

REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION (Irish Branch)

E-NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 4, May 2008

Welcome to the fourth issue of the Regional Studies Association (RSA) e-newsletter. A new development for the Irish Branch of the Association, this e-newsletter serves as a way to highlight conferences, events, publications and other developments in the broad regional policy area. Contact details are included below.

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1. About the Association

The Regional Studies Association is a learned society interested in regional development, policy and research. The Association carries out a range of activities including:

- publishing a journal, newsletter and books;
- organising conferences and other meetings; and
- establishing and maintaining a branch and international section network.

It has an international membership of individuals, corporate organisations and students.

The Irish Branch was formed to provide a forum to discuss regional issues in Ireland.

2. Branch AGM and Lecture (February 2008)

The RSA Irish Branch AGM took place on 20th February 2008 in Trinity College Dublin. It was reported that 2007 was a busy year for the Association; notable developments including the launch of the e-newsletter, the establishment of the local website, the hosting of a joint conference with the Scottish Branch and the hosting of a number of seminars on evidence-informed planning and development. It is hoped that this momentum and increased profile can be further built upon and enhanced during the coming year. The Chairman thanked the Committee for their support during 2007, thanked departing member Dr. Mark Scott for his commitment over the past few years, and welcomed the following new Committee members – Prof. Mark Boyle of NUI Maynooth, Philip O'Connor of the Dublin Employment Pact, Sean O'Riordain of NUI Maynooth, and Louis Wildenboer of John Spain Associates.

The AGM was then followed by a presentation - jointly hosted by the RSA and CURS - by Prof. Rob Kitchin, Director of NIRSA, NUI Maynooth on the recently published *The Atlas of the Island of Ireland: Mapping Social and Economic Change*. The Atlas provides for the first time a set of full colour, detailed maps and cartograms for a range of variables across the whole island of Ireland. It provides a fascinating insight into population, transport, housing and the economy across the island and how these have changed since 1991. But its production was not without its challenges – data incompatibility and issues around data accessibility, synchronicity, continuity and clarity on a cross-jurisdictional basis.

3. RSA News

WEBSITE UPDATE

The website of the Irish Branch of the RSA can be accessed at: www.regionalstudies.ie
Suggestions on the site's continued development is welcomed – as is relevant text! The Association's general website can be accessed at: www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk

REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The 12th RSA International Conference takes place in the University of Economics, Prague from Tuesday 27th May to Thursday 29th May 2008. Entitled *Regions: The Dilemmas of Integration and Competition?*, this event coincides with a time when great changes are unfolding in Europe on the issues of regional development and regional policy. The conference will assess policy progress on the ground in the context of the new European regional policy for Central and Eastern Europe and consider issues such as capacity, inward investment, local economies and governance. Parallel workshop themes include:

- Regions: Hubs of Global Knowledge
- Labour Market Dynamics, Human Capital and Migration
- City Regions
- Spatial Planning and Territories
- Multi-level Governance
- Regional Identities and Imaginations

For further information: email events@rsa-ls.ac.uk or telephone +44 1323 899 698

SECOND JOINT IRISH-SCOTTISH CONFERENCE ON REGIONAL ISSUES

As a follow-on to the success of the inaugural Joint Irish-Scottish Conference which was held in Glasgow in September 2007, the 2nd Joint Conference is now being organised. It is currently proposed that the theme for this event will be *Economic Development, Labour Markets and Regional Connectivity* and that it will take place in mid- to late-September. A call for papers will be issued shortly. Further details will be posted shortly to the RSA Irish Branch website—www.regionalstudies.ie

4. Upcoming Events

• PRESENTATIONS/WORKSHOPS/PAPERS

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Seminar title: “R&D, Technology Diffusion and Innovation Policy: Experiences from the U.S. and China”

Date: 29 May 2008

Venue: ESRI, Whitaker Square, Sir John Rogerson’s Quay, Dublin 2

A presentation by Professor Roger Stough, School of Public Policy, George Mason University, Fairfax, USA.

Seminar title: “Knowledge-based Clusters, Regional Innovation Systems and New Policy Approaches”

Date: 12 June 2008

Venue: ESRI, Whitaker Square, Sir John Rogerson’s Quay, Dublin 2

A presentation by Dr. Michaela Trippl, University of Economics and Business Administration, Vienna.

Seminar title: “Making the best of Globalisation”

Date: 26 June 2008

Venue: ESRI, Whitaker Square, Sir John Rogerson’s Quay, Dublin 2

A presentation by Dr. Iulia Siedschlag, ESRI, Dr. Laura Resmini, University of Valle D’Aosta, Aosta and University ‘Luigi Bocconi’, Milan and Dr. Edgar Morgenroth, ESRI.

All events commence at 4p.m. No booking is necessary. All welcome

For further details contact: Edgar Morgenroth at edgar.morgenroth@esri.ie

• UPCOMING CONFERENCES

INTEGRATED AREA PLANNING

Date: 26 May 2008

Venue: Tipperary Institute Conference Centre, Thurles

Organised by the Tipperary Institute, this 1-day conference will explore the idea that planning for rural areas is a multi-faceted process that ideally should address all aspects of rural community life. Confirmed speakers include Trevor Cherrett of the Commission for Rural Communities in the UK, Gerry Kearney, Secretary General at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Andrew Hind, President of the Irish Planning Institute (IPI), and Seamus Hoyne, Specialist in Renewal Energy at Tipperary Institute. A book on Integrated Area Planning will also be launched as part of the conference proceedings.

For further details contact: Una Johnston, Mementomori at una.johnston@mementomori.ie or Catherine Corcoran, Tipperary Institute at ccorcoran@tippinst.ie

CARBON FOOTPRINTING

Date: 28 May 2008

Venue: Mansion House, Dawson Street, Dublin 2

IBEC, in association with Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI), Enterprise Ireland and the Change Campaign is hosting a 1-day conference on energy use and the impact of business activities on climate change. Those attending will have an opportunity to explore the role of carbon footprinting in the individual business/organisation response to the challenges of climate change and environmental sustainability. Guest speakers include Ken Macken, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), David Wellington of Climate Care, Stephen Russell of the World Resources Institute, Paul Armstrong of the Diageo Group, Colm Bannon of Irish Cement – CRH Group, and Eamon Ryan T.D., Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

For further details see: www.ibec.ie/0/carbon or contact Catherine Dunne at Catherine.dunne@ibec.ie

ESPON: TERRITORIAL CHALLENGES AND COOPERATION IN A WIDER EUROPE

Date: 2-3 June 2008

Venue: Portoroz, Slovenia

The purpose of this conference, hosted during the Slovenian Presidency, is to exchange knowledge on territorial development dynamics – including structures, trends, perspectives and policy impacts – and sustainable and balanced territorial development in the EU and neighbouring countries. The seminar will consider current ESPON results and future activities under the ESPON 2013 Programme. It will stimulate awareness-raising and a better mutual understanding of common and particular challenges and demands facing Europe. The conference will also serve as a platform for creating new contacts and synergies.

For further details see: www.espon.eu

OECD FORUM: CLIMATE CHANGE, GROWTH, STABILITY

Date: 3-4 June 2008

Venue: Paris, France

Consisting of both plenary and parallel sessions, this Forum seeks to consider the key issues emerging around climate change and its potential impacts. For example:

Climate Change

- The political economy of environmentally related taxes
- The role of bio-fuels as an alternative 'clean' energy
- The role of nuclear energy
- The sustainability of cities

Growth and Stability

- Globalisation and job markets
- Economic growth and ageing demographics
- Infrastructure: demand v. supply

For further details see: www.oecd.org

PLANNING FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

Date: 11 June 2008

Venue: The Assembly Rooms, Fenkle Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Economic development continues to be at the heart of planning. Focusing on the North East of England, this seminar considers what the regional economy strategies mean for planning practitioners. It also considers best practice on the ground and what it means to plan positively for development. Speakers include: John McDougall, University of Teesside on the 'Digital City Initiative', Martin Crookston of Tribal Consulting on 'PPS4 – Planning for Economic Development' and Jon Carling, NERIP on the 'State of the Regional Economy'. Registration costs Stg£99 (incl. VAT).

For further details contact: Kay Lough at +44 1661 871 719 or email: northeast@rtpi.org.uk.

RURAL LIFE CONFERENCE: COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN ACTION

Date: 12-13 June 2008

Venue: Keele University, Staffordshire

Empowering communities is central to both policy and practice. Furthermore, community assets, planning and governance relies on it. During this two-day event, delegates will have an opportunity to discuss how rural communities and their partners are rising to the challenge of community empowerment. Cost of registration is Stg£350 – or Stg£300 if representing the Third Sector.

For further details contact: ACRE at +44 1285 653 477 or by email at: acre@acre.org.uk

ENHR HOUSING CONFERENCE: SHRINKING CITIES, SPRAWLING SUBURBS, CHANGING COUNTRYSIDES

Date: 6-9 July 2008

Venue: University College Dublin (UCD), Dublin, Ireland

The European Network for Housing Research (ENHR) International Research Conference 2008 is being organised by the Centre for Housing Research and the School of Applied Social Science in UCD. This event will address various issues relevant to this overarching theme in both urban and rural locations. Plenary sessions will address current debates on topics such as balanced regional development, urban and rural development, housing theory, socio-spatial segregation, new suburban communities.

Workshops are also being planned around the issues of housing and finance, poverty neighbourhoods, space and place, housing market dynamics, social housing in Europe, and spatial design and regeneration.

For further details see: www.enhr2008.com

AESOP/ACSP JOINT CONGRESS: BRIDGING THE DIVIDE – CELEBRATING THE CITY

Date: 6-11 July 2008

Venue: Chicago, USA

The Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) will hold their 2008 annual conferences jointly in Chicago. The conference focuses on the mediating role of cities. Many cities are to some degree divided or contested; with many cities themselves playing a role in reproducing identities that promote conflict between racial, ethnic, religious or national groups. This conference debates the nature of these divides and the role that cities can lay in spanning them through place-shaping, infrastructure development, governance, social capital, environmental justice, etc.

For further details see: www.uic.edu/cuppa/upp/congress/ or contact Kirsten Dazevedo at kdd@acsp.org

KNOWLEDGE FOR GROWTH: EUROPEAN STRATEGIES IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Date: 7-9 July 2008

Venue: Toulouse, France

Since the launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, and its relaunch and refocusing in 2005, Europe has not significantly improved its position in the global knowledge economy. In the meantime, new actors and trends in innovation have emerged – resulting in a more complex and dynamic global environment. This conference aims to take stock of the recent contributions on the knowledge economy and to identify the building blocks necessary nationally and Europe-wide to promote innovation-based growth. Plenary sessions include:

- Innovation and growth in the knowledge-based economy: The challenge to Europe
- Promoting excellence in R&D: Interactions between public and private investments
- Multi-level innovation policies: The contribution of the European Research Area.

For further details see: www.knowledge-conference-france2008.eu

5. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME: IRISH WEBSITE LAUNCHED

The Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development is the EU's main instrument for funding research. Over the period 2007-2013, the Programme has a budget of €50.5billion. The Irish FP7 website, launched in February 2008, is being hosted by Enterprise Ireland and can be accessed at www.fp7ireland.com

STRIVE PROGRAMME

The Environmental Protection Agency STRIVE (Science, Technology and Innovation for the Environment) Programme supports cutting edge research to protect and improve the natural environment. The programme, covering the period 2007-2013, will involve over 1000 researchers and industrial innovators and focus on both international and national environmental priorities.

The seven principal thematic areas for the programme are climate change; waste, resource management and chemicals; water quality and the aquatic environment; air quality; atmospheric deposition and noise, Impacts on biodiversity; soils and land-use; and socio-economic considerations.

In Spring 2008, the Environmental Protection agency (EPA) announced a new grant call under Phase 4 of the Cleaner Greener Production Programme; the aim of which is to encourage better business practices and avoid the generation of pollution.

For further details contact: The Environmental Protection Agency at 053 91 60600 or log on to: www.epa.ie/researchandeducation

If you have a submission or suggestion on any upcoming events, seminars, presentations or conferences and would like them to be included in a future edition, please email newsletter@regionalstudies.ie

6. Publications of Interest

• BOOKS (incl. CHAPTERS)

Title: Mapping Local Government's Role in Social Inclusion

Author(s): O'Riordain, S

Date Published: December 2007

Publisher details: Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin

Local government now plays a substantial local role in addressing social exclusion and poverty in most of their service areas. Across the local authority system there are many examples of innovative approaches to social inclusion which are of note; these play a critical part in underpinning the Leadership and Place-Shaping roles of local government. Indeed the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) study notes the expansion of the range of local authority services through their social inclusion role; thus indicating a high degree of innovation in an area for which there is relatively little statutory provision. Also of note has been the successful roll out of social inclusion units under the National Partnership Programmes. Seventeen of the authorities (i.e. 50%) have, in line with the commitment to do so in *Towards 2016*, established such units to co-ordinate local research and the embedding of social inclusion into local strategic planning.

The directorates of community and enterprise, established under the most recent reforms to local government, are seen by most local authorities as having the primary responsibility for social inclusion. Other directorates, principally housing, are seen as having a supportive and service delivery role. The extent of impact of social inclusion on other core services nonetheless remains open for further consideration by the local authorities. This will be necessary to ensure that social inclusion is fully mainstreamed into the policy making

frameworks that apply in local government generally, particularly having regard for the actions of *Towards 2016*.

The strategic priorities set out in *Towards 2016*, the *National Development Plan 2007-2013* and *NAPinclusion*, provide the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) and the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) with a substantive role in regard to supporting local authorities to embed social inclusion at the local level. This national process is underpinned by the work of the Local Government Management Services Board (LGMSB) and the Office for Local Authority Management. This approach is borne out in the on-going and developing role of the Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group which includes representatives of the Department, the CCMA, the LGMSB, OSI, the Institute of Public Administration and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, as well as the CPA. This particular committee is noteworthy in that, for the first time, a formal institutional arena for national policy has been established to provide for local-national policy dialogue.

Local authority corporate plans currently highlight the importance of social inclusion, and this is also reflected, to an extent, in their annual business plans. It is also evident that considerable effort has gone into the establishment of various fora at the local level. This includes the community and voluntary fora, the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACC), Homeless Fora and others such as Planning Panels, consumer interest groups etc. Their effectiveness does, however, remain a key challenge for the system generally. For further details on this study, contact its author, Sean O'Riordain at sean.m.oriordain@nuim.ie

Title: OECD Economic Surveys: IRELAND – Volume 2008, Issue 5

Editor(s): OECD

Date Published: April 2008

Publisher details: OECD

This edition of the OECD's Economic Survey of the Irish economy finds that it has performed remarkably well over the past decade but that while economic fundamentals remain strong, economic activity is starting to ease. The survey examines some of the key challenges now facing Ireland including maintaining growth, the housing market slowdown, financial stability, pension reform and integrating migrants. This report is available free of charge as a pdf document. Alternatively it can be purchased from the OECD for €52. For further details see: the OECD at www.oecd.org/documentprint/0,3455,fr_2649_33723_39169364_1_1_1_1,00.html

Title: The Impact of European Integration on Regional Structural Change and Cohesion

Editor(s): Krieger-Boden, C¹. Morgenroth, E². and Petrakos, G³.

Date Published: April 2008

Publisher details: Routledge

Edited by three European editors and spanning across Europe, this excellent study focuses on the effects of the European integration process on the inter-regional division of labour in both western and Eastern European countries. Using extensive empirical analysis of the changes of regional specialisation over a period of two decades, observing its causes and consequences the authors show economic integration as a relocation of resources across sectors and space. The authors argue that the resulting challenge to both regional and social cohesion in the enlarged European Union may require a reorientation of cohesion policy at European, national and local levels. Disaggregated national data sets with respect to both the sectoral and spatial levels are combined with an analysis of both regional structural change and the role of foreign direct investment in this process.

This book will be of great interest to post graduate students and researchers interested in international trade and regional economics as well as policy makers engaged with regional and

structural changes at both a European and national level. For further details contact Dr. Edgar Morgenroth at edgar.morgenroth@esri.ie

¹ Kiel Institute for the World Economy in Germany

² ESRI, Dublin

³ University of Thessaly, Greece

• WORKING PAPERS/DOCUMENTS

Title: The Regional Dimension of Taxes and Public Expenditure in Ireland

Author(s): Dr. Edgar Morgenroth, ESRI

Date Published: April 2008.

The ESRI Working Paper No. 195, entitled *The Regional Dimension of Taxes and Public Expenditure in Ireland* has been accepted for publication in *Regional Studies*. Authored by Dr. Edgar Morgenroth, the latest version of this paper can be downloaded at: <http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20080131131705/WP195.pdf>

If you wish to have a recently published book/paper listed in this section of future newsletters, please e-mail details formatted as above to newsletter@regionalstudies.ie

7. An Introduction to the Midland Regional Authority

In each addition of the e-newsletter we plan to briefly profile a body working in the area of regional policy in Ireland. Thanks to Jim Stone, Midland Regional Authority for his assistance in preparing this profile.

Established in January 1994, the Midland Regional Authority is one of eight Regional Authorities set up under the Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Authorities) (Establishment) Order 1993. Their key functions are:

1. Preparing Regional Planning Guidelines and Regional Economic and Social Strategies.
2. Reviewing, as appropriate, the Development Plans of the Local Authorities in the Region and, where relevant, the Development Plans of Local Authorities adjoining the Region; to consider the consistency of plans with one another and with the overall development needs of the Region.
3. Promoting coordination of public services and, where relevant, consideration by Public Authorities of the implications for, or the effect of, their decisions, activities or services on the Region.

The Region is some 6524 sq. km. with a population of 251,664 (Census 2006). The Midland Region covers the counties of Laois, Offaly, Westmeath and Longford.

MEMBERSHIP: The membership of the Midland Regional Authority comprises elected representatives from each of the counties within its remit, as well as one member from the Committee of the Regions. There are currently 24 members on the Midland Regional Authority.

REGIONALLY SIGNIFICANT ISSUES: The Midland Regional Authority endeavours to boost the economic and social development of the Region. The development strategies, as drawn up by the Authority in consultation with the public agencies and social partners, act as a blueprint for regional development. In addressing the challenges facing the Region, the Authority embraces the notion of global competitiveness and bases its strategies on a number of policy

objectives including: the creation of sustainable employment, equal opportunities, social inclusion, the promotion of the information society and the protection of the environment.

The Strategic Economic Objectives for the Region are:

- To drive the implementation of the 'linked gateway' for the Midland Region, as outlined in the *National Spatial Strategy (NSS)*, within a broader context of polycentric development centred on the five main towns in the Region.
- To achieve a regional population in the order of 325,000 by 2020 through building on the individual strengths of the main towns while maintaining and supporting the viability of smaller towns, villages and rural areas.
- To co-ordinate and target key transport/communications investment within the Region so as to support and sustain critical mass and regional competitiveness, create effective links and improve intra and inter-regional connectivity.
- To develop and market a distinct and unique image and identity for the Region that will attract investment and economic activity.
- To support the development of alternative farm enterprises.
- To maximise the social and knowledge capital of the Region with investment in physical, electronic and social infrastructure.
- To develop the Midlands as a region of knowledge and learning by developing and enhancing the role of Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) to ultimately provide a university scale of education and R&D capacity.
- To create an innovation and entrepreneurial culture by providing significant innovation funding and promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in the Region.
- To improve critical mass by building on existing clusters of activity.
- To invest in leading edge business supports.
- To provide social, educational, recreational and cultural facilities of a scale and quality to attract and retain a critical mass of population throughout the Region.
- To achieve an appropriate level and range of public, social and community services and facilities, including housing and accommodation needs.
- To invest in attracting and retaining a skilled labour force.
- To promote and protect the natural and built environment.

The Midland Region has a strong industrial base and is particularly strong in the areas of medical devices, healthcare, pharmaceutical and chemicals, software and engineering. The Midland Regional Authority is supporting and working closely with the job creation agencies (i.e. IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and the County Enterprise Boards, WESTBIC, Partnership Companies, Leader Companies etc.) in establishing the Region as an attractive location for industry. As part of this strategy, these agencies are striving to attract high value added jobs, particularly in the already established areas of software, pharmaceuticals, health-care, biopharma, and food processing sectors. The Authority continues to support the activities of the Midlands Innovation Centre (MIRC) located at AIT.

The *Lakelands & Inland Waterways Strategy* was launched by Failte Ireland and Waterways Ireland in October 2007. The strategy seeks to position Ireland's central waterways as a key international tourism proposition. The Midland Regional Authority supports Failte Ireland in the roll-out of this strategy which will raise the profile of the Midland counties by making tourists aware of what there is on offer in this area - history, culture and heritage with many lakes, waterways and canals.

REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES: The *Midland Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs)*, published in 2004, set out a strategic policy framework for the development of the Region as a whole. Some of the key regional priorities outlined in the RPGs include:

- Enhancing the critical mass of the Region by combining the strengths of the "linked Midlands Gateway" of Mullingar-Athlone-Tullamore with those of the county towns of Portlaoise (County Laois) and Longford (County Longford);

- Developing the full potential of rural areas in the Region in a manner that is also compatible with the strengthening of the urban structure of the area;
- Harnessing the central geographical location of the Region at the “heart” of Ireland with more inter-regional links than any other Region in Ireland so as to build a strategically focused network of transport and communications links;
- Exploiting the Region’s central location and diverse natural and cultural resources to increase the number of tourists visiting; and
- Providing educational opportunities by developing outreach facilities.

The Midland Regional Authority will monitor the implementation of the RPGs and ensure that all county plans in the Region are in compliance with the RPGs; particularly in the areas of population, settlement strategy, infrastructure, commercial/industrial, retail, agricultural development, rural areas, social/community issues, inter-regional issues, and environment and amenities.

EUROPEAN PRIORITIES: The Midland Region is interested in working with other EU regions, particularly those with complementary resources and aspirations, in developing joint solutions to address its’ regional priorities and boost regional innovation. The Midland Regional Authority has considerable experience in the implementation of EU projects. It has been involved in a number of Interreg projects during the programming period 2000-2006; for example, WATERTOUR (Interreg IIIC) which sought to develop and promote tourism activities within close proximity of the lakes and inland waterways and the European Cultural Tourism Network (Interreg IIIC) which created a network of cultural tourism promoters throughout Europe to exchange best practice. The Authority was also a partner of the BMW Regional Assembly in another EU funded project,- the carrying out of a regional innovation audit (Interreg IIIB).

INVESTMENT PRIORITIES FOR THE REGION: While the predominant areas of population growth have been to the east of the Region under the influence of the Greater Dublin Area, the Midland Region has also experienced dynamic changes in its demographic and economic structure, development trends and infrastructure pressure since 1996. Employment growth is concentrated in the larger urban centers and the Region is becoming characterised by an increasing dependency ratio which in turn has implications for health care, type of housing needed and elder care.

A key objective of the Midland Regional Authority is the promotion of the Midlands Gateway (i.e. Mullingar-Athlone-Tullamore). The designation and development of the Midlands Gateway provides the basis to develop a range of high quality employment and educational opportunities centred on first-rate accessibility and mobility. To this end, a development framework on how the Gateway should develop was published in 2006 by INDECON, *Developing a World Class Knowledge-Based Competitive Gateway*. Promoting an integrated, knowledge-based and competitive gateway, the strategy was formulated to ensure the availability of choice in residential, retail, leisure and tourist facilities based on the principles of quality of life and environmental enhancement.

The Region’s road network is characterised by a number of nationally strategic road routes that radiate from Dublin and traverse the Region. National secondary and regional roads connect these main routes and are generally in need of upgrading. The inter-urban routes identified under the previous NDP are not due for completion until 2010. Enhanced transport connectivity, both inter and intra-regionally, has a central role to play in developing the Region’s potential. In terms of economic growth, the Midland Regional Authority is also committed to:

- Providing sustained support for the Midland Enterprise Platform Programme;
- Supporting the establishment of the Midland Innovation Fund; and
- Supporting the establishment of the Midland Regional Research Centre to act as a magnet of attraction for knowledge-based industry.

The Authority recognises the role of Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) as a key driver in the growth of the Region; and as such supports its development and investment in pharmaceutical-medical technology, ICT and other high tech sectors.

Further Details on the Authority and its work can be accessed via their website: www.midlands.ie, Alternatively the Authority can be contacted by email at: jstone@midlands.ie

8. Regional Policy: What's New?

COMMUNICATING EUROPE IN PARTNERSHIP

In October 2007, the European Commission launched an initiative called 'Communicating Europe in Partnership' – this calls for more sophisticated ways of working and the establishment of partnerships between different actors across European society. Regional and local authorities and civil society are seen as playing a crucial role in making this happen. They are witnesses to the direct impact of EU policies in their local areas. It is intended that opportunities will be created which will allow for joint activities and exchange of good practice and learning. Each member state is charged with earmarking funding for campaigns on Europe at the local level.

PROMOTING ENERGY EFFICIENCY AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

The Committee of the Regions has published a study highlighting the role of local and regional authorities in promoting energy efficiency. Entitled The Use of Renewable Energy Sources and Measures to Boost Energy Efficiency – Significant Contributions at Local and regional Level to Combating Climate change, the report was outlined at a conference on local energy in January 2008. The report outlines ten case studies on energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives and identifies key factors behind their success. Further details are available at www.cor.europa.eu/pages/DocumentTemplate.asp?id=5a3a1f28-89fb-4e5a-9878-44a5f8da545a (Source: Irish Regions Office, 2008).

STRONGER LOCAL DEMOCRACY: OPTIONS FOR CHANGE

The Green Paper discussion paper on local government reform in Ireland, Stronger Local Democracy: Options for Change, was published in April 2008 by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The main proposals in the paper are:

- A directly-elected mayor for the Dublin region.
- Directly elected mayors for other cities and counties.
- Devolution of decision-making to Town Councils.
- Devolution of more powers to elected councillors.
- New ethics legislation for councillors.
- A new system of funding local government.

In launching the Green Paper, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr. John Gormley T.D. noted "We need to give local government greater freedom and capacity to tackle local issues locally, working on its own initiative and in partnership with other local and state agencies". For further information, log on to www.environ.ie

IRELAND'S BIODIVERSITY A MULTI-BILLION EURO ASSET

In May 2008, a study investigating the social and economic aspects of Ireland's biodiversity was published. The report considered a number of key sectors including agriculture, forestry infrastructure development, human health and climate change. Conservatively estimating the value of Ireland's biodiversity to be in the region of €2.6billion per annum, the report makes a strong case for strengthening policies that protect Ireland's biodiversity for economic reasons

and highlights far-reaching social and financial benefits for our society. For example, the earthworm is estimated to be worth €700million per annum for the services it provides in removing dead matter and releasing nutrients into the soil. According to Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr. John Gormley T.D., "we must develop and implement appropriate policies to meet this challenge" of increased development, climate change and the introduction of non-native species. To this end, the Government will prepare a revised Biodiversity Strategy for Ireland during 2008.

TELEWORKING: SAVING SPACE AND INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY

Teleworking is proving increasingly popular among Irish Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) looking to make the most of their workforce. From the company's perspective, home-working staff are happier, less likely to leave the company, and quite possibly more productive. Likewise, many employees see teleworking as an opportunity to improve their work-life balance, gaining extra hours that would be normally be spent commuting and avoiding the stresses of traffic congestion. As a result, SMEs are jumping at the opportunities presented by teleworking in greater numbers than ever before. Research by mobile operator O2 shows that the number of SME owner/managers working from home at least one day per month increased from 25% in 2004 to 47% in 2008.

The increasing availability of broadband is no doubt also fuelling the trend. But while technology may be the key factor enabling wider adoption of remote working, the driving force behind the trend is the benefits teleworking offers both companies and staff. "The thing people demand is flexibility", says Patricia Callan, Director of the Small Firms Association (SFA). The SFA is currently drawing up a set of guidelines to help SMEs implement a remote working strategy. Callan says having such a strategy in place can help retain talented individuals. "Staff want a better work-life balance. If SMEs can help facilitate this, then businesses have a better chance of keeping skilled staff on board". Remote working has other benefits for bosses too, including the significant savings that can be made in terms of office space and facilities. By reducing the number of staff on site, businesses can operate in a smaller environment. Callan says the high cost of commercial rent is making firms look for ways to curtail the amount of office space they require. (Source: Enterprise Ireland, 2008 – Edited version of *eBusiness Live* (Issue No. 209) article)

9. Contacting the RSA Newsletter

This is the third e-newsletter of the Irish Branch of the Regional Studies Association. Given the success of the e-newsletter in this, its inaugural year, it is planned to continue this publication in 2008. There will be a further two e-Newsletters produced during 2008 and these will be circulated as follows:

- Mid-July
- Mid-November.

If you have any queries regarding the newsletter, or any comments, suggestions or submissions for future editions (incl. details on upcoming events, publications of interest, job vacancies), please email newsletter@regionalstudies.ie

PLEASE NOTE: the closing date for receipt of submissions is the first day of the month of the next issue.

10. Membership of the RSA

Membership of the Association is open to all individuals and organisations with an interest in the analysis and development of regional policy.

The benefits of membership include nine issues of the international journal *Regional Studies*, four issues of *Regions: The Newsletter of the Regional Studies Association* (overall body), three issues of *Spatial Economic Analysis*, discount on other Routledge publications, access to Association events, and ability to participate in any local branch or section activities.

Membership is based on the calendar year. For the year 2008, membership costs are: Individual £74 (€113); Student £35 (€54); Associate Membership £56 (€85); Corporate £152 (€213). Further details and application forms can be found on the RSA international website:

www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk

11. Current Irish Committee Members

The current RSA committee for 2008 are: Micheál Collins, TCD (Chairman); Chris Van Egeraat, NUI Maynooth (Vice-Chairman); Patrick Collins, NUI Galway (Hon. Secretary); Edgar Morgenroth, ESRI (Hon. Treasurer); John McDonagh, NUI Galway; Des McCafferty, Mary Immaculate College, UL; Stephen Walsh, DIT; Mark Boyle, NUI Maynooth; David Hogan, Shannon Development; Gillian Slattery, Enterprise Ireland; David Meredith, Teagasc; Ronnie O'Toole, Northern Ireland Bank; Caroline Creamer, ICLRD/NIRSA, NUI Maynooth; Sean O'Riordain, NUI Maynooth; Philip O'Connor, Dublin Employment Pact; Louis Wildenboer, John Spain Associates.

The following are the contact details of the Association. We strongly encourage communication by e-mail.

RSA Chairman Micheál Collins: chairman@regionalstudies.ie

RSA Secretary Patrick Collins: secretary@regionalstudies.ie

Newsletter: newsletter@regionalstudies.ie

12. Joining/Leaving the RSA (Irish Branch) Mailing List

If you wish to have your details added to the RSA mailing list please e-mail the following address with the word "ADD" in the subject line: mailinglist@regionalstudies.ie

To have your details removed from the RSA mailing list please e-mail the following address with the word "REMOVE" in the subject line: mailinglist@regionalstudies.ie

The RSA updates its mailing list approximately once every six weeks.

A pdf copy of this newsletter is available on the RSA website at www.regionalstudies.ie