural borders in terms of what makes Ireland and the Irish different.

Following Ireland’s two rounds of voting on the EU’s Lisbon Treaty, in Chapter 19 John O’Brennan reflects on Ireland’s relationship with the wider Europe. Arguing that since the economic impact on Ireland of EU membership has been almost universally accepted as positive, recent rejections of EU referendums are somewhat paradoxical. Some explanation can be found in the exclusive nature of Irish national identity, but also in an increasing chasm between elite and popular opinion on the matter. Despite Ireland’s acceptance of the second Lisbon referendum, there are likely to be more twists and turns in Ireland’s future relationship with Europe.

Turning to Chapter 20, Mary C. Murphy traces the evolution of the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland since the
introduction of partition in 1920. A once troubled relationship has changed to the point where a variety of economic, political, social, cultural and sectoral links now exist between North and South. More specifically, where cross-border co-operation is deemed mutually beneficial, there exists a strong practical and functional logic towards co-operation. The institutionalisation of North–South relations, as per the terms of the 1998 Belfast Agreement, provides an important context within which this relationship has been pursued.

Breda McCarthy, in Chapter 21, looks at cultural tourism development in Irish towns and villages. Beginning with an outline of the factors that facilitate the development of cultural tourism in regional Ireland, she moves on to propose a model of cultural tourism development that argues that stocks of social, cultural and tourist capital are important to the development of the industry, in addition to emphasising the notion of authenticity in the cultural encounters and experiences of tourists and local actors. Through case study research on a selection of Irish villages, towns and hinterland, the chapter demonstrates that tourism development is strongly rooted in the local social and cultural environment. While noting that the obvious starting-point for cultural tourism development is the possession of cultural resources, the chapter argues that cultural capital becomes more valuable when it is combined with social capital, since it assists wealth creation.

Positing twenty-first-century international careers as witnessing a move from economic to lifestyle migration, in Chapter 22 Marian Crowley-Henry explores international careers in contemporary society from a critical and individual perspective. With the increasing internationalisation of trade and careers, and an increasingly multicultural workforce, the chapter argues that it is important to consider the stories of individuals living international careers, so as to better inform policy and practices in organisations and wider society. Built around the findings from a qualitative exploratory research undertaking, the chapter emphasises a focus on a more comprehensive systems approach to careers, encompassing subjective and objective career dimensions, as well as structural influences and life stage elements. Implications of the findings for Ireland's changing multicultural society are discussed, particularly for those Irish who voluntarily choose to embark on an international life and career experience as lifestyle migrants.

Taking Ireland's history of emigration and seeing lessons from Irish economic history for achieving growth in a regional economy, John McHale in Chapter 23 considers the risk the Irish economy faces through recession-induced net emigration. The chapter begins with a brief overview of Ireland's post-Famine demographic history, along with consideration of distinct phases of demographic development and their correlations to economic performance. While the effects of emigration on Ireland have been thought damaging to the development of industries where economies of scale are important, recent international literature on the links between skilled migration and development leans to more optimistic
conclusions than the earlier work on the 'brain drain', highlighting the dynamic benefits of 'brain circulation'. Arguing that emigration will make it harder to achieve competitive advantage in the innovation-intensive sectors the government is targeting in its new growth strategy, the chapter concludes by briefly considering possible implications for three policy areas: fiscal, labour market activation and immigration.

Finally, in Chapter 24, Kate Nicholls considers some of the factors that might explain the Europeanisation of public policy in Ireland. She starts out by reviewing the development of the concept of 'Europeanisation', along with a number of theories developed by political scientists in order to identify the conditions under which policy Europeanisation takes place. She then moves on to argue that the best way to pinpoint the factors that either facilitate or hinder policy Europeanisation is to place Ireland in comparative context. By comparing Ireland with 'most similar' cases, such as Portugal and Greece, the chapter highlights the role of policy-making institutions and processes capable of balancing functions of consultation and incorporation. In the final analysis, the chapter reasons that Ireland's consensus-oriented democratic tradition has provided a good basis on which to construct such institutions and processes.
The chapters in this section look at some contemporary issues of concern to Irish business and society and so, inevitably, highlight interests that are in tension concerning these issues. In broad terms, the chapters cover: interest groups and their role in society; the development of, and challenges faced by, the civil society sector; feminism, activism and social change; the issues surrounding alcohol advertising; the practice of advertising to children; the challenges for society posed by digital information and communication technologies; and spirituality in the workplace.

Gary Murphy opens the section by examining, in Chapter 25, the issues surrounding interest groups and their political activities. Theoretically, interest groups can play a simple but central role in a democratic society by acting as a conduit between citizens and their government. By analysing interest groups' activities in several central debates in Ireland, this chapter shows that the access and expectations such groups have to, and of, Irish policy makers can be of great significance for policy outcomes.

Another set of groups that stand in the space between citizens and government are civil society groups. In Chapter 26, Geoff Weller first considers Irish civil society's antecedents and its contemporary identity, before identifying the Irish civil society sector's development and its present qualities. The challenges for the sector, particularly those related to its relationship with the state and the question of whether there is a crisis of participation in Irish civil society, are considered.

A vitally important social movement throughout the last hundred years has been the women's movement. In Chapter 27, Jennifer DeWan examines how the women's movement in Ireland has experienced a generational shift. Feminist activism, within a cohesive and autonomous social movement, no longer fully defines the practices and subjectivities activists employ to transform their lives. All
this has taken place in the context of dramatic social changes in Ireland that are characteristic of the effects of late capitalism in a European, post-colonial nation-state. These changes have potentially opened up many new opportunities to transform political engagement in general.

Next, in Chapter 28, a major concern in contemporary Ireland is examined in detail: Patrick Kenny and Gerard Hastings explore the controversial issue of alcohol advertising. The alcohol industry maintains that its marketing campaigns operate at the level of brand preferences. Others argue that alcohol advertising contributes to higher overall levels of alcohol consumption. The chapter reviews the empirical evidence on both sides of the debate and presents an overview of current regulations governing alcohol advertising practice in Ireland, drawing some conclusions regarding research into the advertising of this rather special product.

A rather special advertising audience concerns Margaret-Anne Lawlor in Chapter 29. In Ireland, the practice of advertising to children continues to attract strong practitioner, regulatory and public interest. The attractiveness of the children’s market to business is examined and ethical issues concerning child-targeted advertising are introduced. In examining the large body of literature in this area, it is suggested that child consumers may be more knowledgeable and evaluative of television advertising than previously recognised.

Chapter 30 considers the impact of a young technology on the privacy of consumers and citizens. Karlin Lillington explores how the ubiquity of digital information and communication technologies has brought about an unprecedented ability to create, sift and analyse information. The temptation to store and/or have access to such information has proved enormously attractive to businesses, as well as to law enforcement agencies. Business and society, in general, face challenges from the shifting data landscape and changing perceptions of privacy in the new age of information technology.

John Cullen, in Chapter 31, addresses some recent changes in the technology of the self. He explores how faith experiences have undergone a broad change away from established religious frameworks, such as churches, towards a more New Age, ‘inner-self spirituality’, where individuals attempt to come to terms with the meaning of their lives. Personal effectiveness and spiritual management means management of faith experiences in the workplace.

From interest groups to our spirituality, business’s interactions with society are increasingly important. As the authors in this section show, profound changes challenge us to think deeply about these issues and how to manage the balance between society’s concerns and those of diverse interests.
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