

The Irish west coast.
Photo Jan Rothuizen







Dubbing Dublin

Dublin's name, originally meaning 'dark pool' (Dubh Linn), is a good indication of what that place has meant to its residents for many centuries – or at least to the poets among them. It is a deep place, a city to lose one's way in, a topos you can hate or love, a city born of and destined for the twilight, a city marked by melancholy. Only the sharpest pen could penetrate its depths. Some of the greatest aphorisms of the English language are credited to Dubliners: George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Samuel Beckett, Jonathan Swift – all writers whose work is leavened with a sense of topology. Likewise James Joyce, whose predilection for composing a narrative from the place names on a city map may be read as a riposte to a wind that incessantly nags at the human frame and the places where it seeks shelter. Bono too sings as though trying to rise above the wind, which whistles around him daily in his cliff-top fort overlooking the turbulent Irish Sea.

OK, enough of the clichés. This Ireland, this Dublin, exists no more. Nowhere have the 'advantages' of backwardness been more obvious than here. The land that seemed to have escaped the clutches of modernity for centuries has undergone a sea change in the last fifteen years and now stands revealed as the home of unconstrained progress – at least, if that's what you like to call it. And Dublin is the natural focus of all this renewal. The city has a million inhabitants who increasingly work (how could it be otherwise?) in the services sector. The days of poverty-stricken Dublin are over. Income per head of the Irish population matches that of the Swedes, putting them in second place in the European Union. In the capital city, the figure is even higher. Ireland's economy has been growing for years at a rate fluctuating around 10 % per annum. International companies (most of them American) have been attracted to Dublin by the city's favourable conditions, producing a huge boost in purchasing power, as well as skyrocketing real-estate prices. The stock market index has soared by over 200 % in the last six years. So, as you take off on your early morning flight from Dublin Airport to London, you may find yourself surrounded by a lot of men in suits, plus a

handful of sedated 'economic refugees' being ejected after having run the gauntlet of the Irish immigration system.

But just what are the favourable conditions that result in some settling here and others being booted out for attempting to do so? Well, it is precisely the historic deprivation of a city isolated and hard to reach, on the periphery of Europe, that has made it the unresisting prey of investors in mobile knowledge production looking to establish a bridgehead in the European Union. 'Prey' sounds much too passive, though. It was the Dubliners themselves who threw the doors wide open. Not literally, by way of immigration policy, but fiscally, by way of a series of tax measures that turned Dublin into a safe haven for capital. The package is impressive: relocation grants, tax deductions, special tax codes, subsidies – all in all a set of conditions no other European country can match. The investment policy has been backed up by an ambitious set of government measures for the rehabilitation of neglected urban areas. The upshot has been a growth curve of South-East Asian proportions more than worthy of the term Celtic Tiger Economy.

The Dark Pool has been filled in. Dublin is no longer deep, but light and airy. The twilight is banished by the ever-glowing screens of the electronic economy. Poignantly, the very city that once nestled as an almost mythical place in the European collective memory now outdoes all others as a self-created *tabula rasa*.

So a new soundtrack has been dubbed over the old Dublin. The Guinness Brewery has been recast as Media Lab. The Dirty Old Town has been 'upgraded' into Temple Bar. *Archis* beats a trail through a city in the process of reinventing itself – or should that read 'in the process of being reinvented'?

Ole Bouman

The participation of Ole Bouman, Peter Maybury and Marie Pierre Richard, William J. Mitchell and Raymund Ryan was facilitated by the Irish Arts Council's CRITICAL VOICES programme.
www.artscouncil.ie

Archis 2

Text Ole Bouman
 Photo Peter Tansey

Dubbing Dublin

8 Research

Pocketquote
 Samuel Beckett,
 Company

'Nowhere in particular on the way from A to Z.
 Or say for versimilitude the Ballyogan Road.
 That dear old black road. Somewhere on the
 Ballyogan Road in lieu of nowhere in particular.'



Photos top R.V. De Boer
 (www.terraplenet.com)
 bottom Hertz and Marnier
 Faculty RKL Architects, Dublin



