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Review of Dublin from 1970-1990: The City Transformed Joseph Brady Published in 2022 ISBN: 978-1-84682-980-2 Four Courts Press Paperback, 464 pages

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Review of

Dublin from 1970-1990: The City Transformed

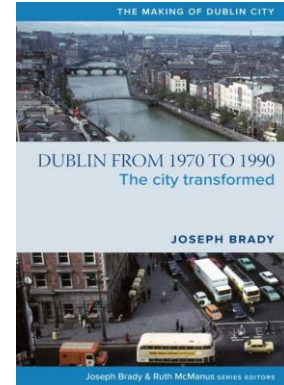
Joseph Brady

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Reviewer

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As someone who grew up in Dublin in the era covered in this book, and who now analyses the city, especially in terms of its housing, this book is a natural curiosity. In many respects Dublin in the period of this book was (and arguably still is) a shanty town of dereliction, poor management, fruitless plans, vacant buildings and sites, pollution and economic distress for many. Why this was, and how Dublin managed to transform itself into a (more or less-) modern city, the beginnings of which we see towards the end of the 1990s, is essentially the matter of this book.

Professor Joseph Brady is an urban geographer, long-time UCD academic, and along with DCU's Professor Ruth McManus, editor of The Making of Dublin book series. He is well-regarded as a veritable mine of information on Dublin past and present. And that is an interesting point about this book: for many of its readers, the era under the microscope is both a long time ago, and yet simultaneously in recent memory. I remember much of the city during this time, which makes Dublin from 1970 to 1990 a somewhat more tangible book than more historical offerings on the story of Dublin, which are long beyond the grasp of many readers' experiences and memories.

In the book, Brady compellingly retells with the help of data, photographs and maps the story of various elements that were parts of the problems that Dublin was experiencing and also part of its slow revival. The retail environment – an important signal of the success of a city – is given detailed treatment, especially shopping centres. Although the development of Stillorgan shopping centre, Ireland's first, pre-dates this book by some four years, there is still plenty to be told of the shopping centres in Crumlin, Donaghmede, Nutgrove, Northside and Rathfarnham. There is detailed information

on the role of layout, and the importance of having an anchor tenant (something that has only changed in recent years).

For me, the story of our shopping centres illustrates that basic rules of property in which profit is king, usually determine the layout of our urban environment, as true in the retail environment as in housing estates.

Having walked past and through it for many years as both a student and a worker, sections on the ILAC centre were particularly revealing for Brady's analysis of what was then Ireland's largest shopping centre (at 21,000 sq.m.) and its role in reinvigorating the northside of the city, as well as the incompatibility of the formality of internationally-styled shopping centre with the informality of the street traders that surrounded it.

Something we now take for granted, the introduction of paid parking in Dublin is fascinating precisely because we – or at least I – always assumed it just was. In fact, the first 504 parking meters arrived on January 14th 1970 “after a decade of consultation and research, or dithering, depending on your point of view” (p42). Another 500 arrived a few months later, and by the end of 1973, there were to be some 3,600 across the city centre. Somewhat serendipitously, although the meters operated between 8.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m., parking wardens did not start their duties until 10 a.m.

The dereliction of buildings and land features heavily in Dublin from 1970 to 1990, but so too does their regeneration. Although much written about over the years, Brady provides fresh takes on locations such as Temple Bar and the Irish Financial Services Centre. He also demonstrates the breadth of his knowledge in tracing the development of – often shoebox – apartments along the Liffey Quays and beyond. Brady has several examples of sales brochures from the period which show how much slicker marketing has become, as well as their sales prices. Of course, in current times, none of those apartments would be offered for sale but would be used to line the pocket of some overseas pension fund.

Pollution, pedestrianisation, population, landscape, urban governance, transport, the Liffey, society and lots more all get their turn in the spotlight in the development of Dublin across two decades. This is a fine publication, full of maps, photographs (many by the author taken from the same place over the decades, in classic geographer style), and other images, all which help tell the story of the city. It is full of memorable gems of facts, thoroughly well-researched, and takes its place among the canon of fine writing about our capital.