

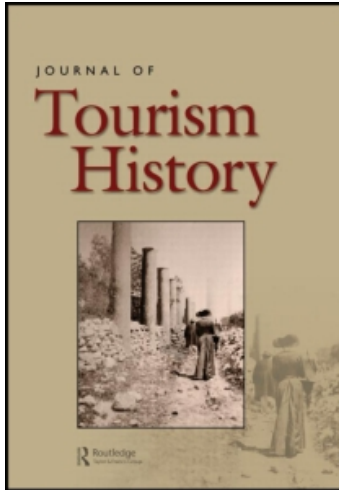
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Making Ireland Irish. Tourism and national identity since the Irish Civil War

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Making Ireland Irish. Tourism and national identity since the Irish Civil War, by Eric G.E. Zuelow, Syracuse, New York, Syracuse University Press, 2009, xxxiv + 344 pp., £35.50 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-8156-3225-2

Until recently, the landscape of the history of tourism in Ireland was relatively bare. Europe and Britain, certainly, were much surveyed but Hibernia little. But that has changed markedly of late, and Eric Zuelow's is a site that must be visited. It provides in part a narrative of how tourism in Ireland developed after the Irish Civil War, that is, from the 1920s onwards, through the hard years of poverty to the decades of take-off. It is very revealing, for example, about what happened to tourism in Ireland during the Second World War (or as the Irish termed it, 'the Emergency'). Shorn completely of English or American visitors, there was no option but to rely on domestic tourism while planning ahead for a resumption of 'normality'. The book offers a coherent and thoroughly informed assessment (as the full footnotes and lengthy bibliography confirm) of the various initiatives taken to promote tourism such as the *An Tóstal: Ireland at Home* project of the 1950s. It allows for the part played by individuals in the creation and implementation of policy – in which personality and persistence as much as principle counted, as illustrated by Father Scanlon's attempts to promote tourism at Tuosist in Kerry. It reviews the work of the tourist agencies, from the original Irish Tourist Authority of the 1920s through Bord Fáilte to Tourism Ireland which brought the overseas marketing of South and North together. It looks at attitudes to the past, to the arguments as to what should be preserved, and from which past, using case studies, and how it was conserved, whether dolmens or jails – Kilmainham, 'saving the Bastille of Ireland'. It assesses the impact of thinking about conservation on traditional housing, where worthy aspirations were diluted by weak or corrupt planning.

Zuelow probes two related issues extensively. The first was a debate, which is not unique to Ireland, as to whether tourism should be promoted at all in view of the danger of adverse cultural costs, corroding true Irish identity. Jobs and income, most of which were seasonal and servile, or so critics argued, were but a 'mess of pottage' if tourism were to undermine the Irish language, thus acting as a fifth column of Anglicisation. There was to be continuing tension in the South between economic and cultural interests, which was particularly centred on the Irish Gaelic language, felt to be at risk from English-speaking tourists. As one writer put it 'foreignism is a deadly threat to the Gailtacht'. Language issues were to come again to the forefront in 2003 with the Irish language act which led, inter alia, to the renaming of Dingle, the name by which even the locals had known it for centuries, as An Daingean. This was greatly resented by the residents both for what it was and because it was imposed from Dublin – and seen outside Ireland as unwelcoming to tourists, as instanced by the *Melbourne Herald* headline article on the controversy – 'tourists beware'. But for those in favour, a vociferous minority, any inconvenience to tourists was a small price to pay for saving the Irish language.

The second issue was how best to promote Ireland: which images were most effective, and how far reality could be massaged or indeed altered. It was difficult ground and there was disputed territory; the promotional role of Guinness was not controversial, nor Irish dance, nor the value of tidy towns, even the whimsy of leprechauns or the Blarney Stone. But what was to happen when a degree of adjustment was needed? Ireland was a country whose main assets were its physical and

human scenery, but what if some of that scenery was not very attractive? The long established Puck Fair at Killorglin in Kerry was an attraction to tourists but it had hard drinking and fighting, and an association with Irish travellers, which made it in the eyes of some, or so Zuelow argues, an unacceptable depiction of Ireland and Irishness. So it became downgraded in favour of new sanitised 'traditions' – such as the Cork Film Festival or the Galway Oyster Festival. An interesting analysis of adjustment is offered. Sometimes it was achieved only after dispute, but sometimes it was not; the restocking in the late 1950s of Irish lakes with coarse fish, which overseas anglers wanted, does not seem to have ruffled Irish fishermen.

A question much debated is whether tourism changes the identity of the host region or country, and if so which identity, and by what processes. In this study Zuelow's focus is on the process of creating or repackaging 'Irishness', an elusive and shifting package of core concepts of heritage, landscape and narrative, on which the Irish themselves might not agree. It is not an easy issue to resolve: in the process of redefinition, how is the particular role of tourism to be isolated? We can agree that Ireland has changed, – the South is now unrecognisable – but how do you distinguish the role of tourism from say the decay of religion (Catholicism?). Although the cover blurb asserts that he is claiming that tourism played a vital role in 'making Ireland Irish', Zuelow – wisely – resists any simple endorsement of the view that tourism changed the Irish people. And in matters of Irish identity there is the elephant in the room as to where the North fits in this discourse, whether British or Irish or both; and what symbols should be used to promote tourism there. Scenery, yes, must be used, as it always has, and is uncontroversial, but what of heritage? The Orange Marches, key to the identity of one tradition there and which it has been suggested could be a tourist attraction, are far from a neutral symbol. There is much then to think over with this stimulating and challenging study.

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