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## Editorial

**Lisa Smyth and John Nagle**

Queen's University Belfast

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It has been an honour to work on this Anniversary Special Issue, in this first year of our tenure as Editors of the IJS. The enthusiasm for the project to reflect on the development of sociology over the last 30 years is evident from the contributions published here. We have benefitted enormously from John O'Brien's assistance and continued support.

This collection captures a sense of how sociology has come to understand its purpose and direction on this island. How the discipline's boundaries, always more porous and open than others (Holmwood, 2010), have been imagined and reimagined over time, is the focus of reflection in the pieces published here. Contestations over who carries authority have, no doubt, been as much evident within sociology as elsewhere. Contributions to this collection indicate the ways in which tensions and conflicts on this question have changed and been reformulated, as Ireland has secularised and diversified.

Sociology on the island operates of course under two different regimes, and the pressures of the audit culture may be more keenly felt north of the border. The social sciences in the North have tended to be dominated by the project of explaining the conflict and its consequences, in ways that have presented challenges for efforts to develop a broader perspective. The problems addressed by sociology in the North tend to be regarded as somewhat marginal in both the Republic and the UK. This reflects its treatment as 'a place apart', an exceptional context with little to offer the larger project of social explanation. While policy-focused research must of course work within jurisdictional boundaries, the mental border which equates jurisdictional with social boundaries has hampered efforts to develop a broader sociology. Todd's (2018) work linking processes of identity change in both parts of the island is one valuable exception.

The discipline has been shrinking in the North, as growing pressures to generate grant income have favoured more applied, interventionist work. Research has become ever more subject to institutional pressures to meet the strategic priorities of funders. Sean O Riain notes that this is also a growing feature of academic work in the Republic.

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### Corresponding author:

Lisa Smyth, Queen's University Belfast.

Email: [irishjsoc@qub.ac.uk](mailto:irishjsoc@qub.ac.uk)

PhD funding and career development have become increasingly tied to such interests across the island.

Nevertheless, as Inglis and others note, long-standing connections across this island and with other parts of the world have strengthened over the last 30 years. It may be that there are now more home-grown sociologists on the island, although facing limited career opportunities. Contributions to this collection focus on the ways in which sociology in and on Ireland has emerged and flourished through international connections, as many have received postgraduate education and employment in the US, UK, and Europe. However, the impact of Brexit and the prospect of a border poll pose new challenges for Irish society, similar to that experienced by many European societies after 1989. This is also a challenge for sociology. It might be time to begin thinking about how to respond.

This collection reflects the ways in which sociological work on shifting social relations on this island, and shifting conceptions of Ireland and Irishness, is flourishing. We look forward to how this is captured in the pages of this Journal over the next 30 years.

## References

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