As Rijeka in Croatia celebrates being nominated the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) for 2020, an article in The Irish Times asks ‘What is the point of the European Capital of Culture?’ Three Irish contenders are working on their final bids to become the second ECOC of 2020 … but is it worth the mammoth effort?

Extract from The Irish Times:

What links Athens, Florence, Paris and Cork? They have all held the title European Capital of Culture. The programme began in 1985, after Melina Mercouri, then the Greek minister of culture, noted that culture wasn’t given the same attention as politics and economics. Initially celebrating the wealth of European heritage, the title, with its attendant year-long cultural extravaganza in the host city, went to the obvious candidates, including Berlin, Amsterdam and Dublin, which in 1991 became the seventh city to be so distinguished. But, hand on heart, who can say that in the intervening years they have beaten a path to Maribor in Slovenia, Mons in Belgium or Essen in Germany? Who can name five cultural highlights in Guimarães in Portugal, Stavanger in Norway or Umeå in Sweden?

As Galway, Limerick and the trio of Wexford, Waterford and Kilkenny (under the banner of the Three Sisters) vie for the accolade in 2020, what’s involved, what is at stake, and why would they want it?

Read full article
THE IRISH ENTRIES FOR EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2020

The three contenders are due to present their second-round “bid books” on June 17th. Jury members, from a panel of 10, will make visits during the week of July 12th, and the winner will be announced on July 15th. The full content of their proposed programmes won’t be made public until June, but here’s a sneak peek from the initial bid books from the *Irish Times* article:

- **Galway: Making Waves**: Galway already has its brilliant Galway International Arts Festival each July, a *Unesco* City of Film designation, and is home of the renowned Druid Theatre Company. Its proposed theme focuses on landscape, language and migration, and includes The Galway 2020 Book of Stories, and *Fuinneog / Window on the World*, a virtual European City of Culture, with 50 per cent of the projects to happen in rural areas. *Proposed operating budget: €45.7 million*

- **Limerick: Multiplicity**: Limerick has the experience of 2014 to build on. It is also home to EVA, the highly regarded international art biennial, as well as the Hunt Museum and a strengthening arts community. The proposal focuses on integration, innovation and imagination, and includes setting up residencies across different sectors, and working to develop creative industries, together with international partnerships and cultural infrastructural projects. *Proposed operating budget: €35 million*

- **The Three Sisters: Currents of Culture**: Each of the three cities involved in this bid has a rich heritage: Kilkenny’s Arts Festival is a considerable draw, alongside Wexford Festival Opera and Waterford’s Spraoi. Although having three centres might seem like a disadvantage, it speaks the EU language of crossing borders, co-operation and partnership in a way that could be hard to beat. The initial proposal was based on four pillars: festival development and innovation, creative and cultural economy, social contract for wellbeing, and urban and rural regeneration. It plays to the festival strengths of the cities, and also to the design and education sectors. *Proposed operating budget: €31 million*

*Image: Waterford Spraoi Photograph: John Loftus*
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