



# CITY PROFILE

# GALWAY

APRIL 2016



# CITY DESCRIPTION

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Country:** Ireland

**Province:** Connacht

**County:** Galway

**Area:** 53 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population:** 75,529 inhab. (2011)

**Metropolitan area:** 462,000 inhab. (2011).

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**Mayor:** Pearce Flannery

**Website:** [www.galwaycity.ie](http://www.galwaycity.ie)

## CONTEXT

The City of Galway is situated in the West of Ireland, in the province of Connacht. It lies on the River Corrib between Lough Corrib and Galway Bay and it is surrounded by the County of Galway. It is the fourth most populous urban area in the Republic of Ireland and the sixth most populous city in the island of Ireland. Galway has had the title of fastest growing city in Europe. In the 2011 census, it consisted of 75,529 people (175,127 in Galway County).

The name of the city comes from the river Gaillimh (River Corrib) that formed the western boundary of the earliest settlement, which was called Dún Bhun na Gaillimhe ("Fort at the mouth of the Gaillimh"). The word Gaillimh means "stony" as in "stony river". Historically, the name was anglicised as Galliv, which is closer to the Irish pronunciation than its name in Latin, Galvia.



# CULTURAL HERITAGE

## LOCATION

Galway is perched on the edge of the Atlantic surrounded by beauty; the unique karst limestone landscape of the Burren to the south; the iconic Conamara landscape – coast, bogland and mountain – to the north; the celebrated Galway Bay, guarded by the stone forts, holy wells and oratories of the Aran islands to the west and Inis Bofin further north. To the east lie arable land and a network of lakes and rivers, great houses, castles and large estates, thatched houses, vernacular buildings and a rich ecclesiastical heritage.

## LIFE SHAPED BY THE ATLANTIC

Throughout its history, from the earliest tool makers of the Mesolithic period through its heyday as the west coast's most important medieval and post-medieval centre of trade and ambition and on to its current status of cultural capital of the west coast – its fortunes have ebbed and flowed. For nearly ten millennia Galway was primarily accessed through the super highway that is the Atlantic – a route that could carry people, goods and vessels anywhere in the world – and through the Corrib and Shannon rivers, Lough Derg and the lakelands. The city and county developed a unique cultural pattern of life, a response to the confluence of place, natural beauty, language, necessity, invention and available resources. A rich oral and written tradition, an innate aesthetic that translated into a wide variety of archaeological monuments, vernacular buildings such as the thatched cottage, richly patterned and coloured textiles and costumes, traditional crafts and vernacular buildings were established. From this emerged a singular cultural identity that inspired hundreds of artists, writers, poets, historians, folklorists, traditional musicians, singers, dancers, designers, cooks and chefs, street performers, creators of spectacles, makers, producers, innovators, directors, dreamers and ready and willing participants and audiences. From the mid nineteenth century, when tourism and touring became a past-time of the wealthy and adventurous – a visit to the west of Ireland was a must-do inclusion in the itinerary. This is reflected in the valuable artworks, heritage sites and monuments, Irish language culture, iconic poetry and plays, songs and concertos, short stories, long novels, food production and vernacular buildings that we are known for throughout the world.

## CULTURAL PROFILE

Over a period of a thousand years Galway continually adapted to its given circumstances – economically, socially and culturally. Most recently, an economic and cultural lull in the 1970s resulted in an unexpected creative explosion that has sustained, grown and developed into a series of internationally known arts and cultural organisations and festivals – such as Galway International Arts Festival, Druid Theatre, Macnas, The Galway Film Fleadh (the only film festival in Ireland that nominates to the Oscars Short Film category), Cúirt International Festival of Literature, Baboró International Arts Festival for Children, Branar Theatre Company, Clifden Arts Week and Cruinniú na mBád – all of which have helped to make Galway an internationally recognised cultural destination. The Galway Races, Connacht Rugby and the Ballinasloe Horse Fair are three more international cultural brands that have marked

Galway out on the world map. The recent designation of Galway City of Film by UNESCO and Galway's membership of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network has added greatly also to the cultural cachet of the city. Galway has a very strong annual music programme with events from organisations such as Music for Galway, the Early Music Festival, Cois Claddaigh, the Galway Baroque Singers and the much loved Contempo Quartet. In addition, Galway has over eighty three festivals in its annual festival programme. These events include beach racing at Omev Island, the Lady Gregory Autumn Gathering, the Galway Food Festival; Oyster Festivals, Inis Bofin Arts Festival, Connemara Sea Week and Bog Week; Féile na gCloch on Inis Oírr, Loughrea and Athenry Medieval Festivals.

Galway is rich in cultural heritage both in the built and natural environment. The City has retained its medieval fabric and scale and presents a walkable city with a coherent core. The county offers a huge variety of landscapes, monuments and biodiversity. Galway City Museum has one of the highest visitor numbers in the country for non-fee paying attractions outside the capital with over 170,000 visitors annually. Galway has a thriving indigenous boat building industry and is a centre for marine research and development for both marine and fresh water with institutions such as the Martin Ryan Institute in the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) and the Marine Institute leading the way in the field.

Galway has the largest population of inhabited islands in the country and these hold unique communities with strong traditions and heritage as well as outstanding areas of beauty.

Galway has a high number of forest parks in the city and county providing green spaces and environmental education to local and visiting populations. Connemara National Park provides a variety of facilities for over 170,000 visitors annually.

In Galway city alone, there are 40,000 pupils and students engaged in education with 26,000 students enrolled in third level education. The population of 20 to 24 year olds is twice the national average.

The NUIG, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Galway Technical Institute, amongst others, offer a wide range of undergraduate, postgraduate and short-term courses for those interested in pursuing a career in the creative sectors.

NUIG has developed a three year Creative Momentum programme that aims to support the creative industry sector in Europe's northern edge.

A new Creative Enterprise course for aspiring creative entrepreneurs has been developed by Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, to provide them with the knowledge, skills and opportunity to develop and test their ideas for a new creative product or service .

## THE UNIQUE ROLE OF THE GAELTACH

Galway is unique in Ireland in having a city that has Gaeltacht status for almost half its geographical area. The Galway Gaeltacht has a higher proportion of Irish-speaking inhabitants (75.2%) than all other Gaeltacht areas in the country combined (69.5%). Over the past ten years, there has been a growth in the amount of Irish speakers living and working in the city and county due mainly to the growth of the communications industry as led by TG4 (the national Irish language television station), Irish language cultural activities and Gaelscoileanna (Irish language schools). The Irish language and linguistic heritage is an intrinsic part of the cultural experience and life of Galway. In March 2016, the elected members of Galway City Council launched Galway's ambition to be a bilingual city, outlining a vision to support the implementation of this initiative. In addition, Galway has also been designated a Gaeltacht Service Town under Acht na Gaeltachta 2012 and a language plan will be prepared as part of this.

# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Known as a type of Shangri-la within the corporate sector that engages with Galway, it is a difficult place to leave. However, it must re-imagine itself if it is to continue to evolve, maintain and secure sustainability under the shadow of fundamental changes in the economic, social and environmental frameworks; it must respond to a rapidly changing world, a rapidly changing cultural framework driven by new technologies; a rapidly changing community which is strengthened by its youth population, but made more fragile as a result.

## CULTURAL DEFICITS

The implementation of a sustainable cultural strategy framework needs investment. One of the areas requiring significant monetary investment during the lifetime of this ten-year strategy is cultural infrastructure, both physical infrastructure and collaborative infrastructure – physical and virtual cultural hubs. In terms of buildings, a number of key cultural deficits are identified below. The proposed additions to the cultural stock of Galway are all needed and will certainly enhance the cultural offer of the city and county. However, before any of them proceed, they will require feasibility studies, cost-benefit analyses, planning permissions and extensive consultation – whether they are large-scale civic spaces, innovation hubs or small-scale community centres.

## CULTURAL NETWORKING

Consideration must also be given to the creation and management of realistic and effective support for shared practices, collaborations and networking opportunities within the arts, community arts, sport, amenity, heritage, built and natural environment and creative industry communities. In some instances, this will include buildings – production space/workshops/gallery space/rehearsal space/shop front/meeting rooms/outdoor space/facilities – and in others, virtual space/digital platforms/online community space/improved websites/improved social media platforms/online markets. This entire infrastructure comes at a cost – and this must be clearly defined and detailed before commitments are given.

## EMIGRATION

The west of Ireland has been deeply marked by emigration from the eighteenth century to the present decade continually losing a high percentage of its young people to the growing Irish diaspora and to careers and lives in other countries. Conversely, in the last two decades it has also been enriched by a wave of immigration into the area. This strategy takes full cognisance of this and proposes a series of objectives that has a role to play in the reversal of emigration and that has, at all times, the best interests of the entire population, but particularly, the young people, as a watermark.

## CREATIVE ECONOMY

In the last thirty years, Galway has become home to the largest number of individuals employed in the creative sector within the western region of Ireland – employment is at a rate of one in every 33 jobs. Collectively, the creative industry sector accounts for 31 per cent of total direct employment as well as 21 per cent of turnover. Galway has an audiovisual, television and film sector that is worth over €72 million to the local economy. There are over 600 people employed in the sector many of whom are based in the cluster of audio visual companies in Conamara. Employment in this sector is growing by 24.5% annually. The Made in Galway initiative was established to develop a brand to showcase locally produced Galway based goods and services. It represents the work of over 200 businesses and provides a web-based directory and support structure for a wide range of craft and food producers in Galway city and county.

Future growth prospects for the western region's creative sector are potentially strong. If a high growth scenario was implemented including support for networking, formal networks for specific sub-sectors and the implementation of an export promotion strategy, by 2020 the sector could generate a forecasted €650m in direct sales and directly employ close to 30,000 people.

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The challenge for Galway is to ensure that more of the local population is offered opportunities to engage in health enhancing cultural activity. In order to do this, the strategy will identify effective and innovative cultural services that support mental and physical health and wellbeing. The strategy will also provide support to cultural institutions and agencies to carry out programmes with communities with high levels of poverty and exclusion. Working with agencies such as the local and national HSE, the strategy will develop, on a pilot basis, one directed health and culture initiative. It will also develop, in partnership with the creative sector, capacity-building programmes for social services and other health workers that improve health and well-being among staff and service users.

## CULTURAL STRATEGY

Galway's Cultural Sustainability Strategy has been evolving as Galway was bidding for European Capital of Culture 2020. The bid represented an opportunity to reflect on the uniqueness of Galway culture - its richness, vitality and diversity - and its place and role in a shared European culture. The bid also presented an unprecedented opportunity to re-imagine and create a world-class showcase of cultural excellence and sustainability. In July 2016, Galway was awarded the title of European Capital of Culture, which it will hold in 2020.

Therefore, the Cultural Sustainability Strategy is part of a broad strategic approach that is putting culture at the very centre of our framework for local development.

So as to realize the vision described in its corporate plans of continuing to make Galway an attractive, vibrant and proud city and county in which to live, work and visit, the City and County Councils and their partners will focus on strategies and actions in three inter-related categories: PEOPLE, PLACE and PROCESS.

## STRATEGIC AIMS

The foundation of this model has been laid using a combination of research, a policy framework and consultation.

These are the strategic aims of the project:

- 1. Access and cultural rights:** Development of a framework for cultural access and participation that includes everyone.
- 2. Cultural heritage:** Work in partnership with communities, organisations, agencies and individuals to safeguard and enhance our cultural heritage.
- 3. Culture – education and excellence:** Encourage and support training initiatives, the development of creative entrepreneurship tool-kits and European learning partnerships for the artistic/creative community.
- 4. Environment and place.** To ensure an integrated approach to cultural development – including environmental, social and economic factors – with sustainability at its core.
- 5. Culture – economy:** Supporting measures for the creative economy, incubations and start-ups, knowledge transfer, design and production.
- 6. Culture – health and wellbeing:** Ensure that more of the local population are offered opportunities to engage in health-improving cultural activity.
- 7. Culture – info and knowledge:** Improve ways to access and use ICT for cultural communication, presentation and production with reference to copyright, copy left open source and European and international co-operation networks.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The challenges and opportunities the city and county face in cultural terms revolve around the following areas: cultural players (historians, archivists, archaeologists, architects, designers, artists, writers, growers, cultural managers etc.), cultural Infrastructure (physical arts, heritage and culture infrastructure), cultural economy, community, cultural management, environment.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

The management plan for this ten-year strategy will take into account the following work areas: consultation; management; funding; partnerships; education; collaborations; local, regional, national and international dimensions; monitoring and evaluation.

The roll-out of this strategy will include the development of a Charter of Cultural Rights and outline the role of a management agency, like a Cultural Council, for cultural development in Galway - dealing with all aspects of arts, culture, heritage, the Irish language and expressions of creativity.

There will be a series of three Implementation Plans (incorporating indicators and reviews) over the ten-year life of the Cultural Policy and Strategy:

- I 2016 – 2018
- II 2019 – 2021
- III 2022 – 2025

Each of these implementation plans will be made up of set of actions agreed through the consultation process.

Finally, a carefully-constructed financial basis will underpin the implementation of the strategy. Galway City and County Councils will identify the funding partners and delivery partners/mechanisms that will help us to deliver the strategy and will include: Local Authority annual budgets and targeted grant schemes, Central government funding (National and local Grant schemes).



# CONTACTS

For additional information about this exercise, please contact:



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