

## NPF - Issues Paper

### Response from Dick Gleeson/Trinity Haus

The overall document is welcomed. The context is well set out, the key chapter areas set out the stall effectively and are structured in a manner which is easy to navigate and recall. The summary questions after each reflective section are helpful and work as good prompts.

I particularly welcome the decision to place 'People, Health, and Well-Being' at the start of the theme sections, and also to include Place as an important factor in this particular challenge. The fact that Place gets an emphasis in several sections indicates that while the NPF will seek to be high-level strategic, it will be grounded in multiple local towns and cities, each with its own unique identity and sense of place. In our previous submission, we discussed the dynamic relationship between top-down and bottom-up, and the need to nurture the capacity and infrastructure of the bottom-up in order to embrace and optimize the platforms offered by the NPF.[See further elaboration below] The phrase used in 'The potential of Rural Ireland' section;....some areas manage human and social capital to effectively engage with emerging strategies...is an important insight, and applies as much to urban areas.

'Our Capital, Cities and Towns' section is critical. I would like to see some more emphasis given to the emerging reality of a polycentric Capital, with a two-way dynamic relationship between the core at the heart of the City-Region, and the external magnets working symbiotically with the core. I am not sure the UK is the best model within which to compare the 'dominance' issue, due to the unusually high population and city spread within the UK. It is noted that under the comparisons with smaller modern national economies, the Dublin ratio is not that far out of kilter. That said, the proposal to consider one or more cities to counter-point Dublin is a good one. I have recently researched work by Fulbright students in Glasgow, under which the Creative City theme was explored in relation to Glasgow and Portland[Oregon]. Issues of the role of Arts/Culture, environment, Creativity, and innovation/entrepreneurship were looked at. Glasgow was found to be more top-down, while Portland citizens seemed to have more of a sense of ownership of what drives the City and who shapes it.

Might not one consider Limerick, for instance, in the same way as Portland, a west of Europe/west of Ireland city, feeding off the energy and aura of its amazing regional hinterland, with the promise of growing the kind of sectors to attract an educated and talented young population, eager to exploit an urban lifestyle and ready to enrich the public life of an old Irish City with its focus on the future.

I think many of our Irish towns are stalled, paralysed, and caught in trajectories of decline, and to use the phrase in the issues document, 'business as usual' is not going to make the difference. Even under pressure, the legacy of the Irish town represents an amazing infrastructure. Working with some kind of retained fabric or skeletal framework seems to produce a better chance of success, than starting from scratch. We need new thinking on the Irish Town however, and we have to draw in some new energy. Top-down must be complemented by 'bottom-up' and 'side-ways in'. The following is suggested;

[a] Every town needs to have an occasional 'Big-Conversation' There needs to be an opportunity to reach a consensus on values, define issues, and articulate a set of challenges. Call this the general area of Vision.

[b] We also need citizens to be drawn into the making and shaping of our Urban Places: we have to figure out the route to co-production. Some well positioned urban stakeholders have the skills to present a succinct evidence base to support their specific objectives. Enabling citizens to produce an evidence base could include activities like storytelling, mapping, data collection and the use of now commonly available internet resources.

[c] Town/City unity and scale; We have to make it easier for citizens to make sense of the physicality and spatial spread of towns. There is a lot of fragmentation and dis-connection. Most towns have a recognizable urban core[usually in trouble] and a set of urban quarters sitting around that core. Layers of sectoral activity are threaded through these urban quarters adding to the complexity. Citizens are well placed to contribute to the production of strategic cycling and walking routes and a 'big-picture' public realm strategy geared to achieve interconnectedness and effective interface.

The challenge of positioning the citizen at the centre of Place-making could be assisted by validating the role of the citizen in the following;

- Enabling conversations about the town/city
- Gathering local knowledge
- Interpreting/configuring evidence
- Making the City[a pilot, a pop-up/shaping a brief
- Nurturing stewardship

[d] Institutional Landscape; The top-down institutional landscape needs a shake-up. Activity operates in silos in towns, with little regard for the holistic picture, or other systems operating to achieve perhaps complementary, overlapping or indeed conflicting objectives. Is it too much to expect alignment between the major systems operating in Irish towns across the social, environmental, cultural and economic spheres. Our current approach is to operate in a sequence of projects regulated by zoning, policy and regulatory codes. Reviewing our plans usually means adjusting a system that is already rigid and resistant enough to change. A reflection on 'urban qualities' and thinking about infrastructure, in terms of top-down and bottom-up, could change mindsets and help ordinary citizens get a toe-hold in understanding and shaping Place. See previous submission on 4 levels of Infrastructure; [1]Hard-Infrastructure of buildings, utilities, public space[2] Institutional Infrastructure-mainly top-down[3] Social and community- capital..bottom-up [4] Personal Infrastructure...bottom-up. Questions arise as to who commissions hard and soft infrastructure, what stakeholders benefit, and whether there is alignment between a town's infrastructures and the needs of a town in terms of livelihood and livability. Thinking of a town in terms of a draft set of desired urban-livability qualities, reached through a 'big-conversation' could also be radical. It aligns with a values perspective, and could help the preparation of briefs, and the generation of strategies, while healing gaps between the spatial and the sectoral/functional dimension.

Mc Auley Place in Naas provides a great example of the innovative, cross-institutional agility, that will be required to develop the kind of hybrid projects

that Irish towns are well placed to deliver in the decade ahead. The Nas Na Riogh Housing Association had it's arm twisted to accept an edge of town location for senior citizens housing. It held out for a town-centre location, securing a challenging disused convent building, and around it built a campus of 53 senior citizens apartments, integrated with an Arts Centre, a Community Centre, and the Mc Auley Tea-Rooms staffed by 80 volunteers. The whole project is directly inspired by the UN Declaration on the rights of older people, and it's town-centre site is instrumental in connecting residents and visitors with the rich ecology of Place and the potential to grow and develop associated with this infrastructure. Developing the vision, model, and a programme of implementation, required the active support of institutional players and funders who would not normally find themselves in the same project team.

In no particular order, some additional thoughts occur;

Internet Infrastructure; The availability of the Internet represents a major new infrastructure in how we manage and interpret data, access information, and work and collaborate together. While the internet has the capacity to facilitate and structure dynamic stakeholder/citizen engagement and collaboration in the urban environment at all scales, this resource remains surprisingly under exploited to date. This contrasts with the pervasive use of the internet for social, recreational, entertainment and personal learning. Innovative examples do exist however of how a range of stakeholders are using this resource as a tool to collaborate and shape their urban Place. The NPF should acknowledge this backdrop and suggest ways in which it may be mainstreamed.

#### Role of Universities

It is quite difficult to align the role of universities with the strategic challenges facing cities and towns. This may be partly due to the structure of the academic year, to a traditional detachment of the university from the view of the city as service deliverer, and to the absence of recognized channels for co-operation. Where it has been happening, it has often been due to personality prompts both in the Local Authority and specific University Departments. Dublin City Council tried to bridge this gap some years ago by producing a document '16 challenges facing Dublin' which articulated specific research requirements under each challenge, and acted as a calling card for the universities. Towns and cities represent an obvious 'Urban Lab' for universities, and the NPF should seek to address how levels of co-operation can become best practice.

#### Structuring Research

Connected with the role of the Universities above, is the challenge of structuring a research road-map for Irish cities and towns. There are multiple bottle-necks and barriers facing urban regeneration across the spectrum of governance, design, dereliction, regulation, funding and collaboration. The theme of research is critical and probably should have it's own sub-section in the issues document. The NPF should consider the inclusion of the concept of a rolling programme of research, tied into implementation. This programme/research roadmap could emerge iteratively from real city/town contexts.

### Design/Strategic Design

There seems to be a strange lack of emphasis [in the paper] on the importance of design, and the usefulness of design thinking. Design thinking is well placed to help us imagine the future in a structured way. It helps us focus on 'What is' 'What if' 'What Wows' 'What Works'. What works is about finding the sweet spot existing between the 'What wows' and the resources available in specific contexts. Design tends to be deeply embedded into those urban places that offer high qualities of livelihood and livability.

### Spatial Highlighting

The County boundaries are powerful but only go so far in highlighting unique landscape configurations and cultural legacies. The Wild Atlantic Way indicates how a route with a great tag-line, based on authentic and undeniable unique experience, can become an addictive and obsessive repeat experience, while enabling peripheral and isolated rural areas to benefit economically and socially. In the past we have used this mental mapping approach to create successes like the 'Ring of Kerry' We probably need to develop this approach further. I have frequently used a book, published some years ago, 'Lakeshore Loops' with 38 short chapters, each relating how you can navigate [by bike] on roads closest to the lakeshore, around the 38 largest lakes in Ireland. The first time I used the book to cycle the 44 miles around Lough Mask in South Mayo, I gained a completely new appreciation of the landscape structure and beauty of this part of Ireland, and of how Lough Mask relates to Lough Corrib, and Lough Conn. I think we have great scope to use our freshwater lakes, rivers, and canals to build a network/clusters of cycling and walking routes, opening up the Irish food, music, and rural-life experience, and also drawing multiple Irish towns and villages into the framework. I think this would be far preferable to relying on over-engineered long-distance cycle routes piggy-backing on bland National Road routes.

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