

Belfast: a European City

The European Commission Office in Northern Ireland



Belfast has undergone a dramatic transformation over the last decade thanks to the combined efforts of the private and public sectors.

The city's bus and rail transport network has been boosted by EU money.

The European Union too has played its part through a range of funding programmes, including the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Peace and Reconciliation Programme.

EU money was invested in the Lagan side weir, which helped clean up the River Lagan. This was a necessary first step in unleashing the development potential of the city's river-banks which up to then had been polluted and neglected. Belfast's well-known Waterfront Hall, which opened in 1997 and became the anchor project of the

entire Lagan side development, was also part funded with EU money. Today the whole river area with a mix of commercial, retail and housing developments, can rightly claim to be at the heart of Belfast's ongoing regeneration.

Further EU investment helped to turn a derelict and heavily polluted former gasworks site into a modern business park. The city's arterial routes, many of which had suffered years of environmental decay, are undergoing a facelift thanks to EU support. The city's bus and rail transport network has been boosted by EU money. Small businesses ►



Image courtesy of Belfast Convention Bureau



Harrison Photography

Opportunity Europe schools' event in St George's Market

► Belfast a European City continued...

and communities across the city have benefited from employment, environmental and peace building projects funded by the EU.

Belfast's re-emergence as a European city has however been about much more than just maximising the use of EU funds. Of particular importance is the promotion of Belfast in Europe as a city for business, investment and tourism. To this end the European Commission Office in Northern Ireland has worked with Belfast City Council to highlight the advantages of building business, cultural and civic links with other cities in the EU.

Belfast City Council has become active in a number of important European link-ups, notably Eurocities, a network of 130 European cities, and the Quartier en Crise network on urban regeneration. It has spearheaded trade links with Cyprus, one of the EU's newest countries. Best practice and experience has been exchanged with Valencia, Stockholm, Vilnius and Rybnik in Poland with the help of EU funding.

Over the last four years, the arrival of many young Europeans from the newest EU countries to live and work in Belfast has added to the city's cultural diversity.

Every autumn young people from the city and from across Northern Ireland

have the chance to sample the cultures, the foods and languages of Europe at the annual Opportunity Europe fair and exhibition which is jointly promoted by the European Commission Office and Belfast City Council.

The city and region have also signed up to the EU's progressive environmental agenda that puts an increasing emphasis on sustainable development. Thanks to its waste management policies, which are based on EU standards, the recycling rate in Belfast has jumped from just three percent in 2004 to twenty four percent in 2007.

A sign of the better times in Belfast and Northern Ireland as a whole is that the region is no longer eligible for the highest rates of EU structural fund support, which is reserved for Europe's most deprived regions. Although some EU funding will be still available in support of economic development, innovation, jobs and reconciliation, the city's relationship with Europe will increasingly focus on building business and civic links and exchange of best practice.

Thanks to its efforts over recent years, Belfast is now well placed to reap the benefits of positive engagement with other parts of Europe.

Web.
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