

Examine the development of primary economic activities in a Peripheral Irish region that you have studied

(30 marks)

The North and West (N&W) region is an underdeveloped area and can often be seen as the opposite of core regions. It is remote and the potential to develop these areas has been inhibited by factors such as climate, relief and location. Due to this, these areas usually have poor infrastructure, high dependency on primary economic activities, limited employment opportunities and large scale out-ward migration (only 13% of graduates remain in the area) which leads to an ageing low population demographic (majority of farmers over 55 years of age).

Due to the physical characteristics of the region, farming has been hindered. The Cool Temperate Oceanic climate brings annual rainfall in some of the mountainous areas of the region to 2,500mm with average temperatures ranging from 14°C (Summer) to 5.7°C (Winter). Rainfall patterns impact soils, and therefore farming productivity, as podzol soil formation through leaching in the mountainous regions is poor for agriculture. Lowland regions suffer also as poorly drained areas, particularly around Lough Mask, Lough Swilly and Connemara hinder farming (peat and gley soils). While the drainage basin of the river Shannon has fertile alluvial soils, this area is frequently flooded. As a consequence, this peripheral region is classified as disadvantaged by the EU. Pastoral farming, poultry and mushroom production are common as the soils do not allow arable (cereal) farming.

Similarly, human factors have had a negative impact on primary activities. The uneven distribution of the population in the N&W region does not allow a strong market for produce, as the region only contains 18% of the population of Ireland, with the main urban centres being Galway, Letterkenny and Sligo. Leitrim has the lowest population density of 18 people per km². Farms are smaller in the area with the smallest found in Monaghan and Mayo (21.8 hectares) As a result of this mechanisation is low and, as a high proportion of farmers are older, new and innovative practices in farming are not common. Difficult environmental conditions, namely high rainfall (relief), peat and waterlogged gley soils, and mountainous terrain, limit productivity.

As a consequence of the above, forestry is relatively widespread in the region due to Ireland's long growing season, well-distributed rainfall and mild oceanic temperature giving a growth rate for trees more than three times higher than the continent of Europe (12% of Donegal is forested). The EU has promoted forestry as a more profitable activity than farming in marginal regions such as the N&W - many farmers have taken up this opportunity. Also, Ireland's fishing industry provides income to this peripheral region, with ports such as Killybegs in Donegal providing employment. Ireland's continental shelf stretches for approximately 480 kilometers off the west coast of Ireland and our shallow sea region encourages the growth of plankton, a microscopic food for fish. The warm waters of the Gulf Stream attract a large variety of fish, such as herring and cod. Our most important fishing ports are on the west coast. They include Killybegs, Castletownbere, Rossaveal and Dingle.