



# GALWAY

Pilot City 2015-2017 • culture 21  
**EUROPE**

Pilot City 2015-2017 for Agenda 21 for culture  
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

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## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENT: GALWAY AND CULTURE**

## CITY DESCRIPTION

### POPULATION AND TERRITORY

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).

### CULTURAL HERITAGE

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" (the mythical and alternative derivations are given in the subsection 'History'). Historically, the name was anglicised as Galliv, which is closer to the Irish pronunciation than its name in Latin, Galvia. 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 Connemara landscape - coast, bogland and mountain - to the north and the celebrated Galway Bay, guarded by the prehistoric stone forts, holy wells and oratories of the Aran islands, to the west and Inis Bofin further north. To the east lies arable land and a network of lakes and rivers, great houses, castles and large estates, thatched houses, vernacular buildings and a rich ecclesiastical heritage.

Throughout its history, from the earliest tool makers of the Mesolithic period through its hey day 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, that translated into a wide variety of archaeological monuments, vernacular buildings, richly patterned and coloured textiles and costumes, traditional crafts and vernacular buildings.

Up from this, grew a singular cultural identity that inspired hundreds of artists, writers, poets, historians, folklorists, traditional musicians, singers etc.

# GALWAY CULTURAL PROFILE

## GALWAY CITY COUNCIL

Culture is at the heart of life in Galway: it is pivotal to all aspects of our development as a city and county. Our ambition is to design, drive and deliver a strategy that transforms Galway into a working model of cultural sustainability, community participation, best practice and world class cultural and creative experiences.

The Planning Authority for the City is the Galway City Council, which aim is to manage a system of physical planning able to cross economic, social and sustainable development issues in the city.

As the result of a long held recognition by the two local authorities (Galway City and County) of the pivotal role culture plays in its past, present and its future; an understanding of the connection between culture and local sustainable development and research into the potential growth of the cultural and wider creative industry sectors , a first cultural strategy has been devised for Galway.

## CULTURAL STRATEGY

The 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.

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).

# CULTURAL ACTORS AND OFFER

## INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Galway is unique in Ireland in having a city that has almost half its area with Gaeltacht status. The Irish language and linguistic heritage is an intrinsic part of the cultural experience and life of Galway for many years with cultural and social institutions such as Gaillimh le Gaeilge, Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, Áras na nGael, playing a lead role in the cultural promotion of the language.

## CULTURAL OFFER IN GALWAY

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, 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, Clifden Arts Week, Cruinniú na mBád and Macnas – all of whom 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.