

Conservation of Small Towns: Workshop and Colloquium 2017

Public Workshop, 26th August 2017, Gort Library

Participants included local residents, local business people, members of local community organisations and representatives from other community groups in similar small towns.

THEME 1:

Gort Town Centre: change and use

Mental mapping exercise: Outcomes and discussion

The session began with a brief description of mental maps; their purpose and how they are produced. The standard annotation for a typical 'Lynch' map was explained, i.e. landmark, node, path, edge/barrier, and district.

Participants were then each given a map of the town, a clipboard and a marker and asked to take a walk around the town for approximately 30mins to observe and record these attributes. They were also asked to record one place/building that had a positive connotation and one place/building that had a negative connotation.

OBSERVATIONS/CONTRIBUTIONS BY THE PARTICIPANTS

The observations and contributions by the workshop participants can be summarised under common themes:

Issues relating to the architectural/heritage value of the built environment;

Traffic and parking matters;

Urban planning/design issues;

Suggested improvements/initiatives

Observations on community engagement generally.

Traffic – obstacle to negotiating the town; speeding a feature – enabled by straight stretches; anti-social driving a particular problem at night; cars reversing into traffic due to parking layouts

Parking – conflicting views on whether there is too much, or whether it is generally a good sign of commercial activity; areas of back lands were identified where parking could be relocated

Quality of built environment is notable – consistency of architecture due to origins as a planned town

Potential of town

Heritage and historic features need to be better highlighted

Special character and potential of laneways – e.g. Lowery's Lane & Boland's Lane – opportunity to establish new creative hub

Landmarks and vistas – e.g. antique shop, views of buildings

River – cut-off from the town; the island (for which town is named) obliterated by engineering works

Barrack town history still of relevance today

Difficulty in orientation within the town centre – flow/paths for traffic, cyclists, and pedestrians is unclear – routes need to be more clearly marked

Accessibility

Underuse of park at Queen St.

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A covered meeting space/node (e.g. near bus stop) would be a very useful addition
Lack of playground in the town – more family-friendly spaces needed
Gateways into town: identifiable by locals generally – should be physically marked out

The previous preparation of studies and plans have produced no discernible actions
Inclusion of all in community projects is key
Locally-sourced finance more important than (limited) public funds
School projects can bring parents on-board also
Importance of local businesses engaging in regeneration process
There is a general lack of opportunity to publicise local events widely – weaker social networks?

OBSERVATIONS ON THE PROCESS

The 'Lynch'/mental map annotation and use:

Following the original methodology devised by Kevin Lynch, participants were asked to identify landmarks, nodes, edges/barriers, paths and districts and the meaning of these descriptions were explained. Participants were also asked to identify one place/building that had a positive association for them, and one place/building that had a negative association; this was mainly in case there was any difficulty in engaging with the Lynchian elements, as it was felt that the primary purpose was to encourage local people to engage the built fabric of the town in a new way, and to promote a subsequent discussion.

Conclusions:

The mental mapping exercise, as a stimulant for a discussion on the built environment by its local stakeholders, was very successful. The type of observations to be made and elements to be recorded could be adapted in infinite ways, in order to advance a particular discussion. In many cases, participants will bring a particular agenda to the table (regardless of the prior mapping exercise) but the method does provide an opportunity to focus attention on specific issues, if desired.

The activity of recording observations on paper maps and discussion in a workshop forum could be a useful tool to the introduction of a local database of information via a web-based application that would be produced by the community, as the process conveys the value and usefulness of mapping, while forming the beginning of an ongoing shared project.

The size and scale of the map used:

The town's urban centre was included on the map but it did not include the extents of the town. This was an intentional decision because the study was largely concerned with the historic core and also because it was felt that the area around which the participants were being asked to walk should be relatively confined for the sake of convenience and time. However, as soon as the maps were handed out, it was pointed out that certain buildings and places that were of considerable significance to the town were not shown.

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Conclusions:

One interpretation of the mental mapping exercise is that participants should limit themselves to (re)observing the streets and places that are included in the map, as these areas are traversed. That is, the exercise is intended to encourage a re-engagement with familiar places and making fresh observations that might have been previously missed.

An alternative methodology is to allow participants to include in the exercise places beyond those which they actually visit during the mapping activity, but with which they are intimately familiar, and regarding which they are likely to have interesting insights. This would be facilitated by using a smaller scale map (of a wider area) on which observations can be recorded, but which (for the purposes of time and usefulness) need not be visited on the day of the mapping exercise.

Both of these methods are equally legitimate, where the purpose of the exercise is to encourage engagement with the built environment. However, it would be useful to be clear which is intended at the outset. It might even be useful to offer a choice of exercises, depending on the area of interest of the participant. The key element for the coordinators should be explaining the methods and purposes with clarity.

THEME 2:

Breathable Materials: Upgrading your traditional building

Presentation by Peter Cox:

How to define a 'traditional' building

Obligations under Kyoto and Paris

BER assessments—weaknesses in relation to 'non-standard' building materials

Summarising some recent research into materials and techniques used to upgrade/insulate traditional building

Presentation by Peter Smith of Ecological Building Systems:

Examples of insulation materials that have good porosity

Details of insulation techniques to avoid thermal bridging

Natural insulation systems

Mineral-based capillary active insulation

THEME 3:

Community conservation measures

Presentation by Mairín Doddy, Galway Co.Co.

Summary of statutory architectural heritage protection

Gort ACA

Workshop for training local people in repairing buildings

Pilot scheme in Portumna for training apprentices

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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



ecological
BUILDING SYSTEMS



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council