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Culture, budgeting and planning in the Department of Finance

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Abstract

This article considers the contribution of the Department of Finance from the late 1950s to the turn of the millennium. It revisits long-standing cultural and institutional issues that former officials and academics raised in the period, particularly focusing on the budgetary system and its weaknesses. It examines the limitations of the department's foray into economic planning, arguing that its potential was never fully realised. The article argues that plans, rather than budgets, were a far more appropriate mechanism for setting economic policy, and that they could have helped mitigate the influence of party politics. It concludes that planning will become even more paramount in the twenty-first century, as Ireland grapples with major global headwinds.

Keywords: budget, culture, Department of Finance, Ireland, planning.

Introduction

The Irish Department of Finance (DOF) commissioned its first official history in 1970. After some internal deliberation, Ronan Fanning was selected as the author, and covered the period from the foundation of the state until the publication of *Economic development* in 1958 (Department of Finance, 1958). The book took far longer to complete than either the department or Fanning had envisaged, and was not published until 1978 (Fanning, 1978). The experience turned at least one subsequent minister off the idea of commissioning a sequel. In 2019, the department held a competition to pick the author of the next volume, to pick up where Fanning left off and continue to 1999. Like Fanning, the author was given full access to the department's vast archive, very little of which is available to other scholars (Casey, 2022). Michael Mulreany, Assistant Director General of the Institute of Public Administration at the time, generously shared his vast expertise on Irish public administration through an advisory group established by the Department of Finance.

The second volume of the Department of Finance's history followed a simple structure: an introduction, a chapter per decade and a conclusion. This kept the focus largely chronological, and while the introduction and conclusion allowed for more thematic discussion, they were necessarily closely tied to the core chapters. This article is more thematic in nature, and reflects on some of the transversal issues from the four decades: the contribution of the department, its cultural and institutional issues, the budgetary system, and economic planning. The methodology is the same as that used in the book: it is based on a systematic reading of the departmental files, as well as interviews with former civil servants and ministers.

The contribution of the Department of Finance

One of the most beloved discussions among political observers is whether a minister has performed well or not. Without the benefit of direct access, this is often much harder to assess than people assume. Even the senior civil servants who worked closely with successive Ministers of Finance displayed little agreement on who was the best minister during their tenures. But how might we judge the performance of the department itself in the latter half of the twentieth century? One might instinctively use budgetary policy as the barometer, but this is to set the question too narrowly since the DOF had much wider powers. It took responsibility for economic development in the late 1950s, extending to social development in the following decade. The DOF was given legal responsibility for both economic and social planning and development in 1980 (Statutory Instrument No. 1/1980). Its mission by the late 1990s was explicitly 'to promote an economy which will maximise growth, sustainable employment and social progress' (DOF Archive, 1998).

The Irish economic experience in these decades was turbulent. The period to 1973 was one of relative underperformance. The flawed fiscal policies of the late 1970s contributed significantly to the prolonged recession of the following decade. The economic transformation from 1987 was all the more extraordinary because it was so concentrated. In just twelve years, the country caught up on the living standards of its neighbours (Ó Gráda & O'Rourke, 2022, p. 19). This was a remarkable achievement, but, from a welfare perspective, a steadier trajectory would have been far preferable: much of the damage caused during the 1980s was not undone by the subsequent boom.

Just as the DOF cannot receive all of the praise for Ireland's economic successes, nor can it take all of the blame for its failings. Its signature achievement was driving the momentum for European Economic Community accession from the late 1950s. Timing was everything here, and, had Ireland joined later, it is entirely plausible that the subsequent foreign direct investment boom could have gone elsewhere. The much more laggardly move to free trade envisioned by the Department of Industry and Commerce had its own rationale. But even at the time it was myopic, risking the prospect of the United Kingdom joining before Ireland and shutting the country out of its dominant export market. That possibility only seems remote in retrospect; at the time, it was perfectly plausible. In this scenario, it is very difficult to imagine any development strategy that would have enabled Ireland to converge on Western Europe. Officials in the DOF were mindful that Irish gross national product per capita was only 54 per cent of the European Economic Community average for 1970, and that this was with the benefit of preferential trade access to the United Kingdom.

The 1970s were marred by unsustainable incomes and public expenditure growth. Officials in the department were strongly opposed to both trends, but had little power to counter them. This should have prompted meaningful action to make the necessary institutional changes. As officials were well aware, the public pay arbitration machinery was far from satisfactory. Pay and pensions consistently accounted for half of current public expenditure, and keeping them in check was fundamental to the welfare of the Exchequer. Reforms proposed by the Department for the Public Service should thus have received active backing from the DOF. The department was prescient in its fears about the impact of the 1977

Fianna Fáil manifesto, particularly on the Exchequer borrowing requirement. It could do little to prevent it, however, given that the strategy had the endorsement of a landslide general election. This was despite the best efforts of both Minister for Finance Richie Ryan and Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave to warn of the dangers of permissive fiscal and incomes policies. Whether the electorate could ever have been persuaded of the dangers of the manifesto in advance is hard to determine.

The early and mid-1980s served as further evidence that the department was subservient to the political realities of the day. For the third decade running, the DOF asked for voluntary cuts from other departments and was presented with proposals for a large net increase. This pattern was reversed dramatically in 1987, when the onus to find the necessary savings was pushed back on the spending departments. The decisive change was a supportive Taoiseach. The irony was not lost on officials interviewed: their power over expenditure control was strongest when the economy was weak, and then dissipated as it recovered (O'Neill & Murphy, 2019). The 1988 tax amnesty is generally considered to have been a major success in view of the enormous yield. But it was a direct reflection of the degree of evasion up to that point. There was little appetite to tackle the problem, and the DOF should have been much more proactive here. The cycle of a narrowing base driving higher rates and more evasion had deep roots. Breaking it required firm resolve and a pronounced cultural shift.

The department played a significant role in creating the necessary conditions for the 1990s boom. Ireland's low corporate tax rate and grants proved a major draw for United States firms looking for a foothold in the common market. Sustaining these incentives through the 1980s was probably reflective of the clout of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA), but there was little evidence of dissent in the DOF. The routine extension of the 10 per cent rate to new activities in successive Finance Bills was a flawed strategy, and its piecemeal nature was suggestive of lobbyist influence. Even a basic calculation suggests that many of these extensions were imprudent, and jeopardised far more jobs than they created. The DOF proved uniquely successful in securing European structural funds, and for far longer than objective economic criteria, like output per capita, would have allowed. By the early 1990s, these receipts were on a scale that would have been unimaginable in earlier decades.

Problems were already mounting by the late 1990s, and the department was quick to point them out. Current spending and incomes were growing at an unsustainable pace. Again, however, the DOF was overruled by the rest of government. Where the department could have been much more dynamic was in studying and preparing for the risks associated with the single currency, especially the likelihood that lower interest rates would further fuel the housing boom. Senior officials already had enormous workloads, and the time pressures in the eye of the storm were very real. Expecting them to have done more on top of their existing jobs is unrealistic. The real problems ran far deeper.

Cultural and institutional issues

In 2010, the Wright Report on the department found a tendency to retain work and responsibility at the senior management level, when it could more appropriately be delegated (Wright et al., 2010, p. 44). This was a long-standing issue. Over forty years earlier, the Devlin Report had observed that Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries across government were 'so involved in the press of daily business that they have little time to participate in the formulation of overall policy'. This entanglement in the minutia, Devlin argued, was a direct consequence of the 1924 Ministers and Secretaries Act, which made the Minister responsible for all acts carried out by his officials: 'the Minister is in essence the Department; he is a corporation sole'. This forced the minister and his senior officials to focus unduly on the details of executive action, to the detriment of policy formation (Devlin et al., 1969). Thomas Barrington served as a member of the group drafting the Devlin report, and later expanded on the point. He described this intense centralisation of Irish Government as the most significant feature of the Ministers and Secretaries Act. While it may have been feasible in the early years of the state, it had become increasingly impractical. A minister could not decide everything personally, but could informally delegate powers to a small number of very senior officials, who would readily know the minister's mind on a broad range of issues and act accordingly.

> The consequence of all this was that an immense quantity of detailed business came to be discharged at the very tops of the departments. The senior officials, instead of being preoccupied with broad questions of policy, became more and more burdened with matters of detail. (Barrington, 1980, pp. 31–2).

Anyone remotely familiar with the schedules of ministers and senior civil servants will appreciate the magnitude of the workloads. That this militates against careful policy formation is difficult to dispute. What is more dubious, however, is the suggestion that the primary cause of this immersion in detail is legislative. The tendency for senior managers to shoulder excessive workloads and focus on the urgent over the important is common across all types of organisations. We do not need the Ministers and Secretaries Act to explain it. Nor is it likely that if the Act had been differently conceived that the problem would have been avoided.

This is not to dispute the core argument that ministers and their senior officials spend a disproportionate amount of time and energy safeguarding against potential mistakes. To do so is perfectly rational given the incentives; enforced ministerial resignations are sufficiently commonplace to dispel any complacency. The primary threat is a sustained and high-profile public scandal. A major problem, however, is that the public and media responses to any given scandal are so often disproportionate and difficult to predict. A seemingly small issue can quickly escalate, demanding constant vigilance. By contrast, achievements by government often gain no publicity at all. A minister might be promoted to a more desirable department on the basis of good performance, but even this is often down to the perception of a steady hand and avoiding criticism. Ministers and departments do themselves few favours in this regard, doing little to publicise their objectives or achievements. The problem, then, is largely cultural. A mistake has far more traction than an accomplishment, encouraging excessive caution and concentration of power. Another widely recognised impediment to reform is that any meaningful change will often involve a very substantial shift in power, generating stiff resistance from existing power holders (Byrne, 1995, p. 64).

This ties directly into the criticism by Devlin et al. of 'the absence of effective communication and dialogue between the public service and the community'. This has been much improved upon in recent years, but for the DOF the issue is especially pertinent and demanding. One of the most striking patterns across the latter half of the twentieth century was that civil servants would know the correct course of action but be overruled by politicians responding to interest groups or public opinion. Too often, the department would sit outside the fray while lobbyists won the political battle. This was a critical mistake. It is often ascribed to aloofness on the part of officials, but probably stemmed more from deference to the minister and perhaps even a lack of confidence. The arguments the department needed to make were often unpalatable and complicated – inherently unappealing causes for ministers who needed to retain their seats. The department thus needed to create another public face, to gradually convince the electorate of the need for fiscal prudence and the inevitably of opportunity costs. One recommendation from the Wright Report was the recruitment of a Chief Operations Officer, an initiative that could free up the Secretary General for exactly this type of engagement (Wright et al., 2010, p. 41).

The need for a public champion for the Exchequer was partially addressed by the establishment of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council in 2011. But the DOF has a much broader remit, and there is little reason for it to remain in the background. In 1988, Patrick Honohan, future governor of the Central Bank, argued that civil servants should be able to speak out on policy issues, observing that the Central Bank had already been doing so for thirty years with no ill effects (Honohan, 1988, p. 42). The long-standing fear of overshadowing the minister needs to be balanced with the need for autonomy, and other countries seem to perform better in this regard. The department was decidedly slow to interact without outside experts throughout the twentieth century, and a subsequent study has suggested that it tended to hold academics in low regard (Christensen, 2017, p. 97). Wright argued that departmental analysis should be subjected to more external scrutiny before budgets were finalised (Wright et al., 2010). One can extend this point much further, and there was too little engagement with external experts of all hues. Constructive relationships with entrepreneurs, investors, tax experts and academics would have made the policy formation process much more robust.

One significant problem here, is that academic economists have little professional incentive to focus on Irish fiscal policy, since it is of little interest to highly ranked international journals. Similarly, economic history has been widely neglected internationally over recent decades (Temin, 2014). This is particularly apparent in Irish history departments, which are now almost completely devoid of economic historians. It is therefore not enough for the department to merely engage with the experts that are there, it needs to deliberately foster and maintain an external intellectual community. Frank Barry (2011) has called for a more open ‘marketplace for ideas’, observing that the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council was a step in the right direction, but only in a very narrow area. Actively recruiting specialists from other organisations would help the department to engage more meaningfully, while simultaneously demonstrating the very significant expertise that it already possesses.

Three related criticisms which are often levelled at the civil service are conservatism/inertia, short-termism and a lack of creativity. The Devlin Report argued that a built-in resistance to change was a core feature of the system (Devlin et al., 1969, p. 142), while the DOF itself recognised that it still suffered from inertia in the 1990s (DOF Archive, 1994). Seán Lemass made a similar observation in 1961:

> I think it is true to say that in some government departments there is still a tendency to wait for new ideas to walk through the door. It is perhaps the normal attitude of an administrative department of government to be passive rather than active, to await proposals from outside, to react mainly to criticism or to pressure of public demand, to avoid the risks of experimentation and innovation and to confine themselves to vetting and improving proposals brought to them by private interests and individuals rather than to generate new ideas themselves. (Chubb, 1992, p. 238).

One former minister interviewed was told by a senior official that it was not the job of officials to come up with ideas: it was not part of their training and they were far more comfortable interrogating ideas from the outside. Whether the culture of the civil service in Ireland was in any way unusual in this regard is difficult to establish empirically. In the third edition of *The government and politics of Ireland*, the political scientist Basil Chubb (1992, pp. 236–8) observed that the British civil service, alongside many other European countries, had a 'distinctively upper-class tradition' in its higher ranks. The top levels of the Irish service, he suggested, were instead populated largely by officers from lower-middle-class backgrounds. The benefit of this was a close affinity with the broader population. The problem, he argued, was that 'the majority, on account of their schooling and their socialisation within the service, tended to accept "the system" with little question, though in this they surely did not differ from civil servants almost everywhere'. They were thus suited to 'running the machine', but did not measure up to the demands that were subsequently made of them. Even this was Chubb trying to be diplomatic. In the second edition, he had suggested that a 'Christian Brothers school stereotype' had dominated the service until well into the 1960s and perhaps even beyond:

> Higher civil servants generally perhaps tended to be intellectually able and hard working but rather narrowly practical in their approach and inclined to be concerned with the short-term objective. They were not inclined to speculate broadly or to reflect on long-term ends or cultural values. (Chubb, 1982, pp. 266–7).

Chubb's focus on schooling sits incongruously with the history of the DOF. He suggested that *Economic development* represented a challenge to the traditional civil service by a small group of reformers (Chubb, 1992, pp. 236–8). Inconveniently, T. K. Whitaker, Secretary of the Department of Finance from 1956 to 1969, and all of the other authors for whom biographical information could be found had attended Christian Brothers' schools. The appeal to 'socialisation within the service' has more substance, but again this can be readily explained by internal incentives. Like ministers, civil servants tend to attract far more attention through their mistakes than their successes, something which they have been at pains to point out for at least seventy years (Ó Muireadhaigh, 1953, p. 55). This inculcates a culture of caution, which militates against innovation or reform. Part of the problem is that a failed initiative can be squarely blamed on the person who proposed it, whereas maintaining the status quo diffuses responsibility. The crippling effects of this mentality have been recognised for decades. In 1960, the economist Patrick Lynch observed that 'if administrators or managers are afraid to risk making mistakes they may stagnate in unproductive righteousness' (p. 188).

Charlie Murray, Secretary of the DOF from 1969 to 1976, observed in 1990 that the civil service was frequently criticised for providing permanent, risk-free jobs. His defence of this was dubious: that removing permanent tenure would be costly because civil servants would demand additional compensation, and that doing so would undermine civil service impartiality by 'opening the door to a change to top jobs' (Murray, 1990, p. 44). The argument of Sean Cromien, Secretary of the DOF from 1997 to 1994, that reform would be traumatic is similarly unpersuasive (DOF Archive, 1991). DOF officials could be as frustrated with the 'jobs for life' culture as anyone, in full knowledge that they were the ones who would be expected to find the necessary money. The public wage bill rose inexorably, predetermining half of current spending before any decisions were made.

The budgetary system

For all of the criticism levelled at the 'dead hand of Finance', its instinctive fiscal conservatism has been repeatedly vindicated since the 1960s. The two major recessions over the past fifty years were deeply exacerbated by excessive current spending growth. This was despite clear warnings from the department on both occasions. Irish fiscal policy has been far too responsive to political demands and lobbying by interest groups. This was evident in the effective non-taxation of farmers in the 1970s, the toleration of widespread tax evasion in the 1980s, and the rapid erosion of the income tax base from the 1990s. The 2008 economic crash briefly inculcated a more conservative attitude to public spending, but relying on collective memory is dangerous, and institutional safeguards should be implemented wherever possible.

The DOF lost the battle over fiscal policy so consistently that it suggests a fundamental shortcoming of the budgetary process. The Wright Report examined the June memoranda on budget strategy brought to cabinet by the Ministers for Finance over the decade from 1999. With only one exception (2003), the spending increases and tax reductions announced in the December budget speeches were consistently above those advocated by the department, often very significantly. The report observed that two major contributing factors were the programmes for government and social partnership (Wright et al., 1990, pp. 21–7). In both cases, political considerations thus trumped the advice of the department. But there was fault on both sides. Former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern has suggested that the failure of the June memoranda to account for pre-existing commitments ensured they were widely treated as fantasy. When asked what would have happened had the advice been followed, he suggested that it could have brought down the government (B. Ahern, personal communication, 16 September 2021).

The system thus allowed the DOF to issue appropriately sober advice, which was then promptly discarded as unrealistic. The gulf between economic and political demands was never properly reconciled. For any system to safeguard the Exchequer, all political commitments would have to be made on the basis of the available resources, rather than multiannual commitments predetermining budgetary policy. The stabilising influence of countercyclical fiscal policy is acutely important in an open economy like Ireland's, whose economic history 'has mirrored the ebbs and flows of the global economy, in highly exaggerated fashion' (O'Rourke, 2017, p. 41). Few senior officials in the department would have contended that the existing system worked particularly well, but there were conspicuously few proposals to reform it. Such an initiative was never likely to come from elsewhere in government, and the DOF should have been much more proactive here.

Planning

The department thus faced two major challenges: inculcating an organisational culture that rewarded success and ensuring that its core responsibility of safeguarding the Exchequer was not subverted by the political process. Planning was the solution to both. By setting high-level objectives, the DOF could control the message, take mistakes in its stride, and celebrate its achievements. Securing political buy-in for its long-term goals would have enabled it to set a firm policy agenda, acting as a buttress against sectoral demands. The response within the DOF to the creation and abolition of the Department of Economic Planning and Development was to abandon planning almost entirely.[1] It is evident from the departmental files that officials still thought of economic planning in post-war terms, with specific macroeconomic targets against which they would be judged.

In fact, 'planning' can describe any effort to imbue policy with 'a sense of direction and long-term purpose' (Whitaker, 1969, p. 264). An appropriate economic development plan would have been akin to the strategy adopted by the IDA from the 1970s: identifying and championing sectors with significant growth potential, concentrating resources rather than spreading them too thinly, and ensuring that policies were coherent across government. To give an example, the IDA worked closely with the Higher Education Authority to ensure that enough electrical engineers and technicians were trained to meet burgeoning demand. This was vital, given that the existing output of graduates was only a quarter of what was necessary (MacSharry & White, 2000, pp. 273, 284). But it represented an encroachment by a state agency into education policy with no mandate, to fill a vacuum left by the central departments.

[1] The Department of Economic Planning and Development was established in 1977 and abolished by Charles Haughey almost immediately when he became Taoiseach, in December 1979.

The DOF was fully aware that neither it nor the Department of the Taoiseach were coordinating policy across government (DOF Archive, 1994). Its foray into programme budgeting in the early 1970s was short-lived, but highly instructive. Officials asked the major spending departments to identify their core objectives, which were largely implicit and incoherent. Given the internal contradictions, we can only speculate at the inefficiencies that this produced across the system as a whole. Social and economic plans are inherently intertwined. Any social plan will have major economic ramifications, since government needs to provide the necessary resources. Similarly, as illustrated by the IDA example above, economic plans rely on supportive policies across the spending departments. By establishing high-level priorities and identifying trade-offs, policies could be properly aligned. The absence of an overall plan produced social and economic policies that were often unsupportive and even directly conflicting.

Spatial policy was a pronounced example. The debate was largely between the IDA and the DOF, over whether to concentrate or disperse industrial projects. But this was frustratingly narrow and myopic. If, as the Department of Health argued, providing quality services was prohibitively expensive across a widely dispersed population, then there were much broader considerations. The IDA considered planning exclusively from its own perspective, but the central departments should have provided a holistic viewpoint, considering the full costs and benefits of each approach. Doing so would have allowed government to confront the public with the inevitable trade-offs. The alternative was ever-mounting public spending demands and suboptimal social outcomes.

At the political level, setting overarching societal goals would have helped deepen support for government. This is particularly important in terms of taxation: the Irish experience in the 1970s and 1980s illustrates the perils of an unfair system losing its legitimacy. There was ample opportunity for reform here also. The Commission on Taxation proposals in the 1980s had their shortcomings, but they were at least radical and far-sighted. One of the major criticisms of the commission's proposal for an expenditure tax is that it would have been regressive. Internationally, some economists have since argued for a steeply progressive consumption tax, which would overcome this obstacle while encouraging saving and investment (Frank, 2017, pp. 109–27, 158–71). At the theoretical level this is highly attractive, since any commensurate reduction in income tax would also help reduce disincentives on economic activity. The Irish Trade and General Workers' Union proposal to the commission suggested the adoption of a simplified system that combined tax and social welfare, providing a basic guaranteed income irrespective of employment status (DOF Archive, 1982). As a far richer country than it had been in the 1980s, Ireland is now much better placed to consider the associated benefits. The cost may still be prohibitive, but even a robust evaluation would be instructive.

The Devlin report's solution to the problem of top officials being overburdened by executive work was to remove them from it entirely. An 'Aireacht' (meaning ministry) would be created in each department and charged with overall policy formulation, with no direct responsibility for daily administration. This proposal was, to put it mildly, lofty. Whatever its objective merits, it was such a major departure that the likelihood of it being widely implemented was vanishingly remote. The much more damaging problem was that far from being elevated to the top priority for the civil service, policy formation remained sidelined. Devlin et al. cited a warning from Whitaker in 1961, that senior officials have suggested has become even more pressing in the interim:

> I am not sure now if the biggest problem after all will not be one of organisation – how Secretaries and other senior officers can organise their time and work to get away from their desks and the harassing experiences of everyday sufficiently to read, consider and consult with others in order to be able to give sound and comprehensive advice on future development policy. (Whitaker, 1969, pp. 154–7).

A far more feasible solution for the DOF was to accord a central role to the Development Division.[2] The division's ambitions were far too limited from the outset, focusing on minor issues and data collection. Instead, it should have sought to tackle the many identified shortcomings of the indigenous economy, while proactively looking abroad for applicable development policies. For all the attention they received, the three economic programmes from 1958 to 1972 did little to identify and support the sectors that could have helped Ireland

[2] The DOF Development Division was established in 1961 in tandem with the department's foray into economic planning. Its functions were moved to the Department of Economic Planning and Development in 1977 and then back to the DOF in 1980.

transition to a high-income economy.[3] The Department for Economic Planning and Development was similarly uninspiring, and its abolition in 1980 allowed the DOF to reabsorb its powers, while harbouring no real intention of ever using them. The tension identified between planning and public expenditure control that Whitaker identified in the 1960s was very real, and the Public Expenditure Division was still visceral in its opposition to planning in the 1990s. The transfer of the Public Expenditure Division to the new Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2011 represented the loss of a key function for the DOF, alongside a major reduction in personnel. But it also presented the opportunity for the department to take on a more proactive role, putting economic and social planning front and centre.

Conclusion

The annual budget is still devoted vast amounts of both energy and ink. Although the political incentives are perfectly clear, the economic rationale has become increasingly dubious. The policy changes that the format encourages are short-term and incremental almost by design. Conversely, if planning was important in the twentieth century, it has become imperative in the twenty-first. Most of the major challenges facing Ireland in the coming decades are similar to those facing other wealthy countries: climate change, an ageing population, the prospect of widespread technology-driven job losses, and the potential retreat of globalisation.

The foreign direct investment-driven model demands constant vigilance and adaptability, with infrastructural demands that seem beyond the capacity of the existing political and economic system to deliver. A country at the technological frontier needs to be much more reflective about its priorities than one with a persistent unemployment problem. The core task has shifted to achieving and safeguarding multifaceted improvements in living standards, in the face of formidable threats. While invention and innovation offer enormous opportunities, they are no panacea. Techno-pessimists warn alternatively of 'a world without work' (Susskind, 2020) or that the low-hanging fruit has already been picked (Gordon, 2017). These are exactly the types of problems that demand extensive research, planning, and state intervention.

[3] The government adopted three economic programmes from 1958 to the end of the 1960s. The first was widely considered successful by contemporaries, while the second and third were abandoned on the assumption that they would miss their targets.

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