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Unlocking institutional imagination: Workshops on cities, public goods and services, and universities

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Introduction

In April 2024, the Futures Forum conference on ‘Transformative Change: Unlocking Institutional Imagination’ took place at Maynooth University. This paper is the fourth in this issue of *Administration* that recounts the conference proceedings. It summarises three break-out workshops and a plenary session that were held in the afternoon of the conference. Participants were divided into three groups that considered case studies of institutional imagination and transformation in specific contexts: universities, public goods and services, and cities. Each workshop had two short inputs reviewing some attempts at imaginative reform beyond this island, which then opened up a discussion on their relevance to an Irish context. In the subsequent plenary session, the chairperson of each workshop summarised the main ideas that emerged. As a way of countering the fatalism that often features in discussions about the long-term future, the theme of the plenary was ‘Active Hope’.

Universities workshop

The Universities workshop, chaired by Prof. Linda Doyle, Provost of Trinity College Dublin, had presentations by Prof. Maggie O’Neill

(Professor of Sociology and Criminology, University College Cork), and Trevor Vaugh (Department of Design Innovation, Maynooth University).

Maggie O'Neill's presentation focused on precarity and casualisation in academia, and she began by recounting the experiences of doctoral students at a recent European Sociological Association postgraduate summer school that led her to co-organise a seminar with the students on the topic in September 2023 and a special issue of *The European Sociologist* (O'Neill et al., 2024).

Professor Raewyn Connell, author of *The Good University* (Connell, 2019) gave the opening panel address at the seminar in which she highlighted the link between the precarious careers of early stage academics with wider institutional changes where universities have responded to a steep decline in state funding by re-imagining themselves as profit-driven corporations rather than units of a public service. Taking competitive firms as their model, Connell argues that universities have embraced a logic of managerialism at the expense of a culture based on cooperation and public service. This logic has emphasised cost reduction, which is achieved through a combination of staff cuts, downward pressure on real wage levels, and the outsourcing and casualisation of labour. It has also spawned a growing number of 'for-profit' colleges and universities, the normalisation of extremely high salaries for senior managers, and increasing levels of surveillance.

An important dimension of 'precarisation' is the persistence of gender-related stereotypes and asymmetries in the status and type of work performed by male and female academics (Murgia & Poggio, 2018). In addition, the neo-liberal logic has driven an inexorable increase in production that, in turn, creates the 'ideal academic' as a subject that is expected to be entrepreneurial, passionate about work, hyper-productive, involved in international networks, and able to attract large amounts of external funding (Lund, 2020; Murgia, 2024). While much has been written about contemporary academic subjectivities, there is relatively little research on the emotional and affective demands faced by early-career academics and the link between their precarity and gender inequalities.

These changes brought about by neo-liberalism have been challenged, sometimes by students such as the student movement against privatisation in Chile. Academics have also critiqued and resisted the changes, as have the unions, such as the long-term action of the University and College Union in the United Kingdom.

However, there is little evidence that these have been very effective in halting the growth of casualisation and outsourcing.

Another element in the wider context is the global polycrisis – war, migration, climate change, rising inequality – an emerging new world order, and a growing relationship between nationalism, identity politics and far-right ideologies. In this context, the challenge for O'Neill's own field, sociology, is to be socially relevant. Here, she refers to Burawoy's (2005) notion of public sociology which he presents as a response to the growing gap between the ethos of sociologists, which is largely critical and left-leaning, and the world that sociologists study, which has moved inexorably to the right. Burawoy maps out a division of sociological labour, identifying four types of knowledge – professional, critical, policy, and public – which he uses to analyse how sociology is connected to different publics, how it might respond to the neo-liberal encroachment of markets and states on civil society, and how to recognise when the different forms become pathological.

As well as such critiques, and as Connell emphasises in her book, there is scope for imagining and implementing new university structures and practices. Such re-imaginings can build on higher education's history of initiatives such as indigenous colleges and universities, revolutionary labour colleges, self-help workers' education movements, anti-colonial universities, and multicultural curricula. Connell also points to the movement to 'decolonise' academic disciplines, to new possibilities with online, experimental, and free universities, and to ongoing struggles in universities around power and decision-making. Rather than wallowing in despair, we urgently need utopian thinking and visions of alternatives as we build a new idea of the university that still does justice to the traditions and values of the university of old.

Trevor Vaugh's contribution was therefore timely and germane as he outlined some of the innovations that already exist. Vaugh currently co-chairs the Design in Government expert working group, and in this capacity he led a project to embed design principles across the public service (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1e3e2-action/>). His focus on facilitating institutional change through design led him to found the Maynooth University Innovation Lab (<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/mi-lab>), which takes a design approach to address challenges within the higher-education system. Building on this, Vaugh has co-authored a book on how design thinking can be applied to innovation projects (Devitt et al., 2021).

Drawing on his research, he outlined some of the initiatives taken by Arizona State University (ASU), which has been recognised as the most innovative university in the United States of America every year since 2015. Michael Crow, who has been ASU President since 2002, strongly advocates a design approach to institutional change, as he has set out in his book *Designing the New American University* (Crow & Dabars, 2015). His approach is encapsulated in the ASU charter: 'ASU is a comprehensive public research university, measured not by whom it excludes, but by whom it includes and how they succeed; advancing research and discovery of public value; and assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves' (<https://president.asu.edu/asu-mission-and-goals>).

ASU is a case study of what a 'new university' might be. Crucially, the institutional re-imagining is based on a deliberate 'design process': 'initiated to reconceptualize the curriculum, organization, and operations of the institution, the design process constitutes an institutional experiment at scale and in real time' (ibid., p. 240). That process is rooted in and faithful to the historical public research university model that, Crow argues, many institutions have abandoned. In contrast to other institutions that cherish selectivity, the ASU student body is roughly representative of the state's socio-economic diversity. One consequence is the university's scale: it has five campuses, four regional centres, 350 degree options, and 145,000 students with more than 62,000 students attending online. It might be seen as a 'post-Fordist' university in that despite its large scale, it also has distinctive learning paths designed to suit individual students' ambitions and circumstances. It is also recognised for its commitment to inclusivity. For instance, it was one of only five universities that got an award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science in recognition of its significant strides in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

Crow set the institutional implementation of interdisciplinarity as one of the eight 'design aspirations' of ASU, which makes it an interesting case of putting theories of interdisciplinarity into practice. Its approach was to comprehensively assess disciplinary identities and interrelationships before building a federation of transdisciplinary departments, centres, institutes, schools, and colleges (Crow & Dabars, 2014).

In 2016, ASU created the PLoS Alliance (<https://plusalliance.org/>) with King's College London and the University of New South Wales Sydney to collaborate on significant issues relating to health, social justice, sustainability, and innovation. This initiative led to TEDI-London (The Engineering & Design Institute London, <https://tedi-london.ac.uk/>), which takes a novel, project-based, interdisciplinary design approach to engineering education. Instead of lectures, students work together on practical projects, co-designed with employers, that are connected to global topics.

Other innovations in higher education also involve the creation of entirely new institutions. For instance, the London Interdisciplinary School (<https://www.lis.ac.uk/>) is a new, private, third-level institution where students are not required to specialise in a traditional academic subject. Instead, their degree is centred on complex, real-world problems and the interdisciplinary approaches required to address them.

Ecole 42 (<https://42.fr/>) is another new institution that takes a project-based approach, in this case in the education of software engineers. Instead of courses, teachers, and classes, it emphasises peer-to-peer learning, personalised progression, gamification, and initial immersion in its methods and philosophy.

Minerva University (<https://www.minerva.edu/>) is a private, non-profit university where all classes are conducted as online seminars capped at twenty-one students and where all students take four foundational courses that cut across the sciences and humanities. The university is based in San Francisco, but students travel to and live in a new country each semester. Founded in 2012 as a 'next generation institute of higher education', it still has only 600 students and 600 alumni, partly because of its very selective admissions process (Spangler, 2023).

Vaugh also pointed to other innovations within existing universities as instances of design thinking. For instance, the Stanford Life Design Lab (<https://lifedesignlab.stanford.edu/>) runs a series of courses that use design thinking to tackle the 'wicked' problem of planning one's life and career. In *Designing Your New Work Life* (Burnett & Evans, 2021), the Lab's co-founders explain how to approach work with a designer mindset that emphasises curiosity, problem-solving, collaborating, and taking action. Loughborough University hosts RIC-KI (Research Ideas Catalogue – Knowledge Impact, <https://ric-ki.lboro.ac.uk/>), which is a platform that curates innovative ideas that researchers and inventors wish to share with the worldwide

community. Potential research collaborators can browse this catalogue and seek to work together on ideas that interest them.

Prof. **Linda Doyle**, Provost of Trinity College Dublin, outlined some of the key themes discussed in the workshop she chaired. Like Maggie O'Neill, she recommended *The Good University* (Connell, 2019) as a useful source of ideas about the university of the future. She observed that Trevor Vaugh's examples of innovations in higher education led to a discussion that exposed the tension between, on the one hand, the merits of thinking differently and, on the other, questions about the values underpinning some of these new institutions and practices. In summarising the discussion, she pointed to three core ideas. First, people – staff and students – should be at the centre of exercises in institutional re-imagining. For students, in particular, the focus should be on student learning, which should not be restricted, and how learning happens. Second, universities need plans and planning; plans, for Prof. Doyle, should drive everything. Third, universities probably need to 'stop doing stuff' so that they can do other things much better. Along with the other universities, Trinity College Dublin is currently engaged in a strategic planning process. While many see this as an exercise in top-down change, Doyle sees real power in groups of people doing things themselves, and she therefore wants to shine a light on these bottom-up, creative initiatives.

To this, the author would add some comments of his own. While planning is central to design thinking, Crow insists that in ASU, 'We have no strategic plan. We've never had a strategic planning process. We have no strategic planning reports. We have nothing' (Amoruso, 2022 @ 10:34). Instead, they have three things: (1) a charter; (2) design aspirations (how they intend to implement the charter); and (3) 'a very specified set of goals, goals relative to the four aspects that we think are most important to the success of the university' (ibid.). Applied to Ireland, the ASU charter might usefully be replaced by the eleven 'objects of a university' as set out in the Universities Act 1997. And instead of a formal strategic planning process, which is heavily critiqued in the strategy literature, not least because it separates planning from execution (Mintzberg, 1994), the notion of 'design-build' – where conception and execution are integrated in a single team that implements and analyses changes in a continuous design process – could be employed by different units across the university, as it is in ASU (Crow & Dabars, 2015, p. 247).

Universities are not built so that faculty have students to pay for their existence, and so it makes sense for them to be student-centred

and to focus on how, what, where, and when students learn. This means that universities might replace their 'Teaching and Learning' units with 'Learning and Assessment' units, since there are different ways of learning and not all learning requires teachers. Taking a design approach to student learning is also likely to indicate that the university of the future should have very different academic employment categories and career structures.

Student-centred does not necessarily mean that students should dictate what or how they learn, not least because most students do not consider such issues in any great depth, nor do they spend time imagining what a future university might look like. A more fruitful approach is to implement a decentralised governance model where intellectual and entrepreneurial responsibility is devolved to semi-autonomous colleges and schools where faculty members are empowered to design and continually redesign programmes of study. Indeed universities have traditionally operated in this way, which suggests that rather than looking to the world of business for models of 'best practice', they might instead highlight the merits of running a business like a good university (Woodbury, 1993).

Public goods and services workshop

The Public Goods and Services workshop, chaired by Dr Larry O'Connell, Director of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), had two presentations, one by Dr Ray Griffin (Senior Lecturer in Management and Organisation at South East Technological University), and another by Orla O'Connor (Director of the National Women's Council of Ireland).

Ray Griffin began by observing how social policy is full of positive radical imaginaries. Confining himself to the domain of social justice, he listed many international examples, such as the International Labour Organization, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, William Beveridge's cradle to grave welfare state, the eradication of polio, and, more recently, the war on poverty, and heart disease, all of which are instances of big system-level re-imagining underpinned by resources and the capability of public institutions. Looking just at Ireland, Griffin pointed to free secondary schooling, the regional technical colleges, and the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme; a myriad of state agencies, such as the Industrial Development Authority, Shannon Free Airport Development Company Ltd, and Córas Tráchtála Teo. (now Enterprise Ireland);

social housing; Noël Browne's tuberculosis hospitals, and infra-structural projects such as Ardnacrusha, rural electrification and, more recently, the national cancer strategy, and rural broadband. All of these remind us of what a capable, imaginative, and proactive state can achieve. This was clearly seen during the pandemic, but also – perhaps less clearly – during the financial crisis of 2007–2012.

In the area of public employment services (PES) – Griffin's research focus – there are good examples of radical social innovation, such as Pobal's Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and the Community Employment Scheme. Such initiatives are funded by Ireland's progressive tax system, which enables cash transfers that stabilise society and keep the whole system of government intact. However, as experience elsewhere makes clear, these systems can be dismantled or diminished on the back of alternative imaginaries.

Inspired by Mill's (1959) insight that a 'sociological imagination' is to see the structural basis for individual problems, Griffin and Tom Boland set up the Waterford Unemployment Experiences Research Collaborative in 2012 to study the experience of unemployment. Griffin quickly realised how difficult it would be to observe the inner workings of the Department of Social Protection, and so he focused on the more visible parts of the policy system that govern unemployment. One stream of his research focused on the UP1 application form that effectively defines a person as unemployed. His analysis of this 'technology of governmentality' – which he depicts as a conversation between the person/institution that drafted the form and the individual who completes it – showed how the form works to dominate an individual by getting them to define themselves in a particular way and to learn how to be unemployed (Griffin, 2015).

In another stream, Griffin and his colleagues used interviews with unemployed people to analyse the governmental shift from passive to active labour market policies. In turn, this led to the HECAT project (Disruptive Technologies Supporting Labour Market Decision Making project, <https://hecat.eu/>), which is a project funded by the European Union (EU) that seeks to investigate, demonstrate, and pilot a disruptive technology to support labour market decision-making by unemployed citizens and those seeking to help them. Drawing on the sense that everyone has their own personal labour market – in terms of geography, sector, skills, and vision – they have developed a tool which constructs a personalised labour market so that a person can see their own labour market.

Griffin's work also opens up a new way of thinking about unemployment offices. Instead of the state gazing at the citizen, holding them to account, and requiring them to reform, the HECAT project is centrally about exploiting emerging big-data processing and analytics capabilities to make the labour market visible, with each individual treated as a unique, complex subject in real time. The aim is to have the state stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the citizen as both look at a visualisation of the labour market on a platform that is engaging, intuitive, and useful to the different end users (visit <http://www.mylabourmarket.com/en/> to see a beta of the platform).

The project is an intervention and provocation into the institutional transformation and re-imagining of PES. As Griffin starts to work on a new project, PESTech, funded by Science Foundation Ireland's National Challenges, he is hopeful that new ways of thinking about data and artificial intelligence can unlock the institutional imagination of the public service to improve people's everyday quality of life.

Orla O'Connor, Director of the National Women's Council of Ireland, described how the Irish model of care, both for early years and older people, is characterised by precarious working conditions, low pay, lack of security, and is predominated by women. Globally, the sector relies heavily on a migrant female workforce. In Ireland, the sector is fragmented with care provided by families and private operators, supplemented by some state provision and supports.

The private, for-profit model is dominant in the institutionalised care of older people in nursing homes, and it is also pervasive at a large scale in early years' provision through chains of providers. The COVID-19 pandemic was, perhaps, a pivotal moment in how Irish society perceives care and its necessity in a functioning society. The pandemic also exposed the limits of the privatised model with minimal state regulation, and its inability to respond to a crisis. One important shift was the state's decision to fund the wages of the early years' sector, which continued in post-pandemic budgets, plus increased investment, fee reductions, and linking partial investment with the capping of fees (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022; Lynch, 2024). However, structural problems remain in the care sector due to the privatised model, which means that services are inadequate where profits are not viable. Overall, the model is neither flexible nor responsive enough to meet the needs of children, parents, and communities. We now need new thinking and new solutions that comprehensively consider the care of older people that supports choice and independent living, and addresses the multiplicity of services required, including not only

housing and accommodation needs, but also health, transport, and recreation.

O'Connor outlined the need for new thinking and new solutions to comprehensively consider care of older people that supports choice, independent living – which needs a multiplicity of service provision (e.g. housing and accommodation, health, transport, and recreation). She offered the specific example of Cuan, the new Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency as an exemplar of new thinking. She argued that the process of establishing Cuan was a good example of institutional imagination in that the process was collaborative. Arguing that a central agency responsible for a unified response to address domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence was a long overdue and important development for Ireland, O'Connor welcomed the new thinking that informed its establishment. More broadly, she argued that we need a different approach to the design and delivery of these types of care services. She recommended developing new models of collaborative governance between the state and civil society, where a key feature is the co-design and co-production of policy and services that place those most affected at the heart of the design and decision-making processes. More can be done to develop co-creation processes that also impact on processes of effective implementation. Particularly important in this regard is co-creation with end users and with staff who are the primary actors delivering the services.

Larry O'Connell, Director of NESC, in his summary of the workshop, focused on unlocking institutional imagination, rather than on the meaning, need for, or forces driving change. He pointed to the need to unlock institutional imagination at three different, though connected, levels.

First, there is a need at the national level, for society, government, and the public policy system to create more 'space for harder and challenging conversations'. This requires an institutional space to discuss fundamental questions, such as Ireland's economic development model, values, and vision, even its underpinning ideologies. There is not sufficient space or ability within the policy system to step back from day-to-day pressures and to reflect on medium-term priorities and directions of travel on issues such as:

- How can Ireland maintain economic and social well-being while living within planetary boundaries?
- How do advances in key technologies such as artificial intelligence and synthetic biology shape economic, social, and environmental choices for Ireland?

- How can more tailored, early, and proactive investment in people-centred services shape well-being, deepen equality, and foster inclusion?
- How will demographic change and changing life expectancy influence Ireland's decision-making across the full range of policy areas?
- How will Ireland's relationship with and role within the EU evolve?

Second, there is a need to consider how local agency can be enhanced. There are structures and innovations at the local level, such as the Public Participation Networks and innovative initiatives, such as the directly elected mayor. However, the conference highlighted that there is not sufficient ability for local citizens and groups to influence outcomes in their own areas.

Third, at the individual level the conference provided a number of examples of the ways in which direct involvement of citizens can unlock institutional imagination. Deep engagement with unemployed people and with those providing care underpinned changes in how data systems could be used to motivate or enable activation and career development, and the potential shape of a new agency related to care.

The challenge of developing institutional systems that work in a co-creative way with citizens should not be underestimated. It will require considerable investment, and ultimately a new mindset and deep reform in the current systems of governance and accountability, not just in public policy but across public-service delivery.

Finally, the conference highlighted a continuing disconnect between the imperative for change and actual actions. In part, this is captured in the phrase 'implementation deficit', which refers to the sense that there are plans and strategies, but many are not fully implemented. To help address this disconnect, the three ideas above should be connected. The drive to create more space for national conversations should connect to local democratic structures and initiatives, which should endeavour to mobilise and support greater levels of real co-creation.

Cities workshop

The Cities workshop was chaired by Prof. Rob Kitchin of Maynooth University and the presenters were Wolfgang Polt, Director of Policies at Joanneum Research, Austria, and Prof. Brian Ó Gallachóir,

Director of MaREI (<https://www.marei.ie/>) and Associate Vice-President of Sustainability at University College Cork.

Wolfgang Polt observed that while local/regional involvement of citizens and broader stakeholders is the primary route for implementing transformative and mission-oriented policies in some countries (e.g. Sweden, Belgium), Ireland seems to face greater hurdles due to its peculiar division of power between the different levels of government. While a change of that governance structure does not seem realistic, tools like ‘state treaties’ between regions and central government provide one model for developing coherent policy at the regional level. One such ‘state treaty’ is Article 15 of the Austrian Constitution which provides a framework for joint action between the different levels of government by allowing ‘treaties’ among them. That article is based on the principle of residual competence, meaning that all matters fall under the competence of individual states unless explicitly assigned to the federal government. Areas where the states have legislative and executive power include specific parts of spatial planning, environmental protection, planning law, transport, and education. While states have primary responsibility, the federal government can play a role through setting general frameworks, providing financial assistance, as well as coordinating the states’ activities.

Similar to other countries, the main barrier is ‘state capacity’ – at the federal and state level – not only in terms of human resources and money, but also in terms of concepts and understanding of policy. This requires dedicated training, as well as a change in culture and practice, to develop the mindset for transformative and mission-oriented policies.

Brian Ó Gallachóir pointed to the significant role of cities internationally in terms of overall greenhouse gas emissions. The urban share of these emissions increased from 56% of total global emissions in 2000 to 62% in 2015. This is projected to grow as a result of continued trend towards increased urbanisation. While 56% of the global population lives in cities, this is projected to grow to 70% by 2050. Due to population growth and consumption growth, urban emissions could double by 2050. These emissions are not evenly distributed with per capita emissions in cities in developed countries seven times higher than in poorer countries.

Many cities are establishing climate ambitions and putting in place climate action plans to enable the realisation of these ambitions. To date, more than 10,500 cities have pledged voluntary actions on

climate change and 823 have pledged to achieve net-zero emissions. Within the EU, over 370 cities competed to become EU mission cities and 100 were selected, including Dublin and Cork. These mission cities have committed to becoming net-zero emissions cities by 2030. There are specific supports at EU level and many EU member states (including Ireland) have established national ‘mirror’ groups to put in place cross-departmental and cross-agency supports for the mission cities.

A key challenge for city local authorities is to mobilise sufficient climate action with urgency and at significant scale. Local authorities in Ireland are typically directly responsible for less than 2% of the emissions in their cities. This does not diminish the indirect role (e.g. via the planning system) and their convening and leadership role that local authorities can draw on to drive climate action.

Rob Kitchin also noted how local authorities in Ireland have insufficient resources to operate effectively and how there is a high degree of unevenness in scale and resources across the local authorities. Leitrim County Council serves a population of 35,000 while Dublin City Council serves a population of 588,000. What he felt is needed is local government reform to create a set of similarly sized local authorities, properly resourced, able to raise local taxes, and of sufficient scale to deliver services effectively and efficiently. A primary unit of local government would then be the region rather than the county, with proper multilevel governance structures and practices, plus a realignment of roles, responsibilities, and funding at the appropriate scale. Such a rebalancing of political power to the local/regional level would align Ireland’s political structures with other European countries of similar size (Ladner, Keuffer & Bastianen, 2022).

In addition, we need longer-term (ten to twenty year) policy cycles rather than the current three-to-five-year local area plans and county development plans. We also need to address the regulatory capture by vested interests of parts of the public sector provision of services and policy development.

Kitchin then identified what he sees as the more important challenges:

- How do we address these issues from the bottom up without neutralising the work of civic organisations?
- How do we foster place-based leadership and local citizen assemblies?

- How do we promote the work of cooperatives (e.g. driving energy transitions through energy communes) and local communities that own and run local infrastructures?

The political change should be bottom-up, driven by local communities, though it must also be accompanied by structural change from the top down. It will be difficult to realise this given the entrenched political power, which means we need to work out the incentive systems and positive feedback loops that would encourage this kind of change. Universities have a role to play in researching these issues and in facilitating debate and enabling a transformation in the organisation and delivery of local services.

To this, the author would add that it is well-known that Ireland has a weak system of local government (Gillespie, 2024; Quinlivan, 2021, 2022; Reidy, 2018, 2021). Mary Murphy has, in a recent Fórsa report, set out a range of proposals to address the issue (Murphy, 2024). A counter-argument, though one not articulated in the conference, might be that the Irish model is actually more capable of delivering better social outcomes than a more localised approach, because a centralised system can have the benefits of scale and leverage sophisticated data analytic capabilities that could not be implemented at the local level. Regional structures, not based on counties, have been considered previously (see Callanan, 2018, chapters 3 and 11), but there is ‘little affinity with regional structures in Ireland, and most Irish people would not profess to holding as strong a sense of belonging to a region as they would do to a county or city’ (Callanan, 2003, p. 430). Indeed the resilience of the county as the basis for local government structures is a good example of institutional inertia.

Yet, there are signs that things might change. First, there is now much more debate about constitutional issues in these islands. For instance, in 2019 the Institute for British–Irish Studies established a three-year project on constitutional futures after Brexit (<https://www.ucd.ie/cpcr/research/constitutionalfuturesafterbrexit/>). These debates necessarily foreground alternative models of the powers of local government and the possibility of federal structures (see, for example, O’Leary, 2022, chapter 18). Second, the first ‘direct’ election of a city mayor (Limerick in June) is an important experiment in extending local government that may, in time, lead to a new structure of eight regional authorities based around Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Sligo, Dundalk, and Athlone. One might then extend this idea by a constitutional change that would

reconfigure the Dáil's representative structure. For instance, one could imagine a Dáil with, say, 130 TDs representing local constituencies and 40 representing regional constituencies. One benefit of this would be that candidates who have a high profile nationally, but who have not grafted locally, would have another route into the national parliament. Finally, Ireland's deepening engagement with Europe should lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of alternative political structures that might, in time, be translated into an Irish context.

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