

SEAPORT POLICY IRELAND: A CRITIQUE

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Abstract

This review offers a critique of recent Irish port policy research publications. For Ireland, an island nation on the periphery of Europe, ports and shipping contributes to the nation's GDP, employment and the measurement of economic prosperity. The paper traces Irish port policies and academic research literature outlining current trends.

A need to change maritime industry and freight demands has been influencing the evolutionary process of the seaports. Ports are important hubs but are only a part of value-driven logistics chain systems. Recent industry trends indicate a shift towards sustainability, which incorporates environmental and social interests brought about by concerns over pollution and social issues. The paper suggests that the policy makers must consider the implementation of intermodal transport as the effective alternative for freight and passenger solutions to satisfy EU legislations on environmental and social issues. A 'smart' ports policy will allow a stable platform for investments, enhance the country's 'green' image and offer practical transport solutions that utilise intermodal logistics.

1. Introduction

Seaports evolve continuously. Their unique development path reflects changing external market demands and internal national socio-economic trends. In Europe, since the early 15th century, external pressures in economic and growing trade patterns have influenced the growth of ports and city-ports [1]. Technological innovations and social pressures, during the second half of the 20th century, brought about radical changes in the world economy encouraging sweeping changes ushering in containerisation and ultimately globalisation. Globalisation led to three major processes: the globalisation of firms, the globalisation of regulations and the globalisation of markets [2]. These global market rationalisations brought about a new realisation within the transport environment and redefined ports within supply chain logistics.

Evolution of ports

The concept of ports has been changing and as such has been difficult to define for the purposes of analytical transport research ([3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9]; [10]) [11]. A 'port' usually originated as a geographic site (i.e. a port region or land area) where maritime activities substantially affected the economic structure (e.g. employment, investment, etc.) by concentrating on the area's assets. From this has grown 'a port system', where groups of ports share a common geographic characteristic, e.g. a coastline or bay, sometimes shared overlapping hinterland regions ([12], [13], [14]).

For this study, a 'port' is broadly defined as: "A logistic and industrial centre of an outspokenly maritime nature that plays an active role in the global transport system and is characterized by a spatial and functional clustering of activities that are directly and indirectly involved in transformation and information processes in supply chains". [15]

This is not intended to be a comprehensive evaluation of all maritime matters, as that would be an inordinately large piece of work (e.g. it does not include reference to fishing or leisure activities, which can reasonably be considered to be a part of the maritime industry). This paper reviews Irish port policy questions following the publication of the Department of Transport's 2013 seaport policy document. The next following five sections offer a critique of past and present Irish port policies. In Section 2, some of the relevant terms used in the paper are defined. Section 3 reviews the previous Irish port policies and the associated literature up to the present sea port policy document. The critique is set out in Section 4 based on three issues: seaports within a supply chain environment; seaports within the sustainability setting and finally the relevance of Irish seaport policies and future trends. Section 5 offers a case study tracing the influences on port clusters following the following the widening of Panama Canal. Section 6 concludes the study with the possible trends for future research.

2. Port Policy background

Defining 'policy' attracts several interpretations; however for this study, policy is an instrument that is fundamental to the structure and the mechanisms that it characterises [16].

Traditionally 'policy' defines the structure for policy-making and implementation as directed by jurisdictional considerations [23]. Transport policy has a major influence on investment, subsidies and taxes that effect different transport modes [16]. These are based on economic values along with environmental and social issues arising from maritime transport trade forecasts. In transport the three main categories of policy are:

1. Maintenance of safety (in shipping and ports),
2. Maintenance of security for people and goods, and
3. Safeguarding the environment and the population from the polluting effects resulting from transport industry operations (air, water, congestion and noise).

Here 'transport' refers to all the four modes of transport (road, rail, air and the maritime).

National policy satisfies two broad issues:

1. It directs the scope of subsidies; where the State builds 'common good' infrastructure to help create an environment for a competitive market and prevent the dominance of monopolies.
2. It Safeguards areas of 'public' goods in areas often ignored by the private institutions.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [16] suggests that a maritime policy should:

- Reduce environmental and other transport-related externalities;
- Promote economic integration and trade competitiveness through better transport services;
- Generate employment and taxable income in the transport business

In practice, maritime policy mainly directs investment decisions aimed at expanding the maritime sector taken at state level influencing the future development of maritime activities [17], [18] [19] [20]. Maritime policy incorporates across all aspects of policy dimensions, across geographical spatially defined and sectoral issues (economics to technical, legal and administrative issues among others) [21]. This underlines the axiomatic situation that in order for government to promote its maritime policy, it must decide to invest in allocated sectors. Here the policy process cycle is not a substitute for the actual making of decisions but an administrative and bureaucratic mechanism for effectively setting in place a process once the difficult decisions have been made [22].

For administrative purposes, marine policy covers two sectors of shipping and ports. Shipping policy covers all items pertaining to the national policies and regulations on the national shipping fleet, tonnage taxes, detailing the full remit covering manning conditions on national flag ships; in short all section directly dealing with 'water-side'. Port policy relates to the 'land-side' of maritime topics. National port policies have directly influenced the evolution of ports [15] and port policy influences all elements of the port's logistics system (packaging, production, planning, warehousing, facility location, information processing, inventory control, and so on).

Within the EU, national governments directs national maritime policies but are heavily influenced at supranational level (e.g. the European Commission) and by international agencies (e.g. the International Maritime Organization, the United Nations). For the shipping sector a structure as shown in Table 1 can be thought to apply.

Table 1: Jurisdiction and policy in Maritime (Shipping and ports)

Jurisdiction	Institutional	Shipping
International	United Nations; OECD	IMO; UNCTAD;
Supranational	European Union, ASEAN	DG TREN; DG-COMP
National	EU Member State, ASEAN Member	Ireland; UK; USA
Regional	County	Dublin; Cork
Local	Port	Dublin, Shanon Foynes

Source: [21]

3. Review of Irish port policies publications

Successive UK governments in the early 1980s' promoted the privatisation of large sections of the UK industry with the intention of promoting competition and reducing Government subsidies. Some believed that subsidies were a 'state-sponsored distortion' of infrastructure [24]. The privatisation of the ports radically changed seaport planning, investment, management, operation and some sectors were regulated by the private sector. A few of these concepts were influencing Irish policy makers.

There are very few academic studies on Irish maritime sector, with reference to the management of Irish ports, port policy changes, ports' governance and regulation. This lack of research data on Irish ports makes it difficult to develop a set of robust quantitative performance indicators for Irish ports' [27], [28]. These policy changes were in line with the demands of the port and industry stakeholders [29]. A later study [30] described the benefits from the proposed capitalisation and commercialisation of ports. Brunt [27] suggested that the changes in management of Irish ports were influenced by five main processes: Europeanization, globalisation, industrial policy, economic restructuring, and transport policy and resulted from the policy emphasis on export-led growth. Ireland, on the periphery of Europe, was transformed into a successful export led economy. Within the EU, trade increased in both volume and tonnage of maritime traffic and .acknowledged in subsequent study 'Transport Corridors in Europe: National Spatial Strategy [34].

The radical changes introduced by the Department of Marine's (DCMNR) Port Policy Statement [31] with the liberalisation Irish port's governance remit and introduced the concept of an integrated transport policy in Ireland. This prompted studies that considered increased port capacity (Bremore, near Drogheda [32]). The Department's key policy tenets for the maritime sector and for national ports policy were based on policy review of the *Ports Policy Statement* [33]. The Strategy Statement articulates the key ports objective under a "Better Ports" label as "to ensure investment in ports meets port capacity requirements and to facilitate the availability of commercial port services which are effective, competitive and

cost efficient". The key policy emphasised ensuring adequate port capacity, promoting competition and facilitating private investment in the sector.

In 2010 there was an improvement by 9%, from 2009 bulk cargoes, increasing to 26 million tonnes. This general recovery reflects a revival of the wider global economy creating stronger market conditions for Irish firms. Overall 7 of the 12 Irish ports had improved tonnages with the total volume still 3 million tons less than the average over the previous 5 years [25] Table 2 provides the freight figures for 2004, 2007 and 2010. Figure 1 shows the list of major ports and gateways in Ireland.

Table 2 Tonnage of goods handled by Irish ports in thousands of tonnes

Category of traffic	2004	2007	2010
Total goods handled	47720	54139	45071
Ro Ro traffic	10570	12547	12256
Lo Lo traffic	7022	8876	6457
Liquid bulk	13315	14348	12019
Dry bulk	14825	15822	13453
Break bulk and other goods	1984	2548	904
Goods received	34703	38907	30712
Goods forwarded	13017	15232	14359

Source: CSO Statistical Year book 2012

Literature review: Table 3 lists the major publications including research studies and studies commissioned by the Department of Transport with reference to Irish ports.

Table 3: Academic and Government studies relating to Irish ports

Year	Author	Main topic(s)	Secondary topic(s)
2002	Dept. of Environment	National Spatial Strategy 2002 – 2020 [26]	Strategy is a 20 year framework to deliver balanced social, economic and physical development between regions.
2000	Department of Environment and Local Government	Transport Corridors in Europe National Spatial Strategy [34]	Recommends dispersing of Dublin based policy onto separate port clusters of business
2002	Department of Marine	Report of Task Force on the Development of Port Estates in Commercial Harbours [35]	
2003	Department of Marine	High level review of commercial ports operating under the harbours acts 1996 and 2000. [36]	
2005	Department of Marine	Irish Ports Policy with mandate to develop into entities with clear commercial ethos [37]	Facilitating the transport of goods on an integrated and intermodal system by integrating the transport policy across all modes.
2006	Department of Transport	Report regarding the future seaport capacity requirement for unitised trade in Ireland [38]	Port Policy report, port capacity, study to ensure capacity needs identified.

2013 [39]	Dept. Of Transport, Tourism and Sport	The core objective of National Ports Policy is to facilitate a competitive and effective market for maritime transport services.	
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Source: Authors

The current framework for national transport policy is the Department of Transport's *Statement of Strategy*. In Transport 21 it outlines the Department's programme for transport infrastructure, where shipping policy, ports and rail receive a passing mention. This apparent oversight seems to belie the Department's pronouncements of the overall aims of national transport policy, especially in promoting an intermodal shift by optimising the use of the transport network [31]. This was further highlighted as one of the positive outcomes of the 3rd European Short Sea Congress [40]. There was a very positive ethos recommended by several national stakeholders (Departments of Transport and Environment, Dublin Transport Office, Health Service Executive, Office of Public Works, local and regional authorities, private companies), in the promoting of railways to facilitate intermodal and transmodal transfers, especially around port cities.

4. Critique of Irish port policies and trends

In a democratic system, policy decisions are not issued by a single governing body or dominant economic elite, but by a multiplicity of participants. A port policy when embedded within a comprehensive transport policy, offers the stakeholders access to a wide array of trans-industrial opportunities resulting from two broad issues:

- Existing conditions on investments, in capital and human resources, towards generating employment, revenues and contributing towards increased opportunities of investment.
- Advantage that it offers allows preferred choices to the policy makers: in direction, planning and investment.

It is a false notion that legislation forces markets to be competitive. Transport markets may or may not be 'efficient' but the economic concepts underlying discussions about market structure and competition and regulation continue to focus debate. Interestingly, for Ireland in a policy environment of microeconomic reform and deregulation, of corporatization, privatization and of widespread adoption of legislated 'competition policy,' the ready access to litigation ensures a somewhat new emphasis on competition law and on a requirement for pragmatism when considering classical economic theory. Irish policy makers should note that the laws in Australia, opts for 'effective competition' rather than the notion of perfect competition. This has become the basis for assessing whether or not a market is 'competitive' [22].

Then, it can be asked, who manages the movement of freight? Firms move freight; between supply and demand locations and the movement results from a commercial or market transaction in which supply satisfies demand via the price mechanism. Firms will not enter the market transaction unless they derive competitive advantage from so doing. Competitive advantage does not necessarily mean the maximization of profits; advantage will be gained in the long run at break-even or better than break-even, acceptable profit. Firm A will derive value from the transactions or utility, or satisfaction often measured in terms of consumer surplus. Not surprisingly, Firm B will not enter the market either unless it derives utility or competitive advantage from so doing [46]

With the world economies emerging from the global economic crisis, there are increased opportunities for the Irish government for investing in improved infrastructure, increasing employment and further economic development. This requires a new realisation between the policy makers, port managers and the stakeholders, each with their distinct perspectives and their preferred solutions. For the policy makers, the challenge is in outlining the path to meet

the needs for the investors and stakeholders seeking value in the port clusters and the supply chains served by the port. Along with the demands for improved governance and management of ports there is a new demand for the inclusion of the environmental and social side-effects known as sustainability.

Irish Port Policy 2013

Following 'Port Policy Review Consultation Document in 2010 [33], the Department presented National Ports Policy, 2013 [39]. The stated objective of the National Ports Policy document was to facilitate a competitive and effective market for maritime transport services. The document dealt with port governance issues; it reclassified the Irish ports into three tiers, with the onus on the first tier ports to lead the response to future port capacity issues. In its section on connecting the ports to its hinterland the 2013 policy document reiterates the 2005 policy paper. On the environmental and ecological issues, the document echoed the European Commission's timely concerns on environmental matters in recognition of the need to sustain the diverse and complex eco-systems around Ireland.

However, the policy document fails to acknowledge three critical issues:

a. Ports position within a national and international supply chain environment

By the late 1990s Poirier [44] and others recognised the emerging dynamics of integration in supply chains. Leading firms formed networks 'for sourcing raw materials...creating services, storing and distributing the goods, and ultimately delivering the products and services to customers and consumers' – creating effective supply networks with significant competitive advantage. Value was created not only by integrating the internal operations of the firm but also by 'integrating systems and supply chain operations across the full range of component functions' [44].

Post third generation ports progressed from stand-alone service providers to elements in value-driven chains, which underlined the significance of whole-of-chain integration and efficiency in port-dependent chains [45]. Sweeney argued for a 'wider cross-functional and inter-organisational integration' and a 'more holistic' approach to chain integration' [46]. Against this background, this critique examines the Irish seaport policy and the integration/efficiency extension onto ports as nodes with the transport supply chains. Robinson [47] urges a rethink of the transport paradigms as supply chain concepts would improve both the seaport efficiency and its performance within an efficient transport chain.

b. The concepts of sustainability

There is a growing acceptance of embracing and incorporating sustainable transportation planning [48]. This initiative is noteworthy for two reasons: firstly as it represents a different understanding of the role of transportation and secondly in addressing the transportation planning, with the combined assets that span academic and traditional policy disciplines.

There is a growing interest in sustainability as a one of the core planning objectives in Europe, where the strategic challenge for the transport policy is to contribute to a separation between transport growth and the negative effects of transport. Policy measures should promote environmental friendly and safe transport solutions. There must be fuller utilization of railroad and shipping, over road, to promote intermodal transport solutions Sustainability is difficult to operationalize and it involves objectives that are often in conflict i.e. environmental conservation, social responsibility and economic viability [49], [50].

c. Irish policy issues and intermodal solutions

'No theory is better than bad theory, but good theory is better than no theory' [43]. Bad theory is internally inconsistent, its premises unsound, its logic flawed; but the way of theorising 'which inevitably produces models of economic life which have little relation to

reality' and as Skidelsky states will also deliver bad theory. This rethinking will allow a policy measure with a 'more holistic approach', 'a comprehensive and integrated approach', a 'method of theorizing' that offers 'real world relevance' [47].

The European Commission [41] states in its transport policy:

Intermodality is of fundamental importance for developing competitive alternatives to road transport. (...) Action must therefore be taken to ensure fuller integration of the modes offering considerable potential transport capacity as links in an efficiently managed transport chain joining up all the individual services.

A progressive ports' policy would build on the previous commitments to the Irish transport industry and reflect EU measures towards sustainability by promoting of intermodal transport systems.

5. Case Study of Panama

Effects of widening of the Panama Canal on Panamanian policy

Port policy is often the primary tool to encourage growth and the synergies of a well balanced port cluster industry. It allows increased investment opportunities to deeper layers generating indirect activities that promote closely linked clustered services to the port(s) such as shipping and freight agencies, chandelling services, ship repairs and dry docking.

New market paradigms necessitate innovative port services for the emerging clients extending from the canal operations influenced by international factors not necessarily related to the port services. Finally, this growth surge allows for parallel growth and contributions adding to the value added' services around the 'port cluster' industry [44]. Proactive policy in Panama exemplifies the new opportunities from the widening of the Panama Canal and the added cluster components, as tabulated in Table 3 [41].

Table 3: The study of Cluster components in Panama Canal

Direct	Indirect	Induced	Parallel
Canal Operations	Shipping Lines Shipping Agencies	Duty Free Port areas	Other modal hubs
	Pilot/launch Services Ship Chandlers Bunker supplies Ship Repair maintenance Port Waste Management	Freight logistics Road/rail linkages Intermodal connections Cruise ship operations Marine tourism/leisure	Marine Services: Marine communication Marine Insurances Marine Legal services Financial institutions Public Services
	Port repairs Dredging	Ancillary maintenance (containers, port cranes machinery)	Knowledge transfers Academic centres

Source: Pagano [41]

6. Conclusion

For Ireland, having a very small core critical market, public policies in transport and ports must strengthen and complement the ports, instead of creating sparse competition within a minimal indigenous 'critical mass'. Recent events and changing philosophies and objectives have impacted on the public sector. These have resulted from government led (from both the administrative and political arms) transformation of the public sector [51].

Further research should evaluate Irish transport case studies involving generalised transport costs (GTC) of mode choice issues combined with the external costs from environmental

pollution and social issues arising from congestion, noise and land issues. This could provide valuable knowledge for industry and policymakers.

In response to the present market optimism there appears to be an inadequate policy response to the management of economic and financial markets. In terms of policy this failure in administration presents a case study which indicates that the outcomes of the political contest, or the 'play of power', in fact, determines the content of policy [50], whether a particular issue is on the agenda and whether the policy will be implemented. However, there is belief that the failure is not one of policy but in not recognising the paradigm shift in transport concept. And the resulting impact on ports and shipping at local levels.

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