

Cities

Ciaran Oglesby talks to Peter Finnegan of Dublin City Council

CO: Welcome, Peter.

PF: Thanks, Ciaran. Glad to be here. I am Director of International Relations and Research at Dublin City Council and we are involved in 2 initiatives which are relevant to your programme. 1 is a clip network in Europe which is looking at the effects of migration and 2 is an open cities project which is looking at the economic benefits of migration.

CO: Great that's wonderful. Peter we are going to begin with a brief description of how Dublin City's current identity was formed by an influx of foreign cultures and peoples, most notably the Celts, the Vikings and the Normans, possibly the biggest influences. How their influences are still visible and feel their effects today. Would you like to explore that with us now?

PF: I would like to maybe take a few angles actually because Dublin has and always was a melting pot of cultures and nationalities and different religions as well. Even before the arrival of the Normans and the Celts there were people here who had a different religious take on the world. Equally it has been the port of exit for many Irish people who have left and gone to live in different cultures around the world. One of the richness of being Irish is the fact that we have been able to accommodate these many differences over the years and it is part of what has made us who we are today. Equally being able to go out and hold our own in different cultures around the world and that Diaspora has been a very important element in our economic success in recent years. Ultimately the soul of our Diaspora belongs back here. But peoples coming to a, I think if you look at most of the capital cities of Europe, last week actually here in Dublin we had 27 capitals of Europe and each one of those cities in turn have played host to different cultures. People have moved across the continent of Europe sometimes as invaders, sometimes as traders, sometimes as visitors but in all cases they have brought something new into the cultural mix and that's fundamentally the kind of Dublin we have today. A mixture of Celtic, Norman, and Viking and in recent years the more English orientated settlement patterns particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries. That is what makes us who we are that mix.

CO: To a large degree it was also the precursor to the evolution of the city. We would have had Dublin in Viking times would have been a walled city with ramparts around the city. We had the black pool outside and the Liberty areas.

PF: Well the Vikings, the Liberty areas came slightly later, came to Dublin as invaders but more importantly as traders and the Viking city that was established around the Wood Quay/ Dublin Castle area and around the black pool that was a deep water area where they could moor ships between the Poddle and the Liffey. That Viking Settlement was effectively a very important part of the trading routes throughout Europe and that's why you will find an awful lot in the archaeology and the digs that have happened around it, an awful lot of very rich evidence of trade from places as far apart as Russia and right across the middle and east and north of Africa. The growth of the city after that, the coming of the Normans, was the establishment of

the first formal walled city because it was a different time and they were protecting themselves from hostile Celtic chieftains who lay on the fringe of the city. The Liberties area referred to came about in medieval times as an area outside of the city where people's taxation wasn't as high. Taxation being an appropriate focus to have these days and that Liberties area grew in that scenario as well.

CO: Now we are going to discuss how the city as a place where different classes meet with different identities and how living in the same place makes them have the same interests or generates an environment where they share the same or similar interests. That would be very true wouldn't it, in the case of Dublin?

PF: I think it's true in the case of any city. One of the good things about a city is it's a healthy place to live in if people don't get into ghettos. They actually do mix in the same space, the same living space. Some cities have grown, particularly cities in the United States, with their ghettos. So you get your Chinatown, your Irish and Italian areas in the city. That tends to lead to a division within cities. This city has always been a place where different cultures tend to mix. You referred to different classes; the class mix in the city has perhaps not been as successful in that context. There are differences in areas of the city in terms of a class division within the city, a lot of that has been overcome by the new regeneration projects that have been undertaken by Dublin City Council. They look at how best to mix classes, different nationalities, different social status within a community so that you are actually building a living area where people who are different interact and those differences help people understand what it is that makes one another tick and it also helps them understand what is important in terms of the things they have in common.

CO: On that note it is very true, as we are all aware now, in Dublin there is a major project that has been ongoing for the past few years on and shall continue in the future, and it is Ballymun regeneration limited. It is an absolutely wonderful project undertaken by Dublin City Council and it is a renewal of major suburban area that was on the fringe of Dublin City and which had been poorly structured and planned for in the beginning, probably because it was not realised that it would grow so fast and so big. Now it has been totally renewed. On that point Peter it's true that Dublin was a very urbanised region in the county as most of the population was based in the city for years and that the first major housing developments of a suburban nature or design were undertaken relatively late in comparison to most other European capital cities. Wouldn't that be true?

PF: I think there is a context to this. When you are talking in this vein you are talking about the centre city core or what we could say is the area currently inhabited by Dublin City Council, which reaches from the Northside, Ballymun, Coolock down as far as UCD on the Southside around to Kimmage, Crumlin and Ballyfermot. Some of those in effect grew as suburbs. Ballyfermot and Ballymun were all green field sites that grew as the city needed housing and the quality of housing needed to be better than the tenements that existed at the turn of the century and into the 20s and 30s in the inner city. They became the model of housing development and the spread further. One of the big problems we have today in Dublin is the fact that that urban sprawl which began in the Ballyfermots and Ballymuns and reached out to the Jobstown, Killinardens and Blanchardstown has gone even further into counties like Meath and Kildare. At one level it guarantees people a certain quality of housing but at another

level it creates a low density urban area. It makes it hard to connect people by providing appropriate and adequate public transport so in some ways, for a modern city, we have to look at higher density. We are not talking 20 story skyscrapers or anything like that. That's not the nature of Dublin City but certainly a higher density of urban living because it's only in the richness that comes from living in a "crowded" or more crowded environment that you get that buzz that makes cities work. In particular that buzz that makes the infrastructure of cities work so there is enough volume of people to use a public transport system, there is enough volume of people to keep life in the city after the main workplaces have closed. Cities need volume and Dublin City, Dublin City Region, has about 1, 5 000, 000 people. If you include the four main local authority areas but a lot of that is very spread out. What we need to look at is to return a little bit to the old model of a very strong and very dense, relative to our current scenario, city core in which people lived. We see some of that happening through the regeneration of docklands, greater density going into areas like that, we see it happen in the Ballymun example that you mentioned. There are opportunities elsewhere in Dublin City particularly around the Naas Road, that kind of development happening, but to make it work, to make a city work it needs to be a place where there are enough people mixing often enough with each other to generate the buzz and provide the wherewithal, the justification for the necessary infrastructure in the city.

CO: On that point, Dublin has come a long way. It had to become very cosmopolitan, very fast in its contemporary setting in comparison to most European countries because we were an island.

PF: Yes, that's true. We recently did an interview with Bob Geldof for that conference of capital cities. He spoke about the fact that when he was young, which isn't that long ago; he referred to Dublin as a "pinched, poor little place" where people's vision didn't extend much further than their own local area. Today it's very much a rich and successful city. It's very much a cosmopolitan city, it's very much a city that looks out to the world, and it's very much a city that entertains not just different cultures but also different food types in the city. So it has changed radically in the last 30 years and that's important, it's important for Ireland because if we don't have a capital city, and a capital city region that can operate in that kind of international arena then we are not going to draw in the necessary economic development and the necessary migrant labour with talent we need to fuel the future economic development, not just of Dublin but of Ireland. I think its one thing that we sometimes forget that if the capital city of any country is ignored or isn't resourced so that it is developing, the whole country suffers. It is a bit like imagining you being an individual with a weak heart. If your heart is weak the rest of you isn't going to operate very well, if your heart is strong you will operate very well so one of the things you are going to look after is your heart and its health. That's very important in relation to capital cities not just Dublin but equally to Stockholm, Copenhagen and Paris. If the capital city of a country isn't looked after, isn't supported, isn't fostered, isn't strong then the country suffers. Today to be a strong capital city you have to be outward looking, you have to engage with the world, you have to be cosmopolitan in attitude and approach and you really have to welcome the differences that make society rich as opposed to seeking perhaps what we had in an earlier part of the last century, the sameness that made us feel safe.

CO: Finally, It seems to be very true because historically Europe has been a landscape where a lot of its cities were planned and developed around its universities. There was a bond there between the centres of learning all throughout Europe from mediaeval times up until now. How true is that today?

PF: Well I think the first thing is that the link between “The Town” and “The Gown” has always been an important factor in the development and life of any city. Dublin is particularly rich in its university life. That’s one the reasons we are able to attract mobile and talented people from around the country and around the world to study and research here. That richness and that connection of universities and cities is something that we have now structured into the life of cities. The current City Manager, John Tierney, took the initiative some time ago to establish what he is calling “The Creative Dublin Alliance” which brings the universities in the city, the city council and the business community together to look at how they can help the city become more creative, draw in more knowledge based economic activity and prepare and plan for the future. The universities are central to that drive, they are equally central to the reflection that is needed upon life in the city. Some of the most challenging and provoking, reflective studies on Dublin have come out of the university milieu and in particular out of planning and geography schools, sociology and political schools in a university because what they are doing is standing back and looking at the urban reality of Dublin today. They are saying “how can that develop”, “what are the challenges” and “where are we going”. That is very important, that research and analysis is vital to inform the people who have the power to make decisions, whether it’s business decisions, city government decisions, the support from state agencies, whatever decisions are made in the city it needs to be informed and it is being informed in large measure by the kind of research and reflection that our universities promote so we have this unique richness of universities, possibly we suffer a little in the size of our universities when they are compared to comparable centres internationally. We like to think sometimes that Dublin is the Boston of Western Europe in that the concentration of universities here is akin to that of Boston.

Jonathan Gallagher speaks to Mary Clarke of Dublin City Libraries and Archives

JG: Can you give a brief description on how Dublin City's current identity is formed because of an influx of foreign cultures and identities?

MC: Dublin has really functioned as a foreign city in an Irish landscape for most of its history. It was founded by the Vikings and developed by the Normans. The Normans brought a European dimension to Dublin through the Norman Empire and we have records in the city archives which describe all of the merchants coming from Western Europe in a big arc from Scandinavia right through to Italy. All of these people were drawn to Dublin by its trading status as an outpost of the Norman Empire in the late 12th Century and this continued right through the early Middle Ages.

JG: Could you explain how the city has evolved as a result of different cultures mixing in the same place?

MC: Dublin has always been something of a melting pot. This is something we are more accustomed to in recent times but it's always been a factor of the city. In the Middle Ages you would have heard a range of languages spoken in the market place. Some Irish, not very much because the Irish were not very welcome in Dublin, you would have heard Welsh, French, a little Latin and some form of early English. English became the standard language of Dublin from about 1450 onwards. It was as late as that, before that the inhabitants would have spoken mostly French so it's always been a very exotic city in Irish terms and its very interesting to see it regaining that particular character today with the mix of people we now have in the city, all gelling together.

JG: How are effects of these different cultures visible today?

MC: My own view would be that the most visible aspect of this melting pot would be in cuisine more than anything else. Irish cuisine, if you could call it that, is quite basic, it's Irish stew, soda bread, very simple food but the foreign influences in Dublin have always brought something more exotic. In the late 19th Century there was an influx of Germans to Dublin. They brought with them extremely good pork butchers, Hugstetters and Olhausens and a much higher quality of sausage. That might sound like a very basic thing but it is something that we all relate to and Olhausen's is still a brand name in Dublin today. You see it growing with the advent of the Italian community in Dublin. Bringing ice cream parlours and good quality fish and chips, that was a new form of cuisine. In the 20th Century J'aime's is still spoken of as a good quality French restaurant in Dublin and Nico's, an early Italian restaurant serving pasta is still functioning and doing very well in Dame Street. In more recent times we have a whole range of restaurants from Brazilian through to Lebanese, Vietnamese and Japanese. All kinds of amazing cultures and cuisines have come to Dublin and are still with us today. I think even the café culture that have, not on a day like today, today its lashing rain, but if we have a fine day in Dublin and people are able to enjoy café culture, sitting out on the pavements, creating Dublin as a European city and through cuisine, that has been the greatest impact that I can see on everyday life in Dublin. It is the obvious effect of multiculturalism in the city.

JG: What is the relationship between different classes in Dublin City. What common interests do the people share within the city?

MC: I suppose this relates to the way people share a space and one way that was very common throughout the Middle Ages and right up until the 18th Century was this idea of the trade guild's processions where members of the guilds went through the city on floats. You had for example the weavers, who would make ribbons and throw them to the people in the crowd who would enjoy the spectacle and we see that nowadays in the St. Patrick's Day parade for example. Even in protest marches that are taking place in the city today. It is a way in which people share a space and perhaps they have competing or conflicting interests or even shared interests. That makes something particularly visible where all classes can come together. There has been a good deal of movement within classes in Dublin. It isn't as stratified as in many other European cities I would think and you would have movement of classes. We see that with people doing family histories where they may find the family has fallen on hard times after having previous wealth or are now much better off than earlier ancestors have been. I think education is the key to that. It leads to a great degree of social mobility within classes and from one class to another.

JG: Dublin was a very urbanistic city so far as the primary concentration of the population was based in and around the city and the first major housing developments of a suburban nature were undertaken relatively late in comparison to most of other European capital cities. Why do you think this is?

MC: The first suburban developments followed the railways and people building houses in what was Kingstown now Dun Laoghaire used the railway to get them into work in Dublin City quickly. Then the trams allowed for a certain expansion but all of this was contained within the canals. The later expansion of suburbs such as Cabra and Crumlin is not until the 1930s and is quite late. It was influenced by Raymond Unwin and the concept of the Garden City, a new concept in town planning. I think it's an offshoot of the independence of the Irish and the fact that the native government, the independent government wanted a better standard of living in terms of social housing, to move people from congested inner city tenements into good quality housing in the suburbs complete with gardens and green space. I think it's very much a product of Irish independence.

JG: Ireland is known as a land of saints and scholars. During the Dark Ages when Europe was in chaos Ireland was seen as a sanctuary and haven for centres of learning. This attracted foreign nobles and created connections between Ireland and the rest of Europe.

MC: I think in the Dark Ages the traffic was one way. It was Irish missionaries bringing learning and Christianity to Europe but at that time we didn't see a great number of people coming to Ireland. That is not my impression anyway it was very much one way in the Dark Ages. We obviously had a huge influence on Europe. I visit Cologne quite often and they have a great interest in and veneration for John Duns Scotus who was one of the early missionaries there. There are many Irish missionaries in Germany who are still well remembered including Killian and Finnian. It's something perhaps that we have forgotten about Ireland but that Europe remembers even to this day.

Jonathan Gallagher speaks to Darragh Hughes of Dublin Castle

JG: Could you please give a brief description on how Dublin Castle's current identity was formed because of the influx of foreign cultures that may have passed through?

DH: It began with the Vikings from Scandinavia who arrived in Dublin in the late 830's at Wood Quay originally which is sadly no longer with us as a site. They had an earthen bank fort on this spot that lasted quite a while. I think the Vikings were really proof of the importance of a race to adapt and to marry as well and to integrate themselves, they were quite gifted at that. They were strange, a fairly ferocious bunch, but then they seemed to relatively settle here. They were able to blend and become accepted. The Norman period is a huge influence as well. It was very brief, really just 3 years, but it represented the introduction of new skills of new knowledge from abroad. It did a lot towards the early building of the castle, they didn't get to finish it off, and then after them the English. The longest people here who properly constructed the castle and built on top of what the Normans started but didn't finish in 1234. We have the existing castle which you can see today. There is not much Viking influence left but you can certainly see the Norman and English and jumping further ahead out to those periods the influence of French and Italian art. We have pieces from both nationalities in the castle as well.

JG: What effects of multiculturalism can be seen in Dublin Castle today?

DH: There is the Chester Beatty Museum which is directly behind us in the grounds of the castle itself which contains the collection of Chester Beatty himself. It is the best collection of Asian and Persian art in the country. Proof anyway, certainly, of access to education. He would have been more educated than a lot of people at the time and wealthier certainly. It was possible to develop cultural interests beyond Ireland and we certainly did. The collection is proof of that. As a space we had a one day African festival here very recently. There were queues all the way to Dame Street to get in. You could barely move after 3pm. As a cultural centre, as a spot on the tourist trail, it is the second busiest in Dublin at the moment. We get visitors from everywhere, from Trinidad and Tobago, Japan and Greece. We have had groups from Algeria, Morocco and Brazil. Dublin as a destination does attract people from the four corners of the world and sometimes we forget that. We are quick to run the place down but we have a lot to offer foreign visitors and they seem very receptive to it. A lot of them can draw parallels between Irish history and their own or they can relate to it being a colony. Maybe it relates to them at the level of imperialism and the old days of the British Empire. Maybe it's not relevant and they are just interested in seeing something old, some remnants of the Norman times which we certainly have. People seem to warm to it no matter where they are from. The sense of how old it is works for some people. It is a proper historical site.