

Dublin Public Participation Networks

Understanding and navigating the public policy ecosystem in Ireland

Prof. Deiric Ó Broin
27th May 2026

deiric.obroin@dcu.ie

DCU Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



1. What do we mean by public policy?
2. Different stages in public policy making
3. Understanding public policy making in Ireland
4. Public policy advocacy in Ireland



DLR PPN
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown
Public Participation Network



**Líonra Rannpháirtíochta Pobail
Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Public Participation Network
Dublin City**

What do we mean by public policy?

- Policy as a decision about a course of action designed to achieve stated outcomes or with specific objectives.
- Policy as a series of decisions over time towards the attainment of a goal or objective which initially can be discerned but not defined with clarity.
- Policy as an interactive process of experimentation and learning.

“Public policy is anything a government chooses to do or not to do” (Thomas Dye, 1972).

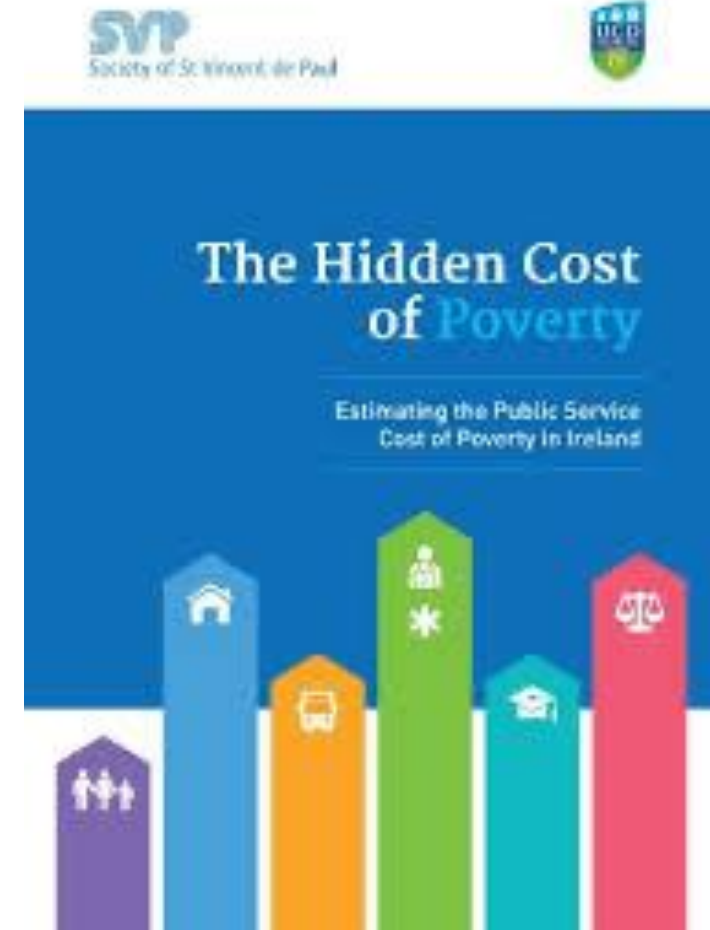


Some examples:



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council



People's Vulnerability

NESC Report No. 158
The Covid-19 Pandemic:
Lessons for Irish Public Policy



Target Supports

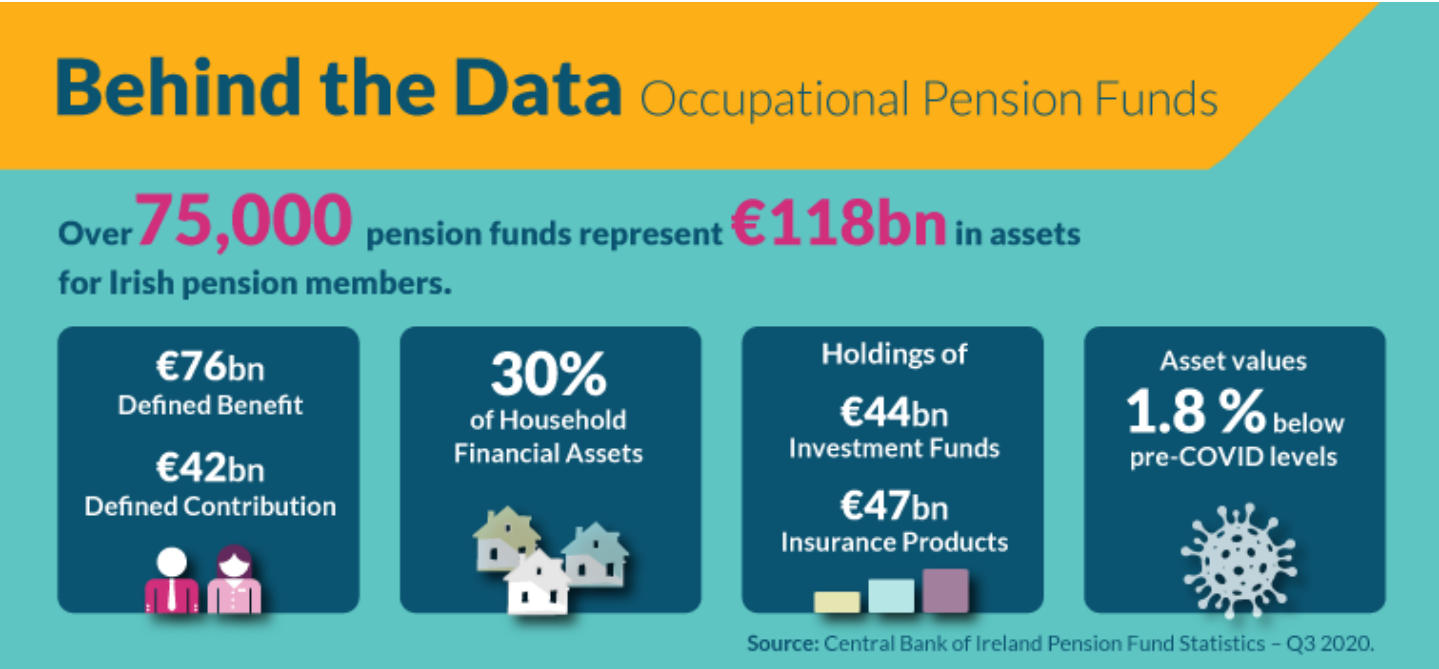


Public policy is a practice and discipline of making tangible written rules that govern a group of people or society at large.

What do you think of this perspective?

What do we mean by public policy?

Policy as a complex bundle of problems, plans, ideas, interests, opportunities, threats, challenges and constraints which need to be processed, managed and translated into a response to meet the political needs of the government of the day, and the medium-term interests of the community.




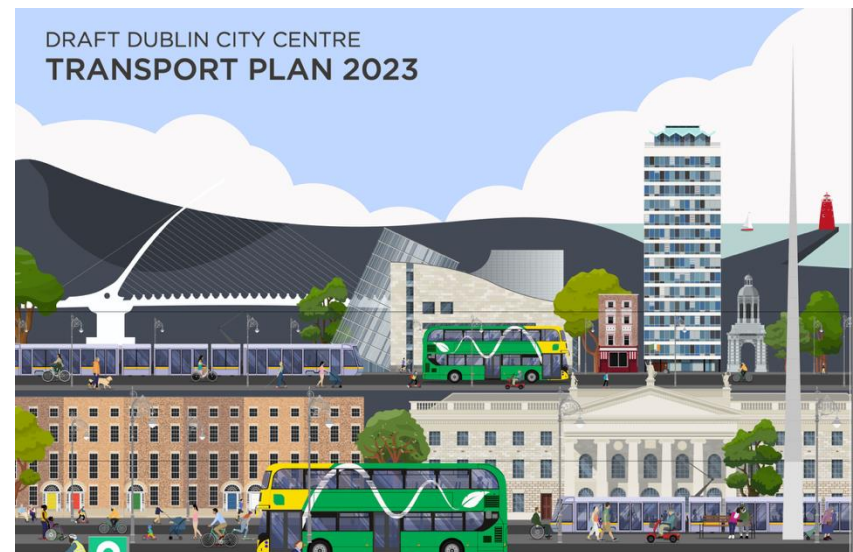


Public
policy in
Dublin?

SDCC Local Economic and Community Plan

South Dublin County Council are currently preparing a new Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP). The new LECP will help shape South Dublin County Council's community and economic development over the next 8 years. The plan will aim to ensure our County is a vibrant and inclusive place for people who live, visit, work and do business here, now and for the future.

South Dublin County Council are inviting the public, community groups and business organisations to take part in a public consultation to help shape the next LECP

What are we **not** taking about?

Think about 2-3 contemporary issues that you are interested in, angry about, confused by or actively involved in trying to change?

Are they public policies?



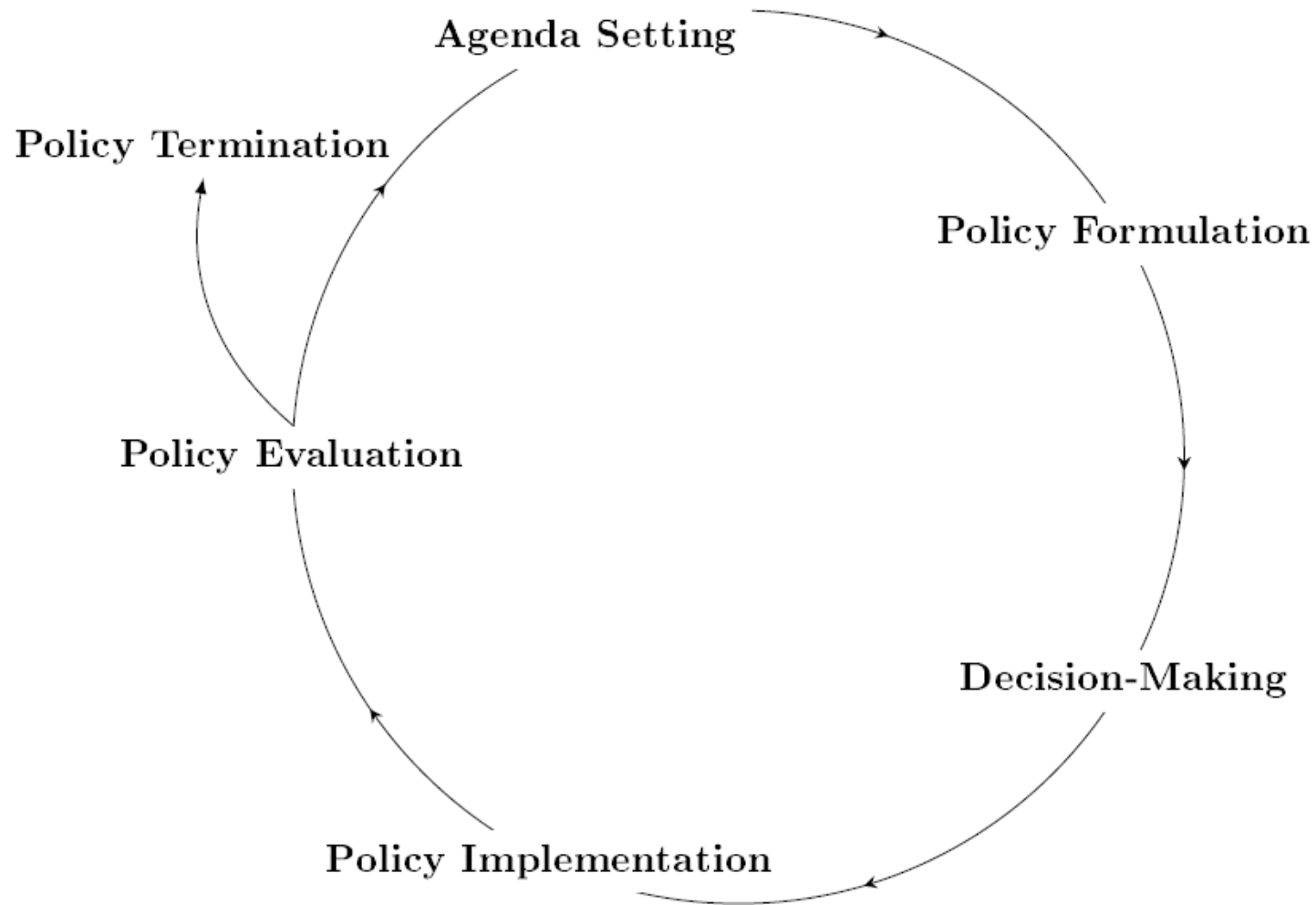
Public policy is normally seen to have a number of key attributes:

- Policy is made in response to some sort of issue or problem that requires attention;
- Policy is what the government chooses to do (actual) or not do (implied) about a particular issue or problem;
- Policy might take the form of law, or regulation, or the set of all the laws and regulations that govern a particular issue or problem;
- Policy is made on behalf of the "public";
- Policy is oriented toward a goal or desired state, such as the solution of a problem;
- Policy is ultimately made by governments, even if the ideas come from outside government or through the interaction of government and the public;
- Policymaking is part of an ongoing process that does not always have a clear beginning or end, since decisions about who will benefit from policies and who will bear any burden resulting from the policy are continually reassessed, revisited and revised.

DO THESE MAKE SENSE?



Different stages in public policy making



Who does what and when?

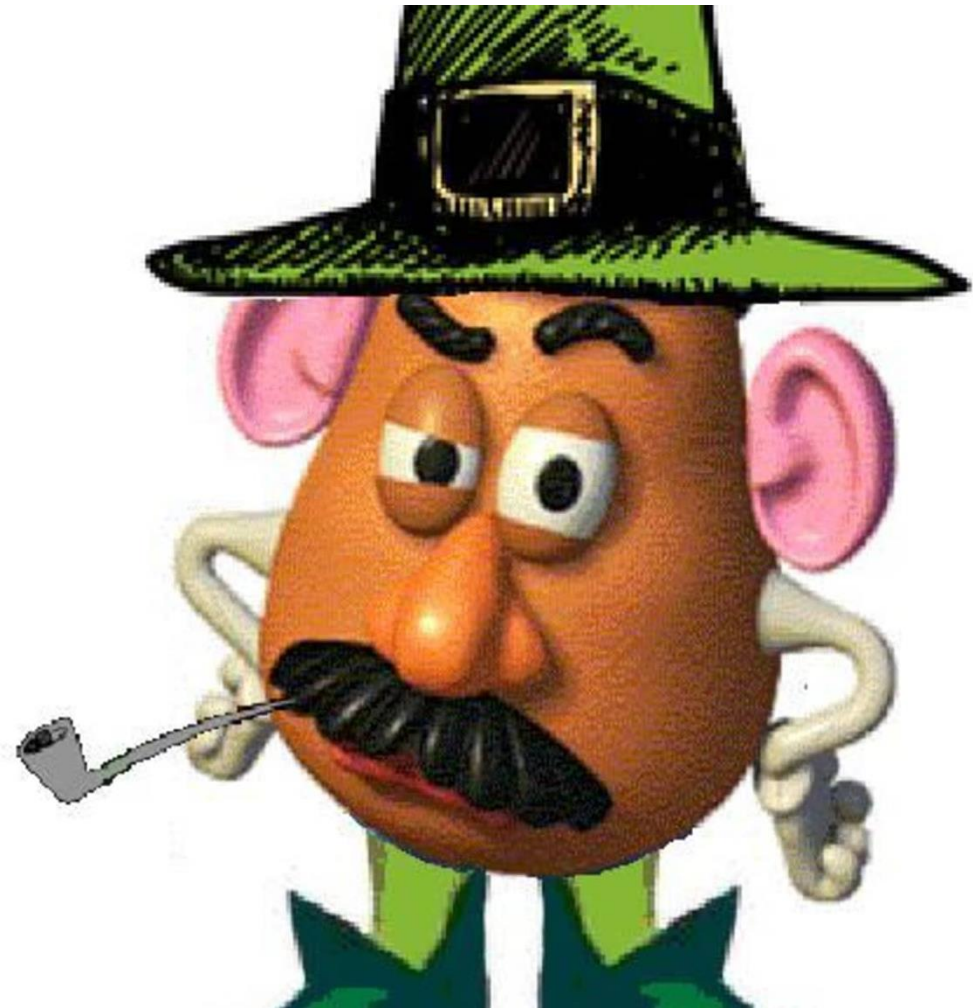
What is involved?

Who is involved?



Understanding public policy making in Ireland

Ireland is unusual in a number of ways



Some features of the Irish system are worth highlighting:

- Very centralised state;
- EU member state;
- Very limited local and regional government competences, very limited powers of locally-elected councillors;
- Variety of arms-length public agencies delivering services?
- **Relatively** strong business (including farmers) and trade union influence and more limited civil society influence on public policy formulation and implementation;
- Variety of structures to facilitate local policy input, e.g. PPNs, SPCs and LCDCs **but** limited scope for local policy development



Advocacy” and “Lobbying” are terms that are sometimes used interchangeably, however, they are different.

Advocacy is a general term that can be simply supporting a cause or speaking up for something you believe in.

There is no legal definition used for “advocacy,” however, lobbying is regulated by the Lobbying Act 2015 legislation to provide information to the public about **who is lobbying whom about what.**

Advocacy

All activities aimed to influence attitudes and policies ... not only – or even – lobbying

Lobbying

A key advocacy tool

... specific activities aiming to make decision makers take a specific stand on a specific issue.

See <https://www.lobbying.ie/> for details

Public policy advocacy in Ireland





Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Trading for Impact National Social Enterprise Policy 2024 – 2027



**Who lobbies
to change
policy?**

Did you?



Public policy advocacy in Ireland



Calling all SMEs

Joining ISME means we can continue to lobby on behalf of all Irish SMEs...

Join on isme.ie





**Pick up
the phone
and ring
me two
years ago!**

Some useful resources:

Tom Ferris. 2015. Reflections on the public policy process in Ireland. *Administration*, Vol. 62, no. 4, pp. 87–106. Available at:
https://www.ipa.ie/_fileupload/Documents/PDF/publications/Reflections_onthe_PublicPolicy_Process.pdf

Fintan Phelan. 2021. Strategic policy committees: Talking shops or active participants in local policy development? *Administration*, Vol. 69, no. 4, pp. 151-160. Available at:
<https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/admin-2021-0032>

Local Authority Budgets <http://localauthorityfinances.com/>



Any Questions?