2013-8

What Stick Figures Tell Us about Irish Politics

Sharon Feeney  
*Technological University Dublin*

John Hogan  
*Technological University Dublin*

Paul F. Donnelly  
*Technological University Dublin*, paul.donnelly@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: [https://arrow.tudublin.ie/buschmarcon](https://arrow.tudublin.ie/buschmarcon)

Part of the Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, Political Science Commons, and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons

**Recommended Citation**


This Conference Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Marketing at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Conference papers by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie, arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, brian.widdis@tudublin.ie.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/)
What stick figures tell us about Irish politics

Sharon Feeney, Paul Donnelly & John Hogan, College of Business, Dublin Institute of Technology

Figure 1
The student’s narrative:
- Politicians: only want your money
- Closed doors: secrets and lies
- Money and votes

What emerged
- Tiny sample of drawings presented, but, overall, largely negative perspectives on Irish politics — general sense of malaise and dissatisfaction
- Overwhelming sense of crisis
- But protest is largely absent
- Conservatism of Irish society
- Sense of powerlessness and inaction
- People resigned to status quo
- Elitism and conynong in upper echelons of society
- String perception that politicians are either corrupt, incompetent or self-serving
- Lots of questions, but no answers
- A negative attitude towards the EU
- An absence of political transparency and accountability
- In whose interest does democracy function?

Figure 2
The student’s narrative:
- Government pillaging citizens for every cent

What we interpret:
- Negative relationship between Ireland and EU
- Enlarged Irish government shaking money from citizens and EU collecting the money
- Other small EU stick men – other EU countries – approving

Doing freehand drawing
- First class, provided students with A4 sheet and pre-printed instructions:
  - Side 1: “Through a drawing answer the following question: What is Irish Politics?”
  - Side 2: “Now, in your own words, describe/explain what you have drawn”
  - Drawing (10-15 mins)
- Describe/explain what had drawn (10 mins)
- Bridge gap between intended message and onlooker’s interpretation
- Divide students into groups of 5 for discussion (25 mins)
- Rapporteur recorded discussion
- Second class, facilitated debrief of class
- Rapporteur noted on flipchart sheets; opened floor for discussion

Figure 3
The student’s narrative:
- Previous work involved students using freehand drawing in critical self-reflection
- “Doing research with people, rather than on them” (Bray et al. 2000: 7)
- Should sense of experience - freedom to express in non-traditional manner
- Drawings, enjoyable, simple, yet deceptively revealing
- Learning experience an unfolding collaborative process of inquiry

What we interpret:
- Image of Ireland and euro - interesting in context of the question
- People debating, questioning, seeking consensus – perception of Irish politicians?
- Unhappy people under a cloud of taxes and other charges

Figure 4
The student’s narrative:
- Bertie – Rich; Brian Cowan – Dead; Enda Kenny – Prisoner;
- Germany – in control; Ireland – in ruins;
- Michael D – Spectator, no wishes left, no control

What we interpret:
- Many details – depth of feelings – sense of social and economic crisis
- Belief that economy and politics are intricately linked
- Former politicians either dead or corrupt, current PM a prisoner; President a ghost;
- Germany receives the money from Ireland

Figure 5
The student’s narrative:
- Irish politics is about how the government “helps”
- People craving food, shelter, etc., whilst Government wastes wheelbarrow loads of workers’ hard earned money

What we interpret:
- People craving food, shelter, etc., whilst Government wastes wheelbarrow loads of workers’ hard earned money
- Ordinary citizens disgruntled

Figure 6
The student’s narrative:
- An Illustration of an endless series of questions to our political leaders, with no answers in return

What we interpret:
- Numerous hard questions are addressed to the figure – presumably a politician
- “A he says its “I don’t know”
- Sense of uncertainty and confusion

Contact us
- Sharon Feeney, BS&S Director of Policy Research, DIT, Aungier Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
  e: sharon.feeney@dit.ie
- Paul Donnelly, BS&S Research Centre Director, DIT, Aungier Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
  e: paul.donnelly@dit.ie
- John Hogan, BS&S Research Centre Director, DIT, Aungier Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
  e: john.hogan@dit.ie
  w: www.johnhogan.net

To see our previous research on this topic:
- www.palgrave-journals.com/eps/journal/vaop/ncurrent/
- www.johnhogan.net