

The Enabling State in the Republic of Ireland

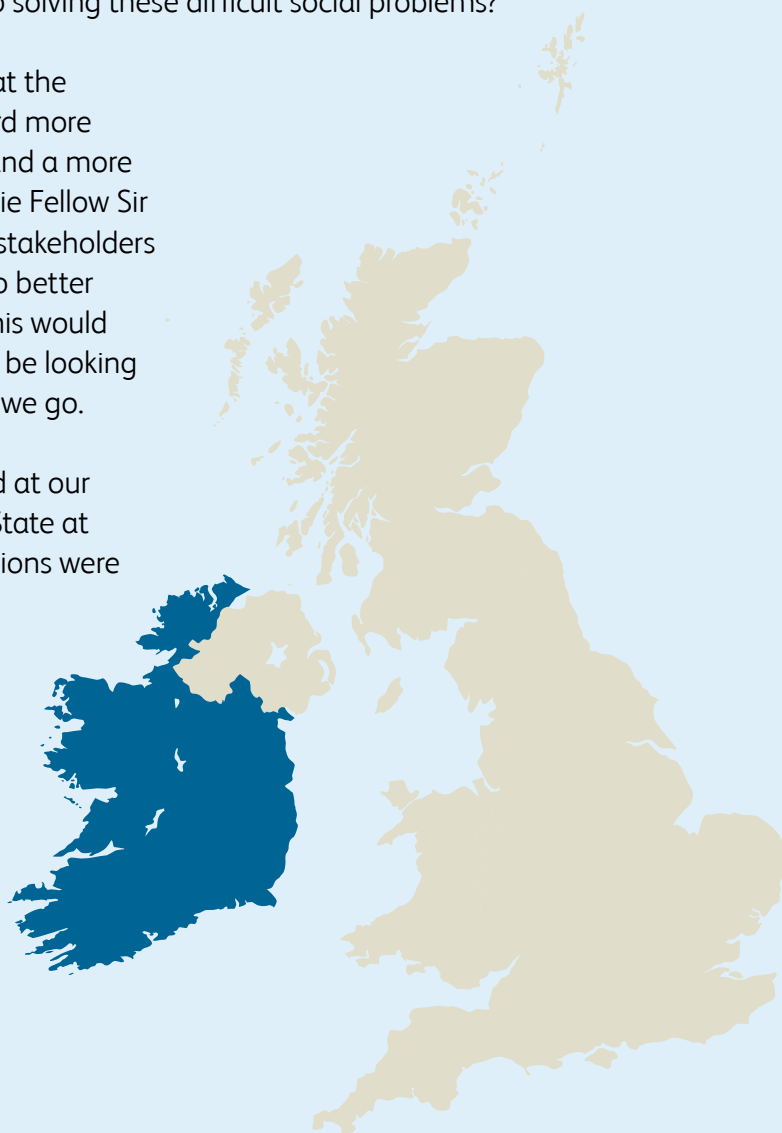
Key issues raised at our Dublin *Enabling State* roundtable on 23 January 2013 at Wood Quay, Dublin

The UK and the Republic of Ireland have experienced huge improvements in wellbeing in the last 100 years, however a number of complex social problems persist. Could a new relationship between the state and individuals hold the key to solving these difficult social problems?

The Carnegie UK Trust believes we are at the beginning of a fundamental shift toward more empowered citizens and communities and a more enabling state. With the help of Carnegie Fellow Sir John Elvidge we are engaging with key stakeholders across the UK and Republic of Ireland to better understand this movement and what this would mean for public service delivery. We will be looking for opportunities for shared learning as we go.

This report summarises the issues raised at our roundtable discussion on the Enabling State at Wood Quay, Dublin. Roundtable discussions were also held in Cardiff, Belfast, Newcastle, Dunfermline and London during December 2012 – February 2013.

We hope you find the report of interest and we would be pleased to hear your views. Please contact Jenny Brotchie, Policy Officer at jenny@carnegieuk.org or on 01383 749757. You can find our discussion paper [here](#).



1. The Republic of Ireland Context

Many of the issues raised in the Enabling State discussion paper resonate in the Republic of Ireland but, unsurprisingly, the broadly UK-based analysis does not always translate easily.

Following a 15 year economic boom when GDP per head rose to amongst the highest in Europe and unemployment fell to below 3%, Ireland has experienced a severe five year economic contraction since 2008 seeing unemployment rising to 15% (over 40% for young people); historically high levels of emigration; a complete collapse in the property market; banking failure; entry into an IMF/EU/ECB rescue and structural adjustment programme; severe cuts in public services budgets and major increases in taxation levels across the board. In short the country has experienced a profound shock and a general crisis of confidence as it has wrestled to stabilise the economy and regain control over its own affairs and destiny.

Social cohesion has been severely tested during this process and the country has been on a five year journey of soul searching and self-questioning as it attempts to identify and agree what caused the social and economic crisis, what lessons need to be learned, and what reforms need to be introduced to ensure the experience is never repeated. The Government's stated overwhelming priority is to exit the IMF/EU/ECB programme and regain national sovereignty, while minimising the severity of the negative impact on the most vulnerable people. The general consensus of the Irish people appears to be that it is doing a reasonable job in this regard, but paradoxically polls suggest that it will be severely punished for the actions it has taken at the next general election. Programmes of local government and constitutional reform are proposed which will have uncertain effects on the relationship between citizens, communities and the state in the years ahead.

The dominating context that Ireland is still a 'bailout' country and is dealing with a five part

crisis in the areas of banking, public finances, national competitiveness, social outcomes and national reputation. There are three other main contextual differences that would appear to inform the relevance of the Enabling State concept to the Republic of Ireland and that in the UK:

- Ireland is a highly centralised state in comparison to England and Wales and Scotland. Control of policy development – and responsibility for actual service implementation in many instances – in the areas of health and social services, education, social welfare and benefits, policing, economic development, agriculture, environmental protection and the administration of justice and many, many others resides with national agencies and Government departments. As a result, local authorities do not have the same significant role as they do in a UK context being largely concerned with the provision of local infrastructure, local planning, maintaining local road networks, public amenities, and the provision of social housing.
- There was no Beveridge Report in Ireland and as such Ireland's health, welfare and social services provision developed in a piecemeal fashion involving a mix of provision by statutory bodies, religious orders and laterally civil society and private sector actors.
- There is – perhaps because of a post colonial attitude to authority in general – no great loyalty to, love of or pride in, the organs of government, the state and in public administration generally.

Consideration of the Enabling State is therefore taking place within a significantly different environment to that in the UK and the debate is influenced by consideration of what is possible in contemporary Ireland, given these multi-faceted challenges.

2. Key Themes

Three key themes emerged from the Dublin roundtable:

- A crisis of trust in the state and confidence in our ability to control our own affairs;
- A lack of proactive leadership, vision and strategic thinking in relation to what's possible for Ireland in the years ahead, with reactive thinking predominating;
- Contested understandings of what the relationship between organised civil society as participative democratic infrastructure and the institutions of our representational democratic system.

The issues covered within these themes is expanded upon in sections 2.1 – 2.3.

2.1 A crisis of trust in the state and confidence in controlling our own affairs

Much of the discussion in the session was affected by a generally negative view of the state and its agencies. This involved a number of dimensions.

Many people think that Ireland's proportional representation electoral system with multi-seat constituencies produces public representatives that have to spend too much time attending to personal matters of a clientalist nature on behalf of local constituents (such as procuring medical cards or social housing etc). Holders of this view regard the electoral system as reinforcing a lack of loyalty to the institutions of state, causing electoral representatives to regard the resources of state as being there to be 'exploited' on behalf of their constituents. Ministers are impeded from focussing properly on matters of national import by the requirement for them to prioritise the servicing of the needs of their constituents over the demands of national policymaking.

This view needs to be balanced however, by the fact that there are many who view the existing system as ensuring that public administration stays responsive to the needs of citizens by requiring elected representatives to focus first and foremost on the needs of their local constituents.

There has also been a history of corruption in politics in Ireland with tribunals of enquiry making



From left: Martyn Evans, Sir John Elvidge, Fergus O'Ferrall and Ruth Barrington



Discussion against the backdrop of Dublin's old city wall at the Wood Quay Venue

findings in recent years against public figures at all levels of the public administration system including business people, former local councillors, former local government officials, and former Ministers in national government.

All of these issues have led to their being a sense of a crisis of confidence in the institutions of Irish democracy. They have also led to some populist, but arguably regressive policy responses such as the current government's proposal to abolish the Senate (the upper house of the Oireachtas) – rather than reform to realise the potential it has to become a second house that is truly representative of the many civil society voices and community and voluntary stakeholders in Irish society.

There is a general sense of a lack of accountability in the public administration system governing public services in areas of health and social services. There is a feeling that these institutions have become quangoised and distanced

from direct accountability to the people and communities they are supposed to serve. There are calls for increased mechanisms for scrutiny and accountability of all institutions which have the public trust including politicians, the church, banks, public administration and public regulation.

There is concern in relation to disengagement from the political process, particularly amongst young people. This oft made observation however needs to be balanced against the evidence of historically high turnouts in the most recent general election and referendums.

2.2 The lack of leadership, vision and strategic planning

Many of the participants spoke about a lack of a guiding vision for society or strategic plan for public services in Ireland. This had added resonance as there was a wide-spread view that the dominant neoliberal model guiding Ireland's economic policy has failed and a new politics 'of the common good' is required. It was also





noted that it appeared that the Government's vision is restricted to doing only that which is necessary to exit the EU/ECB/IMF programme by delivering its economic vision to 'make Ireland the best country to do business in'. While there is a national programme to reform public services and the beginnings of a move to outcomes-based performance management there is no sense that this adds up to a new, inspiring and coherent vision for good governance in Ireland.

2.3 The contested role of the community sector and the possibility of partnership working

Ireland has a strong and well-developed history of community and voluntary activity with communities accustomed to providing for themselves, often with a mix of privately fundraised and statutory resources. But while this is largely seen as positive, it has led to a patchwork of provision and the risk of some areas and communities can find themselves 'cast aside' because of their lack of ability to organise themselves and are therefore excluded from social progress. The recent crisis has however seen some positive developments such as an increase in volunteering, a re-commitment to

values of community, solidarity, care and an acknowledgement that complex issues such as homelessness cannot be solved through state services alone, and will always involve community participation. Communities are seen as the best place to respond to contemporary issues such as loneliness, isolation and social vulnerability.

Against this background, the debate on the role of the community sector is markedly different from that in the UK. It focuses on recent experiences of partnership working with government and the ongoing tension between 'partners in service provision' and 'advocates for social change'. While there is still much practical partnership working between community and voluntary organisations and their statutory funders at local and community level, formal national strategising by social partners came to an end in 2011. Social partnership characterised Ireland's approach to national policy development for the twenty five years from 1987 to 2010 however many (but by no means all) now view Ireland's corporatist social partnership model as having been a major contributory factor in the 'groupthink' that caused the crisis. Exponents of this view regard



social partnership as a ‘carving up of the national cake’ between vested interest stakeholder groups and reject interpretations of it as constituting effective, if imperfect, national strategising. This debate has been won in the public mind with the idea of social partnership now being regarded as toxic, with apologists regarded by some as national apostates.

There is therefore a fundamental debate about what the role of the community sector and organised civil society is in a democracy. Is civil society to be viewed as simply another ‘vested interest’ or ‘special interest’ group vying in competition for scarce statutory resources and limited opportunities to influence the nation’s strategic direction? Should the appeal that groups that exist for the public benefit (such as officially recognised charities) typically make to ideas of fairness, justice and the common good be treated as just more special interest pleading? These are profound questions that are now at play in the Irish debate, with powerful voices arguing that that is indeed the case.

Should the sector be a more vocal advocate for disempowered groups and seek to hold the state to account on their behalf – and how can it more effectively do this while also working in a service provider relationship with the state? It was noted that there are voices in the media and elsewhere in Ireland that argue that the state should not be funding groups that criticise it and should focus scarce public funds on services provision and not advocacy and views such as these may make it difficult for the sector to continue to advocate for social change. Given this background, partnership working between the public and community sectors can be difficult to sustain.

The forthcoming reform of local government and local development structures and processes was recognised as an indication of the relationship between citizens, communities and the state that government envisages in the years ahead.

3. What does an Enabling State mean in the Republic of Ireland?

Overall, the discussions in Ireland suggested that the Enabling State ‘model’ as presented would not work in its entirety in Ireland, but that important elements of it could, and most likely would, if civil society, the community and voluntary sector and governments wanted it to. The language used in the Enabling State paper was discussed in some detail. Concepts like trust, the state, the welfare state and self-sufficiency all have different resonances in Ireland.

There was a strong sense that the time is right for change, that the ‘five part crisis’ needs radical solutions that challenge the current model of public services and the ‘social contract’ between individuals and the state. The number of voices calling for public service reform is growing.

4. Next Steps

Our engagement with stakeholders in each jurisdiction is now complete. We are now carrying out an extensive literature review and seeking out practical examples of an enabling state in action.

Our findings will inform our final enabling state project outputs which we expect to publish in summer 2013.

You can keep up to date with our progress by visiting our enabling state [project page](#) and by following @CarnegieUKTrust, #enablingstate on Twitter.

To sign up to our Enabling State newsletter please get in touch with Jenny Brotchie, Policy Officer at jenny@carnegieuk.org.

Dublin Roundtable Attendees

Ruth Barrington, TASC
 Patricia Conboy, Older & Bolder
 Mary Cunningham, National Youth Council Ireland
 John Dolan, Disability Federation of Ireland
 Rachel Doyle, National Women’s Council of Ireland
 Deirdre Garvey, The Wheel
 Helen Johnston, National Economic and Social Council
 Charlotte Manson, Stratagem (NI) Ltd
 Seamus Mulconry, Philanthropy Ireland
 Joe Mulholland, MacGill Summer School and Arts Week
 Kieran Murphy, Society of St. Vincent de Paul Ireland
 Nat O’Connor, TASC
 Fergus O’Ferrall, Department of Public Health & Primary Care
 Colm O’Gorman, Amnesty International Ireland
 Quintin Oliver, Stratagem (NI) Ltd
 Paul O’Sullivan, Clann Credo – The Social Investment Fund
 Mervyn Taylor, Pathfinder
 Brendan Wheelan, CEO, Social Finance Foundation
 Ivan Cooper, Carnegie Advisor in Ireland
 Martyn Evans, Carnegie UK Trust
 Jennifer Wallace, Carnegie UK Trust
 Sir John Elvidge, Carnegie Fellow
 Jenny Brotchie, Carnegie UK Trust

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