

Contested Ruralities: Housing in the Irish Countryside

Project No: 5164

Karen Keaveney, NUI Maynooth

NUI Maynooth Supervisors: Prof. Patrick J. Duffy and Prof. Jim Walsh

Teagasc Supervisors: Eamonn Pitts and David Meredith

Summary

The purpose of the study is to examine housing in the Irish countryside. Housing in the countryside has become an increasingly contested issue in Ireland due to processes of rural change. The realm of debate is around issues such as who has the right to live in the countryside and how traditional settlement patterns can be sustained into the future. The debate, which has many contributors from politics, media and interest groups, has suffered from a lack of large-scale empirical research. The release of a combination of data from the 2002 Census of Population (house type with type sewerage facility used) has allowed this research to establish the spatial extent of single rural dwellings, the most contested and least known about element of living in the Irish countryside. Using this data in conjunction with the study of local level housing processes, a greater understanding of rural housing in Ireland has been established.

The key objective of the study was to establish the geography of rural housing in Ireland in 2002. The study provides a spatial analysis of rural housing in Ireland in 2002 and the changing pattern in preceding decades. Secondly, it sought to understand the planning policy context for rural settlement from national to local level. Finally, an examination of the dynamics of the rural population assists in understanding drivers of contemporary settlement change.

1. Introduction

Ireland has undergone unprecedented economic and social change in recent years. The now thriving economy has caused a shift from a largely rural based economy to an urban one. Until the early 1970s, rural Ireland was synonymous with agriculture. Changes brought about by membership of the EU, CAP reforms, a changing global economy and generations of out-migration culminated in the eventual decline of Irish full-

time family farming. Today less than 100,000 people are employed in farming (a decline of 40% since 1991). This relatively rapid decline in agriculture in Ireland has impacted on how rural areas are now considered. Historically, people who lived in the countryside farmed the land attached to their individual dwelling. It is clear that this relationship is changing and there no longer remains that interdependent relationship between living in the countryside and farming.

The inconclusive and ongoing debate on living in the countryside in Ireland has done little to establish the location and number of rural dwellings. A deficit of the media-led debate is a lack of knowledge of the basic facts and figures around rural housing; anecdote and hearsay have been relied upon. As a result, the debate has not moved on to the deeper processes behind rural housing supply and demand. In addition, limited academic research has been carried out on rural housing in Ireland. A handful of useful studies took place in the 1980s and 1990s, but unlike Western European counterparts, no in-depth research has taken place on a national level. This overall lack of knowledge and understanding makes a national study of rural dwelling settlement patterns a necessary element of this research. The release of a previously unpublished data combination from the Census of Population 2002 has allowed this research to examine rural housing in general and single rural dwellings (detached rural dwellings using an individual septic tank) specifically. These small area statistics of rural housing variables are mapped and analysed in order to establish the geography of rural housing in 2002.

Rural settlement patterns do not evolve in a vacuum. The planning system, which has been in place since 1963, has greatly influenced trends in rural house location. In order to enhance an understanding of the geography of rural housing in Ireland, policy should be examined in detail. This can be done at multi-scale level, from European to national to local policy. Planning policy intervention has shaped settlement both directly and indirectly. In addition, the population living in the countryside shape the rural settlement pattern. Location choice and preferences, employment, changing household size and needs, access to land, and affordability are some of the complex factors affecting the location and density of, and supply and demand for housing. Spatial analysis of national socio-economic change addresses this. Bringing this to the local level, both a qualitative and quantitative examination of different rural area types give an insight into small-scale planning and rural housing processes. Accessibility, the ability of urban centres to

absorb residential development, provision of infrastructure, quality of infrastructure all contribute to the location of housing in the countryside.

2. Methodology

Three themes of analysis were examined in the study: (i) the geography of rural housing; (ii) planning policy for rural housing; and (iii) socio-economic dynamics in the countryside. The geography of rural housing involved the mapping and spatial analysis of Single Rural Dwellings (SRDs). The data for SRDs was drawn from the Census of Population 2002 from which two unpublished data sets were made available:

(a) detached dwellings with individual septic tanks: this data was made available by Electoral Division for 'before 1971' and from 1971 by ten yearly intervals up to 1990, and then from 1991 to 1995 and 1996 and after.

(b) vacancy rates: as part of the administration of the Census of Population, enumerators are required to identify each house that is visited in Enumerator Record Books (ERBs). Each dwelling is assigned a number. If the dwelling is vacant, then it is either temporarily vacant or 'permanently' vacant. Significantly, if permanency is recorded it is further broken down into four categories as follows: habitable, holiday home, under construction, and uninhabitable.

The maps of rural housing were created using ArcGIS 9.1, a Geographic Information System (GIS) that allows the mapping and analysis of spatial data.

Socio-economic dynamics were examined using two data sources. Firstly socio-economic dynamics were examined through spatial analysis of national data provided by the 2002 Census of Population. Secondly, small-scale areas were examined where questionnaire surveys were used to collect area specific data (in Mayo, Meath and Leitrim). In order to maximise response rates it was decided to adopt the 'call and collect' method of administration. The administration of the questionnaire was based on two contacts with the potential respondent and was self-administered. A key objective of the questionnaire was to contact householders and homeowners. Criterion for selection of the sample target group was as follows: respondents were homeowners; and approximately 50% of the respondents live in new dwellings (1990s onwards). The second stipulation was identified because of the significant rise in house building since the early- to mid- 1990s. The sample selection involved two major steps. Firstly, a

1:50000 maps were used as the sampling frame. The map is divided into a 1 km sq grid. The objective was to cover the case study area by randomly selecting 2 km sq areas every four 1 km sq 'boxes'. Once a random start was made, selecting a 2 km sq area, all other sample areas were selected systematically every four kilometres. The final stage took place during the administration of the questionnaire. The age of dwellings in each selected area was identified upon visual inspection.

3. Results

In spite of the growing urban population in Ireland and concentration of new housing in urban and suburban locations, demand for privately-owned housing in the countryside remains high. The incidence of one-off single rural dwellings (defined as detached dwellings with individual septic tanks) throughout the countryside is a significant feature in many locations. This is overwhelmingly new-build housing which has been the favoured planning approach in Ireland, unlike the UK where restoration of older housing stock is encouraged. Although rapid demographic expansion is characteristic of Ireland as a whole, pockets of rural areas continue to experience depopulation and demographic contraction which is reflected in an ageing population and ageing housing stock. Less accessible remoter localities, therefore, continue to experience problems of derelict housing, outmigration and social deprivation. Ironically, while average family size has fallen significantly in recent years (in rural areas, average number of persons per household was 3.72 in 1981, decreasing to 3.09 in 2002) the size of new rural housing units is increasing. Although houses with five rooms account for the largest proportion of rural dwellings in 2002 at over a quarter of all housing stock, the number of dwellings with eight rooms or more had the strongest growth over the period 1991 to 2002, accounting for under a third of all new rural dwellings.

Single rural houses have normally been characterised by road-oriented locational patterns, frequently in ribbon developments which sometimes negatively impact on local landscapes. In many places, the density of houses relying on septic tanks and deep bored wells, and the incremental addition of houses over subsequent years, has serious environmental implications for ground water supplies. Although housing growth helps to support social structures and local services, new discourses of rurality have led to the transformation of extensive countrysides. Many former landscapes of farmland, for example, now provide settings for a new consumption of landscape by incoming

residents, manifested in such things as large houses, manicured lawns, decks, patios and double-garages. In the comparatively tree-less landscapes of west Mayo hilltops, skylines and 'views' have been appropriated by new houses, to see and be seen.

Pressure for increased housing in the countryside comes from farmers and landowners, the rural housing lobby and many local councillors, all of whom want the rural planning system relaxed to allow more rural housing to enhance the economic and social viability of many rural areas. Visitors from the UK, which experiences rigid planning control in rural areas, frequently comment on the social vitality of Irish rural areas as reflected in new housing. On the other hand, there are interest groups in Ireland (heritage and urban-focussed in the main) harking back to an older eighteenth-century landscape aesthetic which values empty unpeopled views of countrysides, who want more planning control to protect the rural landscape from being inundated with indiscriminate housing. The Heritage Council claims that inappropriate and poorly planned development is putting much landscape heritage at risk because of ineffective legislation to protect environmental and landscape heritage. The Irish Rural Dwellers' Association (IRDA) claims that legislation is too rigid and that planners (and agencies like An Taisce and The Heritage Council) are inhibiting development (IRDA, 2004). As part of the wider framework National Spatial Strategy, guidelines requiring a sustainable approach to the planning of rural housing were published in 2005 (DoEHLG, 2005). However, the criteria for eligibility to build new dwellings in the countryside remain somewhat ambiguous at the local plan-making stage. The planning process to a large extent has kept its traditional focus on town planning and maintained a laissez-faire approach in rural areas. Rural planning practice is very heavily influenced by local clientelist politics which has resulted in one of the most benign rural planning regimes in Europe. The notion of 'local need', for example, is poorly-defined in scope and application and is open to continuing pressure from local politicians and lobbies (Galent et al, 2003: 142-3; 220-221).

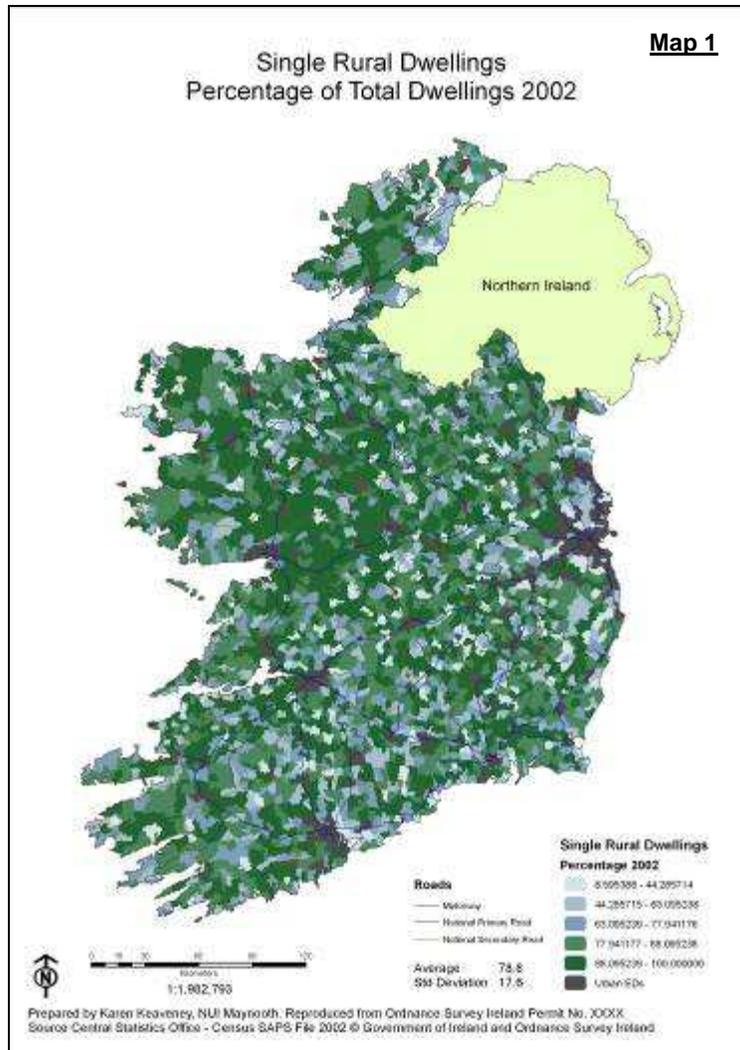
The Geography of Rural Housing in Ireland

The key finding of the study was the establishment of the geography of rural housing in Ireland. Its purpose was to establish the location and density of Irish rural housing, a feature of the housing debate which has remained elusive to date. Thus, the focus here is on elements of the geography of rural housing that are outside the realm of policy and

socio-economics. The study identifies layers of change over time which have created the rural settlement pattern in 2002. SRDs account for one quarter for all dwellings in the state; in rural areas this representation rises to 70% (Map 1). Referred to as one off houses in the media, SRDs have been the main focus of the rural housing debate. This is because SRDS potentially have the greatest impact of all residential development in the countryside. This impact is due to a great extent to the amount built, potential environmental impacts of septic tanks or other individual sewage treatment, hard and soft infrastructure provision and social impacts on future communities.

Period of Construction

In 2002, over 330,000 single rural dwellings (SRDs) were inhabited in Ireland, accounting for over one quarter of all dwellings, both rural and urban, in the state. Half of the current SRD stock is located in peri-urban and strong rural areas meaning that spatially the highest concentration of SRDs are in the east and southeastern parts of the country. The remaining number of SRDs are distributed in transitional, weak, marginal and diversified areas which tend to be found from the midlands to the west (see Table 1).



Rural Area Types	Electoral Divisions	% Electoral Divisions	Area (km ²)	% Area (km ²)	Number of SRDs	% of SRDs
Peri-Urban	442	16.32	10080.79	15.47	83714	24.97
Strong Rural	628	23.19	13432.09	20.61	82578	24.63
Strong in Transition	610	22.51	13811.25	21.20	55687	16.61
Weak	642	23.69	15908.55	24.41	66423	19.81
Marginal	200	7.38	6218.05	9.41	26180	7.82
Diversified	187	6.91	5771.60	8.86	50581	6.13
Total	2709	100	65170.37	100	335203	100

The examination of the period of construction of Single Rural Dwellings addresses arguments in the debate about rural housing that have focused on recent, 1990s house building trends. An examination of the wider timescale of SRD building is important in determining the significance of these recent trends. Tracing the evolution of the rural settlement pattern over time increases understanding of the 2002 pattern and provides the layers that help to establish a geography of rural housing. The series of maps showing SRDs built from before the 1970s to 2002 show that, in very simple terms, there has been a reversal in the Irish rural settlement pattern over recent decades. SRDs built before 1971 (accounting for half of all currently inhabited SRDs) tend to be located in peripheral rural areas, either coastal or inland rural, with the lowest percentage located in urban hinterland areas. The overall pattern is that of distance from large urban centres, for example high proportions are found in the area from north Roscommon to south Sligo, and in coastal concentrations, for example in southwest Cork. A ‘reversal’ of the pre-1971 pattern is seen in the pattern of SRDs built in the 1990s. In this period settlement is most concentrated close to major urban centres. Maps showing the evolution of the SRD settlement pattern from the 1970s to the 1990s illustrate clearly the movement from peripheral or outer rural areas to peri-urban belts. The 1970s experienced the first movement towards a concentration of SRDs adjacent to urban centres (for example, in County Meath). In addition, coastal areas in the west (e.g. Donegal, Kerry) which had previously experienced relatively low SRD settlement, display an increasing proportion. The 1980s show a decline in the consolidation of SRD settlement in peri-urban belts but with a continuing urban movement. The peripheral coastal areas in Donegal and north Mayo experienced a continued consolidation.

	before 1971	1971 to 1980	1981 to 1990	1991 to 2002	Total
Number	154739	55742	53380	67419	335203
% of total	46.16%	16.63%	15.92%	20.11%	98.82%*

* The period of construction of approximately 1% of SRDs is unaccounted for.

In the period from 1990 to 2002 one trend is most dominant: the consolidation of peri-urban SRD belts, particularly evident, for example, in the hinterlands of Galway city, Limerick city and Letterkenny. In addition to the dominance of peri-urban belts, a number of anomalous factors occurred. While the Greater Dublin Area experienced its highest level of SRD building in the 1990s, County Meath experienced its least. This is a direct result of policy change in the 1980s. Other such anomalies include the greater Cork area which displays an inverse pattern of settlement when compared to other cities. The highest proportion of Cork's SRD building occurred in the 1970s. The City introduced a restrictive planning policy in the city's hinterland in the 1990s (Cork Area Strategic Plan, 2001) which would appear to be taking some effect with its relatively low proportion of SRD building in this period. County Wexford, which previously had a low to medium proportion of SRD building, experienced a surge in the proportion built in the 1990s. The high levels can be seen continuously from the hinterlands of its main towns to its coastal boundary. The high levels of SRD building are particularly evident from 1996 onwards.

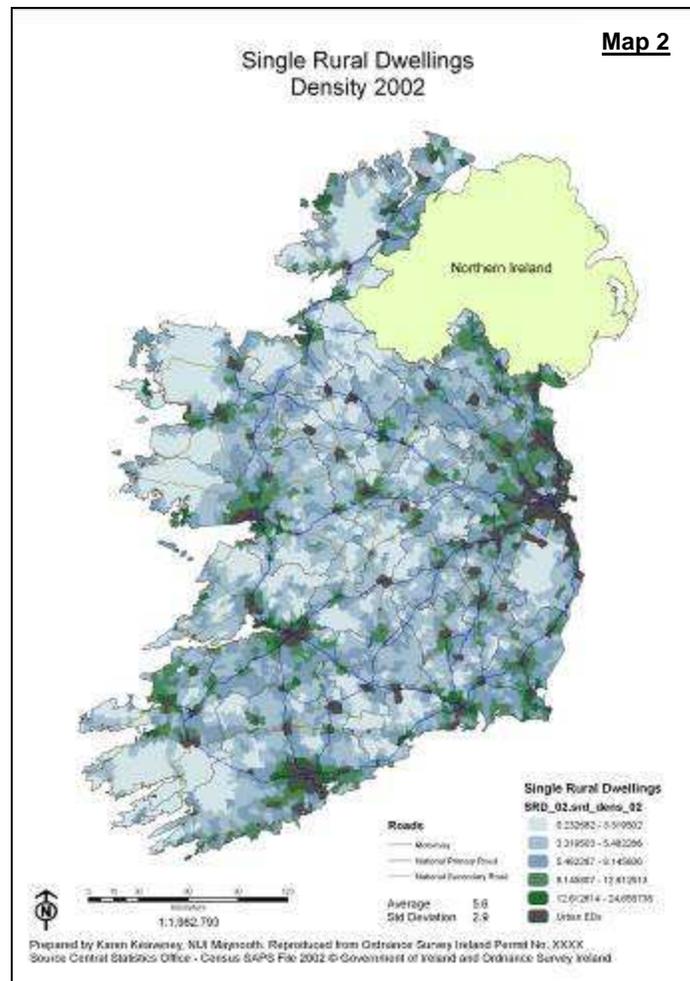


Table 3: County Period of Construction for Single Rural Dwellings, 1971 to 2002						
	1971 to 1980	% 1971 to 1980	1981 to 1990	% 1981 to 1990	1991 to 2002	% 1991 to 2002
State Total	66032	17.4	61435	16.2	76557	20.2
Carlow	723	13.6	769	14.5	1157	21.8
Cavan	1500	13.8	1713	15.7	2143	19.7
Clare	2595	16.8	2535	16.4	3291	21.3
Cork County	8314	18.5	6615	14.7	8355	18.5
Donegal	4634	19.0	4966	20.3	5608	23.0
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	198	16.0	163	13.2	163	13.2
Fingal	549	17.0	540	16.7	687	21.3
Galway County	5411	17.3	5321	17.1	7323	23.5
Kerry	4256	19.2	4078	18.4	4300	19.4
Kildare	2197	18.1	2036	16.8	3074	25.3
Kilkenny	2101	17.5	1897	15.8	2304	19.2
Laois	1475	16.7	1418	16.1	1789	20.3
Leitrim	654	11.7	920	16.5	962	17.3
Limerick County	3416	17.5	3191	16.4	3725	19.1
Longford	1006	17.1	910	15.4	1045	17.7
Louth	1780	21.8	1270	15.5	1766	21.6
Mayo	3630	16.0	3975	17.5	4306	19.0
Meath	4036	23.0	2675	15.2	2211	12.6
Monaghan	1859	19.9	1566	16.7	1742	18.6
Offaly	1351	15.9	1243	14.6	1881	22.1
Roscommon	1667	14.3	1798	15.5	1943	16.7
Sligo	1470	16.4	1570	17.5	1621	18.1
South Dublin	265	20.2	273	20.8	203	15.5
Tipperary North	1556	16.1	1463	15.2	1927	20.0
Tipperary South	1659	14.6	1499	13.2	2222	19.5
Waterford County	1592	18.2	1310	15.0	1760	20.2
Westmeath	1491	15.8	1385	14.7	2120	22.5
Wexford	2708	14.9	2740	15.0	4749	26.1
Wicklow	1560	17.2	1321	14.6	1911	21.1

Density

An examination of housing density per square kilometre allows for a clearer picture of the location and amount of dwellings in rural areas. While the analysis of periods of construction identify the proportion of houses under construction at a given time, the examination of density pinpoints the locational impact of SRDs over time. The average national density of single rural dwellings in 2002 was five dwellings per square kilometre (Map 2). The highest SRD densities occur in areas adjacent to urban centres of all sizes (peri-urban areas), adjacent to the national road network, and in coastal areas, with up to 25 dwellings per square kilometre in these areas. The areas of highest SRD density (12 to 25 dwellings per square kilometre) are found in the peri-urban belts surrounding the five major cities (Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Limerick and Galway), with smaller belts adjacent to large, county towns, for example Athlone, Castlebar and Kilkenny. The lowest densities, particularly those under three dwellings per square kilometre, tend to be located in outer rural areas. However, even within these area, the presence of a small to medium size town dictates a rise in SRD density in hinterlands. Low SRD densities are found where locations are at the greatest distance from the national road network. The natural terrain of some areas add to low dwelling density. For example in south County Mayo, much of the area is peat land and unlikely to support any sizeable structures.

Period	before 1971	1971 to 1980	1981 to 1990	1991 to 2002	Total
Density	2.37	0.86	0.82	1.03	5.14

In the period before 1971, which accounts for half of all currently inhabited SRDs, the main trend is that of belts of low SRD building adjacent to large urban centres. In contrast, examining the density of SRDs in the same period, the greatest concentration of dwellings (up to 13 per square kilometre) is found close to urban centres. The most distinctive pattern in SRDs built before 1971 is that higher densities are located in the east and Southwest of the country, close to urban centres and along primary roadways. In addition to this pattern, densities occur in coastal areas and in urban hinterland areas in the west. Extensive bands of high density pre-1971 are evident in north Kerry, the coastal boundaries of Wexford through to Waterford, and in Meath. The pattern of SRD density from the 1970s onwards exhibits less coastal development with a greater

consolidation of settlement into peri-urban belts. The average national density of SRDs over the three decades from the 1970s to the 1990s (Table 4) is approximately one dwelling per square kilometre. Examining the four periods, it is clear that while the proportion of SRDs built vary over time, there has been a continual trend of urban focused SRD building. The pattern of pre-1970s densities has greatly influenced the contemporary settlement pattern and can explain the high densities that are found in areas today such as Counties Monaghan and Meath, and along coastal areas in the southeast. In the final period of the 1990s, average densities are higher than in the previous two decades, accounting for the overall rise in house-building (72% increase since 1996). The hinterlands of Galway and Cork cities display the greatest consolidation of SRDs, while County Wexford had the greatest increase in density.

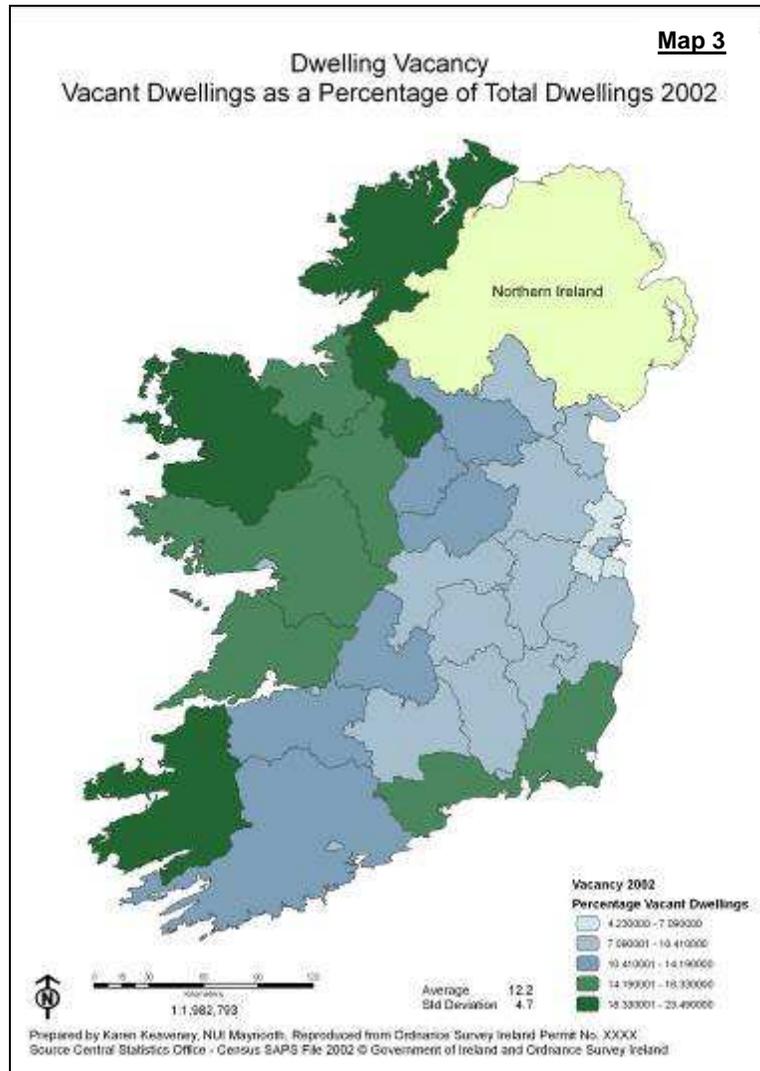


Table 5: County Densities of Single Rural Dwellings, 2002

	Density 2002	Ranking Change (1=highest; 29=lowest)
State Total	5.14	
Carlow	5.95	9
Cavan	5.75	12
Clare	4.79	22
Cork County	6.07	8
Donegal	5.07	19
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	9.83	2
Fingal	7.13	7
Galway County	5.36	15
Kerry	4.70	24
Kildare	7.18	6
Kilkenny	5.82	11
Laois	5.15	16
Leitrim	3.59	29
Limerick County	7.31	5
Longford	5.43	14
Louth	9.92	1
Mayo	4.09	28
Meath	7.54	4
Monaghan	5.49	13
Offaly	4.35	27
Roscommon	4.58	25
Sligo	5.14	18
South Dublin	5.89	10
Tipperary North	4.73	23
Tipperary South	5.06	20
Waterford County	4.86	21
Westmeath	5.14	17
Wexford	7.73	3
Wicklow	4.48	26

Vacant Dwellings

Another layer in understanding the geography of rural housing in Ireland is vacancy rates. This has been a difficult area of research in housing studies in Ireland due to inconsistency in recording of data. Despite limited study of vacancy levels in Ireland, figures collected by the CSO reveal that 14% of all dwellings were classified as permanently vacant in 2002; Map 3 and Table 6 show the county variations. Counties with the highest vacancy rate are located along the western coast with a distinct drop in the rate towards the east. Anomalous to this pattern are Counties Waterford and Wicklow which, relative to surrounding areas, have high vacancy rates (16 – 17%). The overall map of permanent vacancy can only be understood by breaking down the four vacancy categories. These categories are: (i) habitable but vacant dwellings; (ii) holiday homes; (iii) under construction; and (iv) uninhabitable. The following maps show the breakdown of permanently vacant dwellings.

The first two categories (habitable and holiday homes) account for the greatest overall proportion of vacant dwellings. Accounting for an average of 50% of total vacant dwellings, habitable empty houses are found to be at their highest in the east midlands and Limerick, reaching up to 68% in County Laois (see Map 4). The lowest representation is found in the west and southeast, almost directly opposite to the map of total vacancy discussed above. The spatial pattern of holiday homes (Map 5) bears more similarity to the map of total vacancy. Coastal counties on all sides of the island have the highest proportion of holiday homes with the traditional tourist areas of Donegal, Clare, Kerry and Wicklow having the highest representation (27 to 44%). Further inland the percentages drop to as low as 4% in Laois where there would be a limited history of tourist industries.

The final two categories of vacant dwellings account for a relatively small proportion of all dwellings. In 2002, dwellings classified as being under construction accounted for 13% of all vacant dwellings. Spatially the pattern correlates with maps of recent house building. The difficulty with this category of vacancy is that, although it is defined by the CSO as permanently vacant, it is subject to continual change due to the completion of house builds. The pattern of dwellings under construction is not too surprising considering where levels of population growth have been greatest. There are some anomalies in counties such as in Cavan which experienced population declines as high

as 35%. The final category of vacancy is uninhabitable dwellings, representing only 8.5% of total vacant dwellings, with a largely even pattern throughout the country. Monaghan represents the most distinctive area in that it has a well above average with 32% uninhabitable dwellings of total vacancies. Although a relatively small category, it may perhaps be the most significant for future planning recommendations. The potential to provide a footprint for replacement dwellings, which has not been a characteristic of Irish rural housing to date, is strong.

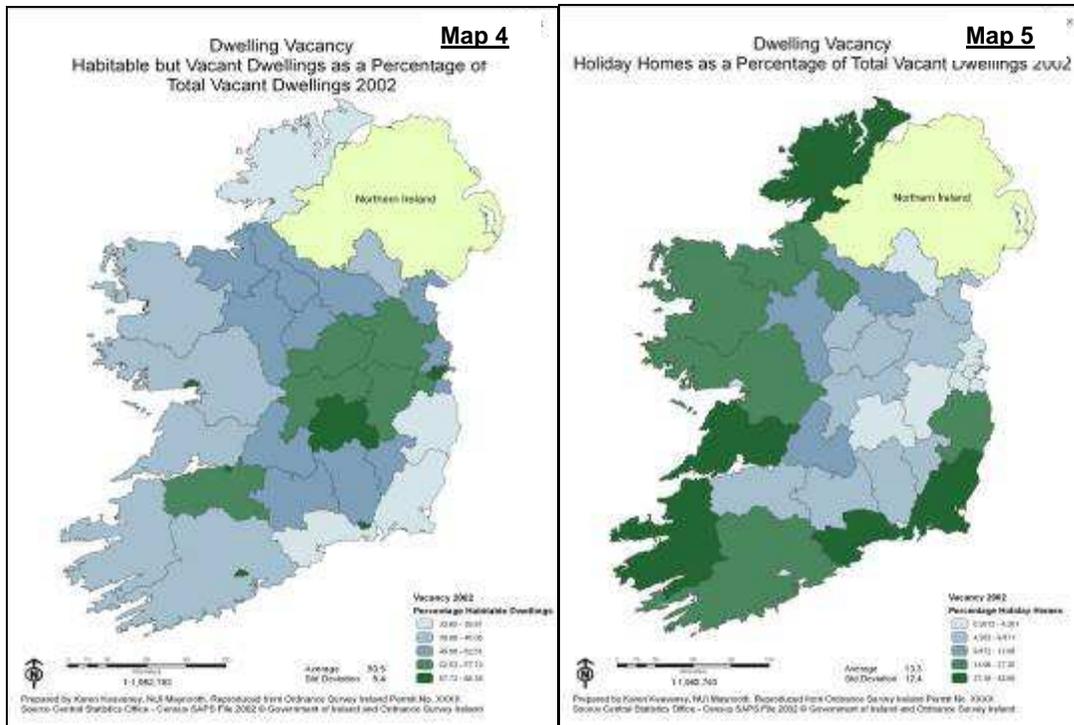


Table 6: County Total Vacant Dwellings 2002

	% Habitable Vacant of all Vacant Dwellings	% Holiday Homes of all Vacant Dwellings	% Uninhabitable Vacant of all Vacant Dwellings	% Under Construction of all Vacant Dwellings	Total Vacant Dwellings	% Total Vacant Dwellings
State Total	48.0	18.2	8.5	12.9	216709	14.40
Carlow	51.8	7.9	10.4	18.6	2154	12.61
Cavan	50.9	11.2	16.0	18.0	4380	19.28
Clare	41.2	30.9	6.8	11.0	9259	21.47
Cork County	44.1	24.4	7.5	14.8	21451	16.93
Donegal	32.6	42.6	6.6	13.3	16007	26.36
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	52.4	1.2	2.3	9.7	5555	7.97
Fingal	51.6	3.3	4.0	16.6	5851	8.77
Galway County	43.7	22.3	10.2	15.3	12133	21.14
Kerry	41.0	33.8	9.6	9.3	13399	23.62
Kildare	54.3	2.5	5.1	18.6	5630	10.03
Kilkenny	47.8	9.9	13.4	14.4	3181	11.05
Laois	63.9	3.0	10.1	12.7	2787	13.06
Leitrim	51.6	22.2	8.5	11.6	3495	27.75
Limerick County	57.7	5.4	10.2	16.6	6398	14.29
Longford	48.0	8.4	17.5	20.0	2745	20.92
Louth	55.2	5.5	7.5	15.2	5030	13.06
Mayo	45.0	27.4	10.9	11.3	12504	24.11
Meath	50.9	9.3	11.0	17.2	4809	10.35
Monaghan	43.3	2.8	32.4	14.4	3255	16.27
Offaly	54.5	7.4	8.3	15.7	2759	12.05
Roscommon	52.5	14.0	11.4	13.3	5106	21.96
Sligo	48.5	18.9	12.6	10.4	4816	19.69
South Dublin	55.3	0.3	3.3	11.8	3828	4.95
Tipperary North	50.3	8.3	12.3	16.3	3688	12.25
Tipperary South	49.9	13.7	8.6	15.7	3647	15.28
Waterford County	38.7	33.4	8.4	11.9	4559	19.68
Westmeath	56.3	6.1	9.1	15.1	4100	14.93
Wexford	35.4	43.7	5.4	14.0	9584	20.14
Wicklow	35.6	23.5	5.9	15.3	4922	11.86

Case Study: Clew Bay, County Mayo

The Clew Bay area of County Mayo is a popular tourist destination with attractive coastal and mountainous scenery. Proximity to the growing towns of Westport and Castlebar has driven the demand for housing either by locals or in-coming commuters in accessible rural districts in the region. The highest level of new development has taken place in Westport and Castlebar towns with significant concentrations in the accessible rural hinterlands. Just under half of the current housing stock in the Castlebar hinterland, for instance, was built in the period from 1996 with one fifth in Westport hinterland area. Many houses have also been built by returned overseas emigrants and up to one tenth of the rural houses are in the holiday home category. The high-quality coastal landscapes in particular have experienced intense amounts of scattered rural housing. In the Clew Bay area one fifth to one third of the housing stock was constructed in the 1990s (see Map 2). For example in the Murrisk area of Clew Bay, to the north of Croagh Patrick, over a quarter of the total rural dwellings were built since 1991, and mostly since 1996, in what is arguably one of the most prominent sites in Mayo.

Attitudes of Residents

As in many rural locations in Ireland, there is a tension between the desire to live in the countryside and an acknowledgement that while local population continues to grow the initial reasons for moving to the countryside may dissipate. In a survey of rural households in the Clew Bay area, residents articulated notions of a rural idyll when describing both their reasons for moving to the countryside or outlining the attractions of living in the countryside. Notions of community, kinship and privacy were also emphasised by residents who had returned from living in cities. In addition, the feeling of being close to nature and wildlife, being able to fully experience seasons and living in close proximity to the sea and beaches were viewed as positive features by many. The attractiveness of living in the countryside was juxtaposed with the supposed unattractiveness of living in towns. For these respondents, the rural is a peaceful place to live, with its only negative features being 'outside' factors beyond the control of local residents, such as lack of public transport, bad road maintenance and traffic speeding.

Rural landscape is a dominant consideration in assessing new housing trends for the countryside. Social issues tend to rank more highly in the discourse of urban and sub-urban housing; rural poverty and bad housing conditions are mainly associated with

marginal predominantly agricultural areas. Here demographic imbalances are linked to low levels of urbanisation and remoteness from services and employment opportunities (Pringle et al, 1999). Thus, for instance, the greatest proportions of houses built before 1919 (one-quarter to one-third) are found in the Sligo, Leitrim, north midlands areas as well as extensive parts of south and east Munster. In the west (Mayo, Galway and Roscommon), apart from the past two decades, significant proportions of the rural houses were built between 1919 and 1940. The extensive newly-populating rural zones, however, have been selected by middle-income mobile classes who have new consumption preferences (as opposed to the earlier productivist traditions of these areas): where landscape commodities like views, nature, tranquillity and freedom from stress, as well as community and local-ness prevail (Kaltenborn and Bjerke, 2002). The very visibility and materiality of these landscapes are particularly important in the debate on rural housing. Housing and garden design, density and location, all impinge significantly on the quality of landscape habitat and heritage. The disruption/destruction of what seems an immemorial farming countryside is at issue in many places. And the west of Ireland, particularly its treeless coastal zone, is especially vulnerable to indiscriminate housing development.

However, in all of these representations of rural life, a tension between existing residents and others' desires to live in the countryside is acknowledged. Potential urbanisation of the countryside is regarded negatively. Some residents groups seeking to improve their rural areas by introducing 'urban' amenities like street lighting, footpaths and landscaped road verges are highlighted as a downside of this urbanisation or suburbanisation of landscape. There is also evidence of a tension between long-term full-time residents and newcomers to the area. References to outsiders getting planning permission before 'locals,' and developers and builders getting preference in the planning process, indicate a resentment of the planning regime.

Holiday Homes

Internal tensions simmer particularly around the issue of holiday homes. It has been difficult to accurately assess the number of holiday homes in Ireland due to a lack of consistent recording methods by local authorities. The 2002 census contains a limited database on second home house building. The rate of second homes as percentage of all dwellings in the state is relatively low at 3%. However, counties along the west coast

have above average rates, with County Mayo having one of the higher rates at 7% of total dwellings. In general it would seem that the greatest density of holiday home development is along a narrow coastal strip extending southwards from Inishowen in Donegal to west Cork and the south coast to Wexford.

In 2002, one tenth of housing in the Clew Bay study area was recorded as holiday homes, concentrated in particular localities: for example, a third of all dwellings in Louisburgh were recorded as holiday homes, dominated mainly by house clusters which are rented out on a short-term basis. The second highest rate of holiday homes is located in the Croagh Patrick electoral division where 27% of all dwellings are holiday homes, in this case mainly one-off, privately-owned houses. In the rural survey a number of respondents took issue with houses lying empty and locked up for most of the year contributing little to the local community.

Rural planning

Because of the often conflicting expectations of full-time residents, temporary holiday home residents and tourists, the role of the planning authorities in controlling future development in the Clew Bay area is vital. The County Development Plan (CDP) for 2003-9 preceded the national rural housing guidelines issued in 2005 (DoEHLG). Policy adopted for both single rural dwellings and holiday homes is brief, focusing mainly on physical planning considerations about minimum basic standards for site size and location. Eligibility criteria for planning permission in the countryside are not addressed. Following the publication of the rural housing guidelines in 2005, all planning authorities were expected to adopt them, superseding any local policy already set in place. In addition to the Mayo CDP, draft Housing Design Guidelines were produced in 2002. In this policy document the local authority acknowledges the need to preserve both the rural community and the unique natural landscape. While rural house design and its subsequent landscape impacts are an important factor in the growth of new housing, underlying issues of the sustainability of rural housing in many countrysides need to be addressed. The notion that if one 'contributes' to the local rural area (DoEHLG, 2005) one should be allowed to live there may be simply too flexible and open a policy. The real complexity of rural housing is not addressed in the national rural housing guidelines. The demand from non-farming, and what could be called non-rural dwellers, is without doubt having an impact on many facets of rural housing from basic site costs to

community and landscape changes. The changing function of agriculture in Ireland and the growing role of the speculative developer are resulting in changing land values throughout all rural area types from urban hinterlands to scenic areas. There is a clear need to examine the contestation of housing, not as the main rural planning issue or problem, but as a manifestation of rural change in Ireland today.

4. Summary and Implications of Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to establish the location and density of rural housing in Ireland. Single rural dwellings (SRDs) dominate the rural housing profile, accounting for all dwellings in some Electoral Divisions and 80% on average. Current debate on living in the countryside focuses on the recent house building boom. Consequently, presumptions about the cause of high development levels have ignored settlement patterns prior to the 1990s. While there is no doubt that Ireland's increasingly urbanised economy dictates an increasingly urbanised settlement pattern, it would be short-sighted to exclude additional factors that influence the location and density of settlement. For example, historic settlement patterns in Ireland are one of the greatest influences on current patterns, with half of the current rural housing stock built before 1971.

In 2002, half of the current SRD stock was located in peri-urban and strong rural areas, with younger dwellings dominating in these areas. Spatially this means that nationally the highest concentrations of SRDs are located in the south and southeast of the country, and locally in belts around towns and cities. The older housing stock is located furthest from urban centres, in outer rural areas. However, despite this pattern, the history of higher SRD densities per square kilometre in peri-urban belts laid the foundation for the rural settlement present today. Throughout the decades, the densities in these areas have remained consistently higher than in others. The rural settlement pattern present in the 2000s is a result of decades of this consistent pattern. High densities in peri-urban areas were finally consolidated in the 1990s with the highest level of house building in the state. Clearly, accessibility to urban centres and by road networks has continually been a driving force in the location of housing. Densities in 2002 reached up to 25 households per square kilometre along the national road network and adjacent to urban centres. While an average density of five dwellings per square kilometre is low in European terms, the traditionally higher rural Irish population means that despite an overall sparse distribution of population, there are concentrations of high

impact housing (environmentally – septic tank; aesthetically – individual, large site). Also, despite some coastal areas having their highest population growth in the 1990s they have had continually higher housing densities relative to surrounding areas. This may be as a result of the influence of the natural terrain (i.e. coastal areas are generally on the edge of mountainous, uninhabitable areas) and the history of traditional marine employment such as fishing. In more recent years, increased population is influenced by a number of factors including the demand to live in scenic areas.

The greatest influence on the rural settlement pattern may be as simple as 'old versus new dwellings'. Older dwellings have an important role to play in current and future of settlement pattern. They are associated with smaller dwellings (five to six rooms), have a higher representation in peripheral rural areas away from built up areas, and tend to have households that have completed payments on their mortgage. Spatially, this represents concentrations in the most rural areas of the west, northwest and southwest reflecting the dominance of traditional farm related settlements in these areas. In the 1990s, a contrasting pattern emerged in the east and south, with a disintegration of the traditional pattern. Additionally, population change indicates that household size is continuing to decline. Despite this, larger dwellings are being built, with a significant growth in dwellings with seven or more rooms. The pattern of younger households in urban hinterlands illustrates the emerging patterns of rural-urban linkages. While most of the recent increases have occurred within the peri-urban belts of the main centres there has also been a notable increase in some coastal areas where a new service based economy has begun to flourish. These areas correspond with the diversified rural area type identified in the McHugh (2001) rural typology. Such areas represent a new form of more distant rural-urban relations.

Vacant dwellings add the final physical layer to the understanding of the Irish rural settlement pattern. Study of vacancy levels in the rural housing stock and the examination of its different categories, pose challenges to the planning system but could open up opportunities for future home ownership. For example, uninhabitable dwellings provide potential footprints for replacement dwellings in the Irish countryside. This has not been a popular route for households in Ireland, being more typical of the UK. Habitable dwellings could also provide alternative housing for households. It also appears contradictory to have approximately 8% of total housing stock in the country

empty and/or habitable while level of house building continues to rise. Holiday homes account for the second highest proportion of vacant dwellings. Typically associated with traditional tourist areas, they have the potential to add to local economies. Challenges arise when planning legislation and development control do not have the capacity to deal with holiday homes appropriately. Additionally, if a dual demand exists for both primary and holiday homes within one area, pressure on resources, infrastructure and amenities may be too high.

References

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2005) *Sustainable Rural Housing: Guidelines for Local Authorities*. Dublin, The Stationary Office.

Gallent, N, Shucksmith, M and Tewdwr-Jones, M 2003, (eds) *Housing in the European countryside: rural pressure and policy in western Europe*.

Irish Rural Dwellers Association (2004) *Positive Planning for Rural Houses*. Kilrush, Irish Rural Dwellers Association.

Kaltenborn, B.P. and Bjerke, T. (2002) Associations between environmental value orientations and landscape preference *In: Landscape and Urban Planning*. 59(1) pp1-11.

McHugh, C. (2001) A spatial analysis of socio-economic adjustments in rural Ireland 1986-1996. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Geography, NUI Maynooth.

Outputs

Publications:

Walsh, J. A.; Keaveney, K. and Foley, R. (forthcoming April 2007) in Walsh, J. A. (ed) *Census Atlas of the Republic of Ireland 2002*. National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), Maynooth.

Corcoran, M.; Keaveney, K. and Duffy, P.J. (2006) *Transformations in Housing in Ireland*. Bartley, B. and Kitchin, R. *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*. Pluto, London.

Conferences:

Keaveney, K. Representations of the Rural: the housing debate in Ireland. Annual Conference of the Royal Geographical Society - Institute of British Geographers, London, August 30th to 1st September 2006.

Keaveney, K. Perception and Place: the rural housing debate in Ireland. European Network for Housing Research, Ljubljana, Slovenia, July 2nd to 5th, 2006.

Keaveney, K. Representations of the Rural: the housing debate in Ireland. Conference of Irish Geographers, University College Galway, May 2006.

Keaveney, K. Recent Housing Trends in Rural Ireland. Conference of Irish Geographers, NUI Galway, May 2005.

Keaveney, K. The Geography of Households and Housing Types. Geographical Perspectives on Outputs from Census 2002, National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, NUI Maynooth, 26th January 2005.

Keaveney, K. and Walsh, J. A. Recent Housing Trends in Rural Ireland. Single Dwellings in the Countryside – Informing the Debate Conference, Queens University Belfast, 3rd December 2004.

Keaveney, K., Duffy, P.J., Walsh, J. and Pitts, E. (2004) Rural Housing – Where's The Problem? The geography of rural housing demand in Ireland. European Network for Housing Research: New Researchers Conference, Cambridge, England, June 30th to July 2nd, 2004.

Keaveney, K Rural Housing: Planning and Policy. Conference of Irish Geographers, NUI Maynooth, May 2004.

Keaveney, K., Duffy, P.J., Walsh, J. and Pitts, E. (2004) Contested Ruralities: Housing in the Irish Countryside. Regional Science Association – British and Irish Section, St. Andrews, Scotland, August 18th to 22nd, 2003.