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**THE IDENTIFICATION OF SCHOOLS
AND PUPILS AS DISADVANTAGED**

A Preliminary Assessment

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE

St Patrick's College, Dublin 9

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AND PUPILS AS DISADVANTAGED**

A Preliminary Assessment

Report to the Combat Poverty Agency

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March 1994

PREFACE

In January 1994, the Minister of Education approached through her personal advisor the Combat Poverty Agency to evaluate the criteria currently utilised for the designation of disadvantaged schools. Since then, the allocation of 50 additional primary and 60 additional post-primary teaching posts in 1994 have been announced in the *Programme for Competitiveness and Work*. The Agency has been asked to provide first a preliminary review of the existing scheme that would allow a judgement as to whether the scheme should continue to operate for another year under existing guidelines. An in-depth review should then be made available in time for the 1995/96 school year. In agreement with the Minister, the Combat Poverty Agency asked the Educational Research Centre to undertake the short-term review.

1. BACKGROUND TO TARGETING SCHOOLS IN DISADVANTAGED AREAS

At least since the publication of the *Investment in Education* report in 1966¹, the achievement of greater equality of educational opportunity has been on the Irish educational agenda. The report highlighted the extent and nature of educational inequality: the low rate of participation in post-compulsory education by children of lower social class, the higher rate of early school leaving from vocational schools where students were predominantly from working class backgrounds, and the small percentage of students from lower social classes that entered third-level education. As well as highlighting social inequalities, the report also drew attention to marked geographic inequalities of educational opportunity.²

Since the publication of *Investment in Education*, the Irish educational system has undergone major changes, notably the opening of the first comprehensive school in 1966, the introduction of free post-primary education and free school transport in 1967, the extension of public examinations to pupils in all types of post-primary school in 1967, and the raising of the school leaving age from 14 to 15 in 1972. Other changes aimed at reducing inequality of educational opportunity include the increased emphasis given to adult or second-chance education, the provision of preschool education for children in disadvantaged areas and the provision of increased capitation grants and additional teaching posts in schools in disadvantaged areas under the *Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage*.

The present paper is primarily aimed at reviewing the mechanism by which the assistance scheme is operationalised. This cannot be done, however, without some reference to the effectiveness of the scheme. There are many factors that contribute to the persistence of inequality of educational opportunity which may be related to the

¹ *Investment in Education* (1966). Report of the survey team appointed by the Minister of Education in October, 1962. Dublin: Stationary Office.

² To avoid giving a false impression it should be noted that addressing the inequality of educational opportunity was not the only focus of the report. A second emphasis lay on the need for the educational system to improve the output of vocationally trained students to provide the economy with a sufficiently skilled work force.

individual student, the family, the school and the area in which the student and/or the school is located. The emphasis on providing additional resources to disadvantaged *schools* attributes a particular importance to the school level of disadvantage, which may be argued on either educational or operational grounds. In a full-scale evaluation, the choice of targeting schools themselves would need to be substantiated. In the present commentary, however, the focus on the school as the appropriate institution of intervention is taken as given.

The development of available assistance to disadvantaged schools since the late 1980s is outlined in Section 2. The criteria utilised in the selection process are described in Section 3. To provide a background against which the resulting selection under the present Scheme can be compared, a brief summary of recent work on the identification of disadvantaged areas is undertaken in Section 4. In the first substantive part of the report (Section 5) the outcomes of the present identification of schools are compared with the recent area designation under the Operational Programme for Local Development. A brief commentary on the criteria and selection process of the Assistance Scheme is provided in the final section.

2. BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHEME

By the late 1980s, two separate schemes were in operation to assist schools in disadvantaged areas. These were

- (i) a scheme of financial aid;
- (ii) a scheme of additional teaching assistance.

The first of these schemes benefitted 164 primary schools, whilst additional teaching post were available to 68 schools under the second scheme. Following a submission by the INTO to Government in January, 1989, a working group was set up under the *Programme for National Recovery* (PNR) to examine and report upon the criteria by which designation under a unified scheme could be made operational.

As a result of the work of the group, discussions at the Primary Education Review Body, and negotiations at the review committee of the PNR, 95 additional teaching posts were allocated to primary schools in disadvantaged areas in the school-year 1990/91. At the same time an allocation of 60 teaching posts was made available to vocational, community/comprehensive and secondary schools.

Under the *Programme for Economic and Social Progress* (PESP) the number of designated primary schools was raised to 208 in 1991/92, and the number included in the post-primary sector was doubled. There were no additional allocations for 1992/93. In the school year 1993/94, however, an allocation of 50 additional posts was made to primary schools.

Of the 258 primary schools presently designated as disadvantaged, 147 (57%) are located in Dublin (comprising Dublin County Borough, County Dublin and Dun Laoghaire) and 57 (22%) are in the County Boroughs of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. The remaining 54 (21%) are in smaller towns and rural locations. Of the 120 post-primary schools designated as disadvantaged, 43 (36%) are located in Dublin, 14 (12%) in the other four County Boroughs, and 63 (53%) are in small towns and rural locations. The number of schools designated and their location are set out in

Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Schools included in Disadvantage Scheme

School Year	Primary Schools				Vocational, Community/Comprehensive and Secondary Schools			
	Dublin	other Urban	Rural	Total	Dublin	other Urban	Rural	Total
1990/91	128	40	14	182	22	3	35	60
1991/92	136	45	27	208	43	14	63	120
1992/93	136	45	27	208	43	14	63	120
1993/94	147	57	54	258	43	14	63	120

Within the post-primary sector there is a stronger emphasis on vocational and community/comprehensive schools which reflects the stronger representation of students from a lower socio-economic background in these types of school. About one quarter of vocational and community/comprehensive schools are designated as disadvantaged, while 10 per cent of secondary schools fall into this category.

All schools selected for inclusion in the Scheme currently receive a concessionary teaching post.³ Primary schools also receive an additional capitation fee of £17 per pupil (£5 for materials and equipment, £10 supplementary capitation, and £2 for home-school-community liaison initiatives). There are no additional capitation fees available to post-primary schools. The Minister, however, indicated in a recent press statement that with the next increase in capitation fees a small differential payment to disadvantaged schools may be introduced.

An important further component to address educational disadvantage is the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme. Currently 106 primary and 36 post-primary schools participate in that scheme. These schools effectively constitute a subset of those schools which are designated as disadvantage under the general scheme.

³ In some larger schools two additional post have been granted.

3. SELECTION CRITERIA

The Purpose of the Criteria utilised

Before looking at the selection process itself, it is important to keep in mind the purpose of the criteria utilised in this process. This can best be summarized in four key points made by the Working Group.⁴

- (i) The primary objective of the criteria is to identify those schools which serve areas of socio-economic disadvantage. "The schools in these areas, as a matter of day-to-day life, have to meet greater financial and other burdens than those faced by schools in more affluent situations. The first objective of provision for the disadvantaged is to help offset social and economic handicaps of these schools."
- (ii) While the Working Group acknowledged that in all areas, whether disadvantaged or not, there will be some more and some less effective schools, it nevertheless held that more effective schools should not be discriminated against.
- (iii) The Working Group believed that, in principle, it should be possible to establish objective criteria for the identification of schools servicing disadvantaged areas.
- (iv) The Working Group was of the opinion that there could be no absolute "disadvantage line" below which schools would automatically be able to claim assistance. Rather, it saw the question of cut-off points above which intervention would take place as being related to the resources that could be made available in any one year.

Given the Scheme's emphasis on assistance to schools in disadvantaged areas, the best

⁴ Working Group on Criteria for Identifying Schools in Disadvantaged Areas, February, 1990.

indicator for identifying schools would obviously be an area index of relative deprivation. "If a suitable indicator were available for a (small) local area it would be possible either to attribute its value to any school located in that area or to calculate an index for the school as a weighted average of the local area or areas which the school serves." (*ibid*) In the absence of such an indicator, the Working Group saw as the only alternative the development of an indicator based on data collected from the schools themselves.

The Criteria

Usually in early April of each year, the Department of Education invites schools to apply for funding under the Scheme. In 1993, over 1,100 primary schools responded to this invitation.

To apply for inclusion in the scheme, principals or boards of management of post-primary schools are requested to supply the following information. (Questions 1-6 apply to 1st-year pupils only.)

- Q.1 Number of pupils whose parents are in receipt of either unemployment assistance or benefit.
- Q.2 Number of pupils living in (a) rented local authority houses; (b) rented local authority flats; and (c) non-permanent accommodation.
- Q.3 Number of pupils from deprived rural backgrounds.
- Q.4 Number of pupils whose parents hold a medical card.
- Q.5 Number of pupils living in single-parent families.
- Q.6 Number of pupils who would be unable to cope with everyday demands if they were to leave school now.
- Q.7 Average proportion of pupils that drop out of school at or about age 15, without any formal educational qualification.

Based on the information returned, an overall index of disadvantage is calculated, taking the following weightings into account: Question 6: 500; Question 1: 400; Questions 2 and 3: 300, and Questions 4,5 and 7: 200. In addition to this, a maximum

of 400 points was set aside for "Judgment". These points could be applied to schools by the Department, having regard to circumstances in the schools being considered.

In the primary sector, a simplified questionnaire is utilised, comprising the following questions:

- Q.1 the proportion of pupils at entry grade in the school whose families reside in local authority housing;
- Q.2 the proportion of pupils at entry grade whose families hold a medical card;
- Q.3 the proportion of pupils at entry grade whose parent(s) are in receipt of unemployment benefit or assistance.

Where the number of pupils at entry grade is below 20, schools are requested to provide data in respect of all pupils in the school.

As in the post-primary sector, a weighted aggregate is derived from this information which also includes a small element (100 points out of 1000) of assessment by the relevant school inspector.

Before assessing the outcome of this selection process, the following section will provide a brief summary of recent work undertaken to identify the most disadvantaged areas throughout the country.

4. RECENT WORK ON THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF POVERTY

For the first time, the *National Development Plan*⁵ for the years 1994 to 1999 contains a separate operational programme for local development. The objective of the Local Development Programme is to revitalise the most disadvantaged areas experiencing the highest levels of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion and to assist with the reintegration of these communities and the people that live in them back into the economic, social and cultural mainstream. This is hoped to be achieved by targeting additional resources (both EC and national) on the most disadvantaged communities and by coordinating the efforts of government, social partners and local voluntary and community groups into a planned and integrated programme of partnership action which will address the multi-dimensional nature of the problems facing these areas.

The Local Development Programme states that areas which will be included under the initiative will be selected on the basis of some objective criteria of disadvantage. The Combat Poverty Agency, in conjunction with the ESRI and GAMMA (Geographical and Multi-Media Applications Ltd.), has undertaken substantive work on the identification of disadvantaged areas to facilitate the process of identifying areas for inclusion in the Local Development Programme. As this work is highly relevant to the scheme under review in this report a brief outline of the methodological approach taken in this work is provided here. In the following section (Section 5), the areas identified as being the most disadvantaged will then be compared with the location of the schools selected for inclusion in the Assistance Scheme. Relevant maps are included in the Appendix.⁶

⁵ Government of Ireland (1993). *National Development Plan 1994-1999*. Dublin: Stationary Office.

⁶ It should be noted that the final selection of areas for inclusion into the Local Development Programme is still under review. However, changes are likely to be minor and do not affect the measurement of the degree of disadvantage, but are more concerned with how clusters of disadvantage can meaningfully be aggregated into Partnership areas suitable for policy intervention.

Approach taken

Although obviously one of the most significant factors associated with disadvantage, unemployment rate alone is not an adequate indicator of the underlying disadvantage of an area. The reason for this is that long-term adverse labour market conditions may assert themselves through factors other than the unemployment rate, particularly the thinning out of the working age population as a result of the selective processes of outmigration and hidden unemployment in the form of on-farm underemployment. Following extensive work by James Williams for the Combat Poverty Agency⁷, a combination of eight variables from the 1986 Population Census were used to identify the overall degree of disadvantage of any area. These are:

- (i) the percentage of persons in higher or lower professional classes
- (ii) the percentage of persons leaving school at 20 years of age or over
- (iii) the percentage of persons leaving school at 15 years of age or under
- (iv) the percentage of persons in the unskilled manual class
- (v) the unemployment rate
- (vi) the percentage of persons in small scale farming (defined as 30 acres or less)
- (vii) the labour force participation rate, and
- (viii) the age dependency rate

As Volume II of the 1991 Census of Population (labour market statistics) had not yet become available, analysis had to be undertaken on the basis of the 1986 Census. This meant that information on housing could not be included due to lack of coverage in that Census. Nevertheless, comparison of the methodology and results with the CODAN study⁸ suggests that the inclusion of housing variables would not have significantly altered the outcome of the analysis.

There were two stages involved in identifying the most disadvantaged areas. The first involved identifying District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) which were particularly disadvantaged on the basis of a multivariate analysis. The second stage involved the delineation of clusters of disadvantaged DEDs identified in the first stage. Whilst the first stage essentially provides a means by which to identify disadvantage along

⁷ James Williams, *Spacial Variations in Deprivation Surrogates - A Preliminary Analysis*, Report submitted to the Combat Poverty Agency, February 1993.

⁸ Sean O Siochru (1987). *County Dublin Areas of Need*, Vol. I and II. Dublin County Council.

objective criteria, the second stage was inevitably more subjective in character.

The identification of disadvantaged areas

Using the eight variables above, a factor analysis was undertaken at the DED level to identify underlying factors.⁹ The factor loadings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Results from the Factor Analysis of Poverty-Related Variables

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
HILOPROF	-.85	.01	.26
SC20GT	-.80	-.01	.22
SC15LE	.80	-.12	-.19
UNSKILL	.51	.68	.11
UNEMP	.51	.66	.12
SMALLFARM	.51	-.63	-.20
LFPART	-.39	.17	-.79
AGEDEP	.53	-.38	.45
% Variance	40.2	18.7	13.7

Broadly speaking, one can refer to the first factor as representing demographic characteristics and the second as representing labour market characteristics. Together, those two factors explain 58.9 per cent of variance. The third factor, driven primarily by the labour force participation rate, was excluded in the further analysis, since it exhibited high values both in very prosperous and very disadvantaged DEDs/Wards and therefore could not be clearly linked to the overall degree of disadvantage.

To derive a single indicator for the overall disadvantage of each individual DED, the 3438 DEDs were ranked and demographic and labour market deprivation decile rank scores were assigned to each of them; a score of 1 indicated an area in the least disadvantaged decile of DEDs and a score of 10 indicated an area within the bottom decile.¹⁰ The two factor rank scores were then added without further weighting, since

⁹ The analysis involved a principle component analysis with varimax rotation. Methodologically it repeated the analysis undertaken by James Williams at the level of Rural Districts (see Footnote 7) for the 3438 DEDs.

¹⁰ This approach was chosen rather than using actual factor scores for two reasons: (a) The frequency distributions of the actual factor scores were expected not to exhibit a normal distribution and, when combining the two scores, the aggregate score could not have been meaningfully interpreted. (b) It was felt

both factors were considered to be of equal importance. Hence, an area which is relatively prosperous will show a low score (a minimum of 2 for the combined demographic and labour market factors), while an area which is highly deprived on both counts will exhibit a maximum score of 20. The quintile distribution of the aggregate deprivation decile rank scores was then mapped on a single map for the whole country, with enlarged maps being provided for Dublin and the other four County Boroughs. The bottom quintile includes all those DEDs that score 15 or more in their aggregate decile factor rank score. These "most disadvantaged areas" contain 19.5 per cent of the total population and 32 per cent of the nation's unemployed.

Delineation of clusters of disadvantage

Ideally, the next stage would have involved the application of a cluster algorithm to the individual decile factor rank scores derived for each DED to identify clusters of deprivation. However, existing programmes for cluster analysis do not allow the simultaneous application of taxonomic and geographical contiguity constraints. Thus an alternative approach was adopted which involved a one-day workshop in which a panel of experts with broad knowledge and experience of local development was brought together. The results from this workshop are reflected in the subsequent proposals made by the Combat Poverty Agency to the Department of the Taoiseach and are documented in the Appendix.

It is important to stress that, whilst local knowledge played an important role in discussing the feasibility of Partnership areas in terms of their overall size and their likely boundaries, the identification of the potential areas in the first place originates from an analysis based on objective criteria. Furthermore, the boundaries of the suggested Partnership areas were seen as preliminary, as they cannot be ultimately defined without the consultation of local actors to take account of prevailing administrative and community entities.

that the use of actual factor scores would give too great an importance to the exact value which was unwarranted, given the use of 1986 data.

5. COMPARISON OF SCHOOLS DESIGNATED AS DISADVANTAGED WITH AREAS INCLUDED IN THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Outcomes in the Designation of Dublin Primary Schools

Given the short time available to prepare an initial commentary on the present mechanism for the designation of disadvantaged schools, it was not possible to prepare a comprehensive review of the location of all disadvantaged schools and their respective area characteristics. The reasons for this limitation are as follows:

(a) Identifying the District Electoral Division (DED) or Ward into which a school falls requires considerable local knowledge. School addresses often lack road or street names and, outside Dublin, Ordnance Survey maps of sufficiently detailed scale are considerably dated. To undertake a correct location by DED/Ward of all primary and post-primary schools constitutes a considerable task of its own.

(b) While in the case of primary schools one can reasonably assume travel-to-school distances to be relatively short, at post-primary level, schools tend to cater for a number of DEDs/Wards and, in the extreme case, may have no linkage to their local area at all. In such cases school characteristics could not be inferred from knowledge of any one area, but would have to be based on knowledge about the proportions of pupils from all the areas that are served by the school.

For these reasons, the analysis undertaken was confined to the locational characteristics of designated primary schools in Dublin. This, however, covers a majority (57%) of all primary schools designated under the Scheme.

In the combined areas of Dublin City, County Dublin and Dun Laoghaire, 147 out of a total of 410 primary schools (36%) are designated disadvantaged.¹¹ This may be compared with the 95 out of 322 DEDs (30%) in the same area which fall into the category of greatest deprivation under the Local Development Programme. These areas

¹¹ This figure excludes a further 49 special schools which are not included in the Assistance Scheme.

cover about one-third of Dublin's population. Hence, the present level of inclusion into either programme is of similar magnitude.

It is reassuring that the present scheme of school designation mirrors to extraordinary extent the designation of areas for inclusion under the Local Development Programme. Of all designated primary schools in the Dublin area, 10 (90%) fall within the designated Partnership areas. A further 10 (7%) fall into pockets of disadvantage, mainly in South County Dublin which, though possibly not included in a full Partnership, are nevertheless recognised in the Local Development Programme.

Of the 133 designated schools within Partnership areas, 115 (86%) fall within those DEDs/Wards that suffer greatest disadvantage (a score of 15 or more). The remaining 20 schools are located in adjacent DEDs and seem to cater largely for these very deprived areas. (This, for example, was the case in the South Inner City and Cabra, where a number of schools are located just outside the most deprived DEDs).

In total, only 13 or 14 (3%) of all Dublin primary schools located in DEDs of greatest disadvantage are not designated. These were located as follows: Ballyfermot (3), Crumlin-Kimmage-Walkinstown (2 or 3), Tallaght (2), North Inner City (4), South Inner City (1), and Kilbarrack (1). Clearly, at least for Dublin primary schools, it would be wrong to claim that a large number of schools serving disadvantaged areas are not included in the Scheme.

Designation of Primary Schools in other Urban and Rural Locations

Given the different methodologies underlying the designation of schools and local areas, the degree of concurrence in the outcome for Dublin primary schools is encouraging. However, it is unlikely that this "goodness of fit" will equally apply to schools and areas outside Dublin.

The less urban an area is, the less homogeneous its social composition tends to be. Within Dublin City, both affluent and disadvantaged areas are relatively well defined

and also tend to coincide with common perceptions. In the periphery of Dublin, distinctions already become less clear. Blanchardstown, Clondalkin and Tallaght essentially resemble other County Boroughs and smaller urban centres in that they comprise both a number of highly disadvantaged as well as some more prosperous DEDs/Wards. In these areas the possibility arises that schools could be selective in respect of the population which they are serving.

In rural areas the problem becomes further compounded by the greater variability in school size. In areas of low population density, disadvantage may be concentrated within a small, disadvantaged school. Alternatively, at-risk pupils from such an area may be subsumed within a larger school which caters for a number of localities of different levels of needs. The latter point becomes particularly relevant in the case of post-primary schools which tend to be larger in size and to serve more extensive rural areas.

Without knowledge of the exact location of schools outside Dublin, it is difficult to judge what proportion of pupils outside Dublin who reside in most disadvantaged areas attend schools included in the Assistance Scheme. However, only 111 (less than 4%) primary schools outside Dublin are included in the Scheme. This compares with nearly 20 per cent of DEDs outside Dublin which fall into the category of most disadvantaged DEDs. This at least suggests that the Scheme is characterised by a major urban bias.

In the post-primary sector, the problem of very small, dispersed rural schools is not as pronounced as in the primary sector. Typically, it is the closest town which provides the post-primary school for the rural hinterland. This makes it easier to include schools in the present scheme and, indeed, over half (63) of post-primary schools are located in small towns and rural areas.

Whether it will be possible to derive an adequate identification of disadvantaged post-primary schools from area statistics will greatly depend on how significant travel-to-school distances are. The main point being made here is that the coverage of

disadvantaged schools according to the present criteria seems to differ considerably for primary and post-primary schools. Given the importance of early intervention, this seems to point to the need to develop a distinct component to assist primary schools in disadvantaged rural areas and small towns.

6. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE CRITERIA AND SELECTION PROCESS OF THE ASSISTANCE SCHEME

Following a brief review of the Scheme and initial consultation with relevant personnel in the Department of Education with responsibility for overseeing its implementation, the following observations and comments can be made.

(i) Appropriateness of assisting schools servicing disadvantaged areas

In their recent study on Poverty and Policy in Ireland¹², Brian Nolan and Tim Callan of the ESRI state that while they have a role in targeting disadvantaged areas, policies that narrowly focus on black-spot areas will inevitably fail to serve the majority of the poor. Though their study is related to unemployment and poverty, the point equally applies to the Scheme under consideration here. In the short time available it was not possible to estimate the exact figure of at-risk students who, even if disadvantaged areas were optimally targeted, would be catered for under the Scheme. But from the available evidence on the designation of areas for inclusion under the Local Development Programme, one has to conclude that only 35% to 40% of students from a disadvantaged background would be included in the Scheme.

This is not to say that schools in disadvantaged areas do not deserve special assistance. However, a scheme which concentrates on the most disadvantaged areas is not a substitute for structural support of at-risk pupils throughout the whole educational system and can only be regarded as a supporting scheme *to offset the additional handicaps resulting from the cumulative effect of the multiple disadvantage experienced by people living in those areas.*

It is very important to keep this point in mind. Unrealistic expectation as to what the Assistance Scheme may achieve can lead to an underestimation of the true benefits of the Scheme. These are seen to lie in compensating for (a) the greater financial burdens of disadvantaged schools in their day-to-day running, (b) the lack of voluntary

¹² Brian Nolan and Tim Callan, eds. (1994). *Poverty & Policy in Ireland*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan.

contributions that can be sought from parents, and (c) the greater strain on teachers that are dealing with compounded disadvantage on an ongoing basis. However, in the absence of a full-scale evaluation it is impossible to identify where exactly the Scheme makes a valuable contribution and where it does not. This is particularly relevant to one aspect of the Scheme. Inclusion in the Assistance Scheme should allow schools to be more innovative in developing appropriate responses to the needs of pupils from disadvantage backgrounds. If this was further encouraged and properly evaluated, it could provide an important stimulus for the development of the educational system as a whole.

(ii) Appropriateness of current indicators

The outcome of the present selection process has been dealt with in the preceding section. Here, I concentrate on the choice of indicators themselves.

The strong concurrence in the outcomes of the school designation and area designation approaches in the Dublin area suggests that the criteria utilised are identifying the same underlying factors that contribute to deprivation. From the multivariate analysis described in Section 4, we know that these underlying variables are highly inter-correlated and can effectively be described by two factors, one representing demographic characteristics and one representing acute labour market disadvantage. As the latter factor, which closely resembles the criteria utilised for the designation of schools, is the dominant factor in urbanised environments, the concurrence in the outcomes of designation within the Dublin area comes as no surprise.

Problems arise, however, when trying to establish what constitutes rural deprivation. To give an example: At the county level, Roscommon has the lowest unemployment rate in the country. Nevertheless, the county is one of the more disadvantaged regions. The reason for this perceived contradiction is that prolonged adverse labour market conditions in rural locations tend to result in strong outmigration and hidden unemployment in the form of agricultural under-employment. The area designation for the Local Development Programme attempts to capture these diverse forms of deprivation through the use of multivariate analysis.

How similar considerations can be used for educational purposes is a difficult question. Outmigration is strongest amongst core working-age cohorts, which are also the core cohorts with school-going children. Hence, in the extreme case, rural deprivation could be characterised not by the presence, but the absence of children from deprived backgrounds. At the local level, this may be exemplified by rapidly falling enrolment numbers and a threat to school survival.

If the present scheme aspires to be one that will assist schools *in disadvantaged areas* throughout the country, a distinct rural component will have to be developed as part of the scheme, even if the number of pupils in any one school is very small. In its present form, the criteria undoubtedly have an underlying urban bias.¹³

(iii) Appropriateness of current procedures

The process by which principals currently apply for inclusion in the scheme is very labour intensive. At the same time, results are not always completely reliable and, at times, result in contradictory outcomes. (This, for example, happens when a senior school is not included but the junior school is.) Clearly, schools which serve identical populations should be treated equally. Further, the present system is not very transparent. The mere fact that more than four schools apply for any one school designated shows that principals or boards of management find it difficult to judge for themselves whether or not they would be eligible under the Scheme.

There is a strong preference for the establishment of criteria which would build upon data which are either available from the Census or are routinely collected by schools, or a combination of both. Work undertaken in the context of the Local Development Programme has brought forward the identification of areas which suffer multiple disadvantage. Given the strong concurrence between schools currently designated and areas designated for area partnerships, a strong case could be made for bringing the scheme fully in line with those area designations.

¹³ Note that, throughout the paper, the term "rural" refers to essentially "non-urban" areas and comprises all areas exclusive of Dublin and the county boroughs of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. A rural component is hence seen to cover disadvantaged rural areas inclusive of towns and villages.

This would also be in line with the increased importance given to the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme which, by its very nature, acknowledges the importance of the wider family and community influences on a student's educational achievement. The *Green Paper on Education* and the *Programme for Competitiveness and Work* both renew government commitment to this wider approach in addressing educational disadvantage.

If such a process was followed, it would not be possible to review the degree of underlying disadvantage on an annual basis, nor would it seem to be necessary to do so. The whole rationale for targeting designated areas through a specific programme is based on the assumption that the areas face problems of a scale which are not easily overcome within a short period of time. Indeed, analysis confirms that the areas characterised by deep-rooted disadvantage have changed very little over the past ten to twenty years.¹⁴ A five-year funding commitment (for example for the duration of the National Plan) seems to be an appropriate framework to allow schools to develop long-term strategies in combating disadvantage.

(iv) Evaluation of use of additional resources

It is well established by now, that any scheme which targets black-spot areas will always cater for only a portion of those pupils who need special attention. This problem cannot be overcome by an ever-finer tuning of the criteria which are used in the designation of schools or areas. Hence, the main requirements for the selection criteria are to be able to identify the most deprived areas, to be consistent and to be transparent. Beyond this, selection criteria cannot be improved without actually knowing what the educational effects of the present provisions are.

As already mentioned, no evaluation has been undertaken to assess the effects of the

¹⁴ See for example Agnes Breathnach, 1976, "Towards the Identification of Educational Priority Areas" in *Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 7, pp376-384 and Sean O Siochru *et al*, 1987, *County Dublin Areas of Need*, Vol I and II. The areas identified as being disadvantaged in both of these studies coincide to a remarkable extent with the areas identified in the study by the Combat Poverty Agency. This is despite the use of different Census of Population, differences in the total areas covered by the analysis, and considerable variations in methodology. This suggests, that the results are remarkably robust and are sustained over long periods of time.

present Scheme. The programme of special measures was last evaluated in the school-years 1985/86 and 1987/88. Since then the Scheme has grown considerably in size, both horizontally and vertically. A notable exception is the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme which is the subject of an ongoing evaluation. Important questions, however, need to be asked about the working of the Assistance Scheme as a whole. How can the additional resources be put to use most effectively? How innovative are schools in developing initiatives that meet the special needs of children for whom the school constitutes an environment to which they have difficulty in adapting? What are the needs of teachers for in-service training and psychological and resource backup?

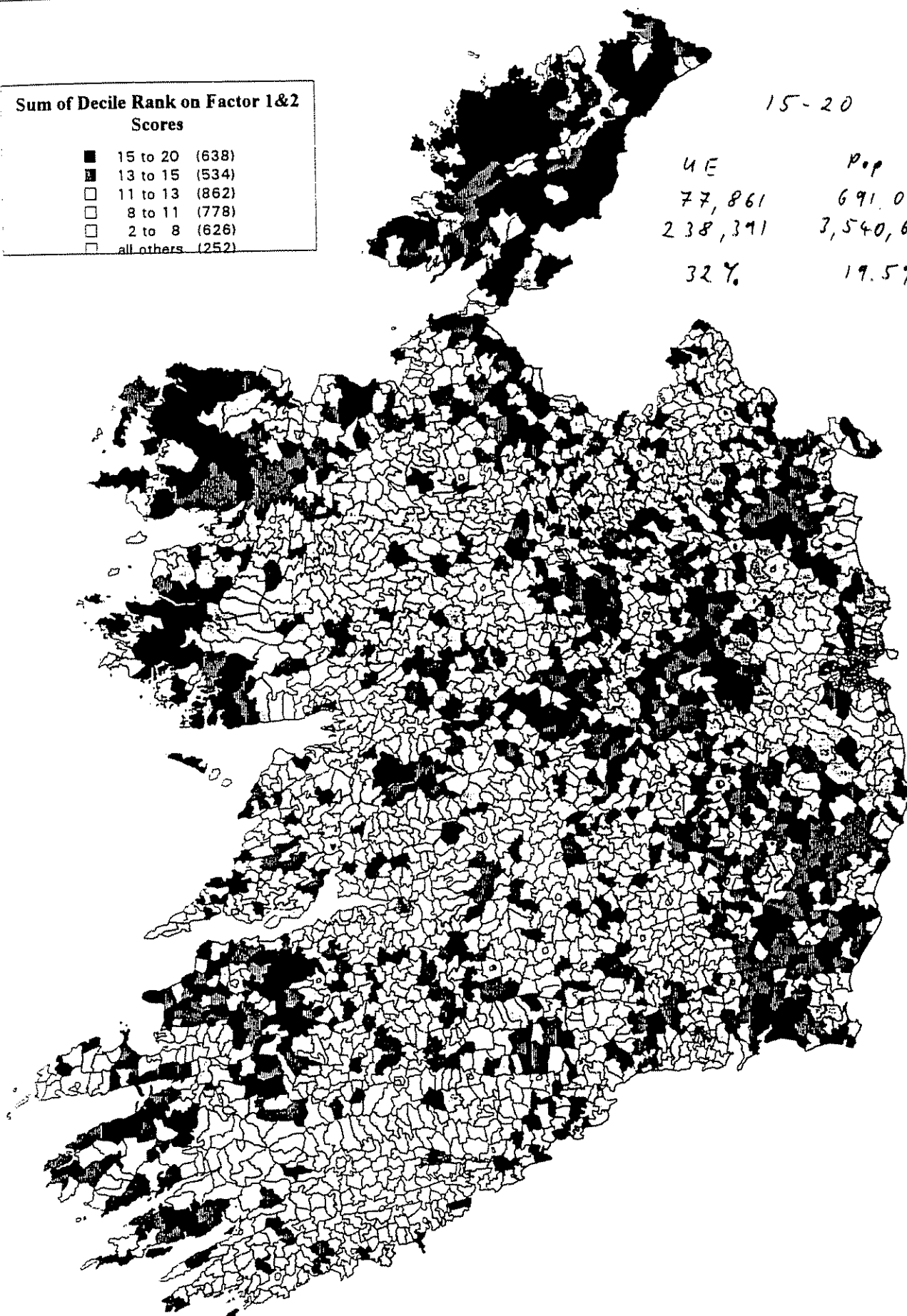
The point being emphasised here is that it is not possible to improve criteria for selection into programmes independently of an evaluation. Although the targeting of the most disadvantaged students is an important element in an overall strategy to provide students with greater educational opportunities, recent research also indicates that the school on its own is limited in what it may be able to do to enhance the educational achievement of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, greater attention may need to be given to initiatives that attempt to influence the wider environment in which student's development takes place and the decision to establish a scheme that focuses on schools servicing disadvantaged areas rather than on individual schools or even pupils may be defended not only on operational but also on educational grounds.

Sum of Decile Rank on Factor 1&2
Scores

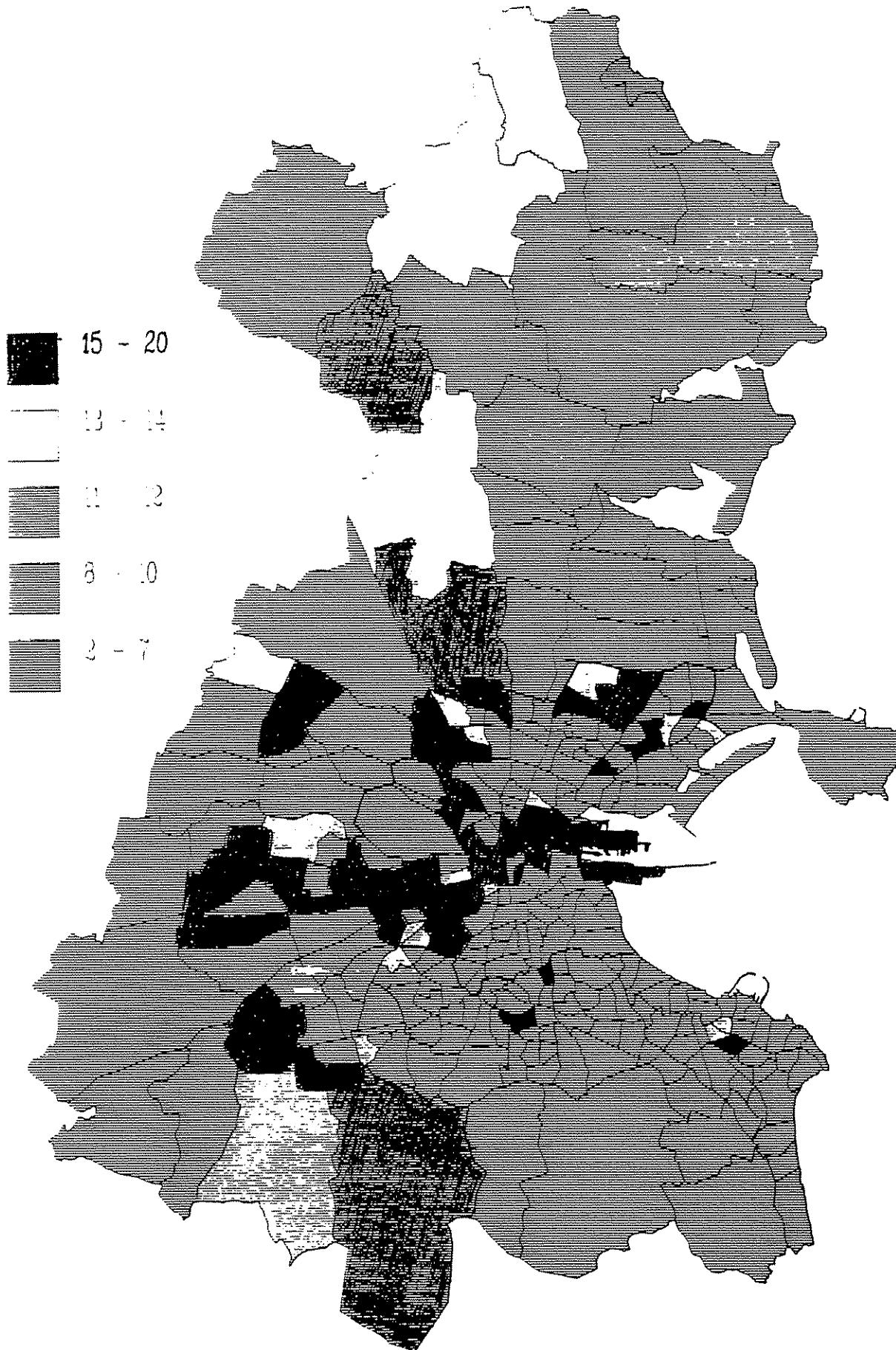
■	15 to 20 (638)
▨	13 to 15 (534)
□	11 to 13 (862)
□	8 to 11 (778)
□	2 to 8 (626)
□	all others (252)

15-20

UE	Pop
77,861	691,036
238,391	3,540,643
32%	19.5%

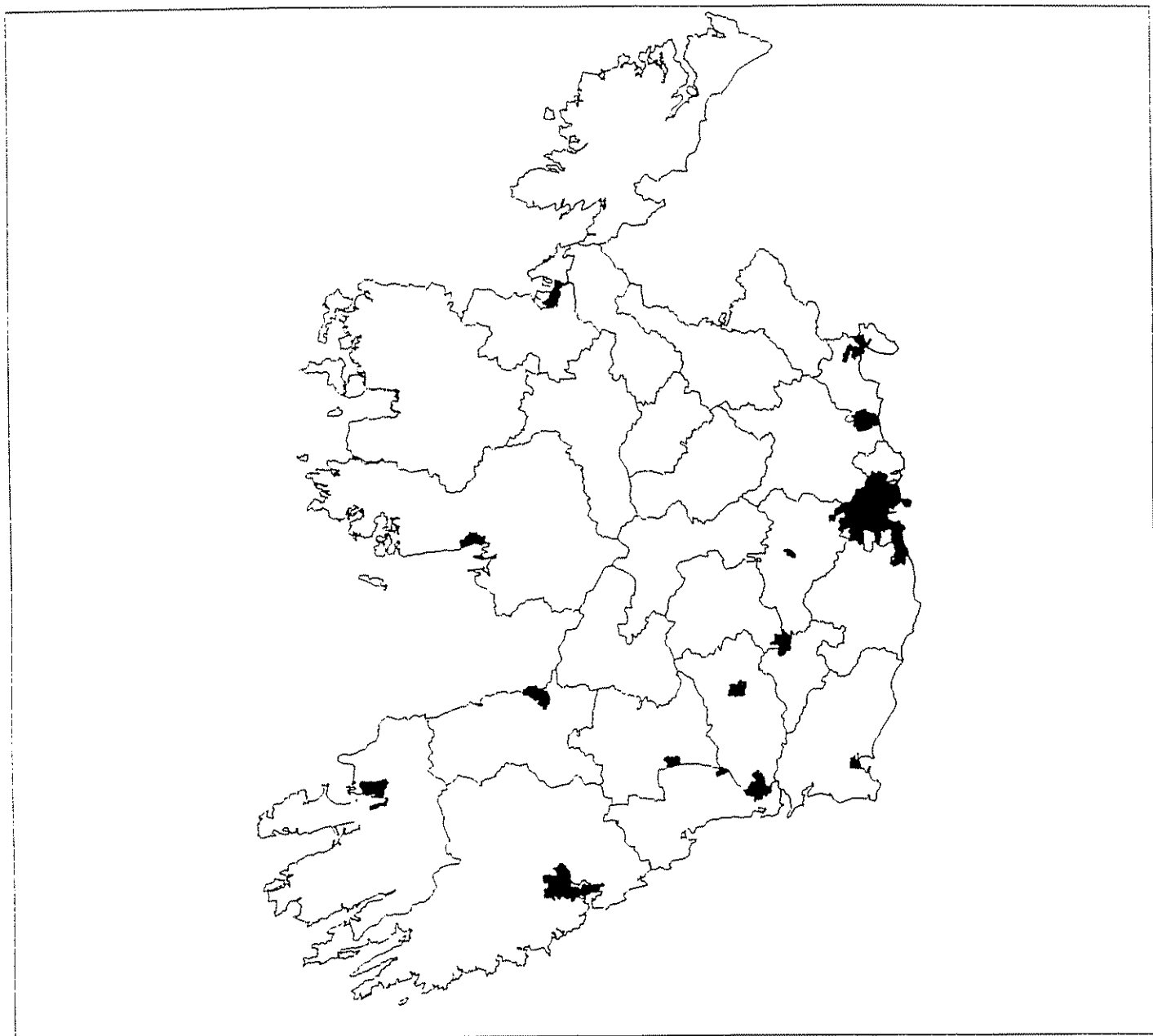


Underlying Demographic and Labour Market Deprivation Dublin



* measured in combined unweighted ranks of factor scores.

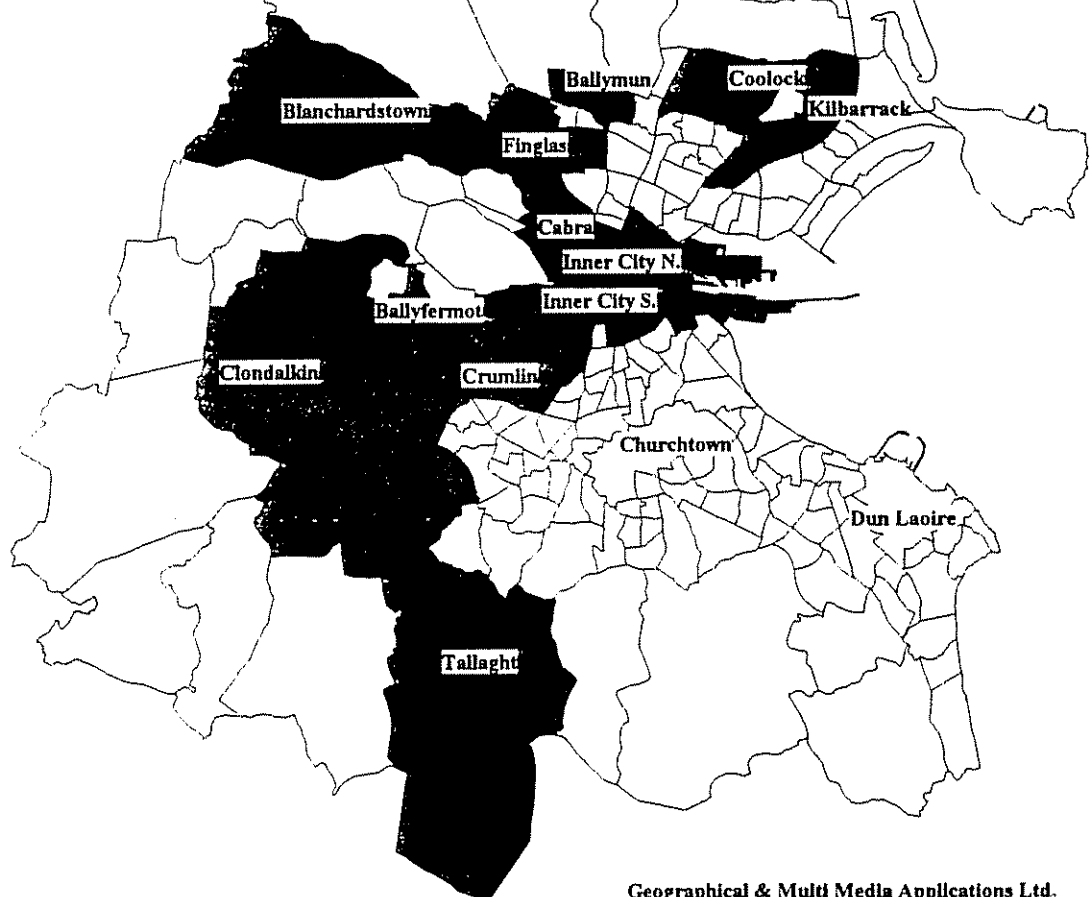
Zones with more than 1000 Unemployed within 5 Kilometers



Proposed LDC Areas

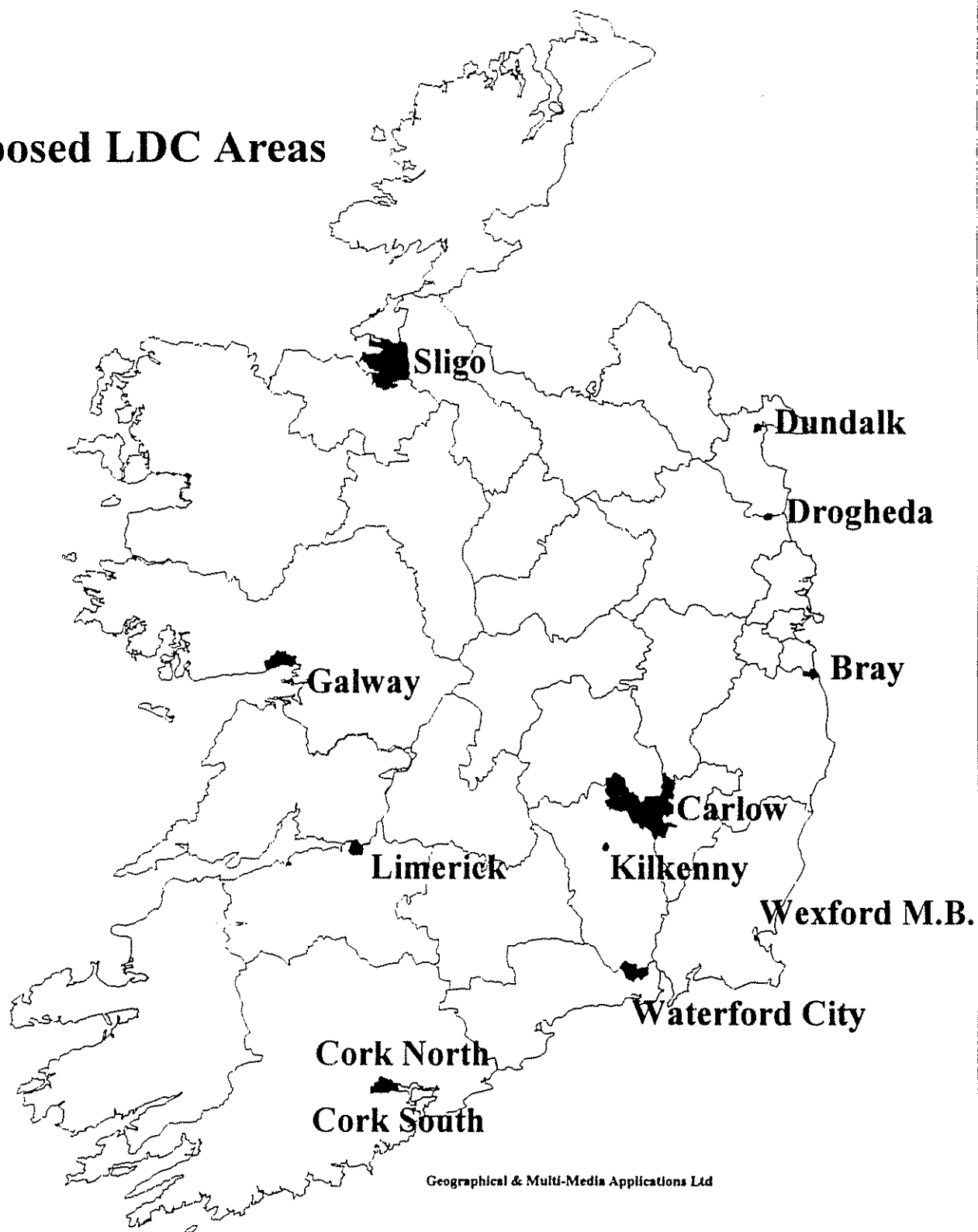
Key

- Proposed
- For Consideration

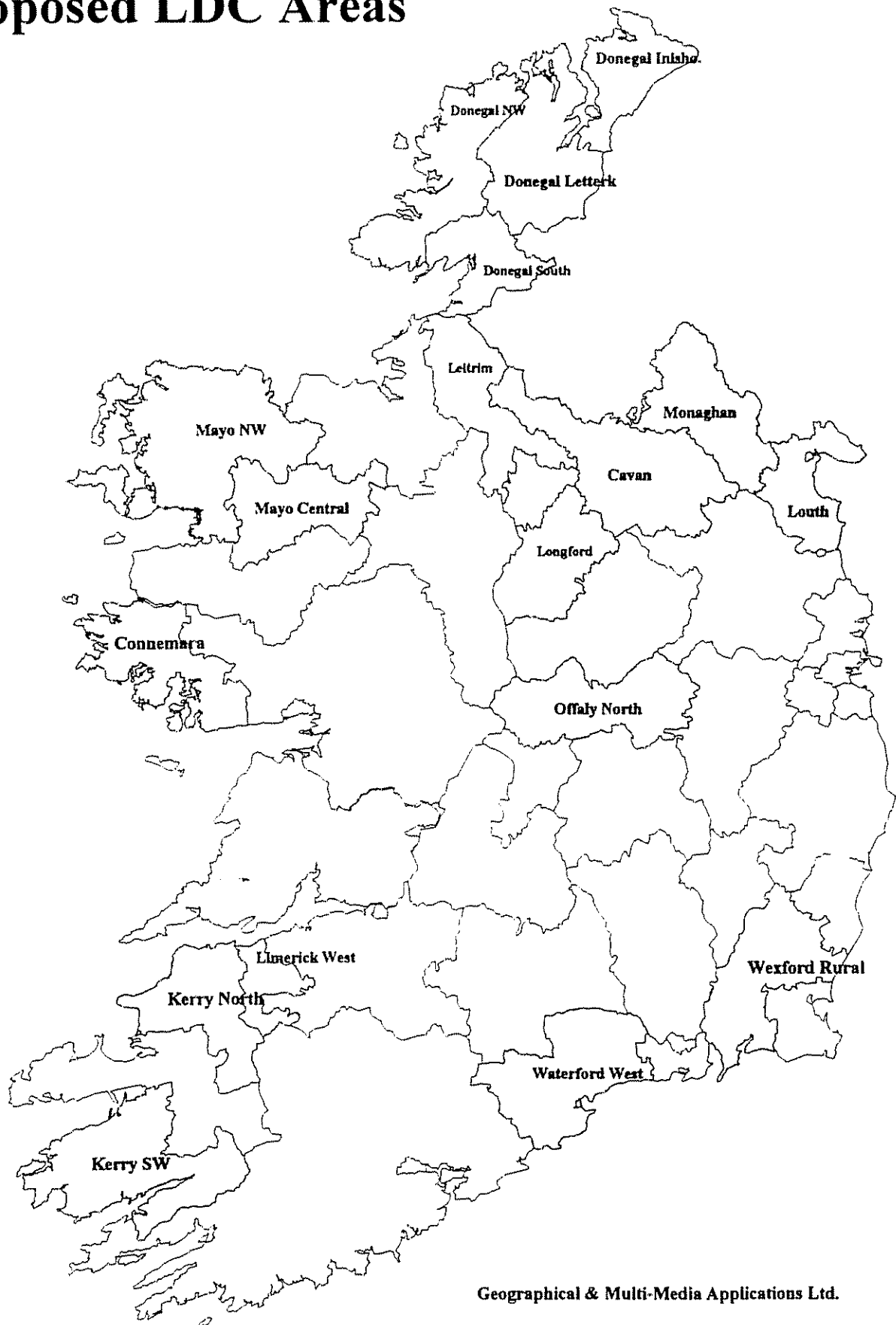


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Proposed LDC Areas



Proposed LDC Areas



Agnes Beech-Hamilton, (1976) 'Deprivation in the Dublin Region', *Journal of Urban Studies*, 13, pp. 389-404

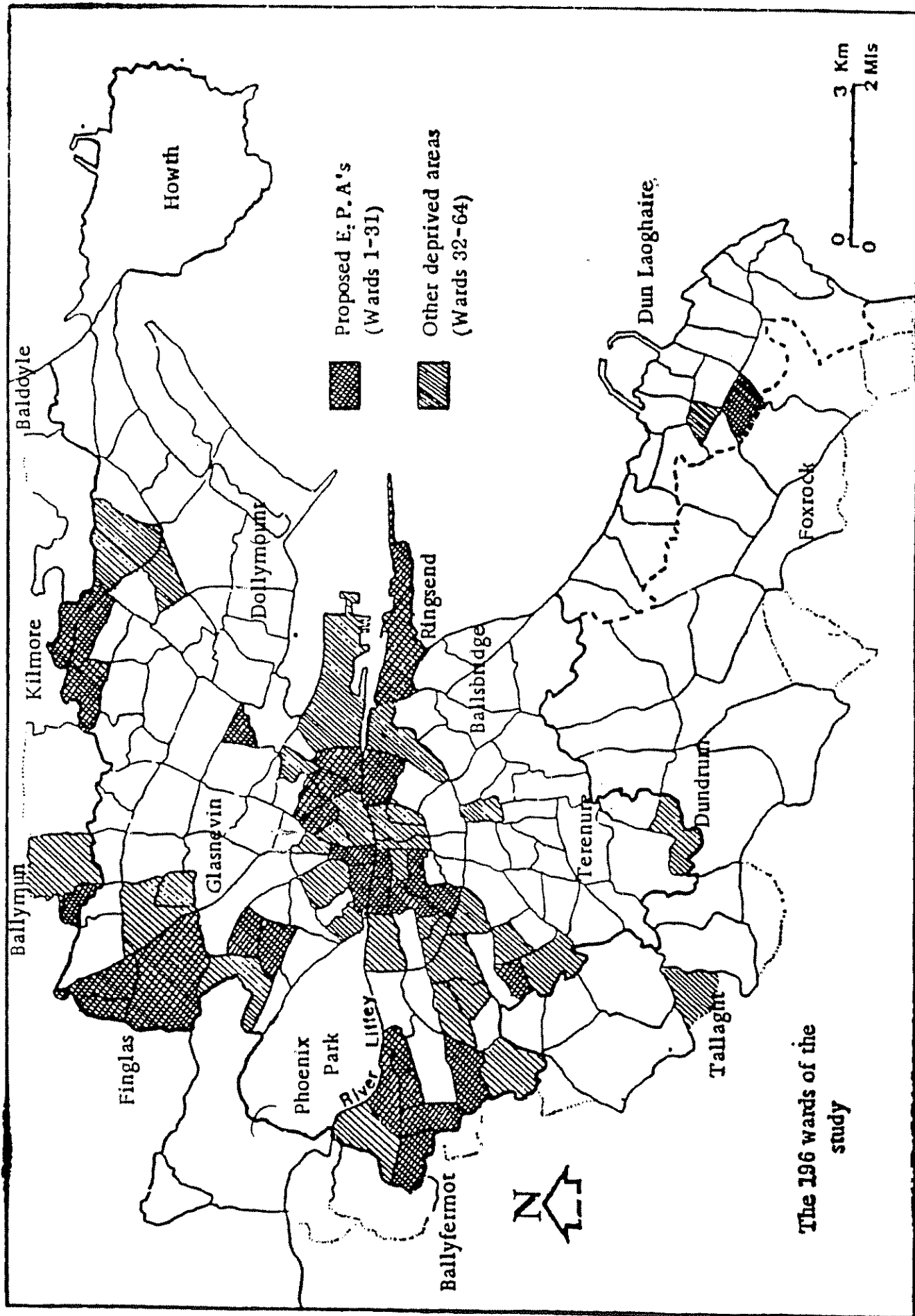


Figure 1: Socio-Economic Deprivation: High-Ranking Wards on Factor I.