Third Year Special Topic Research Project PO303

Special Topic: Private Troubles and Public Issues

'Water, Electricity…and High-Speed Internet?'

Exploring Issue Framing and Discourse in the National

Broadband Plan, 2012-2019

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Date Submitted: 22/04/2021

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Acknowledgements

Dedicated to the memory of all who have passed in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and in gratitude to all who have worked tirelessly to bring it to heel since it first emerged.

I would like to sincerely thank the staff of the Department of Sociology that I have had the good fortune to work with, in particular my supervisor Professor Mary P. Murphy for her insight, encouragement, guidance, and seemingly inexhaustible patience.

I would also like to thank my family. Words alone cannot express my gratitude for your support through these difficult years. Thank you for always being a burning torch in the dark.

Abstract

One of the few unchanging trends of the 21st century has been the increasing importance of digital technologies in Ireland and Europe. Part of that trend has been an increasing 'digital divide' in broadband speed, digital skills and engagement. The National Broadband Plan (NBP) represents the Irish governments attempt to address this divide. Using a political discourse analysis of four NBP documents, this research project examined how the importance of broadband to society, the digital divide in Ireland, and the role of the state in broadband policy, had been framed during the NBP's development as a policy. It found that the government consistently framed broadband as an indispensable public utility and the Irish digital divide as a question of replacing inferior rural infrastructure, while framing the role of the state in broadband policy as being merely a facilitator and regulator for the broadband industry. The Overall, the NBP was framed as both a utility and a marketized entity, despite the presence of alternative discourses.

Introduction

In 2012, Minister for Communications Pat Rabbitte referred to the coalition government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) as the 'rural electrification of the 21st century' (De Breadun and Minihan 2012). Eight years and three general elections later, the NBP has gone from a taskforce report to one of the largest communications infrastructure projects in modern Irish history, with an estimated cost to the state of €3 billion over 25 years (Burke-Kennedy 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief how access to quality broadband is both socially and economically essential (TASC 2021). The minister was correct in his assessment of how important the expansion of broadband connectivity would be to Irish society. However, the two problems have drawn very different policy solutions. Where rural electrification was primarily directed by the state through the ESB, the NBP is set to be a public-private partnership that will result in the state owning none of the built infrastructure, despite bearing half of its formidable costs. Was this always the plan?

I believe an answer may be found by examining how the stakeholders involved in the NBP have discussed and framed the project, in presenting to the public and amongst themselves. I have pursued this as the topic of my research project because I believe the development of the NBP demonstrates, for better or worse, how future Irish governments may approach large-scale infrastructure policy. Given the sheer scale of the project, geographically and financially, the choices made by those stakeholders over the course of its development will have long-lasting and long-reaching consequences. Discourses of a probable digital divide in Irish society, the role of the state in projects of this nature, and beliefs around the importance of broadband to society have all undoubtably played a role in shaping those choices.

In this project, I am interested in examining what those discourses and beliefs were and if they were consistent, from proposal in 2012 to policy in 2019. I have organised the project into four chapters following this introductory section. To develop a framework of

understanding for the concepts involved in this topic, the research will draw on a body of established theoretical and empirical literature. The relevant literature will be discussed in the first chapter. Building on this theory, I will outline my methodological approach and specific research questions in the second chapter. The data provided by the chosen methodology and the findings that emerge from it will be discussed in detail in the third and most substantial chapter. Finally, the conclusions of the research project and the broader implications of its findings are outlined in the fourth chapter.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The literature reviewed falls under two sections. The first deals with the 'why' of broadband policy. This will use theories of the network society to explain why governments place considerable importance on broadband policy. Theories of digital divide will also be used, which explains how inequalities develop in public participation in the information society and its relation to policy. The second set of theories address the 'how' of broadband policy: the concepts that are used to determine how policy solutions are identified and put into action by governments. The first of these are the theories of framing and the power elite, which accounts for how issues and their solutions are defined by those actors that exercise power over them. In both sections, existing empirical research on the topics will be discussed.

1.1 Why Broadband Policy Is Made

1.1.1 Information Age and the Network Society

Often discussed in similar terms as the industrial revolution, the rise of this network society has given rise to an information age, where information technology and the internet have 'transformed' the political economy (Webster 2014:50). The work of information and network society theorists, in particular Manuel Castells (2010), Frank Webster (2014), and many others, explains why the provision of internet access has become such an important area of policy for twenty-first century governments. For Castells (2010), it is fundamentally down to capitalistic competition. Since the late 1990's, states that do not continue to expand their IT infrastructure are seen to be at risk of falling behind other nations in important economic variables, such as productivity and competitiveness (Castells 2010:99). What this theory tells us is that governments understand information technologies such as broadband to be

economically essential to the 21ˢᵗ century state. This explains the movement of quality broadband access from a private trouble or luxury to an apparent necessity warranting its own policy. Castells believed that this would reduce traditional inequalities gradually (Lupač 2018:41). In response, a more specialised body of literature has developed to account for the inequalities that have instead arisen in the network society.

1.1.2 The Multifaceted Digital Divide

These inequalities of participation in the network society have come to be defined as the digital divide, and the work of Jan Van Dijk (2020) has come to define understanding of the concept. For Van Dijk, the digital divide is a multifaceted set of inequalities that constitute barriers to people's participation in Castell's network society. Factors like physical access, digital skills, motivation, and others all play a role in causing and sustaining it (Van Dijk 2020:30). As the theory of the divide has grown over time, emphasis has shifted from physical access to digital skills (Van Dijk 2020:30-2). Many others have added to this theory with their own perspectives. Peter Lupač (2018), as one example, calls into the question the assumptions around the necessity attributed to the technology in the first place. In just one of his criticisms, the agency of those who chose not to engage with newer information technologies is often pushed to the side (Lupač 2018:145-50). There is also debate over the purpose of the digital divide as a standalone concept of inequality.

This is because the concept overlaps with traditional understandings of social inequality. Factors such as age, gender, class, and race are all still core variables in understanding the inequality that has come with the information society (Lupač 2018:59, Van Dijk 2020:32). The digital divide as a concept may be new, but its causes are not. Siobhan Stevenson (2009) is an example of a writer that has been critical of the digital divide as a

concept. For her, it as an unnecessary discursive shift away from the already well-understood inequalities in society, such as class, which underpin it (Stevenson 2009:13-14). Digital inequality and exclusion, both categorised under the digital divide, are ultimately reflections of wider social inequalities. However, the digital divide remains a useful and well-used framework of understanding the specific inequalities in access to information technologies and the network society. Van Dijk's (2020) model of the digital divide, illustrated in Fig. 1, specifically incorporates those core inequalities. In the Irish case, the NBP was explicitly portrayed by the governments as a solution to the physical access dimension of the digital divide, between urban and rural (Burke-Kennedy 2019). Most of the empirical literature discussed next uses the concept of the digital divide to examine unequal outcomes in broadband policy.
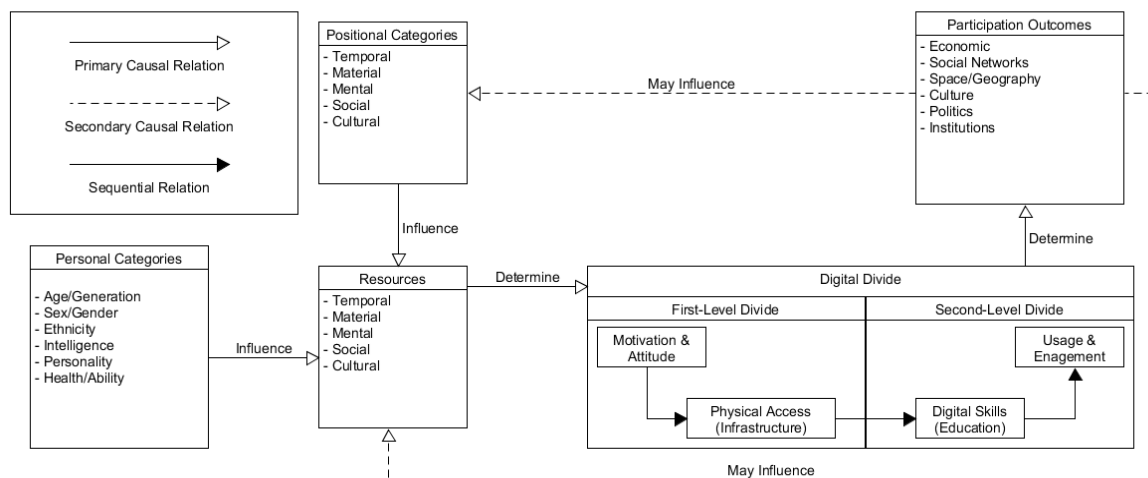
*Figure 1: Jan Van Dijk's (2020:33) model of the digital divide, showing causative and sequential factors.*

1.1.3 Researching Broadband Policy

The intersection of digital divide theory and broadband policy has produced a broad set of literature that puts the concept to the test. Martin Hilbert (2011), for example, has found that the divide has become a genuine concern for governments as far apart in context as the United

States, South Korea, and Chile. König and Wenzelburger (2019) show us that addressing the digital divide, or at least expanding the network society by infrastructure policy, is now seen as a vote winner by political parties. The work of Williams et al. (2016) on British broadband policy shows that, for first world nations with strong existing infrastructure, the digital divide manifests itself most prominently as a difference in the quality of broadband available to urban and rural populations. The literature shows that addressing the digital divide has become a live political issue around the world, including Ireland.

In Ireland, broadband policy research follows the same broad trends as the international research. For example, Coyne et al. (2015) examined the benefits and barriers to the use of highspeed broadband in secondary schools, finding that policy efforts to bring the technology into schools has had positive effects for teacher's abilities. In another example, one that focuses more on economic impact, Haller and Lyons (2019) argued that addressing the digital divide is important to increasing productivity in service industries, which supports the government's claims around the economic benefits of the NBP. Ultimately, in Ireland and elsewhere, the body of empirical research bears out the claims made by the theory: that the digital divide is a multifaceted, pervasive, and accepted policy target. However, there is a key aspect understudied in this selection of literature. Most of this research focuses on the effects of broadband policy, rather than the processes by which those policies come about. This research project is intended to contribute by researching the policy process as it relates to government engagement with the digital divide and the network society.

1.2 Framing and Policy Development

1.2.1 Issue Framing and the 'Power Elite'

Given that the concept contains different dimensions, the digital divide is a malleable concept for interested governments and parties. As an example, why might certain parties and governments place more importance on addressing the physical access divide over the skills divide? Issue framing theory explains this. This refers to the context in which issues are placed and then perceived, who has the power to frame issues, and why they do so. One of the most important theorists of framing is Erving Goffman (1986), whose work forms the basis for the issue framing theory that is used in political research. A frame is the accepted 'background information' for an event or issue, which shapes the individuals understanding of it (Goffman 1986:22-3). For George Lakoff (2014:20), framing is the process of 'getting language that fits your worldview' accepted, which occurs over time through persuasive discourse. As an example, the thesis of his book is that, in the case of American politics, right-wing parties have been effective users of this persuasion and achieved greater success in framing issues through language and presentation (Lakoff 2014). Ultimately, what this demonstrates is that the way in which ideas are presented is an important factor in what policy solutions emerge.

Frames decide which solutions to an issue are acceptable or possible, and which are not. The questions around the digital divide are undoubtably subject to framing. As an example of one such question, did the governments mention the causes of the digital divide in relation to existing inequalities, or was the issue framed in isolation, as Stevenson (2009) believed it would be? The question raised by this, naturally, is what actors are involved in this framing? Though Lakoff (2014) gives the example of political parties, it is important to consider the role of actors outside institutional politics. Power elite theory makes the case that it is the elite groups in society that frame issues. C. Wright Mills (2008) stands as the most significant

architect of power elite theory. Wright Mills (2008:140) identified the power elite as '…bureaucrats and politicians and millionaires'. In essence, the power elite are those with the social and economic power to influence the decision making and agenda setting of the state. Given the involvement of the broadband industry in crafting the NBP, it makes sense to be aware of the role economic power elites play in framing, rather than focusing on political elites alone.

1.2.2 Framing, Discourse, and Irish Policy

Though framing and discourse analysis have not yet been applied to Irish broadband infrastructure policy, both are frequently used to explore similar policy research topics. In a recent article, Eilís Ward (2020) used framing to illustrate how the government's adoption of the 'Nordic Model' of sex work regulation as policy. She argues that the 'Turn off the Red Light' campaign portrayed sex workers through a discourse of helplessness, which was ultimately the framing accepted by the government in drafting its policy solution (Ward 2020: 30-2). In another case, Peter Holden (2020) has argued that the Irish government used framing aggressively during the Brexit negotiations, which helped to shape the European Union's negotiating strategy. While these are just two examples, what this brief selection of literature demonstrates is that the framing of issues matters when it comes to Irish public policy, even across topics as wildly different as sex work policy and Brexit. Both are also examples of framing that are illustrated through discourse analysis of different sources. I intend to employ a similar approach to determine the impact of framing on the NBP's development.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This research project will explore two related areas of the development, from strategy to policy, of the National Broadband Plan (NBP), from 2012 to 2019. My core research questions concern the issue framing of broadband access in the policy documents. Broadly, the research questions of this project fit with others that explore discourse in policy documents. Rather than starting with a pre-existing hypothesis of which issues have or have not been framed in the documents, this project has been designed with an inductive analytic approach in mind. A definition of this approach by David R. Thomas (2006) describes it as an approach that will '…primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher'. In this case, the raw data is derived from the NBP policy documents chosen for the project and the direction of the project has been shaped by reading through them. Taking this approach has posed the questions that will be answered in this chapter: What methodologies can be employed to find issue framing in these documents? Which documents should be used to find that evidence? What should be considered evidence?

2.1 The Methodologies of Broadband Policy Research

In determining my approach, I have reviewed some of the previous methodological approaches used by previous broadband policy research. As discussed in the literature review, broadband policy research is an area in which multiple methodologies have been used and much of this research focuses on the impact of that policy. Coyne et al. (2015:362-6) used a representative survey of teachers from 436 secondary schools, choosing a quantitative method to understand how the use of high-speed broadband affected the teaching environment. The use of a quantitative method was useful in that case as it allowed the researchers to gain a broad and representative answer to their questions about the real-world effects of the policy on

teachers. However, in examining the generation of such policies by political actors, König and Wenzelburger (2019:1685-7) took a qualitative approach. To understand why political parties now find it important to make digitization pledges central to the manifestos they put before voters, they examined a large of number of manifestos from eight European countries published between 2010 and 2018. To provide data, they screened each manifesto for the sections dealing with digitization issues, extracted and coded relevant sentences, then compared each manifesto across different variables. This project intends to make use of a similar document-based approach.

2.2 Political Discourse Analysis

The concept of framing, as articulated by Goffman (1986) and others, is a core component of this research project. Framing through political discourse occurs in many areas, though this project will be looking specifically for evidence of framing in policy documents relating to the NBP. To accomplish this, the project will use a method called political discourse analysis. Discourse represents both the representation of ideas as well as the interactive process of exchanging ideas (Schmidt 2008:2). As explained by Van Dijk (1997), political discourse is defined by different actors within a political sphere, of which public policy formation is only one example. The documents produced by such processes constitute political discourse because '…forms of text and talk in such cases have political functions and implications' (Van Dijk 1997:14). In such a discourse, the actors have a top-down dynamic. On one side, there are 'authors', meaning individuals, groups, or institutions who occupy positions of power, and 'recipients', meaning those who are in the intended audience and are uninvolved in the direct production of the discourse (Van Dijk 1997:12-3). Drawing on C. Wright Mill's (2008:140) power elite theory, this research project understands the authors of these documents to be political and industrial elites, which possessed decision making and agenda setting power

during the NBP's development. A political discourse analysis using NBP documents would represent a useful method of finding evidence of issue framing by these authors.

Political discourse analysis is part of a family of similar methods of critical analysis (Van Dijk 1997:37-8). An example of a similar practice can be found in Lähdesmäki and Wagener (2015). Using discourse-based methods, they were able to examine the framing of 'intercultural dialogue' as a policy in the Council of Europe's 2008 White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. To investigate how the authors of the White Paper did this, they identified 11 terms as 'core keywords' that expressed the author's understanding of 'intercultural dialogue' (Lähdesmäki and Wagener 2015:16-17). This type of approach has also been used in relation to broadband policy. Tapia et al. (2011) approached their research question with a similar document-based discourse analysis. In their research, they used a critical discourse analysis on a wide variety of texts containing discourse of social inclusion in the planned broadband infrastructure projects of several American cities. They chose a discourse analysis approach because of their interest in 'the quality, rather than quantity of textual documentation', the content of which demonstrates the ability of dominant political actors to exercise power (Tapia et al. 2011:217). These discussions have led me to believe a document-based political discourse analysis is likely to be the most useful method of answering the research questions posed by this project.

2.3 Documentary Sources

The use of documents as document analysis as a qualitative research method is quite common, specifically for 'intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation, or program' (Bowen 2009:29). For this project, public policy documents produced during the development of the NBP will be used. The use of such

documents provides '…a means of tracking change and development' in the policy process (Bowen 2009:30). Complimenting this, Reese (2001:7) described framing as 'an active process and a result'. As the final character of the NBP is the result of that framing this project is interested in exploring the framing process. To achieve this, documents from different points in the NBP's development have been chosen. Bearing in mind that such documents form the empirical base of this research project, it is important to be selective with those documents. The policy process that brought about the NBP has produced a vast number of documents, of varying sizes and usefulness. While analysis of all of them together would certainly provide a very clear indication of how the authors of the NBP framed the issues, this research project is limited in scope as an undergraduate thesis and will use only four.

The first and most substantial is the 91-page 'Report of the Next Generation Broadband Taskforce', published in 2012 (DCENR 2012a). The second, which draws on the first and was published the same year, is the 21-page 'Delivering a Connected Society A National Broadband Plan for Ireland' policy paper (DCENR 2012b). The third is the 47-page 'Connecting Communities: The National Broadband Plan Strategy' from 2015 (DCENR 2015). The fourth is the 24-page 'Delivering the National Broadband Plan' from 2019 (DCCAE 2019). Each of these documents were produced at different points in the development of the NBP and all have been collected from government websites. By using documents from different stages, the research project can determine if issues have been consistently framed the same way over time or if they have been discussed differently. Again, Browder (2009) provides an important guideline to the use of documents in this way. The process of reading of these documents must 'identify meaningful and relevant passages of text' while demonstrating a 'capacity to identify pertinent information and to separate it from that which is not pertinent' (Browder 2009:32). To determine what is pertinent and create meaningful data, those passages of text must be categorised through coding.
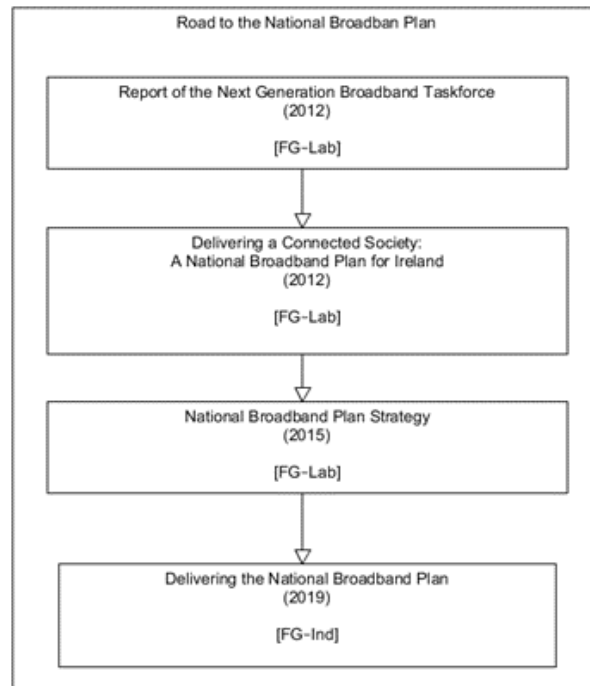
Figure 2: Timeline of the NBP Documents used in this discourse analysis.

2.4 Coding for Framing in Political Discourse Analysis

In political discourse analysis, the concept of 'macro-propositions' offers a way of categorising any data that may demonstrate evidence of framing. These are essentially the inferred meanings within a given discourse (Van Dijk 1997:27-8). Van Dijk (1997:27) makes the point that these have both a 'political function' and a 'general persuasive function'. For this research project, these macro-propositions are taken as evidence of issue framing by the authors. As an example of this, take the sentence '*The Internet must be seen as a fundamental requirement for all Irish businesses, irrespective of size*' from the 'Report of the Next-Generation Broadband Taskforce' (DCENR 2012a:43). The context of this sentence is the importance of broadband access for business, and the 'macro-proposition' that it represents is that Irish commerce 'must' be expected to make use of internet access. In this case, the authors, the members of the taskforce, are framing broadband access as an economically essential utility, rather than a luxury service that can be done without.

The inductive approach taken means that these examples of issue framing have emerged organically from reading the documents. Writing on this approach suggests the best way to organise the resulting data is in 'summary themes or categories' (Thomas 2006:239). Following this advice, three themes have been identified and coded for: the state's role in broadband policy, the importance of broadband access to society, and the form of the Irish digital divide. It is worth mentioning an important distinction from Potter and Wetherell (2002:52) that, unlike in content analysis, such coding is 'not the analysis itself but a preliminary to make the task of analysis manageable'. The analysis comes from a discussion of the data in relation to the topics outlined in the literature review and framing in previous documents. Using this system of categorisation, the project will discuss issue framing under the three summary themes in relation to the theories presented in the literature review. To do so, it will use examples yielded by analysis of the chosen documents, which are primarily sentences extracted from the texts and then coded, as seen in Fig. 3.

Index	Page No.	Content	Theme	Tags
30	12	While this level of traffic growth is driving the need for next generation infrastructure, the level of investment required to meet the needs of an emerging digital economy is significant, particularly where there are low population densities.	Form of The Irish Digital Divide	rural divide, infrastructural digital divide,
28	12	These services are the foundation of Ireland's future competitiveness and would drive and enable significant changes in the way citizens interact and society is organised.	Importance of Broadband Access To Society	economic importance, social importance,
25	12	The Taskforce has identified the targets that industry would expect to reach for high speed broadband services which will ensure that Ireland takes full advantage of the opportunities offered as well as identifying potential gaps in service provision	State's Role In Broadband Policy	facilitator, epistemic leadership from industry

Figure 3: Three examples of discourse analysis using the Report of the Next Generation Broadband Taskforce (DCENR 2012a). Sentences are categorised into themes and tagged with codes.

In categorising the documents themselves, the project will also make use of Vivien Schmidt's (2008) 'discursive institutionalism', specifically the idea of 'communicative' and 'coordinative'. These are ways of codifying the type of relationship between what Van Dijk (1997) described as discursive authors and recipients. Communicative refers to discourse that follows the traditional top-down flow from the actors responsible for disseminating

information from the political system to the general public (Schmidt 2008:8). Coordinative, on the other hand, is a more horizontal discourse that takes place between the political actors responsible for forming the policy, such as government ministers and civil servants (Ibid.). Whether a particular document and its discourse is coordinative or communicative is likely to affect how issues are framed.

Discourse Types	
Communicative	Coordinative
Vertical Communication	Horizontal Communication
Government to Public and Civil society	Between Policy Makers and Interests
Advertises Policy	Designs Policy
External, Mass Consumption	Internal, Private

Figure 4: Schmidt's (2008) model of communicative and coordinative discourse types. Both have different features. These are determined by the relationship between author and recipient.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Qualitative documentary research is an approach that often requires significant attention be paid to potential ethical issues. For example, issues of consent, privacy, anonymity, interpretation, and ownership were flagged as important considerations in document research (Sixsmith and Murray 2001:424). However, in the use of public policy documents, there are less potential ethical problems to run into. That does not mean there are none, however. In this case, the data has been collected from publicly accessible documents with public authors, published by government departments. Due diligence, in the form of proper referencing and attribution, is an important aspect of this methodology. In the same vein, context is an important aspect of any textual analysis method and an awareness of that context must be considered in

the coding of the data (Bryman and Burgess 1994:218). Overall, any text used as data in this project will be presented as found in the source documents, which have been referenced.

2.6 Methodological Summary

Ultimately, the methodological approach chosen for this research project is an analysis of political discourse aimed at finding evidence of issue framing in the development of the NBP. This evidence is found within the four document sources and, through an inductive reading of those sources, this research project classifies that evidence into three themes based on specific macro-propositions: The state's role in broadband provision, the importance of broadband access to society, and the form taken by the 'digital divide' in Irish society. The bulk of this project's analysis will discuss issue framing under those three themes in each of the documents, comparing issue framing in the NBP over time. The research will also discuss alternate discourses, to demonstrate the alternative frames that were not applied in the development of this policy.

Chapter 3: Data Analysis and Findings

3.1 Report of the Next Generation Broadband Taskforce (2012)

3.1.1 DCENR 2012a: Context, Discourse Type and Authorship

The Report of the Next Generation Broadband Taskforce (DCENR 2012a) is one of the earliest documents associated with the development of a national broadband plan for Ireland. The document is an investigative report into how such a program might be facilitated by industry and the state. It was commissioned by the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) in May 2012. The NGBT taskforce consisted of twenty-three people, thirteen of represented various broadband providers and commercial interests (DCENR 2012a:76). The remainder consisted of civil servants representing the Irish government, such the Minister for Communications Pat Rabbitte, and officials representing the European Commission and European Investment Bank. Those people chaired the subcommittees of the taskforce, while the representatives of the broadband providers and representatives of local authorities constituted the members of those subcommittees (DCENR 2012a:77).

23 Members of The Next Generation Broadband Taskforce			
European Union (3 Participants)	Irish Government (7 Participants)	Broadband Industry (13 Participants)	
Anthony Whelan (European Commission)	Aidan Dunning (Secretary General, DCENR)	Colm O'Neill, (CEO BT Ireland)	Mr. Stephen Shurrock (CEO O2 Telefonica)
Anna Krzyzanowska (European Commission)	Alex Chisholm (ComReg)	Colm Piercy (CEO Digiweb)	Mr. Tony Hanway (CEO O2 Telefonica, Replacing Stephen Shurrock)
Hristo Stoykov (European Investment Bank)	Adrian Devitt (Forfás)	Conal Henry (CEO eNet)	Tommy McCabe (Telecommunications Industry Federation)
	Fergus O'Dowd (T.D)	Dana Strong (CEO UPC)	Torlach Denihan (Telecommunications Industry Federation, Replacing Tommy McCabe)
	Ken Spratt (NBP Secretary, DCENR)	John Shine (Deputy CEO, ESB)	
	Katherine Licken (Assistant Secretary General)	Jeroen Hoencamp (CEO Vodafone)	
	Pat Rabbitte (Minister for Communications)	Paul Donovan (CEO eircom/meteor)	
		Robert Finnegan (CEO Hutchison 3G)	
		Seán Bolger (CEO Imagine)	

Figure 5: The members of the Next Generation Broadband Taskforce

The relationship between authors and audience in this document means that the discourse present is coordinative, rather than communicative. It is a horizontal discourse, primarily intended to inform policy makers using market information provided by industry leaders of the private sector, who are presumed to have the necessary knowledge to do so. According to Schmidt's (2008:8) description of coordinative discourse, this is the type of discourse that epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions can most frequently be found contributing to. In this document, the broadband industry representatives constitute both epistemic contributors and commercial advocates. As this analysis will demonstrate, this report would go on to have an important impact on subsequent documents and the form taken by the NBP. This document served as a foundation for the discourses found in subsequent policy papers.

3.1.2 DCENR 2012a: Framing The Importance of Broadband Access

The discourse around the economic and social importance of broadband access in the document frames it as an essential service. At one point, it is even compared to the industrial revolution and electricity (DCENR 2012a:9-10). Both social and economic benefits are given as a reason for the state to invest in a national broadband plan. The report emphasis the social value of a prospective national broadband plan, but it is framed quite vaguely in the discourse. Assertions are made that the plan would '…drive social inclusion and connection to every corner of our society' and that 'the availability of high-speed broadband can have a transformative impact on society', but specifics are left unsaid (DCENR 2012a:9-10). Economic benefits are also central to this discourse and are mentioned with greater frequency. The assertion that any investment would lead to '…growth, entrepreneurship and jobs in existing and emerging sectors' as well as 'underpin competitiveness' again demonstrates the framing of broadband as an essential service (DCENR 2012a:4, 9). In both cases, broadband is

framed in the report as a utility that people cannot be expected to do without. This understanding is consistent with Castell's (2010:70) understanding of the technological demands of the networked economy as being 'pervasive': ever-present and increasingly vital in people's lives. This understanding acts as a foundation for the framing of other issues in the document.

3.1.3 DCENR 2012a: Framing The Irish Digital Divide

The discourse in this document around the form of the digital divide in Ireland frames the issues around three main concepts: a primarily rural divide in infrastructure and an engagement gap. The infrastructural divide between urban and rural Ireland is the dominant framing used in this document. The statement that rural communities will 'become more marginalised if they are not equipped to participate fully in a society that is increasingly reliant on online and digital services' is a good representation of this framing (DCENR 2012a:15). The taskforce again uses the spectre of 'falling behind' to describe what they perceive to be a lack of engagement of the SME sector with the internet. They are described as 'losing large volumes of business opportunities' because of this (DCENR 2012a:21). In his work on the digital divide, Lupač (2018:86) makes the case that this is absolutely the dominant understanding that governments have of the digital divide. In this document, the question of digital skills as part of the divide, which Van Dijk (2020:30-2) argued was fast becoming the main feature of it, arises only regarding teacher training. Ultimately, the report primarily frames the digital divide in Ireland as being an infrastructure gap between urban and rural populations follows a trend.

3.1.4 DCENR 2012a: Framing The State's Role in Broadband Policy

The report frames the role of the state in any prospective broadband plan around intervention only where there is market failure. Industry made clear in the report that rolling out infrastructure to rural communities would not be profitable, meaning the discourse inevitably frames the state as bearing that responsibility (DCENR 2012a:14). In addition, the role of industry in providing epistemic leadership is an important element of this discourse. The understanding of what was possible in terms of broadband speed was framed by industry, with the broadband plan being aimed at achieving 'the ambitious targets which industry have identified' (DCENR 2012a:15). The European Union is also framed as having played an important role, which is referenced in the document's discourse on the state's role in broadband policy. This framing appears in two forms: the EU described as an instigator for broadband policy, through its 2012 Digital Agenda, while its state aid rules are given as a reason why the state may only intervene in the market on a limited basis. Any deviation from this would end up 'undermining existing or planned private sector investment' (DCENR 2012a:19). Overall, the state is framed in this document as being a facilitator for the broadband market, being expected only to intervene in a limited manner.

3.2 Delivering a Connected Society (2012)

3.2.1 DCENR 2012b: Context, Discourse Type and Authorship

        This document packages the recommendations of the previous report into an outline for a national broadband plan (DCENR 2012b:6). Published by the DCENR in August 2012 after a public consultation on the prior NGBT report, this document is an early outline of what the Fine Gael-Labour government envisioned for their broadband infrastructure plan. This document represents the transformation of the Next Generation Broadband Taskforce's recommendations into core policies of the developing NBP. The document contains very little substantive difference to the NGBT report, serving instead to communicate its findings in terms of their relevance to the government's policy. As such, this document engages in a communicative discourse, with the general public as its intended audience. Rather than a horizontal discourse between the government and the broadband industry, this document involves a vertical discourse between the DCENR and the citizens. The purpose of communicative discourse is to advertise policy solutions that were '…developed in the context of the coordinative discourse' (Schmidt 2008:8). The connection between this document and the NGBT report is a good example of that relationship.

3.2.2 DCENR 2012b: Framing The Importance of Broadband Access

        Like the previous report, the discourse found here mentions both social and economic benefits of broadband access but focuses on the latter. '…positive economic returns, positive socio-economic benefits and a positive benefit-cost ratio' are the highlighted benefits of increased broadband access (DCENR 2012b:5). Wherever the importance of broadband access is discussed, the discourse centres on economic issues of growth, competitiveness. Social

concerns such as exclusion due to a skills divide, which Manuel Castells believed would leave 'pushed to the margins of informational capitalism…the unskilled and educationally ill-prepared', are generally skimmed over in comparison (Webster 2014:123). The framing of broadband access as essential to such enterprises also fits with a theory Castells developed about the nature of commercial management in the network society. Technological change means that a new type of worker is sought after, as a 'network-oriented and adept 'informational labour' is responsible for running capitalism nowadays' (Webster 2014:122-3). Bearing this is in mind, the framing is to be expected. Without making use of this type of labour, 'time savings, productivity gains and increased sales' would be lost (DCENR 2012b:3). This framing asserts that modern businesses cannot afford to opt out of the use of information technologies and assures the reader that a prospective national broadband plan will support a 'digitally enabled society' (DCENR 2012b:16). This framing would fit with what Lupač (2018:137) described as an 'economic/occupational definition of the information society'.

3.2.3 DCENR 2012b: Framing The Irish Digital Divide

Of the different 'layers' of the digital divide Van Dijk (2020) discussed, this document again frames material access as the main feature of the Irish digital divide (Lupač 2018:98). Irelands low population density is blamed for this, with the document stating that '…more rural and isolated areas with between 15% and 30% of the population' constituting the target for state intervention (DCENR 2012b:8). Here, the poor quality of rural infrastructure is framed as the main challenge the prospective national broadband plan must solve. The form of state intervention envisioned being focused on 'homes and businesses in areas where high speed broadband is not available' (DCENR 2012b:5). However, the document claims the government will commit to giving citizens the opportunity to develop 'the skills necessary to enable them to fully participate in the digital economy and society' (DCENR 2012b:9). The discourse

frames the main targets of action on that issue as being the SMEs and secondary school students. To understand why, we can again borrow from Manuel Castells (2010:405), who explained that the growing prevalence of the internet in society means '…the price to pay for inclusion in the system is to adapt to its logic'. The authors of the document, likely understanding this, framed the NBP as a necessary policy to prevent the SMEs from being 'left behind' by motivating them to adapt to the logic of the new system. Despite these references to a broader digital divide, the discourse still frames the largest obstacle to digital participation as being outdated rural broadband infrastructure.

3.2.4 DCENR 2012b: Framing The State's Role in Broadband Policy

As this document is based on the previous report, it inevitably repeats its discourse on the role of the state in broadband policy. The framing is identical, the Minister for Communications opening the document with a commitment that 'government will intervene where – but only where – it is evident that the market will not deliver' (DCENR 2012b:1). Industry provided epistemic leadership on this, indicating 'the market will provide speeds of 70Mbps to100Mbps for 50% of the population' (DCENR 2012b:8). As a result, these users are framed as being outside the responsibility of any prospective national broadband plan. The engagement divide previously discussed has also been framed as the state's responsibility in this discourse. Where provision of the infrastructure is broadly the responsibility of the market, advertisement of that infrastructure is not. The state is understood as having to act as an advertiser of the digital economy, being responsible for '…a national awareness campaign aimed at presenting the compelling case around the benefits of the Internet to those not currently digitally engaged' (DCENR 2012b:10). The discourse frames the state's role as being minimal in the actual provision of the infrastructure. Instead, it is framed as being a 'facilitator' for the market rather than being a 'deliverer' of that infrastructure as a public utility.

3.3 National Broadband Plan Strategy (2015)

3.3.1 DCENR 2015: Context, Discourse Type and Authorship

Three years after the publication of the previous document, and under a new Minister for Communications, Ireland's Broadband Intervention (DCENR 2015) followed in much the same track as its predecessors. This document built on nine different reports commissioned by the DCENR since 2012. These reports, together with the initial NGBT report (DCENR 2012a), provided the code to which the NBP would be designed: a public-private initiative to invest in rural broadband infrastructure. Having moved beyond the conceptual stage, this document set out the specific objectives the government hoped to achieve through its investment. It also marked the start of the state's search for a private sector partner in a commercial stimulus or concession type model, state ownership having been already ruled out by this stage. In its framing of the issues, the document heavily delineated between areas where the state was perceived to have responsibility and areas considered the domain of the broadband market. The document contained no surprise departures in the framing discussed in the previous documents, instead forming just another part of a consistent vision of what the NBP would be. It is another communicative document, as its primary intention in employing discourse is to inform and advertise the government's already chosen broadband policy (Schmidt 2008:8).

3.3.2 DCENR 2015: Framing The Social Importance of Broadband Access

The importance of broadband access to society and the economy is again framed as a non-negotiable imperative in this document. This can be seen in the opening assertion that 'quality broadband is a utility that is just as important as electricity' (DCENR 2015:2). As had been demonstrated in the previous two documents, social concerns are framed as being

subordinate or dependent on those economic concerns. Issues of social exclusion are only vaguely included, with statements such as 'In addition, social and leisure activities are also progressively more dependent on Information & Communications Technology' found among more detailed discourse around the economic benefits (DCENR 2015:13). Once again, economic competition emerges as a dominant theme in this discourse. Poor rural broadband infrastructure is framed as a threat to economic prosperity in Ireland. The document states that 'Traditional industries such as farming and retail are increasingly relying on technology to compete nationally and globally' (DCENR 2015:13). Castells (2010), in his theory of the network society, described a motivation for this 'left behind' framing. Those industries that do not make use of information technology, or cannot access infrastructure like high-speed broadband, are exposed to competition with those who do (Castells 2010:91-4). The danger comes in being 'unable to follow the rules of the new economy' (Castells 2010:91). In this framing, those rules are absolute and Ireland cannot afford to 'fall behind'.

3.3.3 DCENR 2015: Framing The Irish Digital Divide

Though issues of the engagement and skills divides were mentioned in the previous two documents, they are notably absent from the discourse in this document. Instead, the scope of the NBP initiative has been framed as "dealing definitively with the broadband connectivity challenge in rural areas" (DCENR 2015:12). The interest is only in those areas 'where there is no certainty that the commercial sector will invest' (DCENR 2015:29). By the publication of this document, the digital divide in Ireland has been simplified and packaged into a policy solution. The cause has been identified as market failure and state investment to incentivise the private sector has been framed as the solution. The narrow framing of the digital divide decouples those divides from the purview of the NBP. This consistently fits in with a broader trend in how governments perceive and frame the digital divide overwhelmingly as an urban-

rural or generational divide (Lupač 2018:85-6). In this document, skills and engagement are framed as separate issues to infrastructure, to be addressed with separate policies.

3.3.4 DCENR 2015: Framing The State's Role in Broadband Policy

This document is far more explicit on what the state will be expected to do. Compared to 2015, NBP is more specifically designed to "facilitate a competitive market where retailers can provide services to all premises in the intervention area" (DCENR 2015:24). The document introduces five options but frames only two of them as workable: a 'commercial stimulus model' where the state would offer grants to the private sector to 'make private investment commercially viable' and a 'concession type arrangement' where a private sector company builds and operates the network for the period of a contract before the asset reverts to state ownership (DCENR 2015:24-5). Though the actual role of the state in rolling out the NBP infrastructure is minimal, it is also framed as having an oversight role over any potential private sector partner. There, it is the state's responsibility to '…lead, manage, enforce and be responsible for the overall management of the contract, including contract governance' (DCENR 2015:30). Though the previous two documents framed the role of the state as being minimal, this document more clearly frames its role as a 'facilitator' and 'regulator' of the broadband market, in which maximising competition private sector is held to be an important goal.

3.4 Delivering the National Broadband Plan (2019)

3.4.1 DCCAE 2019: Context, Discourse Type and Authorship

Published in 2019 under the Fine Gael-Independent coalition government, this is perhaps the most clearly communicative document of the four examined. By the time of its publication, a bidder had already been chosen, National Broadband Ireland (NBI) owned by the investment firm Granahan McCourt (Burke-Kennedy 2020). The form of the NBP had been concretely defined. The discourse of this document is, even more than so than the previous three, aimed at advertising the government's policy, raising awareness of the program among rural local authorities, and justify the planned expenses to the taxpayer. The purpose of communicative discourse is, after all, to counteract any potential '…negative public reaction for unpopular policies' (Schmidt 2008:8). As this analysis will show, the discourse of this document framed the issues almost identically to its predecessors. No meaningful evolution in the discussion of the importance of broadband access or the form of the Irish digital divide could be found. This document does elaborate on the responsibilities and constraints the winning bidder, Granahan McCourt, would be expected to abide by. However, its framing of the state's responsibility remains entirely consistent with its predecessors, even as far back as 2012.

3.4.2 DCCAE 2019: Framing The Social Importance of Broadband Access

Once again, broadband is not described as a luxury service in this document. Instead, it is 'as critical to modern living and working as more traditional infrastructure such as electricity and water' and its deployment will unlock a huge amount of potential in rural Ireland (DCCAE 2019:3). Commercial competition is again framed as a key benefit, with the document

promising that the NBP would provide the infrastructure for 'small and medium businesses to compete successfully on a global scale, accessing more customers' (DCCAE 2019:4). This document demonstrates that the NBP developed under what Lupač (2018:160-4) termed the 'indispensability hypothesis'. The logic of that hypothesis states that as the proliferation of high-speed broadband increases, the more costly it is for those left behind to participate in work and in society (Lupač 2018:164). This is a key aspect of the dialogue surrounding the necessity of the NBP in this document. Though the phrase 'right' is not used in this document, the association with water and electricity puts it in a more fundamental category. Though not surprising considering the previous three documents, this represents the guiding role of that hypothesis in the design of the NBP.

3.4.3 DCCAE 2019: Framing The Irish Digital Divide

Poor rural broadband infrastructure is again framed as being the cause of the Irish digital divide. Given that the form of the NBP has already been decided, the role of discourse here is to advertise what has already been planned. The danger being framed in this document is that, in the absence of the NBP, 'rural Ireland will be left behind' (DCCAE 2019:3) The investment being made in the NBP is primarily and specifically directed intended to 'bridge the digital divide with urban areas' (DCCAE 2019:8). This framing has also been seen in the previous three, but here it is rarely accompanied by references to skills or engagement gaps. As Lupač (2018:90) and Van Dijk (2020) both warned in their work on the subject, this may be a dangerously narrow understanding of the digital divide and a misrepresentation of the full gamut of reasons why people are excluded from the network society. Engagement and digital skills are framed beyond the NBP's scope, which accounts for the relatively low number of mentions of those divides in the discourse. By itself, this discourse does not mean the state has

lowered the priority of addressing those divides, but it does represent a narrowing in the NBP's scope compared to the documents circulated in 2012.

3.4.4 DCCAE 2019: Framing The State's Role in Broadband Policy

By the 2019 publication of this document, the state's role in the NBP has been definitively framed. As a regulator, the state sets conditions and targets that NBI, the deliverer of the NBP, must reach. It's departments '…will also have a role in the NBP with regard to its oversight of pole and duct infrastructure providers and Retail Service Providers' (DCCAE 2019:23). Industry has retained its epistemic leadership, which is used in this document to justify its role as the deliverer of the NBP as '…the personnel behind NBI's management team have many decades of experience in designing, building and operating telecommunications networks' (DCCAE 2019:14). Both the state and NBI share responsibility for advertising the new infrastructure and encouraging engagement with it. Both committed to reaching out to community groups and running advertisement campaigns, '…in order to encourage and enable as many people as possible to take up all the benefits and opportunities their new digital society participation will offer' (DCCAE 2019:21). With the infrastructure produced by the NBP belonging to a private company, the state is framed more clearly in this document's discourse as being a regulator, facilitator, and advertiser, while its role in the delivery of the infrastructure remains minimal.

3.5 Alternative and Similar Discourses

3.5.1 Contingency Planning and Alternatives

As part of this research, the role of alternative discourse in the policy making process that brought about these documents has also been briefly examined. Discussion of alternatives in two documents occurred late in the NBP's development. Both of these documents exhibit a coordinative discourse, having been prepared for government ministers by government departments. In fact, given the presence of redacted commercially sensitive material, they are the most coordinative of the group. The first example examined eleven alternative approaches to the NBP that could be taken if a bidder could not be found (DPER 2018:10-1). Of these, the report focuses on two alternatives that would allocate the NBP to a state-owned broadband agency, either as part of an existing agency or an entirely new one (DPER 2018:12-4). These envisioned a greater role for the state in the ownership and construction of the NBP. The explanations given for why the commercial stimulus model is preferable to these also match with the issue framing found in the previous four NBP documents. These priorities centre around potentially higher costs, delays in rollout, and the loss of the epistemic leadership that the private sector possesses (DPER 2018:15-6). This latter concern was framed as the dominant risk that the government perceived in using a state-led model.

Building off the previous report, another contingency planning report was carried out (DPER 2019). This report laid out three alternative approaches, all variations on the commercial stimulus model. These were a proposal to split the NBP into two different tendering processes, a proposal to give a maximum subsidy of €1 billion to procure the largest broadband coverage that budget would allow, and a proposal to build basic backhaul infrastructure which 'may' provoke further commercial investment (DPER 2019:2-3). The report makes clear that a key element of any alternative proposal must be that it allows '…the

continuation of work with industry…to maximise commercial investment…by removing barriers to investment' (DPER 2019:4). However, what those barriers are understood to be is unknown, as that section has been redacted from the document. Aside from that requirement, the other priorities are nearly identical to those in the 2018 report: timeliness, value for money, and the difficulty in matching the epistemic capabilities of industry (DPER 2019:5)

Although the discourse analysed in the previous four documents has framed the issues very similarly, these contingency reports demonstrate that alternative discourses were present. However, they were only contingencies. A core part of the discourse found in the first report is the importance of epistemic leadership from industry. Without this, the report argues, any rollout of the NBP would be more expensive and take longer. The second contingency report specifically deals with just three options, all very similar to the commercial stimulus model favoured in the previously discussed NBP documents. This suggests an overall consistency in the government's framing of the issue, despite an awareness and active consideration of alternative models very late in the NBP's development.

3.5.2 European Union Broadband Plans

To examine how the 2012 approach taken by the Irish government compares to those found elsewhere in Europe, this research project has briefly examined the 'Study on National Broadband Plans in the EU-28' (EC 2014). However, that report concluded that there was a very high degree of variation in the broadband plans put forward by the member states, arguing that this can be explained by the infrastructural differences across those states (EC 2014:8). Despite this, there were some categories those plans could be grouped into. Ireland, together with eleven other member states, focused on the operational implementation of broadband targets in their plans (EC 2014:50). Based on the analysis of the report, the other member states

have taken a similar approach to Ireland in their framing of the state's role in broadband policy. European national broadband plans also envisioned state intervention largely in relation to cases of market failure, specifically in rural-urban divides (EC 2014:205-7). Ireland's NBP is described as having a 'supply-side' focus, grouped with market-orientated initiatives found in the United Kingdom, Austria, France, Denmark, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania (EC 2014:213). Overall, the findings of this report suggest that the development of broadband plans in other member states may not have substantially influenced the discourse surrounding the NBP. However, this comes with the caveat that a more detailed comparative examination of these plans may yield far more data and a more definitive answer.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

4.1 Consistencies and Cognitive Lock

Ultimately, the results of this research project may not have been surprising, but they have been illuminating. The discourse around the importance of broadband to society was almost identical across the four documents. Each one framed the internet as being a social and economically essential utility. Issues of economic competitiveness and benefits for businesses dominated this discourse in each document. Wherever the Irish digital divide was discussed, it was consistently framed as a problem of physical infrastructure in rural areas. Other aspects, such as an engagement gap or a digital skill divide, are discussed far less frequently. In discourse analysed from the four documents, the state was consistently envisioned as being a 'facilitator' rather than a 'deliverer' of broadband infrastructure, an area that industry was given leadership in. This comes despite the consistent comparisons between access to broadband and rural electrification made in the documents.

It was also the case that the Irish government was not alone in pursuing the specific model it did. My brief exploration of European broadband plans demonstrated that while several European countries also adopted a 'supply-side' approach, that categorization is very broad. The question of to what degree policy transfer played a role, defined by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000:6-7) as 'involving the adoption of policies across a number of different nations', may also have been partly answered in that report. The report specifically called the national broadband plans of the member states 'hardly transferrable' due to the unique starting positions of those states (EC 2014:13-4). Though policies pursued in other EU states may have influenced the government's approach, policy transfer does not seem to have been a significant factor in the NBP's development. It seems that no blueprint existed for a national broadband

plan at the European level. Overall, the Irish governments discourse on the NBP was consistently framed and seemed to have developed indigenously.

The theory of 'cognitive lock' may account for this lack of deviation. As defined by Mark Blyth (2001:4-5), cognitive lock occurs when a set of policy ideas comes to be understood and accepted as the 'right' way of doing things. This in turn leads to path dependency, in which policy-making becomes possible '…only in terms of these ideas' (Blyth 2001:4). Of course, such a cognitive lock does not mean there was an absence of alternative discourse. As my brief analysis of the contingency reports in 2018 and 2019 demonstrated, there were alternatives under consideration. However, even when alternative solutions were proposed the framing remained consistent. Time and time again, the epistemic leadership of industry was deemed to be so indispensable that the loss of public ownership was considered an acceptable price to pay. The Report of the Next-Generation Broadband Report (DCENR 2012a) acted as the policy blueprint for the government. It is in that report, and in the wholesale and consistent adoption of its recommendations by the government, that we find the influence in framing the issue of the power elite Wright-Mills (2008) discussed.

That the ideas of this power elite became cognitively locked is not a surprising find. Unlike other utilities, such as electricity, broadband simply does not have a long history of state-led delivery. Unlike social housing, there is no historical legacy of state involvement in the sector to draw on. In addressing the digital divide in infrastructure, the role of the state has been reduced to a 'facilitator' of the broadband sector, which is framed as alone in possessing the epistemic competence to carry out this task. This is a state of affairs that some, such as Slayton and Clarke-Ginsburg (2018), would class as a form of regulatory capture. Broadband as a utility has been developed almost entirely within the 'neoliberal era' in Ireland. Given that the dominant political ideology emphasises the importance of market freedom and competition, the question of broadband delivery has become cognitively locked to those ideas. Broadband

is perceived as the domain of those 'corporate, technocratic and epistemic authorities' empowered by neoliberalism (Plehwe 2016:69). This research demonstrates that the discourse of policy makers surrounding broadband has reflected the strength of that cognitive lock and, in turn, the influence of the broadband industry's power elite.

4.2 Absences

What I was most surprised by was what was not present in the discourse of these documents. Any meaningful retrospective discussion of the Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) is conspicuously absent. As the most recent example of broadband infrastructure construction, I would have expected these documents to refer to them far more than they did. Why was that model not pursued? The few mentions of the MANs are positive, with one document (DCENR 2012b:6) crediting them with '…significantly enhancing the productive capacity' in areas they were introduced. The MANs are a state-owned asset, one the authors of these documents framed as being successful. Why was the model not discussed in these documents? What factors led to state ownership being discounted at such an early phase in the NBP's design? Why could urban broadband infrastructure be state owned while rural broadband could not? Another research project may find it illuminating to explore references to the MANs in other NBP documents, to understand why the same model was not applied again.

4.3 Limitations and Further Questions

There are a multitude of limitations with this research project. On example concerns the small number of documents used. For more experienced researchers and projects with a larger scope, there exists a wealth of information in the documents produced regarding the

NBP. Official policy documents, department statements, public consultations, and the final contract with Granahan McCourt all represent useful sources for anyone attempting to understand how this policy became reality in the form it has. Another example is the discourse analysis approach. This approach has primarily examined only documentary sources, being concerned with how ideas were presented there rather than with the individuals presenting them, or their validity. A more thorough examination of the individuals involved in these documents, especially in the consultations, might reveal more about why certain ideas dominated during the NBP's development. Comparison with previous public-private partnerships would also be very informative. Ultimately, this project only touches the surface of an important and deeply complex policy solution. Being a relatively new policy, the NBP is fertile ground for researchers interested in the interaction between state and society, the relationship between government and market, as well as the impact of EU state aid rules on the design of infrastructure projects. One of the additional questions these findings might bring up is a simple but essential one: so what? What can examining the NBP tell us about infrastructure and the state in the 21st century?

The authors of each of the four documents all framed the importance of broadband infrastructure to modern society as indispensable and closing the rural digital divide was an imperative. The NBP was even framed as having equal status to the rural electrification scheme by successive governments. Yet unlike rural electrification, the deployment of its information age successor has been ceded almost entirely to the private sector. None of this is exactly surprising to anyone familiar with the Irish state and infrastructure in the 21st century. This has implications for future infrastructural projects. The parties behind the proposal and implementation of the NBP have introduced a new paradigm for utilities defined as socially essential. With its interventions scrutinized in the language of cost-benefit, value for money,

and industry knowledge, the role of the state in providing those utilities is diminished. In terms of implementation, the NBP simply is not the rural electrification of the 21st century.

However, that famous question asked by the late Mark Fisher must also be asked here: is there no alternative? Is broadband infrastructure impossible to provide without marketization? How has our supply-side model fared internationally? Were submissions made during the public consultations taken onboard? How do past experiences of the 'state-as-facilitator' for such services compare? Even the question of how differently the Irish government could have handled the NBP is affected by questions around the state aid rules of the EU. Unfortunately, these questions lie beyond the scope and word-count of this undergraduate research project, which has only served to illustrate the strength of marketisation as an idea even when confronted with complex social issues like the digital divide. Still, I believe the performance of Broadband Ireland under Granahan McCourt will likely provide answers and justifications to those seeking to find that alternative in the years to come.

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Appendix 1: Discourse Analysis Excel Spreadsheets

Data Worksheet
17779141.xlsx

Appendix 2: Discourse Analysis Documents in PDF

DCENR 2012a.
Enabling a Connecte

DCENR 2012b.
Delivering a Connec

DCENR 2015.
National Broadband

DCCEA 2019.
Delivering the Natio