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Imagineering Ireland: Future Scenarios for 2030

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Purpose

In contemporary society, it is well recognised that public policy, corporate strategy and individual choice, and the way in which they are conducted, is becoming increasingly complex. Consequently, in the context of this rapid change and heightened uncertainty, a better and more versatile understanding of the future and the powerful forces influencing its evolution, is required to assist in policy formulation and decision making at every level across all sectors. In 2005, the Futures Academy, Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland, produced a document *Imagineering Ireland – Future Scenarios for 2030* to demonstrate how scenario development can be used in Ireland to explore the opportunities and threats that lie ahead for the nation over the next few decades.

Context: Contradiction, Competition, Contention

Currently, Ireland is a country of contradiction, competition and contention. Contradiction, in that, on the one hand, after a decade of sustained economic growth, it is one of the wealthiest nations in Europe, with higher numbers in employment than at any time since the birth of the state, low levels of taxation and government indebtedness almost the lowest in the euro-zone. On the other, the disparity between rich and poor is the widest in Europe, the physical infrastructure of Third World quality, the health service in shambles, and some of the old virtues that made Ireland and the Irish so special fast disappearing.

Competition, for the enterprise model that has worked so well to-date, will almost certainly have to be modified considerably if the economy is to flourish and progress over the decades to come. What surely is needed now is a greater emphasis on

fostering a new enterprise model that is market-led and knowledge-based.

Contention, where, in common with most other developed societies, such issues as migration, addiction, crime, pensions and the environment evoke a range of conflicting emotions. In response to these challenges, The Futures Academy at the Dublin Institute of Technology recognised the necessity to anticipate and prepare for complexity and uncertainty and in 2005 developed a range of possible and plausible scenarios for the future of the island of Ireland. The objectives of this exercise were to:

- Detect the priority national issues for study (key variables) by identifying relationships between specific driving forces of change (technology, society, environment, economy, governance, demography and culture).
- Determine the main actors and their strategies, and the means at their disposal for bringing their projects to a successful conclusion.



- Describe, in the form of scenarios, a range of possible and plausible development trajectories for the island of Ireland, by taking into account the most probable evolutionary path

of the key variables and by using sets of assumptions about the behaviour of the various actors.

The Process

The following stages are typical of the development process employed by the team.

- **Set the Strategic Question** – central to this is the holding of strategic conversations with key actors in society.
- **Identify the Driving Forces of Change** - categorised by a technique such as the ‘Six Sector Approach’ (societal, demographic, economic, environmental, governance, technological).
- **Determine the Main Issues and Trends** - identifying the issues and trends relevant to the strategic question.

- **Clarify the Level of Impact** upon the strategic question and degree of **Uncertainty** (likelihood of occurring within the given timeframe).
- **Establish Scenario Logics** – logical rationale and structure for the scenarios.
- Create a range of **Possible and Plausible scenarios** – this will facilitate decision makers in testing policy options and moving towards strategic planning.

The **project team** consisted of selected members of The Futures Academy and the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Trends Dominated by Diversity and Disruption

A number of trends were identified under the Six Sector approach but given space restrictions, we will focus on three - socio-economic, technological and governance trends.

Identified Socio-Economic/Cultural Trends

- The movement towards a more open, democratic and honest society will continue, and assist in fostering greater tolerance in an ever more diverse and multifarious community.
- Inexorably, though excruciatingly, the peace process will progress towards a more socially, economically and even politically integrated island of Ireland.
- Public service, be it in health, environment, enterprise, education, transport, communications or justice, needs to be instilled with a new pioneering spirit on the part of legislators and administrators alike.
- The demise of older traditional values, customs and beliefs, and the absence of newer ones to replace them, leads to a growing feeling that the social fabric of the state is torn and in urgent need of repair.
- Build a society based on the great cardinal civic virtues essential to a well-functioning democracy and the common good, being: the generous impulse, the readiness to be compassionate, the facility to modulate self-interest, the sense of fair play, and the assumption of duty.
- The national figure for suicide, especially among young men, has been on the increase for the past decade, and shows few signs of abating.
- Statistics show that the extent and prevalence of drug misuse, particularly by the young, is high and rising, re-

quiring an innovative search for a set of effective solutions backed by adequate resources.

Enlarging the Value-chain of ICT

As the world moves towards new frontiers in biotechnology, nanotechnology, and combined spheres such as digital genomes, the country should continue to examine what it has to offer from an educational, industrial and governmental support perspective. Major trends include:

- An Tánaiste has called for the creation of a civic science in Ireland, meaning: a science engaged with and invited into the national dialogue; a science responsive to the public and worthy of public trust; and a science embraced and valued by students, parents, educators, industry, communities and government.
- The ICT industry in Ireland is positioned at a relatively low point on the value chain, dealing in mature technology that has been developed elsewhere, and needs to increase the value-added component in its ICT products and services.
- Scientific and technological industries in Ireland need an enlarged cadre of world class professional researchers who cannot only innovate but also contribute original marketable ideas that can form the nucleus of new globally competitive companies which can attract multinational investment.
- There is a need to build enterprise capability to develop products and services by ensuring that both national research and enterprise agendas are aligned, and facilitating this by developing strategic technology platforms, as well as encouraging greater collaboration between academe and enterprise.
- State investment in research is significantly lower than in most developed economies, and, as the Irish economy moves more and more to one based on knowledge and expertise, so the level of funding for research must grow.

- A Centre for Advanced Informatics should be established, with an independent identity and location, to conduct internationally recognised research and development relevant to industry.

Broadening the Base for Democracy and Peace

- Complex and tortuous though it has been, the peace process seems now to be at the beginning of the end, so long as the identities of both groups are fully respected and reflected in all the constitutional and institutional arrangements still to be determined, and a progressively structured partnership between North and South could lead to further dimensions of unification.
- As things stand, the future of Ireland is strongly linked to the future of the European Union, and in particular to the

competitiveness imperative enshrined in the Lisbon Strategy, but current constitutional wrangling could lead to a reassessment of alignments and alliances.

- Different intergenerational agendas will appear across the State as the youth, the 'grey', the well-off workers and the disadvantaged collide in deciding who gets what, and how it is paid for.
- The influence of single issue lobbies similarly will grow, representing specific cultural, environmental, social or economic interests. Somehow there is a need to engender greater appreciation of, and participation in the political process, and attract a higher caliber of person to engage in it and assume leadership roles.

The Scenarios

Liberty Americana: This scenario is based on expanding globalisation and growing libertarianism. There is a diminishing role for national government, and a growing emphasis upon international collaboration, largely aimed at facilitating global competition and enhancing market efficiency. The accent is on the individual, and the prime motivation materialist.

Equality Europa: This scenario is founded on a system of shared values, a fair distribution of opportunity and a desire for sustainable development. It is held that these are best attained through a strong framework of public policy under the aegis of a forceful European Union. The emphasis is on collective, collaborative and consensual action, shaped by commonly held attitudes and aspirations.

Celtic Fragility: This scenario is built upon the desire to preserve personal independence within a distinctive national identity. Patriotism dictates that political power remains with the nation state in an increasingly fragmented world. Most weight is attached to the furtherance of individual freedom, protected by state security, and conscious of cultural difference.

A New Mindset for Flexible, Adaptive Strategies and a Need for Futures Thinking

A new mindset is required by all agents of governance to anticipate and prepare for the future - one that embraces individualism, collaboration and innovation, a mindset that addresses societal and environmental, as well as economic, imperatives, above all, however, a mindset that can tackle complexity, uncertainty and change. In other words, governance at all levels, in the post-capitalist era demands a total strategic commitment based on entirely new ways of thinking about organisations. This implies a mindset that is oriented to process rather than to structure; that is ecologically driven

rather than hierarchically driven; that is value-added rather than competitive; that is holistic rather than functional; and that is collaborative and innovative rather than adversarial and derivative. A futures orientation, with strong strategic foresight capability and capacity, founded on flexible and adaptable systems, is the secret of success. To create the future one must first be capable of imagining it. Not predicting, not planning, not forecasting – imagining. Preparing a society or an organisation to anticipate that it could face a number of environments that are fundamentally different from the present is a radical departure from standard practice for most. But by learning to develop and use methods and techniques drawn from the 'futures field', agencies and organisations can take actions to make a desirable future occur, quickly adapt to unfavourable environments, and efficiently implement strategies that will succeed in many different social and market conditions.

Ireland becoming an Influential Small Nation

The hope, the dream, the 'prospective', is that by 2030 Ireland will become the world's most influential small nation the first true 21st Century country. Known for their resilience, adaptability and capacity for transformation, the Irish 25 years hence are admired around the world for their courageous and explicit commitment to enabling their fellow citizens to flourish as active and responsible co-creators of their lives, families, communities, economies and country. Memorably, the opening decades of the 21st Century witnessed the creation of a society founded on open-source organisations, networks and infrastructures which fostered and facilitated the history-altering work of socialising and supporting all Irish people to be co-authors in composing their future story, capacities that did not exist in 2005. Internationally the Ireland of 2030 punches well above its weight, it is viewed as the most 'future aware' jurisdiction in the world, having capitalised on a continuing programme of strategic foresight over a period of 25 years allowing successive governments, business organisa-

tions and civic agencies to envision, think-through and respond appropriately to the signals of change and the critical issues that are hidden within them. Inevitably, the best of the world's best willingly come to live, work and invest in Ireland in order to participate in, and learn from the success of a great 21st Century culture. The main purpose of *Imagineering Ireland – Future Scenarios for 2030* is to promote the concept that Ireland needs generally more of a futures orientation, and specifically much greater omnipotence and capacity in the field of Prospective or Strategic Foresight. Ireland currently has no dedicated, world class independent Strategic Foresight institution. At a time in the nation's development when crucial decisions are needed in the key social, economic, political, technological and ecological arenas, this gap is a major weakness. There is, therefore, a need for a Strategic Foresight Institute for Ireland.

What would a Strategic Foresight Institute Do?

Depending upon how they are defined, there are many organisations in the world that perform the function of strategic foresight. Whilst they differ widely in scale, scope and special interest, what each has in common, is a central and explicit focus on some aspect of the futures domain. A composite view of their conventional characteristic activities can be listed as follows:

- They raise issues of common concern that are overlooked in the conventional short-term view; e.g. issues about peace, environmental stability, inter-generational ethics, the implications of new, and expected, developments in a number of fields. They highlight dangers, alternatives and choices that need to be considered before they become urgent.
- They publicise the emerging picture of the near-term future in order to involve the public and contribute to present-date decision-making.
- They contribute to a body of knowledge about foresight and the macro-processes of continuity and change that frame the future.

- They identify some of the dynamics and policy implications of the transition to sustainability.
- They help to identify aspects of a new world order so as to place these on the global political agenda.
- They facilitate the development and application of social innovations.
- They help people to deal with fears and become genuinely empowered to participate in creating the future.
- They help organisations to develop foresight strategies in relation to new products and markets, and to evolve in appropriate ways.
- They provide institutional shelters for innovative futures work which, perhaps, could not easily be carried out elsewhere.

Preventing Overshoot and Collapse

The main purpose of a Strategic Foresight Institute for Ireland is to facilitate the emergence and application of high-quality forward thinking in each major sector of the economy and section of society. It would contribute to formulating a long-term strategy encouraging wider social, cultural and economic shifts from an Irish society that is driven by the past imperatives of a 20th Century culture, and the short-term perceptions of the present, toward one that is increasingly open to the forward view and thus able to be futures-responsive. Without applied Strategic Foresight, the fear is that Ireland will stumble blindly into a process of 'overshoot and collapse' as the human species moves beyond certain well-known global limits. With applied Strategic Foresight, savage social learning experiences can be minimised. The human prospect can be altered by consciously engaging in the wholesale redesign of systems and moving toward a more balanced world. A world where Ireland leads the way!

"The future belongs to those who prepare for it today".

Malcolm X (1925 - 1965)

Sources and References

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About the EFMN: Policy Professionals dealing with RTD, Innovation and Economic Development increasingly recognize a need to base decisions on broadly based participative processes of deliberation and consultation with stakeholders. One of the most important tools they apply is FORESIGHT. The EFMN or European Foresight Monitoring Network supports policy professionals by monitoring and analyzing Foresight activities in the European Union, its neighbours and the world. The EFMN helps those involved in policy development to stay up to date on current practice in Foresight. It helps them to tap into a network of know-how and experience on issues related to the day to day design, management and execution of Foresight and Foresight related processes.