

Galway: A Sense of Place

By Roddy Mannion

Welcoming, appealing, vibrant, historical, arty, traditional, charming, dynamic, cosmopolitan, bohemian, atmospheric, energetic, colourful, medieval, fun loving, exuberant, ancient and modern, blend of old and new, cultural – these are some of the words and phrases used to describe one of Ireland’s most loved cities.

Galway: A Sense of Place is an engaging and visually appealing study of the city of the Tribes, its many features and attractions, but also its problems and weaknesses. Universally popular as both a place to visit and to live, the book reveals the story of this vibrant city in three parts. Part 1 is a record of the built city, tracing its evolution thematically through its three defining themes of water, foreigner and stone. Part 2 is a celebration of the inhabited city, capturing the range of ingredients that contribute to its sense of place, physically, culturally and socially. Part 3 is a vision for the future city based on a rediscovery and reinterpretation of its historic urban texture and quality.

On the surface the book is a soft exploration of the diverse and enduring appeal of Galway as embodied in its intimate but energetic medieval centre as the stage set for its festive life, including the upcoming Volvo Ocean Race, which in a city famous for its festivals is predicted to top them all. However, under the surface there is a harder edge in the book’s honest appraisal of Galway’s contrasting suburban surrounds, with its dilution of a rich urban legacy and loss of place, and where, ironically, most of its citizens now live, work, shop and recreate.

In essence, the book is a tale of two cities – the 1% perceived city at its distinctive, dense core with a uniqueness that distinguishes it from all other Irish cities, and the 99% ignored city of its amorphous, dispersed suburbs with a sameness it shares with all other cities. The author argues that in the challenging years ahead Galway needs to rediscover its European roots and allow its cultural creativity and celebratory urban life to extend and envelop the entire living city, and not just the perceived city at its historic heart.

Fully illustrated throughout, and aimed at both residents and visitors, Galway: A Sense of Place explores the body and soul of the city and suggests the path it needs to follow to manage future change and retain its enormous popularity.