



“By the People, for the People” Bringing public participation back to politics

Short summary of the impact

International best practice dictates that policies impacting people should be evidence-based, and that those most affected are in the best position to explain the needs that effective policies have to meet. The problem is that people outside academia rarely get to contribute to research, and (apart from opinion surveys) policy makers find it hard to understand people’s true needs when they formulate policy. Researchers in UL’s Department of Politics and Public Administration have addressed this problem by developing participatory frameworks for public policy design. Working in collaboration with politicians, policy makers, community groups and citizens, UL researchers have found ways to collect the evidence needed by state agencies, politicians and policy makers to target policy interventions and resources precisely where people most need them.

In effect, UL’s researchers have become translators between officialdom and citizens, helping create collaborative partnerships that provide for robust

evidence-based policy making. These partnerships marshal the insights and inputs of all policy stakeholders, and result in policy that is more effective for all.

Underpinning research

Maura Adshead and Chris McInerney are concerned with how policy processes work. They utilise methodological innovations to unearth “bottom-up” perspectives on policy implementation and impacts to complement “top-down” views of policy formulation and influences. In addition to traditional methods associated with policy analysis, their research has led to new approaches that involve collaborative engagement with a range of policy stakeholders. The research breaks new ground by practically applying theoretical emancipatory research frameworks in the area of public policy, by means of evidence-based research projects carried out in collaboration with stakeholders in local communities. This approach to public policy and community-oriented research underpins the Irish Aid/

HEA funded project on ‘The role of public administration systems in the delivery of effective HIV-AIDS policies’. Valued at €923,486, the project draws together a UL inter-disciplinary team with research collaborators in Makerere University, Uganda; Dar Es Salaam University, Tanzania; and, Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa (RA 1).

McInerney and Adshead’s research methods have led to innovative practice in the area of policy research and civic engagement, incorporating policy stakeholders from state and civil society in the design and delivery of participatory policy processes. McInerney played a pivotal role facilitating the Ennis 2020 Community Visioning and Participatory Planning Initiative; more examples of such projects are given in Section 4. This praxis-based foundation has led to new pedagogies that incorporate problem-based learning approaches to ‘real world’ policy problems and collaborative research projects. Adshead was instrumental in developing the UL Practicum; more generally, their work has revitalised





university approaches to community-oriented research and civic engagement. Finally, since 2008 McNerney and Adshead have produced four books, 14 book chapters, 10 refereed journal articles, 6 working papers, and 11 research reports; these publications detail the empirical studies and practical application of their collaborative work across a range of policy sub-systems and policy domains (Refs 1-6).

References to the research

1. McNerney, C. (2014) *Challenging Times, Challenging Administration*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, + 212pp.
2. McNerney, C. and Adshead, M. (2013) *Problem Based Learning and Civic Engagement - Shifting the focus of learning in public policy education*, PS: Political Science & Politics 46/3: 630-636.
3. Adshead, M. (2012) *The exercise and impact of Social Partnership on Irish Government*, in E. O'Malley and M. MacCarthaigh (eds) *Governing Ireland: from Cabinet to Core Executive*, Dublin: IPA.
4. McNerney, C. and Adshead, M. (2010) *The challenge of community participation in the delivery of public services: exploring participatory governance in Ireland*, Dublin: NESF, March 2010, +164pp, ISBN 1-8-99276-55-6.
5. Adshead, M. and Tonge, J. (2009) *Politics in Ireland. Convergence and divergence in a two-polity island*, Palgrave, April 2009, xv+264pp.
6. Adshead, M. and McNerney, C. (2008) *Ireland's National Anti-Poverty Strategy as new governance*, in Considine, M. and Giguere, S. (eds) *Local Development*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008, pp. 233-254.

Research Awards

1. Adshead, Lodge, McNerney & Muldoon. *The role of public administration systems in the delivery of effective HIV-AIDS policies*. Funded by Irish Aid/HEA. 2012-2016: €923,486

Details of the impact

The impact of public policy interventions



is difficult to quantify in the short term; there is significant lag time between implementation and observable impact. However, there is strong anecdotal evidence of the impact of Adshead and McNerney's work at four levels: national, local, professional practice (capacity building), and individual (civic engagement by students and citizens).

Shaping debate and influencing policy at national level

While much of McNerney and Adshead's research is conducted at local level, their insights into the ingredients of effective partnerships (including trust, honesty, and some form of status equality) are equally relevant to national and international projects. As a result, their research is used by national and international peers as a reference for politics and public policy processes in Ireland. For example, in 2009 they were commissioned by the National Economic and Social Forum to research effective methods of leveraging participation at the local level to improve delivery of public services. The resulting report continues to influence the design of processes that support citizen participation and local development in Ireland.

This work is a key report in informing the implementation of national public policy and is as current and alive as it was in 2009 as we shape the future of local and community development planning processes and debate the scope and possibility of meaningful citizen engagement and community participation (Source 1).

Their influence is further illustrated by the significant international authorship and editorship of books to which they have

been invited to contribute. Adshead's reputation as a 'public expert' on Irish politics and policy is reflected in a variety of invitations to contribute editorial opinion pieces in Irish media, including the Irish Times, Irish Examiner, Sunday Times, and online news media such as the Journal.ie and Pravda (Slovakia).

Both Adshead and McNerney have been invited to host events as part of 'The President of Ireland's Ethics Initiative: Shaping Ireland's Shared Future'. McNerney's reputation as a consultant for NGOs and advocacy groups is reflected in regular invitations to address events hosted by civil society organisations; for example, the Knowledge Exchange Forum hosted by the Advocacy Initiative in July 2013 on the theme of participation in promoting social justice advocacy. This national event was attended by more than 70 leaders from a range of civil society organisations.

More recently, in 2013 Adshead and Tom Felle (Department of Journalism, UL) collaborated with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to convene a workshop examining 15 years of the Freedom of Information Act in Ireland, bringing together more than 60 civil servants, public officials, journalists and academics to review the FOI legislation and its proposed revision.

For the Houses of the Oireachtas Communications Unit our interaction with Maura Adshead, both with the FOI conference in February 2013 and subsequently in the creation of...the book on FOI for which she is the editor, has been an invaluable exposure to the research and theoretical perspective to a matter that is a very real, every day part of its work. Maura has been consistently open, accessible



and resourceful in terms of connecting the academic value that UL can offer an organisation such as the Houses of the Oireachtas. In that context, our interaction with Maura has had real impact on our approach and thinking with regard to making our records and information more accessible and thus more transparent (Source 2).

Leading collaborative policy projects at local level

Since 2006, Adshead and McInerney's expertise is routinely sought to facilitate collaborative public policy research projects. Their work has linked policy makers with people who carry out policy on a daily basis and with people who access services, making it possible to identify and fix the unintended consequences that frequently occur during policy implementation. Their projects have demonstrated how evidence-based policy making and implementation can work at the local level.

Following a successful Community Research Partnership with the Ennis Community Development Project, Adshead was approached by the Ennis Inter-Agency Steering Group. This group of 14 local statutory agencies, all of which deliver public services to refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and travellers, recognised that lack of coordination and understanding crippled the effectiveness of their service provision. They commissioned Adshead and colleagues to carry out baseline research on the needs of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in County Clare. The research report (Getting to Know You) was used to underpin the Co. Clare Integrated Strategic Plan for Immigrants (Source 3), and was disseminated amongst the community in the Count Me In collaborative research project with travellers, asylum seekers and refugees (Source 4). The report's recommendations have improved collaboration, service delivery, and commitment to quality monitoring across agencies.

The research and development of the strategy document commenced in 2007 and the research informing the document

was gathered from local studies carried out by the University of Limerick. This strategy document is the first step in developing a common agenda for taking practical actions to support immigrants in the community. I commend all of those involved in the development of the strategy (Source 5).

Another example of local impact is the collaboration between Adshead, Ronnie Greenwood (Department of Psychology, UL) and the Limerick branch of the New Communities Partnership (NCP), a national umbrella organization for 78 new ethnic community groups in Ireland. This collaboration involved setting up and supporting an NCP women's group in Limerick to assist in providing supports and services to a mostly 'invisible' group of ethnic minority women. The women's group highlighted a number of gaps in social supports; as a result, a Community Research Partnership was created to conduct an emancipatory research project to explore and remedy these gaps. This research has generated on-going collaborations between the NCP and the Department of Politics and Public Administration and laid the foundation for ongoing advocacy efforts:

It has been a great satisfaction working with Dr Maura Adshead, Department of Politics and Public Administration, University of Limerick. Maura was perceived as "...somebody who listens and can understand...somebody whose work can inform policy and carries hope for social change". Maura and her work have boosted NCP and communities' momentum in Ireland (Source 6). On another front, following public dissemination of their research for the National Economic and Social Forum (Ref 4), McInerney was invited by Ennis Town Council to develop an approach that would engage the Council more deeply with residents and users of the town. The first phase of this process, carried out in conjunction with UL students, facilitated different forms of dialogue with over 400 people as part of a community visioning exercise:

Underlying this initiative was a desire

to find out what citizens / residents / users of Ennis wanted for the Town over the next decade. This evidence based approach, using community visioning as its foundation, is both innovative and exciting. The partnership model utilised by the Town Council, the Clare Active Citizenship Network and UL is to jointly research, strategise, implement and monitor the progress of the Framework up to 2020 (Source 7).

The second phase refined this exercise and led to the production of a strategy for the future development of the town: Ennis 2020 - Planning Beyond Recession, designed to align with the National Spatial Strategy. This strategy was adopted by Ennis Town Council and was formally launched in March 2013 (Sources 8 and 9). Concrete results of the strategy have been noted by both elected representatives and public servants.

The Ennis 2020 initiative facilitated an engagement process between statutory agencies, UL as a third level institution and the community and voluntary sector/ citizens of Ennis. The concrete impact in terms of projects/initiatives stimulated included various socio-economic projects. For example, the international Purple Flag branding, accreditation for high quality tourism product offering, and a safe night-time economy in Ennis (Source 10). The effectiveness of the Ennis initiative has been recognised by other counties across Ireland, resulting in a number of requests for McInerney and Adshead to facilitate similar projects. In addition, the Ennis 2020 Framework led to Ennis Town Council's being shortlisted in the eleventh annual Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Awards for 2014. While the outcome will not be known until November 2014, the letter of notification states: "The judging panel were very impressed with the high calibre of entries and competition for a place on the shortlist was extremely tough" (Source 11).

Impact on professional practice

McInerney and Adshead's approach to public policy research and praxis has generated a number of institutional-level



impacts in terms of capacity building. These include university collaborations with civil society; incorporation of these collaborations into teaching and learning initiatives by means of project work outside the university; and skills training for Irish public servants and community volunteers.

In 2011, in conjunction with the Limerick City Development Board (CDB,) McInerney and Adshead convened a Summer School on Civic Engagement. This school was offered nationwide and focused on the practical skills needed by public servants and community-based organisations to more effectively encourage local participation and civic engagement. The four-day school was launched by Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government Phil Hogan TD, and was attended by more than 100 participants from all over Ireland.

(The Summer School was) absolutely brilliant... (it was my) first time ever in the corridors of UL (after) living in the city all my life. (It was a) fantastic experience, very open forum, everyone had a chance to have their say (Source 12).

As a result of their experience with collaborative partnerships and civic engagement research projects, Adshead and McInerney have developed a range of new skills for teaching politics and public administration. This has produced a significant renewal of curriculum, particularly in relation to graduate methods and civic engagement. Since 2006, McInerney and Adshead have contributed the UL Winter School on PhD methods (emancipatory research, action research, community-oriented research, civic engagement techniques, and ethics), giving graduate seminars every year to more than 20 PhD students from across Ireland and abroad.

In 2013, McInerney pioneered the 'Politics Problem Based Learning (PBL) laboratory' using local civic engagement and 'real-world' problem solving opportunities to explore and evaluate the utility of PBL for politics teaching. All Politics and Public Administration staff and teaching graduates are part of this exercise, which is supported by an AHSS faculty teaching award. PBL experts from the UK and Ireland were



invited to support reflection on this process with PPA staff.

Since 2009, both Adshead and McInerney have contributed politics and public policy modules to BA degree training programmes for the Office of Revenue Commissioners, training public officials in bespoke designed courses on public administration and social policy for tax officials; these courses enable officials to set their work in a larger context. Nationally, texts by both Adshead (2009) (Ref 5) and McInerney (Ref 1) are used by the Office of Revenue Commissioners for their training in Irish politics and public administration.

This degree course... (undergoes) regular evaluation of content and of overall effectiveness. Chris's contribution has attracted particularly favourable comment both from students and from Revenue senior management. This is particularly significant because the module in question is designed to give students an awareness of their socio-political environment as preparation for strategic decision making. This can be a more challenging requirement than the imparting of technical knowledge (Source 13).

Finally, Adshead and McInerney have provided skills training to a range of community stakeholders. As part of the Count Me In project, volunteer refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and travellers were trained to conduct community-based research in partnership with university students.

'Count Me In' not only brought University of Limerick expertise in Ennis, but for the first time, communities here felt that they were not "researched on" but were associated fully in the research. Starting from designing questionnaires, conducting research on the field to the data processing in UL, all this side by side with UL students, it was for many of participants a life experience...immigrants and Travellers (are) still talking today about it. Now with Dr. Adshead's involvement in Intercultural and Diversity Education Centre (IDEC-Ireland), we have no doubt this will bring to a new high level the joint work of our communities in Clare and (the) academic community from UL (Source 14).

Local councillors and public servants have also developed their capacity to engage with citizens and communicate with constituents in new and meaningful ways:

The Ennis 2020 process has also changed mindsets, causing people to think differently about how we operate as a local authority (Source 7).

Development of broader civic engagement mission

McInerney and Adshead's range of experience combining community-oriented research, civic engagement and 'real-world' problem-based teaching has shown them the strategic potential of this area in higher education institutions more generally. They have acquired a range of methods for developing university



commitment to civic engagement that supports other key university ambitions for teaching and research. Their work has helped both students and citizens to understand and advocate for civic engagement.

On an academic level, their research has informed a range of academic outputs by students. For example, data for the research report *Getting to Know You* (which underpinned the Co. Clare Integrated Strategic Plan for Immigrants) was collected by buddy teams of UL students and community researchers, and used to develop 11 final year undergraduate dissertations, 4 MA dissertations and 1 PhD (Eidin Ni She, submitted September 2010).

On the level of praxis, since 2007 Adshead has led the development of the UL Practicum, which in 2014 was incorporated into the UL Broadening the Curriculum initiative in collaboration with UL Civic Engagement Champion Bernie Quillinan. The UL Practicum, which builds on the successful piloting of a 'Community Research Partnership' and related projects in Ennis, provides accredited student learning on a university-supported project-based module.

The Practicum experience has without a doubt positively shaped my time in Ireland. The people I have met and the opportunities I have had because of Practicum have made me a better student, a better teacher, and above all, a better person (Source 14).

On the community level, the participatory research in "Obstacles faced by Migrant Women in Accessing Social Welfare Support" fostered enthusiasm and commitment among the migrants' community, as well as a broader sense of acknowledgement and caring within the entire community. It forged strong links between the university, the city of Limerick, and specific communities within the city. The impact of the collaboration between the University of Limerick and the New Communities Partnership (NCP) went beyond training and capacity building, deepening understanding of strategies that can be employed by local government to

ignite community revival.

As a result of their work, Adshead and McInerney have been at the forefront of UL initiatives to develop a clearer strategic direction for university civic engagement activities. These include Adshead's chairing the UL Civic Engagement Task Force (2012): the group's final report made 23 recommendations for action, all of which were approved by Management Council and are currently underway. Since 2013, both Adshead and McInerney have collaborated with UL Civic Engagement Champion Bernie Quillinan to set up a hub for civic engagement staff supports and information. They have been actively involved in the design of the 'UL Engage' website, which outlines civic engagement activities for students, staff, public and external groups and provides complete links to all UL services and resources.

In sum, McInerney and Adshead have found ways to translate internationally accepted theory into practical approaches that engage stakeholders and end-users in the development of effective public policy. Their work is changing the way policy makers and citizens interact, and is creating commitment to civic engagement at multiple levels: in students and community members; in public administration and academia; institutionally, locally, nationally and internationally.

Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Recommendation from Marie Carroll, Former CEO Southside Partnership and former member of the National Economic and Social Forum
2. Written testimonial from Mark Mulqueen, Head of Communications, Houses of the Oireachtas, Dublin

3. Policy documents for the Integrated Strategy for Clare immigrant services can be accessed at: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/SocialInclusion/IntegratedStrategy0912.htm>
4. Count Me In publications can be accessed at: http://www2.ul.ie/web/WWW/Faculties/Arts,_Humanities_%26_Social_Sciences/Doing_Community_Research/Publications/Count_Me_In
5. Written testimonial from Minister Conor Lenihan, Office for Promotion of Migrant Integration
6. Report from J. Jacques Mounoume Lobe, Regional Coordinator, New Communities Partnership, Limerick
7. Written testimonial from Cllr. Johnny Flynn, Mayor of Ennis, Co. Clare
8. Research underpinning the Ennis 2020 initiative undertaken by Ennis County Council in collaboration with the Clare Active Citizenship network can be accessed at: <http://ennis2020.ie>
9. Strategic policy document resulting from the Ennis community visioning research exercise can be seen at: http://www.ennis2020.ie/Ennis_2020_planning_beyond_recession.pdf
10. Written testimonial from Leonard Cleary, former Town Clerk of Ennis Town Council
11. Letter from Ian Talbot, Chief Executive, Chambers Ireland, Dublin
12. Testimonial from Mattie Collins, Limerick resident
13. Recommendation from Tony Buckley, Assistant Secretary, South West Region, Revenue
14. Written testimonial from Alphonse Basogomba, Chairman, IDEC Ireland
15. Written testimonial from Sadie Scibo, former UL Practicum student, Chicago

Find out more: Watch the video at www.ul.ie/researchimpact



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