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Irish Sociology

There is currently much talk in professional and other sectors about the need for *reflexivity*. In other words, we need to be conscious of what we know, but also how we know it. Amongst other things, this means developing an understanding of where disciplinary areas of knowledge come from. A discipline, whether physics, geography or sociology, is a social construct and has its own history. In this chapter we attempt to piece together the data – which remains patchy and is still evolving – that can give us an idea of where Irish sociology has come from.

In Ireland sociology has never had the official status or public recognition that adheres to dominant discipline areas such as history, economics or psychology (Conway, 2006). It is a common complaint of sociologists that they do not have the media profile of their counterparts in other fields – there is as yet no Irish sociological equivalent of a Diarmaid Ferriter, David McWilliams or Maureen Gaffney. Sociologists are rarely called upon to offer commentary or expert critique, even on what might be regarded as ‘social’ matters, nor are their books to be found in the best-seller lists. On the other hand, it can be argued that the discourse of sociology has had quite a pervasive effect on Irish society, helping to frame many current debates and insinuating itself into the language of policy and critique.

In her analysis of the role of social scientists in Irish public life, anthropologist Eileen Kane (1996, p. 136) distinguishes between ‘the intelligentsia’ and ‘intellectuals’. The former, she suggests, are in the business of producing easily identifiable knowledge that is useful for public administration, whereas the latter provide independent critical commentary about the state of the world, including how it is administered. It is tempting to see the first as acting within the system and the second as somehow outside of it, but Kathleen Lynch (1999b, p. 53) reminds us that in Ireland, as elsewhere, many intellectuals, even ‘radical’ ones, are relatively privileged and part of the structures of power. Sociologists may occupy either of these positions or combine them in different ways. Often, for example, they are employed by the state, in educational institutions, research centres or government agencies, but at the same time they do strive to develop a critique of the system of which they are a part. Needless to say, this can be a difficult balancing act.

Sociology has mainly been viewed in Ireland as an applied social science. Governments, funders of research, professional bodies and media commentators expect it to provide empirical data by which public policy can be guided. Its task is to analyse patterns and predict trends and to help the powerful to manage society,

solve social problems and bring about desired forms of social change. It is also recognised as adding a useful dimension, even a human element, to the study for certain professions, such as medicine, nursing, law or education. But of all the social sciences, sociology is probably regarded as the least satisfactory and reliable public servant, less serious than other more 'scientific' disciplines like economics and political science. Kane suggests that for the public and policymakers, 'social scientists are seen to be, at best, jaywalkers, losing fact to science and meaning to literature' (1996, p. 133).

This understanding of the discipline is one-sided and '[slights] both the nature and potential of public life and the importance of other, more critical and theoretically informed versions of sociology' (Calhoun, 1996, p. 429). Sociology can do more than provide the data needed to carry out the 'technical activities' of ruling elites. It can also generate and inform public debate on the important issues of the day and subject 'the concepts, received understandings and cultural categories constitutive of everyday life and public discourse to critical theoretical reconsideration' (Calhoun, 1996, p. 429). As British sociologist Ken Plummer (2010, p. 3) poetically puts it:

sociologists stand in awe and dreading, rage and delight at the humanly produced social world with all its joys and its sufferings. We critique it and we critically celebrate it. Standing in amazement at the complex patterns of human social life, we examine both the good things worth fostering and the bad things to strive to remove. Sociology becomes the systematic, sceptical study of all things social.

This chapter briefly outlines the variety of approaches in sociology before exploring the development of the discipline in Ireland. This development can be clearly linked to three main areas: the state, the Catholic Church and the interest of 'visiting' scholars. Each of these strands has had a long history in Irish social thought. Then the chapter describes the processes whereby the discipline of sociology has institutionalised itself, largely through the work of the Sociological Association of Ireland and the employment of sociologists in the tertiary education system. It examines the stimulus to sociological research provided by Ireland's increased focus on academic and scientific research, so much a part of the emergent 'knowledge economy'. Overall, we hope to provide a framework within which the nature and extent of contemporary Irish sociological work can be located.

VARIETIES OF SOCIOLOGY

There can be a variety of reasons for 'doing sociology'. These include a *managerial* objective to make government more effective and rational; a *critical* or *democratic* objective to inform and develop individuals so they can participate more fully in society and its government; and an *intellectual* objective to critically examine the social world and better understand it; this may even extend to a 'playful' objective,

where the analysis is intellectually stimulating in itself. In Table 2.1 we can see the connection between these objectives and the four ‘founding theorists’ of sociology whose ideas about modernity and its development we outlined briefly in Chapter 1.

Table 2.1: Sociological approaches of the founding theorists

Playful/intellectual	Managerial	Critical/democratic
Simmel	Weber, Durkheim	Weber, Marx

Durkheim’s writings reflect an instrumental and positivistic approach to sociology: it can provide the state with diagnoses of social trends that help it to manage society in a more rational and progressive and less conflictual manner. Marx offers a very different model: the sociologist as politically engaged critic who seeks to awaken and shape the consciousness of the public, in particular that part of it – the working class – that can bring about revolutionary social change. Simmel offers a third model. He was the first theorist to suggest that sociology should examine and analyse society at play as well as at work. It is possible to see his sociological work as a form of ‘play’ – a disengaged intellectual activity that sees playing the game as its own reward. The hardest person to locate in this simplified scheme is Weber. Less optimistic than Durkheim about the benefits of rationality and rational social management, Weber is closer to Marx in his attempts to develop sociology as a critical reflection on the long-term processes of social ‘modernisation’. But Weber, unlike Marx, had no alternative vision to capitalist modernity. His work often seems, like Simmel’s, to provide only its own reward in the intellectual pleasures of understanding and creative interpretation.

From its earliest days, sociology has been characterised by disagreement over its nature, purpose and social role. When we look at the history of the discipline in Ireland, we may expect to find similarly competing views as to what it is or should be about. This chapter is an attempt to sketch that history. It argues that sociology in Ireland has tended most often to reflect the Durkheimian managerial model. Its desired contribution has been to help improve, reform and rationalise how Irish society is governed, but there have been occasional flights from this position towards the critical/democratic stance, particularly in the late 1970s, and towards the playful/intellectual approach, particularly since the 1990s. We will try to explain, sociologically of course, why this has been the case.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL INQUIRY IN IRELAND

In 1934 the visiting American anthropologist Conrad Arensberg reported that he ‘could not source any material on Irish sociology, indicating the absence of sociology (or anthropology) as a professional discipline at that time in Ireland’ (Byrne et al.,

2001, p. XXXVn). Despite this valid claim, social inquiry has had a long history here. In recent years there has been an emerging literature that has sought to trace the history and development of sociology in Ireland. Though a full-length study has yet to emerge, a number of important writers, documents and institutions have been identified.

Conway (2006, p. 8) asserts that (as in other countries) 'Irish sociology was likely born sometime during the 19th century' and that this was 'outside the university setting' (p. 12). Writers such as Byrne et al. (2001), Hill (2005), Garvin and Hess (2006), Conway (2006), Murray (2005, 2009) and Murray and Feeney (2009, 2010) have begun to explore the development of sociological analysis of Irish society in quite considerable detail. They have helped to describe and analyse the three main sources of early sociological knowledge: the state; the Catholic Church; and overseas writers, including sociologists and anthropologists. The next part of this chapter outlines these three sources in more detail. The combination of these three powerful influences – state, church and external influence – produced a landscape of sociology in Ireland that was quite distinctive for many years. By contrast, in Sweden sociology developed very much from the discipline of philosophy (Larsson, 2008), whereas in Latin America it emerged from the study of law, with a specific focus on nation-building (Pereyra, 2008, p. 269).

OFFICIAL KNOWLEDGE

The emergence of sociology in Ireland, particularly the generation of 'statistics', was, as in other countries, inextricably linked to the operation of government and the development of the modern nation state. The word 'statistics' originally related to the study of how a state should be organised and embraced the legal, educational, public health, welfare, criminal and economic aspects of society. It gradually came to mean, more narrowly, quantitative information or 'figures' as states began to collect ever more numerical data as a way to monitor and regulate populations.

The first population census in Ireland (a 'private census of Mr Dobbs') was attempted in 1732 (Kennedy, 2001, p. 10) and was followed by another in 1821. The year 1824 saw a detailed educational census and in 1847 the first agricultural census was carried out. In 1854 there was an exhaustive census of landholding (Griffith's Valuation) throughout the country. These statistical exercises were an important element in the colonial administration of the country.

The first association in Ireland devoted to empirical social inquiry, the Dublin Statistical Society, was formed in 1847. Fifteen years later it was renamed the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society (SSIS). It celebrated its 150th anniversary in 1997 and continues its work to the present day (Daly, 1997, 1998; www.ssis.ie). As Daly notes (1997, pp. 19–28), it was no coincidence that the Society was founded at the height of the Great Famine, which was a major challenge of governance to Britain's oldest colony.

An instrumental, state-sponsored view of social inquiry would have been widely

shared across 19th-century Europe, but for Ireland there was an additional factor: it was a colony of Britain and disruptive and difficult to control. As with military technology, the technology of social inquiry found colonial Ireland a good terrain on which to experiment. The early formation of the discourse of social inquiry in Ireland occurred in circumstances where it was deemed important not only to increase the rationality of the state, but also to increase its control over society.

The early membership of the Dublin Statistical Society was drawn from the city's affluent male professional and intellectual elite – lawyers, Trinity College academics, businessmen, senior Dublin Castle officials and leading members of the Church of Ireland (Daly, 1998, p. 2). Few were interested in statistical techniques as such. Rather, they believed that systematic and objective, or 'scientific', information would help to answer the great social questions of the day and suggest a direction for reformative action by the state. Daly describes them as people who were generally optimistic about how Ireland was progressing economically in the wake of the Famine and who tended to share the 'assimilationist' view that 'the best recipe for further prosperity was to bring Irish laws and administrative practices into line with those in England and Wales'. For Boylan and Foley (1992), the social scientific inquiry that the Society fostered was not a 'value free universalistic science', but a key part of the 'civilising' project launched by a colonial elite that aimed to transform Ireland into, as Archbishop Whateley put it, a "really valuable portion of the British Empire" rather than a sort of "morbid excrescence" (quoted in de Guistino, 1995, pp. 228–9).

During the first 25 years of its existence, the SSIS had a considerable impact on the United Kingdom's Irish legislation and on matters such as the management of poverty and of children in need. From the 1870s, its influence was undermined by the rise of nationalist and labour movement politics and none of those actively involved in these social movements was a member of the Society. Yet within a few years of the establishment of the Irish Free State, the SSIS was a significant political arena once again. It established close links with the new civil service and many senior public officials were active members (Daly, 1998, p. 4). Like its predecessor, the new Irish state continued to measure, count and analyse its population as part of its system of government. It found in the SSIS an appropriate forum for the generation of data and advice on the direction of policy.

By the 1950s the SSIS had become a prominent advocate of 'economic planning', particularly through the papers read to it and published in its *Journal* by T.K. Whitaker. By the 1960s, it was entering into 'a golden age ... Many views first aired at its meetings had now been accepted as official policy. Economics and statistics appeared to offer a blueprint for a modern and prosperous Ireland, precisely as the Society's founders had hoped in 1847' (Daly, 1998, p. 7). In the process, 'social inquiry' had become largely redefined as economic and statistical inquiry. Most of the papers presented to the SSIS came from economists and statisticians, especially those employed by government departments and semi-state bodies, the Central Bank and the Central Statistics Office (Daly, 1997, p. 165). The

marginalisation of sociology in the SSIS foreshadowed the marginal position it would occupy in the larger society but, simultaneously, it was also set free from the business of government to develop different understandings of its role and purpose.

Nevertheless, the instrumental and applied nature of social inquiry espoused by the SSIS strongly influenced the subsequent shaping of Irish sociology. With funding assistance from the American Ford Foundation, in 1959 the Society was central in the establishment of the Economic Research Institute (ERI). The foundation of the ERI was directly linked to the economic and social development in Ireland that was taking place under the 1960s Programmes for Economic Expansion (Murray, 2009, pp. 164–86). The ERI's early concerns – European integration, productivity and tariff protection – mirrored the concerns of the government of the day (Daly, 1997, p. 161). Despite this congruence, the ERI was explicitly 'non-political'. Following a review by the Danish social scientist Henning Friis (Jackson, 2004, p. 25; Murray, 2009, p. 180), it had 'social' added to its remit and became the ESRI in 1966. It became a key location for sociological research in the country and the chief employer of professional sociologists.

The ESRI has specialised in conducting large-scale social research that is predominantly numerical or quantitative in form. Research is addressed to issues seen as significant social or policy problems by the state and is undertaken with a view to making public policy and action more rational and effective. ESRI research has contributed in particular to our knowledge of class structure and mobility patterns in Ireland and of inequalities (particularly gender related) in access to education. The influence of the ESRI in defining what constitutes useful sociological knowledge has been felt in other state-funded research institutions such as Teagasc, the Health Research Board, the Educational Research Centre and the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). Over time, sociology has acquired a footing in all these sites, but what constitutes the discipline is fairly tightly defined.

In the new century the ESRI has continued to conduct policy-driven research, some of it in established fields where it has a well-merited international reputation, such as social mobility, poverty and disadvantage, education and labour market studies. It has also been active in areas that reflect the concerns of Ireland of the 2000s, such as immigration, sport, ageing, social capital and sexuality. It continues to have a strong influence on social research in Ireland, not least through the migration of some of its key sociologists to the universities, though it has had to engage in a much greater amount of externally funded activity.

SOCIOLOGY AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

In an analysis of the emergence of sociology in the West, Langer suggests that Catholicism has been less than helpful to the development of sociology, drawing attention to the comparative lack of development of the discipline in countries such as Austria and Spain. He argues that:

Catholicism always generated its own 'social theories' which are usually less individualistic and less complex than the dominating theories of sociology. On the other hand they have more normative implications ... when sociology developed in a Catholic milieu it was either occupied with the question of 'social order' (especially how to stabilise the state) or strongly empirically oriented (usually in a later stage). Sociology as the secularised self-consciousness of modern society did not flourish on Catholic foundations. (Langer, 1992, p. 5)

The development of a Catholic-influenced sociology in Ireland reflected aspects of the experience elsewhere. Sociology made sporadic appearances in academic circles in Ireland from as early as 1910, when it was taught in University College Dublin under the name of 'social philosophy'. Its adoption in the National University of Ireland reflected the interest in social ethics stimulated by the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and later by the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), 'with its concern for a counter to the trades unions and what was perceived as a drift on the part of the working class towards socialism and communism' (Jackson, 1998, p. 1).

In 1944 the Catholic Truth Society published Father Peter McKeivitt's book, *The Plan of Society* (McKeivitt, 1944). This textbook was intended to underpin the course in Catholic sociology at the Maynooth seminary, where the Knights of Columbanus had endowed a Chair of Sociology and Catholic Action in 1937. However, the book had very little to say about Irish society per se. It was based on an interpretation of aspects of European society in the context of papal encyclicals and on the works of prominent European Catholic writers, with references to a very small number of American and British sociologists. It also reflected the fact that apart from some state-derived statistical information, there was a dearth of indigenous sociological research within Ireland.

By the 1950s, the Catholic Church's interest in pastoral and community issues and its strong involvement in voluntary associations and voluntary service provision had led a number of its members to take an interest in the discipline of sociology. The Christus Rex Society organised the teaching of sociology to selected groups of religious in the late 1950s. It also published a journal, *Christus Rex* (renamed *Social Studies* in 1973), that became an important outlet for Irish sociological writing during the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, Catholic sociology continued to exert considerable influence through its role in journals, institutions and even the locations where sociologists met (Conway, 2006, pp. 13–15). It was also involved in adult education through the Dublin Institute of Catholic Sociology, founded in 1950 by Archbishop McQuaid and headed up by the Rev. James Kavanagh, author of the widely read text *Manual of Social Ethics* (Kavanagh, 1954), an outline of Catholic social thought on topics such as human rights, the family, private property, capitalism and communism. The Institute organised an annual Social Study Congress with prominent speakers (Conway, 2006, p. 14).

As in Spain (Langer, 1992, p. 12), clerics and former clerics were prominent as early sociologists in Ireland. Thirty years after the appointment of Father Peter

McKevitt at Maynooth, the first chairs in university sociology departments were also given to Catholic priests – at University College Dublin, where James Kavanagh (later to become Archbishop of Dublin) was appointed in 1966, and at University College Galway. Clerics with a strong interest in sociology, including Professor Edward Coyne and Father Bill McKenna, were also instrumental in the establishment and development of the Jesuit-run College of Industrial Relations, now the National College of Ireland (Kennedy, 2001, pp. 181, 205). The first lay professor of sociology in the Republic of Ireland, Professor Damien Hannan, was appointed to University College Cork in 1971 and the second, Professor John A. Jackson, came to Trinity College Dublin in 1974.

In Irish universities, in contrast to the research institutions, Catholic social teaching and philosophy heavily influenced sociology, particularly in terms of the ‘Catholic corporatism’ that had developed in other European societies such as Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. Whereas the positivist tradition in sociology inherited from the SSIS and similar organisations emphasised social research that served the state, the Catholic corporatist tradition focused on civil society. This referred to core institutions outside the state, for example the family, the community and the parish.

The relationship between the ‘Catholic’ and the ‘official’ elements in Irish sociology is interesting. Both tended to be positivistic and rather uninterested in theoretical issues and debates. Each took for granted that they could easily identify the proper objects of sociological research in the ‘real world’ (social problems) and tended to encourage empirical research rather than theoretical or conceptual development. Lynch (1987, p. 117), talking about the sociology of education, though her remarks can be applied to the discipline as a whole, suggests that ‘the Catholic view of the good – in terms of social order – has been transformed from being a religious ideal into a conceptual model of the world that purports to represent empirical reality’. Yet the perceived consumers of ‘official’ and ‘Catholic’ research were quite different in each case: for the former, the state and its agents; for the latter, ‘the people’, variously defined.

The extent to which early Irish sociology approached any form of social critique or defined social problems independently of a statist perspective was due to the influence of the Catholic tradition. It remains a discernible influence on the activities of bodies like Focus Ireland, Social Justice Ireland and the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice. Catholic social teaching, on the other hand, had provided considerable opposition to the enthusiasm among members of the SSIS during the 1940s for the introduction into Ireland of a British-style welfare state (Daly, 1998, p. 6; Kennedy, 2001, p. 192). There is also no doubt that some Catholic clergy sought to appropriate Irish sociology so as to prevent it from becoming a vehicle for the importation of socialist or Marxist ideas into Irish society.

FOREIGN VISITORS

Today we think of Ireland as a particularly globalised society, but in fact it has long been a society of interest to thinkers and writers across the world. After a period of historical neglect, the work in and on Ireland of some major international thinkers of the 19th century has begun to attract attention. The work on Ireland of writers such as Harriet Martineau, Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville is beginning to be explored, while there is a renewed recognition of the importance of Marx's and Engels's work on Irish society (Hazelkorn, 1980; Slater and McDonough, 2008; Ó Síocháin, 2009; see 'Marx on Ireland' below). Analysis of these works has helped to locate the analysis of Irish society within a broader sweep of European and American social and political analysis.

Martineau, de Beaumont and de Tocqueville visited Ireland in the first half of the 19th century (between 1831 and 1852) and reported on their experiences to an international audience: they 'applied a sociological lens to Ireland's then impoverished situation' (Conway, 2006, p. 10), which was of international interest. As we outlined in Chapter 1, Harriet Martineau is increasingly being recognised as a major founder of the discipline of sociology. Her writings spanned many topics and fields, but Ireland was a significant one. Her work can mainly be found in *Ireland: A Tale* (1832), which, like much of her other work, made use of the novel form to express her observations, and in *Letters from Ireland* (1852), based on a series of letters she dispatched from post-Famine Ireland to the London newspaper, the *Daily News* (Conway, 2006, p. 9).

In 1835 the French writer Gustave de Beaumont travelled to Ireland with his friend and fellow writer Alexis de Tocqueville, the celebrated author of *Democracy in America*. He returned in 1837 and two years later his observations and analysis of pre-Famine Ireland were published in two volumes as *L'Irlande Sociale, Politique et Religieuse*. This book was republished (in English) in 2006 with an introduction by Tom Garvin and Andreas Hess (2006), who describe it (p. vi) as 'one of the first sociological bestsellers in France'. De Beaumont was highly critical of the role of landowners in Ireland and noted the poverty and inequality brought about by an inequitable society. He argued that 'Ireland was to the United Kingdom what slavery was to the United States' (Garvin and Hess, 2006, p. xi). He prophesied 'the emergence of an Ireland of small owner-occupier farmers'. His book is 'a classic account of the painful birth pangs of Irish democracy, Ireland providing in miniature a model of the struggle for democracy against feudalism in Europe' (Garvin and Hess, 2006, p. xiii).

De Beaumont's analysis is reminiscent of anthropologist Clifford Geertz's notion of 'thick description', i.e. 'a wide range of readings and possible interpretations, usually derived from a broad variety of sources. Detailed note-taking, interviews with experts and other knowledgeable sources, direct observation, the collection and careful study of secondary sources such as journals, government reports, books and studies, as well as detailed notes from travel books and diaries, all contributed

to the final draft' (Garvin and Hess, 2006, p. xiv). Similar approaches were to be taken by the many anthropologists who subsequently visited Ireland.

Marx on Ireland

According to Slater and McDonough (2008), Marx had a far more complex understanding of the colonialisation of Ireland than can be accounted for by dependency theory. They develop this argument on the basis of a close examination of Marx's 1867 *Outline of a Report on the Irish Question to the Communist Educational Association of German Workers in London*, which was delivered during the height of Fenian activity in Britain.

In the case of Ireland, Marx argued that colonialism – from the Plantations to the 1860s – impacted on all aspects of Irish civil life, including political representation, the legal code between the landlord and tenant, the economy, the population structure, emigration, the ecology of agricultural production and the physical and mental health of the native population.

Marx's account implies that colonialism can violate the ecology of the colonised society as well as its economic, political and social integrity. Slater and McDonough argue that the control exercised by the colonising regime meant that a colonial agenda became inescapable. In the Irish case, the colonial agenda meant supporting a feudal landlord caste and a feudal mode of production.

Marx's account of Irish history indicates that there cannot be a general theory of colonialism, with a single 'prime mover', because colonialism depends on the conjunction of the forces operating in the political regime with those in the local economy and civil society. Marx provides the theoretical tools for conceptualising colonialism as a social process, making it possible to trace the *particular* colonial tendencies operating within a *specific* colonised society.

An important influence on the formation of Irish sociology has been the subsequent work of foreign sociologists and anthropologists, particularly the latter. Anthropology normally deals with 'other' societies perceived to be very different to our own. We are familiar with the idea of anthropologists leaving the Western world to go and inquire into the 'primitive' peoples of Africa or the South Pacific, but for anthropologists in Britain, Europe, the United States and Australia, Ireland itself often provided a suitably exotic, or even 'primitive', location for research, made even more attractive by the fact that the society was (mainly) English speaking. This generated a steady stream of anthropological researchers, from Browne and Haddon in the 1890s (Curtin and Wilson, 1989, p. ix) to Eipper, Wilson, Peace, Saris and others in the 1980s and 1990s, seeking to understand our mysterious ways (Wilson and Donnan, 2006).

The most influential of such anthropological research remains that by two American social anthropologists, Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball, conducted

in a farming locality in north Co. Clare in the early 1930s. The striking feature of their work, compared to other social research carried out in Ireland at that time or in the following 40 years, was that it addressed a problem set not by the state, church or any other 'external' body, but from within the discipline of anthropology itself (Byrne et al., 2001). Arensberg and Kimball, following the research practices developed in America by Lloyd Warner (in his 'Yankee City' studies) and Robert and Helen Lynd (*Middletown*, 1929), wanted to discover how communities work. How do people who live in them behave towards each other? How does this behaviour add up to a set of patterns or 'social system' that can reproduce itself over long periods of time, even when the individuals involved have gone and have been replaced by new ones? Warner and others had developed the idea that communities can be analysed as integrated systems made up of interrelated parts that are 'functionally interdependent'. They had tested this theory through research in American, largely urban, communities. Arensberg and Kimball wanted to see if the theory held true in a remote and isolated rural community. Their interest was not initially in Irish society at all but in testing and developing a theoretical idea about how societies should be understood.

We could thus locate Arensberg and Kimball towards the playful/intellectual end of the spectrum outlined in Table 2.1, but it was their detailed observations about rural Ireland that made the greatest impact on Irish social researchers. Almost inevitably, given how social inquiry has been understood in Ireland, they were seen to be writing about a 'social problem': small or marginal farming in the underdeveloped western periphery. Arensberg and Kimball's work set the agenda for sociological research into urban (Humphreys, 1966) as well as rural Ireland and the context for analyses of the 'modernisation' of Irish social and cultural development for much of the next 40 years. It was only in the 1970s that critical assessment and discussion of their approach began to take place, marking a watershed in the development of sociology as a discipline in Ireland (Tovey, 1992).

Sociology on the buses: The 1967 Tavistock Dublin Bus Study

In 1946, just one year after the Second World War, a London-based non-profit research institute under the title of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations was established to carry out empirical research on various aspects of industrial life in England. It conducted a range of studies of work and working lives ranging from the social organisation of employment in coal mines and textile mills to evaluation research. *Human Relations*, the journal of the research institute, provided an outlet for much of its published work.

Industrial unrest among Dublin bus workers in the 1960s provided the impetus for the then chairman of Coras Iompair Éireann (CIE), Todd Andrews, to enlist the help of the Tavistock Institute to better understand the factors influencing work morale among busmen in Dublin city. This was a period marked by industrial unrest in relation to a new 'one man one bus'

policy introduced by the national transportation company. The Tavistock study – based on interviews with drivers, union officials and managers carried out by five researchers and guided by socio-technical systems theories emphasising shared rather than hierarchical decision-making in work contexts – was envisaged to involve a data collection phase followed by a strongly practical-minded phase aimed at bringing about on-the-ground changes in industrial practices. Empirically, the study focused on the nature of the work of the Dublin bus drivers and their relations with managers and union officials. The findings of phase one confirmed what bus workers already knew – that morale was low and declining.

The second practical phase of the Tavistock study ran aground, however, as a result of the politics of research publication. Even when the partially completed study was published, media pundits and CIE representatives homed in on the study's dated empirical material. The wider – if neglected – lesson of the study was that it highlighted what it termed a 'privatisation' trend among Dublin bus workers by which was meant a tendency to put individual needs and interests ahead of those of the collectivity (Murray, 2005).

THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF IRISH SOCIOLOGY

By the 1970s, Irish sociology was becoming consolidated as a distinct discipline, developing the features, such as career paths, standardised curricula, organisations and publication outlets, that help to establish a field of academic endeavour. In this it was very similar to comparable countries, such as New Zealand (Crothers, 2008) and Sweden (Larsson, 2008). By the mid-1970s there were four or five sociologists in each of the departments in University College Dublin, University College Cork and Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and two in the Department of Political Science and Sociology at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) (Jackson, 1998). Lecturers in sociology began to be appointed to the teacher training colleges and the Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs). Publication outlets for sociological work were increasing. The *Economic and Social Review (ESR)*, a journal produced under the auspices of the ESRI, was first published in 1970. Though it published more papers from economists than from any other discipline (O'Dowd, 1988, p. 20), it did publish an increasing number of sociological papers over time. In 1973, *Social Studies* rose out of the ashes of the previous *Christus Rex* journal (Conway, 2006, p. 15).

The international influence continued to make itself felt. The ESRI employed a significant number of researchers who had received their sociological training abroad, especially in the United States. In the university sector, while many staff had taken a first degree in Ireland, virtually all had received postgraduate sociology training abroad (including later President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins). Staff

employed in the National University colleges had generally trained in America; in TCD the links were predominantly with Britain.

Both foreign and foreign-trained sociologists were instrumental in carrying out a form of 'technology transfer' in the importation to Ireland of (particularly) British and American models of sociological theorising and research. It could be argued that the development of sociology in Ireland was dependent, in a similar way that the sociology of other less powerful Western countries was, for example in Australia, Scandinavia and Canada. The sociology of the core countries, in particular the United States, the UK, Germany and France, has long dominated the development of the discipline in smaller peripheral countries. In the latter the resources devoted to sociology are comparatively small and these countries rely heavily on their 'big brothers'. This is especially the case when, as with Ireland and Britain, the similarities between the countries (not least linguistically) appear at least on the surface to be substantial. This may explain why Irish sociologists have long drawn on the work of those in the core economies (principally the UK and the US) rather than in countries that we may have more in common with economically, politically and socially, such as Finland, Austria or New Zealand.

American-trained sociologists working in Ireland largely adhered to structural functionalist theoretical models, while staff from Britain were largely followers of one or another variant of Marxism, which enjoyed a revival in Britain and Europe in the late 1960s and 1970s. During the following decade, other theoretical perspectives began to emerge and be used, such as symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and ethnomethodology. These interpretive approaches challenged both Marxist and functionalist realist worldviews. A growing interest in qualitative rather than quantitative methods, stimulated by feminist thought as well as by anthropology, challenged the dominance of positivist orientations in research. This theoretical and methodological pluralism stimulated new topics for research and new issues for debate. O'Dowd notes (1988, p. 4) that some sociologists feared that this 'hindered the development of the discipline' and, in particular, 'undermined its potential contribution to policy-making'. It seemed likely to alienate prospective funders who saw a discipline riven with internal controversies and arguments about its own theoretical assumptions and research practices.

A highly significant milestone in the institutionalisation of sociology was the establishment in 1973 of the Sociological Association of Ireland/Cumann Socheolaíochta na hÉireann (SAI). The SAI has carried out the normal range of activities of a professional association: hosting annual conferences and occasional seminars, maintaining a website (www.sociology.ie) and, from the 1990s, publishing an academic journal, the *Irish Journal of Sociology*. The impact of the SAI as a forum for debate and self-recognition has been invaluable. During its first decade, its conferences were the site of lively arguments that pitted Marxism against functionalism; modernisation theory against dependency theory; revisited Arensberg and Kimball and the conception of Irish 'peasant' society; or disagreed over how to interpret the place of 'community' in Irish life.

In the 1980s the SAI sought to further professionalise sociology. It established principles of employment for research workers and developed a research code of ethics. At one point the Association appeared to be moving towards becoming an exclusive professional body that would monitor and regulate the right to practise. This initiative raised issues about access to membership – which had always been very open – and there were stormy debates about the purpose of the SAI and, more broadly, of sociology itself. For some there was still the idea that the prestige of the discipline depended on its ‘relevance’ to society, defined in statist or social problems terms, while others were committed to a more critical and detached orientation.

An important contribution by the SAI to the consolidation of the discipline was its sponsorship of publication of the ‘Studies in Irish Society’ collections: *Power, Conflict and Inequality* (1982), *Culture and Ideology in Ireland* (1984), *Gender in Irish Society* (1986) and *Whose Law and Order? Aspects of Crime and Social Control in Ireland* (1988). It also commissioned two Irish sociology textbooks in 1986 and 1995. Together with Peillon’s *Contemporary Irish Society* (1982) and the ESRI book *Understanding Contemporary Ireland* (Breen et al., 1990), these texts were widely used in teaching and significantly shaped the development of Irish sociology.

IRISH SOCIOLOGY SINCE THE 1990s

In 1991, after a decade of economic stagnation, the Irish government agreed to make funds available for a programme of educational expansion in response to demographic and social pressures on third-level places. This supported the expansion of sociology across the tertiary sector and saw the emergence of more opportunities for graduate study in particular. At the same time, new sources of funds for research became available, mainly from the EU. For the first time, large-scale research became a possibility for Irish sociologists. After decades of state resistance (Murray and Feeney, 2009, 2010) government departments began to fund research either through the employment of researchers or by commissioning research from the universities and research institutes. Small, independent research consultancies were set up by sociology graduates and flourished in the new research climate. In 1995 the Royal Irish Academy set up a Social Science Research Council to support research projects and postgraduate training (Jackson, 2004, pp. 35–8).

In the late 1990s the billionaire Irish-American philanthropist Charles ‘Chuck’ Feeney, through his organisation Atlantic Philanthropies, pumped large amounts of money into the development of academic research in Ireland, significantly shifting Irish state policy in the process (O’Clery, 2007, p. 269). The resulting Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI) underpinned significant investment in social research, including sociology, through the establishment and funding of bodies such as the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), centred at NUI Maynooth; the Institute for the Study of Social Change at UCD; and the Institute for International Integration Studies at TCD. Since 1999 the state has funded scholarships for postgraduate social

research, thereby greatly expanding the opportunities for Irish students to conduct sociological research. Whereas formerly the narrowness of the funding base meant research had tended to be closely tied to specific policy issues (Lynch, 1999b, pp. 44–6), a more generous funding environment has led to the emergence of a broader approach to sociological research.

Though figures are hard to come by, sociologists have increasingly been employed in both the state sector and in private industry, such as market research and consultancy companies. Sociologists made a significant impact through the policy-oriented research programmes of state advisory and advocacy bodies such as the Combat Poverty Agency and the National Consultative Committee on Interculturalism and Racism (both bodies were closed down by the Fianna Fáil/Green coalition government in 2008–9) and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency (merged into the Health Service Executive in 2010).

The investment in research funding has seen the number of sociology books and articles published in and about Ireland significantly increase, reflecting the dynamic nature of contemporary Irish society. Subjects have included ‘established’ topics such as education, religion, inequality, housing, the family and community, but have also explored topics of popular interest such as globalisation and the mass media; Travellers and Irish society; immigration, multiculturalism and racism; sport; and sexuality. These issues continue to reflect matters that are of immediate concern to politicians, public servants and opinion formers: they might be interpreted as sociologists’ attempts to address public issues that have arisen in contemporary Ireland. But there have also been attempts to analyse the perhaps more everyday and mundane indicators of change in Irish society and culture, such as food and drink, traffic, popular music, public art, shopping and celebrity culture. The series published by the Institute of Public Administration, *Sociological Chronicles*, has provided a platform for this type of analysis in particular.

Despite this expansion of output, it is perhaps surprising that sociology has not really managed to establish itself within Irish life as a significant or stimulating guide to how that life is changing. While Langer (1992, p. 1) suggests that in Western society as a whole ‘sociology has become the most popular way for society to interpret itself ... firmly integrated into ... everyday communication’, in Ireland such influence seems to rest more clearly with historians, literary critics and, increasingly, psychologists. How then, with its history to date, should we evaluate the contribution that Irish sociology has made to Irish society? Does Irish society need Irish sociology at all?

Bonner (1996) has suggested that Irish sociology has been good at producing substantial factual knowledge about Irish society but has left questions of sociological theory largely unexplored. He reflects the claim of historian J.J. Lee (1989, pp. 562–643) that there has been an underdevelopment of philosophy or theorising in contemporary Irish life compared to our much stronger aesthetic and literary traditions. History and psychology are very popular ways to interpret reality, given their emphasis on the narrative and on the individual.

Similarly for Kane (1996, pp. 139–45), positivistic thinking has been endemic within Irish society. It has ‘shaped not only the social sciences, but official and public expectations about the nature of reality and what constitutes credible evidence as a basis for action’. The result is a ‘stultifying empiricism’; a sociology oriented towards ‘social engineering’ that has seen as its primary audience the state and, formerly, the Catholic Church. As a result, Kane argues, Irish sociology has emphasised pathology, crime and deviance; poverty and unemployment; violence, drugs and alcohol; the conditions of some minorities; and the problems of rural areas. These are all fields that ‘have symbolic and political resonance for both church and state’. A further consequence for Kane is that Irish sociology (like most others) studies ‘down, in class and power terms, rather than up’, with very little, if any, research being done on the powerful social groups in society. That is left to (a few) investigative journalists and, in recent years, various public tribunals of inquiry.

Kane contrasts this type of sociology with critical theory, which sees research as part of an attempt ‘to facilitate transformation towards a desired end’ (1996, p. 140). For critical theorists, knowledge is always embedded in its socio-historical context. They ask ‘knowledge for whom?’; ‘knowledge for what?’ Inquiry is thus ‘a political act’. Kane remarks that critical theory can also produce a top-down or paternalistic perspective on the subjects studied. It sees others as in need of truth and empowerment, not the theorists themselves. It ‘seeks to transform the world view of others, while failing to seek the insights of those whose thinking we are liberating to liberate our own’ (1996, p. 141). Kathleen Lynch has also been a major critic of contemporary Irish sociology from within the discipline and has urged sociologists to adopt an approach to research that empowers those researched and overtly addresses issues of power within the research process (1999b).

In the decade and a half since Kane and Bonner made their critiques of Irish sociology, there has been substantial growth in publishing in the discipline. The terrain of Irish sociological research and writing has expanded to embrace a more diverse and eclectic range of approaches, ranging from state-sponsored, large-scale quantitative research to more speculative, qualitative and interpretive work. Much of this work is outlined and discussed in the remainder of this book, though it is not possible to span the whole field and we have not had the space to consider some important work. Nevertheless, we would suggest that there is enough relevant and interesting contemporary research in Ireland to ensure that sociology remains a significant and valuable element of the social sciences, even if it sometimes has to struggle for its place in the sun.