

The Nationalist

Visiting architect gave us much food for thought

Loving local!

with Yvonne Jones



WELCOME back to this week's *Loving Local* column.

Now that 2017 is well underway, we at Carlow Chamber and LoveCarlow are very much looking forward to making further progress over the next 12 months. We are undoubtedly very proud of what we achieved in the seven short months from June to last December. However, that was only a start and in 2017 we must all work together to build on this momentum and continue to make great strides towards our vision of re-establishing Carlow town centre as a great place to live, work, shop and socialise.

Last week, a number of us attended a very informative presentation given by Giulia Vallone, who is senior executive architect with Cork County Council. During the presentation, Giulia kindly shared her experiences of reinvigorating the town centre in Clonakilty through an urban redesign project.

Ms Vallone's work has resulted in Clonakilty winning a number of design accolades, including the *Great Town Award 2016* in the UK Academy of Urbanism Awards and the *Public Choice Award* and was highly commended for the *Public Space Award* in the **RIA** Irish Architecture Awards.

During the presentation, Ms Vallone also shared a number of insights garnered through years of research into small towns and public spaces. Many of her insights struck a chord with me but the most significant was the notion that sometimes towns and counties can spend so much time and resources on promoting tourism attractions that they forget about the importance of providing a great place for the people who actually live there.

Ms Vallone talked about the importance of "real tourism", which is the notion that often visitors don't necessarily just want to come and see a specific tourist attraction. Instead, in many instances, tourism is about coming to a place to observe the local culture of a town and to see how people live and engage with one another.

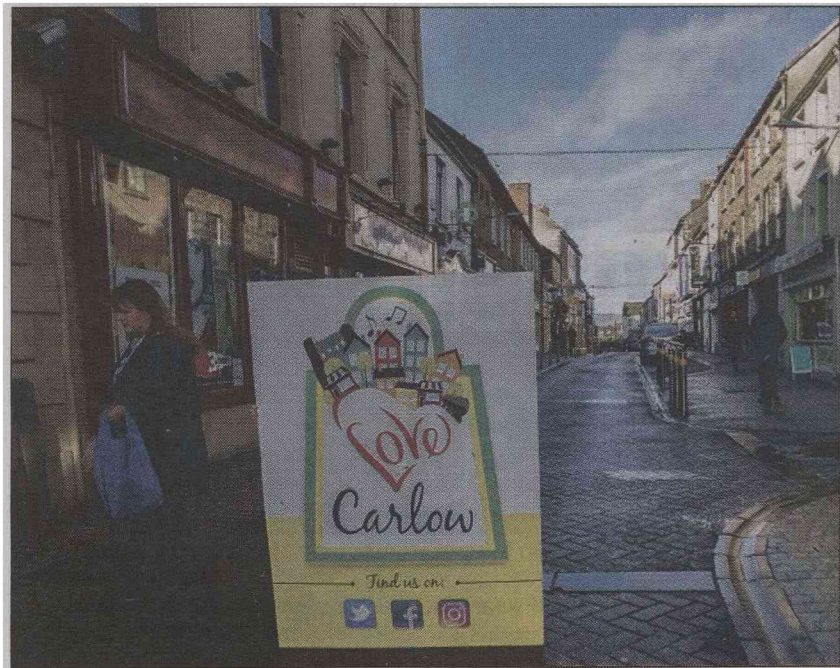
This has huge resonance for Carlow, given that traditionally we are not a key attraction on the southeast tourist trail but by creating and developing a great place to live, tourists will eventually be drawn in to experience the vibrancy and culture of a thriving Irish town.

Since the chamber began Love-Carlow last June, I have seen many instances of this over-emphasis on trying to attract tourists when our basic product simply isn't right. For example, in 2016, we placed emphasis on providing a garden trails festival when the reality in our town centre was that the roundabouts and planters were piled high with weeds.

For 2017, we need a re-think at a strategic level about what we are trying to achieve as a town and county rather than ad-hoc plans by individual groups, which feed into no obvious overall plan of action. I am very hopeful that our potential can be realised in 2017 if we can work together. I hope that this time next year, we will have seen significant changes and that we will be proud of where we are heading as a town and county and that as a group we are committed to working together to make Carlow a great place to live.

Until next week, keep on showing your love for local.

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Carlow Chamber and the LoveCarlow campaign are looking forward to making further progress over the next 12 months Photo: michaelourkephotography.ie