



# Diversity Powering Dublin's Success

Kieran Rose November 2007.

2 Eoin Collins has highlighted a great quote in Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class*<sup>1</sup>:

“A GREAT CITY HAS TWO HALLMARKS: TOLERANCE FOR STRANGERS AND INTOLERANCE FOR MEDIOCRITY”.

<sup>1</sup>This is a quote from The Cosmopolitan City by Bonnie Menes Kahn.



That encapsulates a lot of what I have to say today. My background is as an urban planner, I am also chair of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), a member of the Board of the Equality Authority, and I have had a long term involvement in progressive social change and the trade union movement. What I would like to attempt to do today is link all these issues. Indeed it is one of the great values of this Conference to look at the City from different and unusual angles at the same time. Key issues for the City are I suggest:

- ↳ Openness to diversity, in all its forms, it is almost a fundamental approach to life, openness to diversity of people whether gay people or new people coming into the City, openness to diversity of architecture, and diversity in the built environment.
- ↳ Economic success is key, it is fundamental to social success, and should be welcomed for the life opportunities it offers, and not to be decried as some do; material wealth, it would seem, is good for them but dangerous for others.
- ↳ The introduction of the Planning and Development legislation in 1963 was part of the Lemass-era opening out and modernisation of Irish society after the publication of TK Whittaker's *Economic Development*. The original intention for the introduction of the planning and development system was that it, along with all the other great social and economic reforms of the period (such as the introduction of free second level education), would be a promoter of economic and social progress not a barrier or a delaying mechanism.



4 There are common themes across all these issues. There are two different mindsets, liberating or limiting. The liberating mind-set is characterised by embracing diversity, having high ambitions for a better quality of life for all, a confidence in our ability to deliver positive change, openness, flexibility, responsiveness to changed circumstances and prioritising real peoples lives over abstract ideological positions. This approach can deliver progress and optimise opportunities in all areas whether social, economic or city-making.

The limiting or fearful mind-set is characterised by being change averse, having low ambitions, a lack of confidence; a resistance to diversity; and sacrificing ordinary peoples life opportunities to a glorification of a past that never was.



These are exciting and hopeful times for Ireland, for Dublin, for everyone including gay people and our new arrivals who see Ireland and Dublin as a place of opportunities. This was well-put by the Taoiseach in his introduction to the National Development Plan

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THE PAST DECADE HAS SEEN TREMENDOUS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS IN IRELAND. WE HAVE PUT IN PLACE THE FOUNDATIONS OF A TRULY MODERN, FORWARD LOOKING, INTERNATIONALISED SOCIETY. THE GREATEST CHALLENGE WE NOW FACE IS TO CONSOLIDATE AND SUSTAIN THIS REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT TO ENSURE THAT WE PROVIDE A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL.

Joe Lee in his great work *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* typified Ireland of the 1980s as 'stumbling towards the future with war in the north and gloom in the south'. Since then there has been major progress in every aspect of Irish life; economic, social, cultural and in terms of our self-confidence and in the rights and freedoms of people in this country including for lesbians and gay men.



6 The National Development Plan *Transforming Ireland - A Better Quality of Life for All* sets out the roadmap to Ireland's future. Within the next seven years, our economy and our society will undergo a transformation almost as radical as the changes we have experienced in the past decade of growth and development. Over the next seven years 184 billion euro will be invested in economic and social infrastructure. 'Nothing on this scale has ever been attempted before in our history' according to An Tanaiste, Brian Cowen T.D.

With all this massive public and private investment, we now have the realisable potential for Dublin to become a truly world-class city in the same league (although different in population and for different assets) as Vancouver, Paris, Chicago, Buenos Aires, Tel Aviv and the newer up-and-coming cities especially in Asia and the Middle East (e.g. Dubai). And this would be in the interests of the vast majority of people

According to Paul Kearns, "A recent PricewaterhouseCoopers analysis of the world's largest city-economies predicts Dublin to be fastest growing city economy in the 'western world' between the years 2007 and 2020. In fact of the 29 European cities that made the 'Global' 100, Dublin is predicted to be the super-performer, the only European city with twice the average predicted European city economy growth rate."



And Paul goes on to put the question as follows:

DOES DUBLIN HAVE THE AMBITION AND COURAGE TO FULFIL ITS POSSIBLE DESTINY AS A 'GLOBAL CITY', AN 'OPEN CITY', A 'CITY OF IMMIGRATION', A 'MULTI-CULTURAL DIVERSE CITY', 'GAY-FRIENDLY', A 'CITY OF EXCELLENCE', A GLOBAL PLAYER IN SETTING NEW MODELS FOR A CONFIDENT REINTERPRETATION OF ITSELF AND ITS FUTURE.

We need to ensure that our approach to the city is in tune with the optimistic, high ambitions, high achieving spirit of 21st century Ireland and Dublin.

Earlier today we heard from Richard Florida on how important the creative industries and creative workers are in the new economy and in global competitiveness and how openness to diversity especially in relation to gay people and people from diverse backgrounds and other countries is critical to success.

In his *Rise of the Creative Class* he writes of how 'we live in a time of great promise. We have evolved economic and social systems that tap human creativity and turn it into economic value as never before. This in turn creates an unparalleled opportunity to raise our living standards, build a more humane and sustainable economy, and make our lives more complete.'



- Creative workers are those who add economic value through their creativity and these include scientists, engineers, designers, artists and those employed in knowledge-based industries such as financial services. Increasingly cities are successful largely because creative people from around the world want to live there and from his research he found that people were drawn to places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas. He writes of 'creative ecosystems – habitats open to new people and ideas'.

Places with a high concentration of gay people tend to have higher rates of innovation and economic growth. He is not arguing that gay people literally cause cities to be successful, but that our presence in large numbers is 'an indicator of an underlying culture that's open-minded and diverse'- and thus conducive to creativity and attractive to creative workers. A place that welcomes gay people, welcomes all kinds of people.

Lesbians and gay men have benefited from and contributed to the fundamental progress that has taken place in Ireland and have much more to contribute. Previously many gay people had to emigrate for two reasons; to get a job and to be in a society where it was possible to live openly and happily as gay; now gay people are coming to this country for the same two opportunities. Again this highlights the importance of economic success.



The key outstanding issue for lesbians and gay men in Ireland today is the legal recognition of our intimate relationships. There is no reason why there should not be an equality of rights and responsibilities for all, in other words civil marriage for same-sex couples.

As a country our self-confidence has increased fundamentally - we now have a 'can-do' success-orientated approach. We recognise that in a world fast-forwarding to the future, we can and must compete effectively at a global level and continue to be at the cutting-edge. There is no reason why these high ambitions and can-do approach cannot also apply to all areas including legal reform and social inclusion.

So in the recognition of gay relationships, we should aim to be world-leaders; to become the sixth country in the world after Spain and South Africa to provide for civil marriage for lesbians and gay men. The Taoiseach has spoken eloquently of what he described as the 'critical psychological milestones in the journey of modern Ireland'. I think the introduction of a radical and equality based gay law reform and subsequent equality legislation in the 1990's that was a model for the rest of the world was one of those critical psychological milestones where we as a society took what was a principled and bold step forward and were delighted and became far more self-confident that we did so. Civil Marriage would be another critical psychological milestone. The links between this self-confidence and openness to change as a society and creativity and innovation in general is an area well-worth investigation.



10 The high expectations and commitment to delivery in the new Ireland should apply across the board; for example, given our current resources, there is no reason why we should not finally and conclusively tackle the heritage of poverty and disadvantage in this country. In a challenging paper *Creating a Place for All in the Knowledge Economy and the Learning Society*, John Sweeney (NESC) states that we have a serious problem of educational disadvantage with approximately 18 per cent of our young people who do not finish secondary school. As regards sorting this problem out, he states that 'what will not help is if we adopt mind-sets that, from the start, absolve us from really trying.' One such negative mind-set defines the challenges in such a way that capable and good people could even gain moral capital from turning their back on Ireland's current economy. This perspective argues that the economy has prospered at the expense of society. John Sweeney goes on to rebut this mind-set: 'our economic performance is much more part of the solution than part of the problem when it comes to ensuring a better quality of life for all. The lesson from our past is that poor economic performance sets limits to the social objectives that can be set and achieved. The threat from our future is that a poor social performance will set limits to what we now hope to achieve for our economy.'

One of the worst aspects of the old Ireland was the mind-set that high ambitions or expectations were futile if not ridiculous for us in this country (not for our emigrants); failure was to be expected, almost welcomed. Change was something to be feared; as one Tory leader is said to have responded when asked what changes he proposed, 'Change? Change? Aren't things bad enough already?'



In his study of modern Ireland 'Preventing the Future', Tom Garvin asks the question in the subtitle 'Why was Ireland so poor for so long?' A critical factor, he states, was that there was a 'reluctance to engage seriously with the modern world' and this encouraged 'cultural pessimism, a passivity even a hopelessness'. The notion of a static and unchanging order that was to be regarded as ideal was quietly accepted and Ireland was to pay dearly for these choices. He concludes that 'The Irish, it sometimes seems, were hell-bent on preventing the future while pretending to embrace it'. What Tom Garvin describes as a clear anti-modernist streak in some Irish official and clerical thinking was also expressed in architecture. According to a recent study, Building for Government: The Architecture of State Buildings. OPW: Ireland 1900-2000, the 1942 Dublin Airport symbolised "*the rising confidence and ambition of the new nation*" and it marks a moment in the nations history when a public building first expressed:

## UNALLOYED ENTHUSIASM FOR THE CHALLENGE OF CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE

I think there are now strong ideological forces *Preventing Dublin's Future*, based on all the negative mind-sets I outlined at the start with added begrudging and snobbery. These forces would squander and stymie the great opportunity we now have to make Dublin a dynamic and creative world-class city on the altar of glorification of a past that never was and their own psychic self-satisfaction..



12 Max Page has written a great study of the massive redevelopment of New York in the period 1900-1940 entitled *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan* and there are many parallels for Dublin, he describes New York as 'a city in the process of becoming'. He writes that in the various battles new buildings, demolition and planning lay:

## THE FUNDAMENTAL TENSION BETWEEN A CELEBRATION OF THE METROPOLIS - ITS DYNAMISM AND DIVERSITY - AND A PROFOUND NOSTALGIA BORN OF A FEAR FOR WHAT THE MODERN CITY PORTENDED

The various battles over development and the politics of place in Manhattan 'were suffused with contemporary battles over the most fundamental issues of the day' including the efforts to control immigrants. For the old elite New Yorkers the real melancholy comes, not from the fact that buildings were soon to crumble into dust, but that their 'old and well ordered social fabric ... has itself crumbled and vanished utterly from view'. There are similar resistances at work in Dublin today.



Joe Lee makes a similar point about an elite in Ireland in the 1950s who resisted economic and social change, who were spiritual collaborators in the mass eviction process that drove more than a half a million out of Ireland between 1945 and 1960 because they were more concerned with the advantages of emigration to them such as 'a stability of manners and customs which would otherwise be the subject of radical change'.

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One of the most life-affirming aspects of contemporary Ireland is the sense of self-confidence, the optimism and the determination to succeed in whatever area of endeavour such as business, architecture, culture, politics. One of the great barriers to progress is a reactionary nostalgia for the 'good old days'. When and what were those exactly? The days of mass unemployment, mass emigration and TB? Authoritarianism, class deference and stultifying social control?

We need to be informed by and cherish our past based on a wide understanding of our history including economic, social, urban, and labour history. One of the significant barriers to change and progress is an antiquarian and limited understanding of our past and heritage. We must engage with, but we cannot become prisoners of a past. Richard Florida puts this well when he states that new creative cities can emerge and surpass established players very quickly. He analyses how some cities lose out and says the answer is simple, 'these cities are trapped by their past', in the culture and attitudes of a bygone age and so innovation and growth shift to new places. We need to learn from our past, from our failures and successes, from our eminent historians such as Joe Lee, Tom Garvin and others.



14 In his novel, 'Saturday' Ian McEwan writes a paean to progress and delights in the modern world; 'At every level, material, medical, intellectual, sensual, for most people [life] has improved'. Now we are 'blessed by supermarket cornucopias, torrents of accessible information, warm clothes that weigh nothing, extended lifespans, wondrous machines. Whole music libraries held in an object the size of a child's hand.'

In his wonderful study *Cities in Civilization* on the evolution of great world creative cities such as Los Angeles, London, New York and other cities; Peter Hall asks the question what the next global creative city will be and concludes that it will be:

A SPECIAL KIND OF CITY, A CITY IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FLUX WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF NEW AND YOUNG ARRIVALS, MIXING AND MERGING INTO A NEW KIND OF SOCIETY

This sounds like Dublin, it could be Dublin, but only if we get rid of our limiting mind-sets and are ambitious, open and determined to succeed.

Kieran Rose November 2007.



This is an edited version of a talk given to *Dublin: A Creative City Region* hosted by the Dublin Regional Authority and the Dublin Employment Pact in October 2007 where Richard Florida was the keynote speaker.

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