

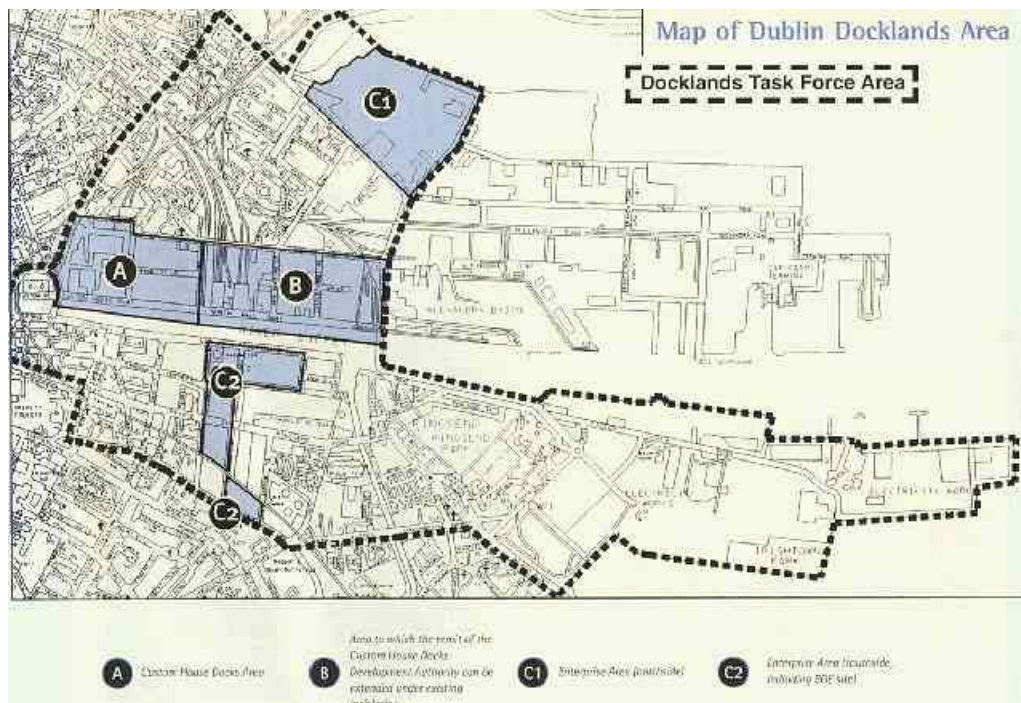
Land use policies in Ireland

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Ireland is a country with many peculiarities, which has had a recent development. Contrarily to most of other EC countries it still has a rural and young population, not densely spread over the territory and scarcely urban. In addition to this, only in relatively recent times the political parties assumed identities of their own, dealing with socio-economic cleavages between the people. Central Government has always been neutral in matters of foreign policy, while Local Government comes from a transformation of the old English administrative system, with some anomalies such as the lack of an elective figure, corresponding to the Mayor, who can represent the population.

For many centuries the Irish island has been under the domination of the British neighbours: a true colonialism which has left the legacy of a quite efficient administration, but also of a heavy economic backwardness: English government only encouraged Irish agriculture, while industry was left at an embryo stage that lasted until the Fifties of our century. The Great Famine at the end of XIX century worsened the situation, causing so many Irishmen to die or emigrate that the population was reduced to a half in fifty years.

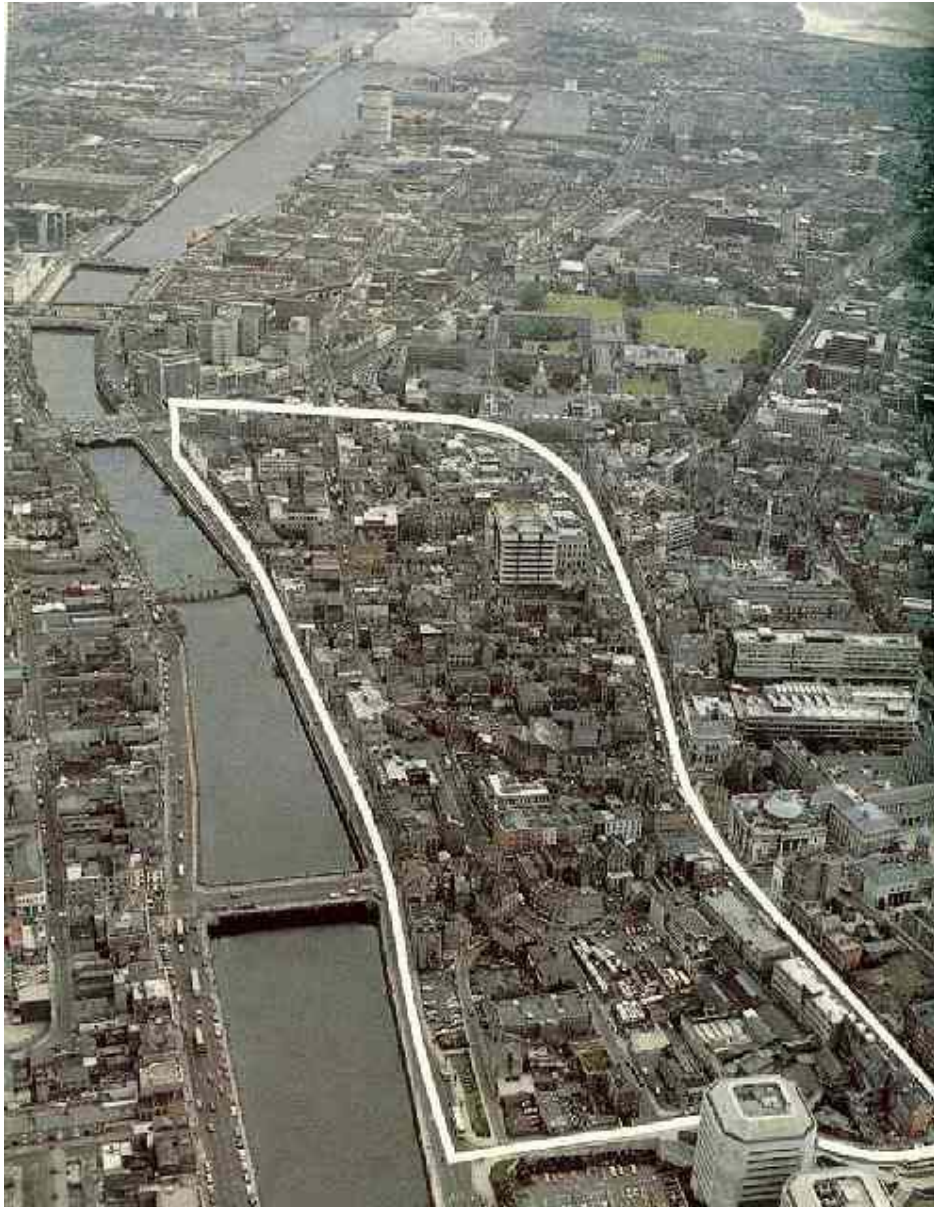


In 1922 a civil war ended the British domination (but some political tension is still alive) by giving birth to the Irish Republic, whose government, including two elective Chambers, has been guided until today by the centrist party *Fianna Fáil*, or by coalitions hardly ascribable to the center – right or the center – left wing. Local Government, provided with limited powers, is founded on a division between 34 County Councils (actually, 29 true County Councils and 5 County Borough Corporations), each of them supplied with a Manager, a singular figure object of disputes, who holds executive powers.

During the last twenty years Ireland made great strides, by developing its economy and improving its infrastructures, that were particularly scarce. A blazing success due to a wise and strict management, but also to the sustain provided by the EU, that continues to include the entire territory of Eire among the regions helped by the structural funds: unemployment is still over 12%. Accession to EEC dates from 1973: it has been a real turning point for the political identity, and for the economical one as well. Sometimes, in order to take more advantage from european fundings, Ireland privileged even some policies instead of others. In any case, the heavy investments made in this country have also given an impulse to architecture and town planning, that could express original and interesting features after quite a long stasis.



Irish town planning was born in Dublin during the first decade of the century, heavily influenced by the existing English discipline: Patrick Geddes strongly contributed to the movement. In the Sixties the relating law apparatus was completely renewed, and it formed the basis of the present situation. The lack of the regional level, both in the administrative sense and in the land planning sense, is a particularity of the Irish system: the locally valid Development Plan is the only true effective planning instrument. The upper level coordination is weak. An important role is played by the people and the courts, according to the common law principle.



As the major city of the Republic, housing one third of the total population, the capital is the mirror of the Irish renewal, for good and for bad. The brand new plans for the quarters of Temple Bar and of the Custom House Docks are the best positive examples of this, for the town planning and for the architecture too. These two works show clearly the peculiar way of planning the city in Eire, with good results. But Dublin can also represent the mistakes of the past (low care for the artistic inheritance, wrong evaluations in urban policies) and the problems of today (a Local Government with little initiative and lack of organization, few investments).