Reframing modes of working as a young practitioner towards a bottom-up approach in architecture.

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Masters of Architecture Research Thesis

13 January 2023

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Reframing modes of working as a young practitioner towards a bottom-up approach in architecture. Empowering young architecture practitioners to value their skills in communities.

An exploration into modes of working as a Master of Architecture Student through the case study of a series of events carried out by the West Cork Architecture Network in Bandon, County Cork.

Part A: dissertation

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I am extremely grateful to my tutors, Dr Brian Ward, Dr Alice Casey, Dr Kevin Donovan, Miriam Delaney, Emma Geoghegan , Dougal Sheridan and Deirdre McMenamin for their invaluable advice, continuous support, and patience during my PhD study. Their immense knowledge and plentiful experience have encouraged me in all the time of my academic research and daily life.

I would also like to thank Jack Prendergast and Diarmuid Wolfe from the West Cork Architecture Network (WeCan) for their encouragement and support, these projects exist because of them.

Thank you also to Marguerite and Maria from Creative Bandon for their driving force and unrivaled enthusiasm for everything I wanted to try and achieve. I would like to offer a special thanks to Cllr Sean O Donovan and Cllr Marie O'Sullivan for their help in securing buildings for projects in Bandon.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Angela Brady OBE PPRIBA for the technical support, guidance and generosity both with time and knowledge.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Mum and Dad, my brother and my girlfriend Lucia. Without their tremendous understanding, encouragement, patience and support in the past few years, it would have been impossible for me to complete my studies.

Decleration

I hereby certify that the material in this dissertation toward the award of masters in architecture is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment other than part fulfillment of the award named-above.

Signed: Finbarr Kinmonth Duerden

Dated: 12 01 2023

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Abstract

This piece of reflective research aims to showcase what undergraduates and graduates of architecture school have to offer to the public realm, and in this case, rural communities. As part of the West Cork Architecture Network (WeCan), I have seen the value that young architects, without the restrictions of architecture with a capital A, can bring to communities that are underrepresented. Throughout this document, I present various different modes of working that have been applied to projects with the communities of Bandon and the greater West Cork area. By analysing problems and gaps within the town of Bandon, I was able to identify ways of navigating the complex maze of rural town politics and bureaucracy. The aspiration is that the product of this research will be a guidebook or map for other young architects or architecture collectives to improve and connect with their rural towns, villages and communities through asset-based community development. The focus therefore is less on the production of a building but more so on improving and adding much smaller interventions to what is existing to improve the public realm.

Introduction

The second semester of the Masters of Architecture comprised of an extension to a Sudbury school in Sligo. Sudbury schools are schools that promote self-directed learning, catering for children aged from 5 to 19. The brief was to create an extension to accommodate an additional two hundred students. Due to the school's unorthodox way of operating, I began by trying to engage the students in the task of coming up with what they thought their extension should accommodate. This mining of bottom-up intelligence from the user proved to be challenging, and something I had not previously ever attempted to do in a project. By reflecting on the idiosyncrasies of this process, I became interested in methods of engaging users and the public with architecture and the built environment.

The knowledge collated within this body of research aims to contribute to Melanie Dodd's 'expanded definition of architectural practice' (Dodd, 2011) through the case study of projects or events carried out by the West Cork Architecture Network (WeCan) within Bandon, a town branding itself as the gateway to West Cork (Bandon Walled Towns Committee, 2017). Melanie Dodd, as a solo practitioner and also part of MUF architecture, has many more years of experience than I do. Objectively, by mapping a far more naïve journey of an architecture student belonging to a research collective over a period of seven months, other young architects can see what is possible. Unlike Dodd's research, it comes from the view of a student rather than architect that has been practising for many years. This both limits and drives the project to showcase what is possible as a young architect. The research will be foregrounded by a brief introduction to WeCan, followed by a description of Bandon that outlines both the rural and social challenges that face the town.

WeCan (The West Cork Architecture Network)

The West Cork Architecture Network (WeCan) was set up in September 2021 after receiving a grant from the Arts Council under the *Engaging with Architecture* Scheme. The manifesto as presented to the Arts Council is as follows:

- To inspire in new generations an appreciation for architecture as a vibrant art, among the already rich culture of craft and design in West Cork.
- To highlight the validity of rural design innovation in a beautiful and lived in architectural landscape.
- To celebrate the inherent sustainability of the strong communities of West Cork, reflected in the built (or not so built) environment.
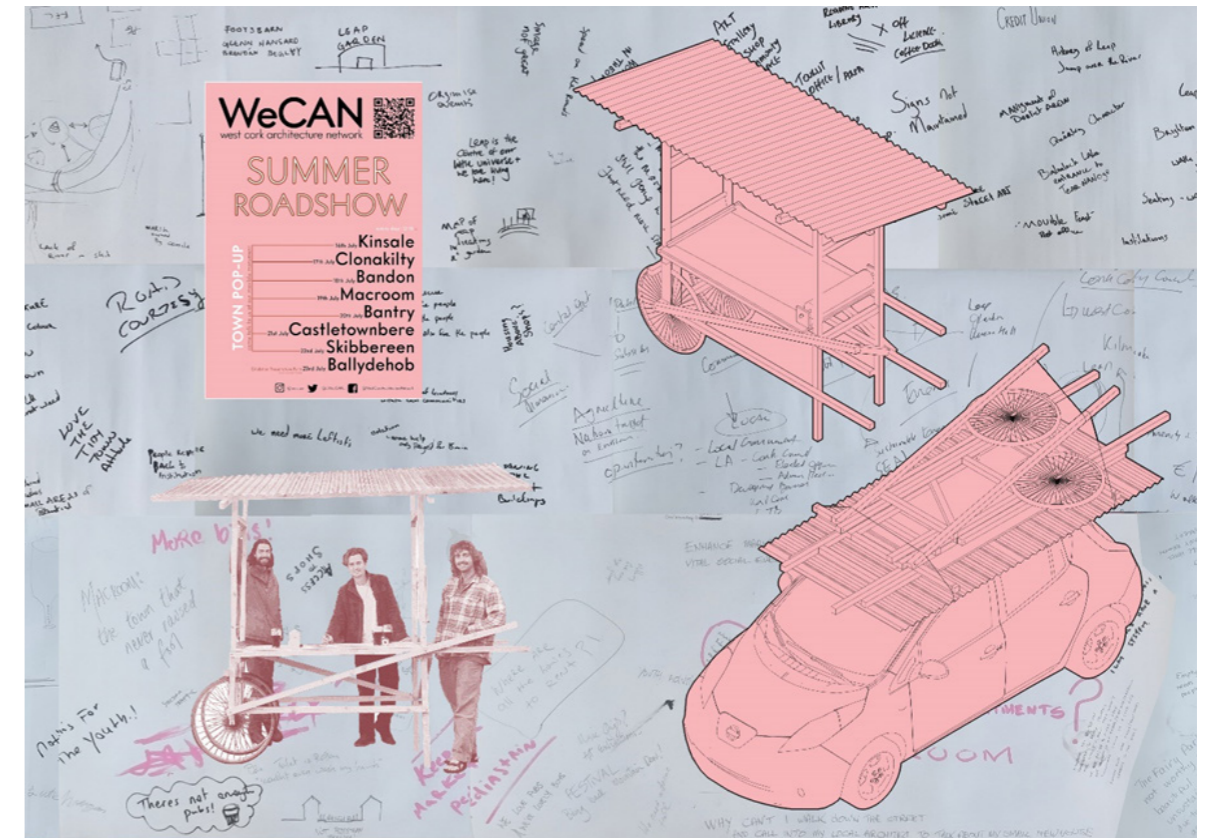

Figure 1
WeCan summer road show poster and cart packed and in action (Kinmonth Duerden, 2022)

Figure 2
WeCan summer road show cart in action in Bandon (Prendergast, 2022)

- To curate events that actively engage with all members of local communities, inspiring a re-imagining of the potential of rural architecture.

WeCan was kickstarted by two graduates from Technical University Dublin, Jack Prendergast and Diarmiud Wolfe in September 2021. Having grown up in a small town in West Cork myself, I was intrigued. My participation in WeCan began the following summer when we took on an ambitious venture of touring West Cork in order to discover what made the towns of West Cork special and where improvements could be had.

The summer road show was a week-long event whereby a core group of 3-8 architecture graduates and students built a transportable covered drawing table. This would afford us to have nomadic impromptu discussions with small communities in each of the towns we visited (see fig. 1,fig. 2).

A large roll of paper was used to note most of the conversations and interactions which took place over the course of the tour week. Locals wrote, drew or had us write down notes for them. With each town the length of paper grew, until eventually, we had used up the sixty meter roll of paper in a continuum of informal public discussions. The two-week road show culminated in an exceptionally well-attended participatory exhibition of the roll of paper at Levi's pub in Ballydehob. Our bottom-up approach was received with much enthusiasm from the communities we visited and by this point, the potential for further active work was more apparent than ever for WeCan.

Following on from the summer road show, a member of Creative Bandon, a community group that aims to build pride and confidence in the community through the arts, reached out to us and asked if we wanted to run a pop-up event for Bandon Culture Night. With each event, it was clear that the Network was being considerably strengthened and communities began reaching out to WeCan, an outcome we had not anticipated would materialise with such immediacy. During Bandon Culture Night, in September 2022, we were given the use of the old Permanent TSB building that had been left vacant for over eight years. Creative Bandon gave us the opportunity to establish contact with the local municipal district council and further outreach with the local community. For the people of Bandon, it was a chance to see the potential in one of the many vacant buildings scattered across the small town.

A temporary exhibition on culture night drew large crowds ,of about 150 visitors, that were eager to see a familiar place open its doors, in a town where often, doors close and remain shut. With paper draped from every wall and projectors exhibiting the results from other towns we spoke to locals and councillors about what visions they had for Bandon, as well as for the building itself. Councillors talked about how the building was earmarked for a cultural center while the public spoke about the possibility of the building as a covered market space. Wider conversations took place regarding what the town was lacking, including a great deal of dialogue on the desire for a swimming pool and a cinema.. Visitors were invited to write and draw on the walls of the building, adding their vision and ideas to the blank canvas of underutilized spaces. (See fig. 3, fig. 4)

Why Bandon?

Located 29.5km southwest of Cork City (see fig. 5), Bandon's dominant character is that of a rural market town (Bandon Walled Towns Committee, 2017). With a population is 6,957 (Central Statistics Office, 2016), it has been observed that a large proportion of its inhabitants are commuters who have settled in and around the town. The majority of these commuters would be traveling to and from Cork

Figure 3
Old permanent TSB building, Bandon.
Before the event (Kinmonth Duerden, 2022)

Figure 4
Old permanent TSB building, Bandon.
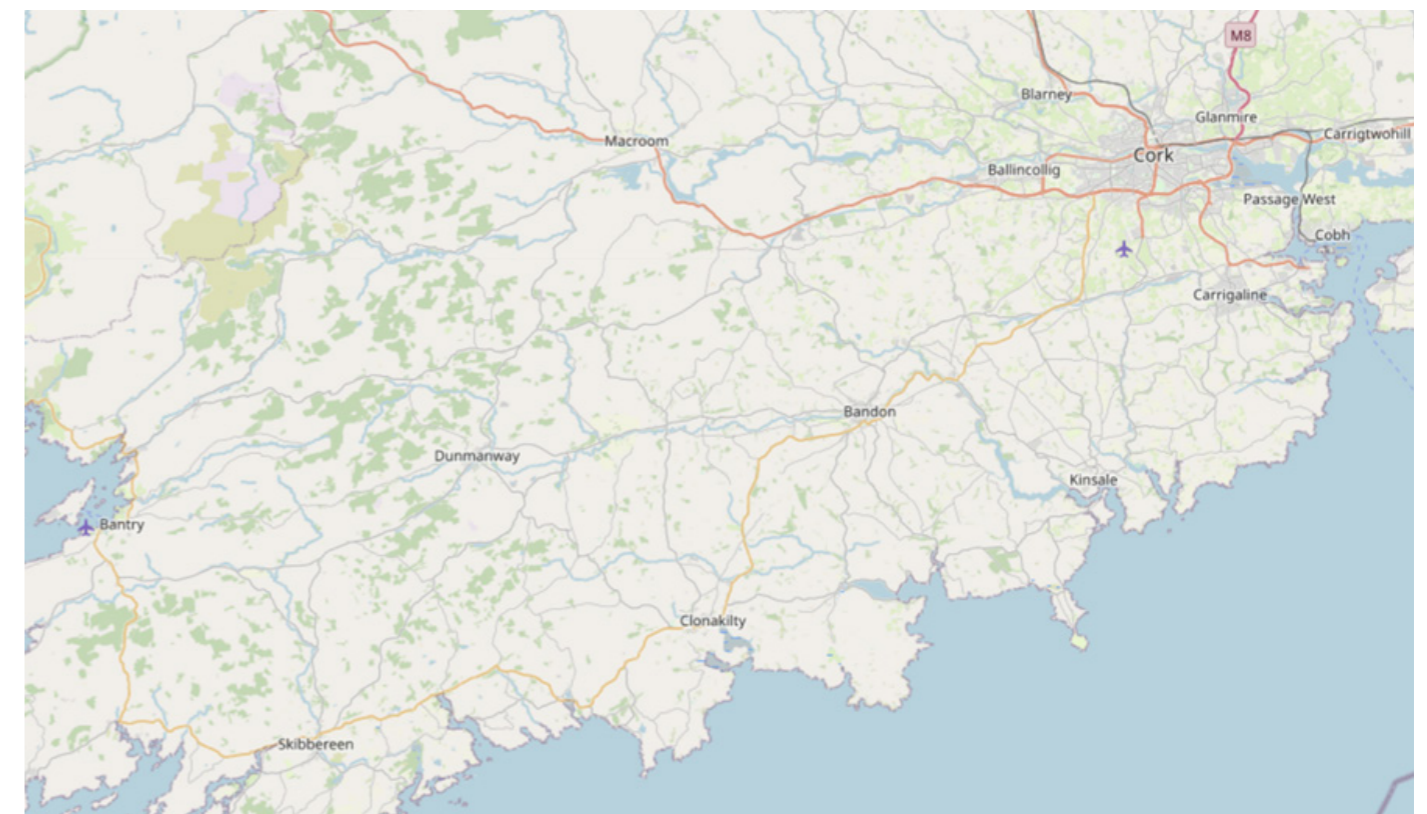During the event (Prendergast, 2022)

Figure 5
Map of West Cork (Kinmonth Duerden, 2022)

City. Overall, there are lower proportions of professional, managerial and non-manual workers living in the town than the state average. Furthermore, unemployment is marginally higher than that of the national average and. (Bandon Walled Towns Committee, 2017) house vacancy stands at over 12 percent (Central Statistics Office, 2016).

With a long history of serious flooding, primarily due to heavy rainfall in the catchment area of the Bandon River and of its tributary, the Bridewell River (Office of Public Works, 2019) and high tides in the last quarter of a century have had a devastating effect on small businesses and public spaces, resulting in many shops being left vacant (see fig. 6).

In more recent years, flooding has been stopped by an intensive floor relief program which saw its completion in early 2019. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic the following year only exacerbated the situation for Bandon and vacant properties now run along the entirety of the main street of the town. Today, without the fear of flooding looming over the town, Bandon is at a point where businesses can begin to be revived and shops can open once again.
Through the informal conversations with the communities in Bandon, WeCan has found that there is general sense of discontent with the approach Councils have taken in the past with regards to public consultation. The flood defense scheme has done little to empower the population; despite its effectiveness in relieving the town from further flooding. The people of Bandon, who have already seen so much destruction caused by the river, have lost a big part of their public realm by the high walls that now mask the river from the town.

In an effort to lift the spirits of the community in the summer of 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic was well underway, Bridge Lane road was temporarily closed and turned into a public gathering space (see fig. 7) according to the planning notice, between the June 2020 and September 2020. The socially-distanced gathering space remained in place until the summer of 2022. Now, although the benches have been removed, and Bridge Lane vehicular road is reinstated, the result of the temporary intervention has been that it will permanently become a seating area, the scope of this seating area is still unknown.

Research area

'Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody' (Jacobs, 1962)
This idea to create spaces for people to exist in is one that drives my architectural ambition. I am interested in community-engaged architecture and this research positions itself relative to many spatial agents who I admire greatly.

Spatial agency is that the agent is one who effects change through the empowerment of others, allowing them to engage in their spatial environments in ways previously unknown or unavailable to them, opening up new freedoms and potentials as a result of reconfigured social space. (Nishat Awan, 2011)

The interest as exemplified in the WeCan manifesto is a context driven approach to spaces and places, in rural towns of Cork. By critically questioning architectural norms and professional structures that are existing, the reflective architecture student or graduate practitioner can begin to re-imagine a new form of engagement, creating a more meaningful approach to place making in rural towns for everyone.

Through a series of experimental events brought about by WeCan across a number of months, this paper aims to reflect and learn from initiatives taken by the team. By reflectively navigating the connections and actions required to make these events happen, I will create a road map or guide for

derelict/disused shops
on the ,south street/
pearse street,bandon

Figure 6
Vacant shops on south main street
(Kinmonth Duerden, 2022)

Figure 7
Bandon's Bridge lane pedestrian zone implemented during Covid
(O'Callaghan, 2020)

future young practitioners to engage with their local communities, empowering them to make a change as I believe all architecture students can. The investigation of the architectural practitioner as more than just the creator of buildings empowers students to see their potential working in many modes of practice around creativity and enabling projects to happen by bringing people together. Asking rather than presuming we know the answer.

The analysis of these modes of working comes from Melanie Dodds PHD 'Between the lived and the built: Foregrounding the user in design for the public realm' (Dodd, 2011)
Dodd's line of inquiry through multiple actors opens up the idea of multiple personas working simultaneously on a project. These are as follows, The Local, The Double Agent, The Educator, The Artist, and The Policy Maker. Having read her work I have adapted, from it, my own modes of working as an architecture student/graduate. The personas or modes of working that have emerged are: The Professional, The Activist, The Designer/Maker, The Provocateur and The Support. These roles, as described by Dodd, are embodied in the work of the architect but might not always get the limelight they deserve.
As Dodd has done, I explore 'a consideration of the alternate roles or personas we adopt within practice which reframe ways of operating as an architect and offer opportunities for collaboration'(Dodd, 2011, p. 8), or as a young practitioner for the sake of this research and beyond.

Three main events dominate this research: the summer road show, the Bandon culture night event and finally, the erection of a provocative sign reading 'CINEMA' inside a vacant property on South Main Street. All events took place in Bandon and from these events a series of questions arise.

The summer road show brought with it the question of how to engage the public with architecture and place. We did this by creating a mobile covered table, or as we called it the cart. On this table we noted conversations in the form of a long roll of paper. Put simply, the cart made people stop, allowing the public to engage with us, facilitating discussions and finally, encouraging visitors to write and draw on the roll of paper. The cart was movable, this meant we could quickly wheel it to the busiest place in the town to gain as much of a response as possible, without needing to seek permission from anyone for being there. The cart, together with its roll of paper and the WeCan team to operate it, was the machine for community engagement.

Culture night was similar in that WeCan was still there in person, but this time we were given the use of a building by the Municipal District Council. The hope was that people would come to us instead of us going to them. The building was the tool for community engagement. It was more of a place specific solution. The space, unlike before, afforded us walls and a power source to project previous work and maps on the walls. Similarly, during both of these events, the group from WeCan needed to be present to facilitate the discussions. The big question emerging from this event was: How can you best use a building as a tool for community engagement?

Finally, there was a question of how one can facilitate discussions about architecture in the absence of the Architect. This question took me right through the whole of the final semester. My answer to this was to provoke a response from the public and record that response. From the previous events it was clear that the people of Bandon wanted a cinema. By creating a sign out of an old pair of curtains that said CINEMA (see fig. 8), and hanging it in the window of a vacant shop on the main street, I was able to make people stop and provoke a response. Through a google forum and a paper survey I was then able to record the response from people without me being there to facilitate it. I was there in time and phonecalls but I wasn't there in person to listen. Ultimately, I proved it was possible to engage people with architecture in the absence of the Architect since over 120 people responded to the survey Online,

Figure 8 - Cinema sign in a vacant shop front in Bandon (Kinmonth Duerden, 2022)

in a discussion about building vacancy and underutilised spaces in their town.

The area of research broadly positions itself in the field of community engaged architecture, placing an emphasis on process over product. As Jeremy Till states, 'I am more interested in the processes that go toward creating that object. Architecture is thus discussed as agency.' (Till, 2009, p. 151)

Temporary interventions and pavilions within buildings or on the street both lend themselves well to this type of bottom-up approach. The subject of temporality is extremely broad and well researched. It is a subject of work that is largely associated with artists rather than architects. Perhaps owing to the reluctancy of some architect to relinquish the control over the aesthetics of a built project. One of the reasons architects tend to become less involved in temporary installations and interventions is due to the fact that we rely on the construction budget of a whole build for our fee, usually taken as a percentage of the budget. For this reason, it's more difficult to value our time as consultants and enablers. (Hyde, 2012) However today more enlightened clients will include this important process as part of paid design work.

Research idea

The research idea is that in order to fully understand something it is necessary to immerse oneself in it. To test, learn and begin to flex the system of community engagement one has to conduct it. By attempting to erect a sign on a shop front and provoke a reaction by the local community, multiple obstacles emerge in the process. There is a learning and recording of these obstacles which open themselves up to a critique of the governance system that exists in a place. Another aspect of the sign is its attempt at a provocation and tool to engage with the public. An obstacle that became apparent was the bureaucracy associated with erecting a sign on a shop front. The Municipal District Council did not want to approve a sign on a shop front for fear that it would set a precedent for future signs to appear without planning permission. Despite this being the case, it was possible to display a sign behind the window of a shop without planning permission. The nimbleness of the proposal existed in its temporality, and in the end it becomes less important how long the sign is going to be there but more about that fact it is not permanent. The permanence of an intervention appears to be a much larger physical hurdle for town governance to navigate, due to their need to protect public interest with permission for permanent signage.

Research question, concerns, hypothesis

It should be clarified that the use of the word temporary suggests intentional impermanence from the outset. Whether it is occupying a vacant property, a building site that has halted construction or simply utilising an underutilised space, temporary use seeks to fill a void in a nimble fashion. Within this piece of research, the relationship between bottom-up approaches to architecture and temporary interventions are intrinsically linked to sustainable and meaningful rural town regeneration.

There is an assumption being made that the use of temporary interventions lend themselves very well to an engaged response to problems within towns. Many County Councils encourage pop up use to keep shops and town centers alive. Proposals for buildings or permanent projects require long time frames, large amounts of money and lots of professions to safeguard the process of construction due to the obligatory building regulations, health and safety, fire regulations and design. Public consultations happen Online or in town halls at strange times, oftentimes leaving the public underrepresented and unable to intervene with the vision of the architect or developer. The days of town architects having informal across the table conversations with locals are less and less. By creating informal temporary

Figure 9 - Folly For a Flyover, Assemble.
(Assemble Studio, 2022)

Figure 10 - The Cineroleum by Assemble
(Arch Daily, 2010)

Figure 11 - Flow, by Jozef Wouters' Decoratelier Studio
(Floornature Architecture & Surfaces, 2022)

proposals, such as chairs in parks or cinemas in petrol stations, locals can feel a sense of ownership and agency over a project, they can talk to their friends and feel proud of a place in their town. When people feel like they have had a 'say' in a project they will cherish it more.

Folly For a Flyover and *The Cineroleum*, (see fig 9, fig. 10) both by Assemble (Assemble Studio, 2022), saw an architectural opportunity in a space that was not being utilised. It was built by students and volunteers to create a joyous space of rich atmosphere capable of making everyone laugh, and moments later everyone cry. That is the nature of film, but who would have thought it could happen under a fly over or in a disused petrol station?

Similarly, Jozef Wouters' Decoratelier Studio, with the help of 50 young people, created for the first time in 40 years an outdoor swimming pool in Brussels (see fig. 11) (Floornature Architecture & Surfaces, 2022). These projects exemplify what is possible with small amounts of money, lots of hands and open-minded landowners and councils. They birth places that people want to be in, want to belong and want to give life to. I found this example to be quite pertinent since Creative Bandon have been campaigning for one of two temporary swimming pools from swim Ireland to be brought to Bandon for twelve weeks for a cost of twenty thousand euro, in the hope that it will set a precedent for a permanent swimming pool to be built (O'Mahony, 2022)

By carrying out small interventions in a small town, lessons are learnt. The long-repeated argument that one does not fully understand a building until they have drawn it, rings true for understanding what it really takes to try and implement a bottom-up approach through architecture. A mission that was subconscious to me for so long was that I wanted to feel empowered by doing architecture that felt more meaningful. Many young architects do not realise the potential they have to make a change to the lives of people and see first-hand the value in their own work. Through this research paper I aim to empower young architects to do what we have done. I am also aware that I have not even begun to scratch the surface of community engaged architecture, but by carrying out this research project, it has given my understanding of architecture, new meaning and hope.

Literature review

Melanie Dodd's PHD, *Between the lived and the built: foregrounding the user in design for the public realm*, has proven to be invaluable to this research project. Dodd's interest in community engaged design through multiple modes of working begins to resonate with many of the other references that form the basis of this paper. Dodd's line of inquiry through multiple actors opens up the idea of multiple personas working simultaneously on a project. These are as follows - The Local, The Double Agent, The Educator, The Artist, and The Policy Maker. Having read her work, I have adapted from it my own modes of working as an architecture student/graduate (see fig. 12).

Free Market provides an Irish example of how horizontal engagement on the ground with locals can influence the vertical engagement with policy change and a bigger picture approach.

"Free Market' is an architecture exhibition and ongoing research project that explores the importance and possible future of small market towns in Ireland.' (Free Market, n.d.)

This was done by Free Market visiting the four chosen towns and organising public events, collecting stories and sharing ideas. Free Market shows us that architects can work at different scales to proliferate improvements and regeneration in rural Irish market towns. (Free Market, n.d.) Although not explicitly
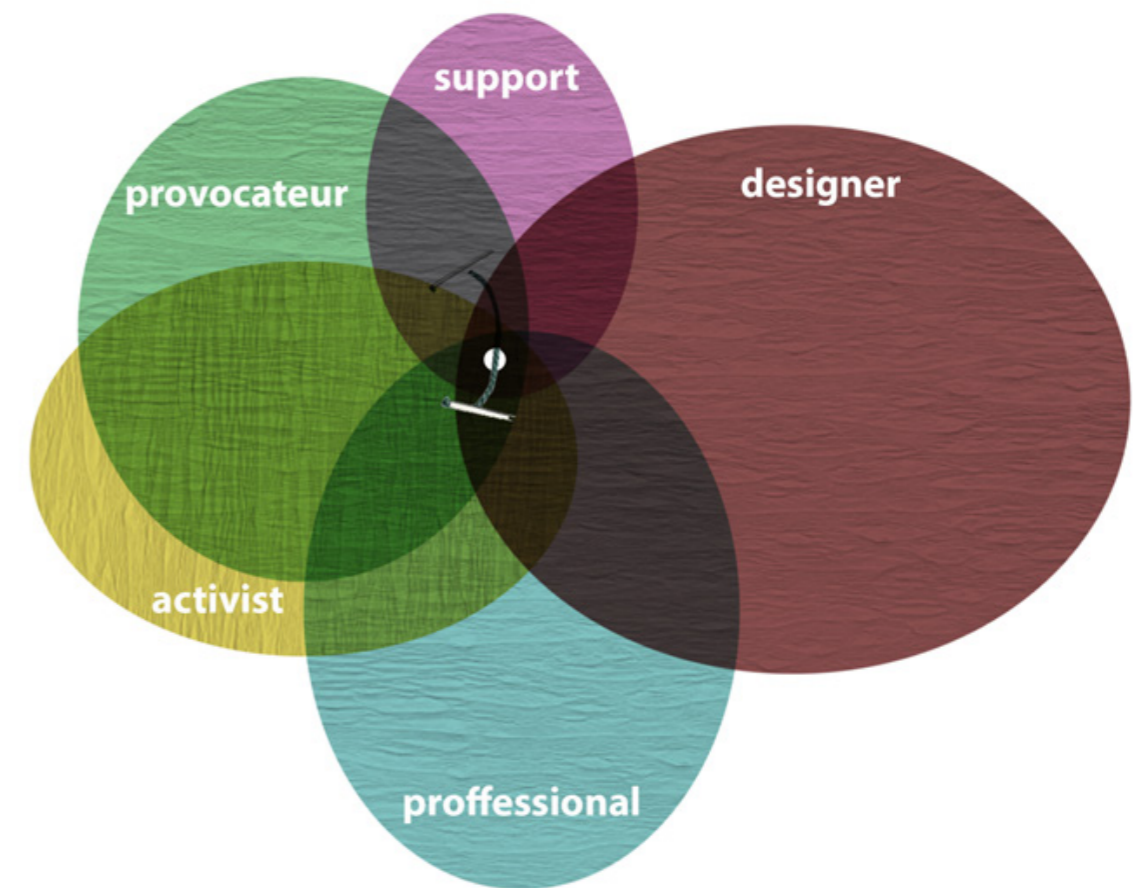

Figure 12 - Modes of working with the Architect at the center holding these overlapping roles together. (Kinmonth Duerden, 2022)

referenced, Dodd shares similar ways of working to Free Market.

Architects after architecture (Rory Hyde, 2021) and *Future practice conversations from the edge of architecture* (Hyde, 2012) both have been excellent resources that have provided a multitude of different views from different practitioners in the built environment, creative and social space. *THIS IS WHAT WE DO a muf manual* overlaps both with the previous work in that it features in Rory Hydes interviews and Free Market makes reference to them.

Assemble Studios' *Cineroleum* and *Folly For a Flyover* are both pertinent examples of temporary interventions that activate inactive or vacant spaces.

'The resourceful, creative actions of a group of residents were fundamental to finally bringing these streets out of dereliction and back into use. Over two decades they cleared, planted, painted, and campaigned in order to reclaim their streets.' – Assemble Granby four streets (Assemble Studio, 2022)

Granby four streets, another project by Assemble, has been instrumental in preventing demolition of and reactivating spaces. There are many projects similar projects by the same practice that do a lot for communities through temporary interventions, often using bottom-up cmmunity led approaches.

Similar to Assemble, although more art based, is Joseph Wouters' Decoratelier studio that works a lot with communities and believes strongly in the ability of temporary installations and workshops to activate participatory design on a hands-on level. (Somviele, 2020) *Flow,* a temporary swimming pool built by 50 young people, is just one of his many projects that uses a hands-on approach to realising design through participation. (Floornature Architecture & Surfaces, 2022)

Method

The method used throughout this research has been of practice-based research. Within the remit of practice-based research the study positions itself within 'intervention and provocation' (Lucas, 2016, p. 45)

Through this thesis I have researched the various roles of the architect and how these many facets of the profession enable a more honest grass roots approach to the manifestation of meaningful public space/reuse of vacant space or buildings. Through these five modes of practice, I will disseminate the project and illustrate how each of the modes are integral to the my role as an architecture student, but also as a member of the WeCan collective working in the town and community of Bandon. These roles, although apparently separate as they are presented, are in fact quite difficult to analyse in isolation. Parts of each mode will overlap with other parts thus, I hope, proving their interdependency. As seen in fig. 13, the role of the architecture student/researcher/architect is a pivotal point that holds all these modes together, depending on what type of project is it these roles become apparent. Their expertise can bring a better understanding to explaining what can be done practically and physically and enable progress with vision and drawings to assist.

Professional

As architects we are bound by the professional liability that comes with the role. What is interesting about this dynamic is that we default, from our teaching in university, to act in this professional way because, although we may not yet be architects, often the work we do represents other architects who may be liable to prosecution if mistakes are made, so insurance is necessary to cover liability.
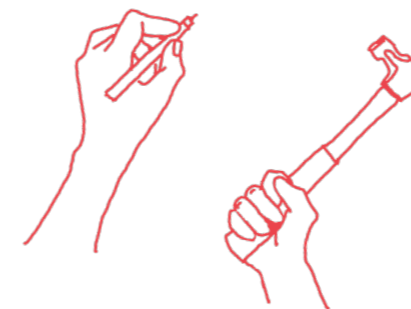

1
The Provocatuer

2
The Professional

3
The Activist

4
The Designer/Maker

5
The Support

Figure 13
The illustrated modes of working

The other reason we act as professionals is to gain the trust of clients and communities with the projects that we propose to undertake. We do not enter into any sort of written agreement, but over time earn the trust of the locals. Often this may already exist if you are working in a town you grew up in or in one nearby. On more than one occasion, councillors or community groups advised us to promote ourselves as locals. Melanie Dodd talks about the double agent that acts as the local or the professional depending on who she is acting with or for.

For this reason, the first way that I chose to go about erecting the sign on a shop front was to contact the owners of the building. The building originally chosen was the old Permanent TSB building now owned by the council, the same building WeCan had held the culture night event in.

Melanie Dodd describes her role as a 'facilitator' becoming more of 'a custodian or curator of the public realm'. Other architectural practitioners see this as an almost forensic task of providing a service to the broader site and its occupants. Patrick Bourdain, the French architect, believes that we have a duty to create an analysis of the law, to create new rights and opportunities for people. (Kim Trogal, 2009)

Activist

'The activist as a creative practitioner therefore is one who uses tools and techniques of art and design production to pursue a cause, often an issue of controversy, protest or dissent, and often socio-political in subject' (Dodd, 2011, p. 59)

There is an assumption which arises from this action, as an architecture student, that the product of the creative work would be something that would be an act of resistance. The first act of resistance was creating an informal place for community consultation. The WeCan cart acted as a form of resistance against orthodox forms of top-down community consultation. By asking the people what they like or dislike about their towns or what they require from their communities, people were able to write, draw and talk to us. Some notes were named while other comments were anonymous, and sometimes we were actively asked to look away while comments were being written. This acted as an empowering form of resistance, a form of democracy.

Chantelle Mouffe makes the argument that true inclusion within democracy is not possible, and despite this inevitable failing it helps add something to the participation of democracy. Due to the conflicting nature of liberalism and democracy, Mouffe explains, there exists within equality an irresolvable tension.

'Liberal equality is an abstract and universal concept. For liberal theorists, 'every person is, as a person, automatically equal to every other person' (Mouffe, 2000, p. 39). In contrast, democratic equality is substantive because it constructs 'the people' as a bounded community. For Mouffe, democratic equality 'requires the possibility of distinguishing who belongs to the demos and who is exterior to it; for that reason, it cannot exist without the necessary correlate of inequality' (Mouffe, 2000) Central to Mouffe's argument is how the creation of an 'us' always implies a 'them.' This democratic paradox –between abstract universal equality and an exclusionary democratic community – is inescapable, and yet productive: the commitment to universal liberal equality enables citizens to challenge exclusion.' (Stacy Clifford Simplican, 2015)

Figure 14
The cinema sign hung in a
vacant shop window

This reading of democracy is important to dwell on since no form of community consultation is truly democratic beacuse *'This [can] place the architectural activist in some conflict as unlike the artist the architect is bound by professional and contractual agreements and duties of care to both a client, and the public at large'* (Dodd, 2011, p. 59). This does not take away from the fact that the work can still strive to be democratic.

This reading of the architect activist is of particular interest to this project because in turning up with a cart on the street, WeCan does not need to seek permission. Furthermore, since it was a self-driven project that was largely self-funded, there was no client controlling us. This gave WeCan a great sense of autonomy and agency over the project. Ultimately, the aim is to serve the people by bringing about a change in the community engagement system that exists and help makes the town or village better by leading with a vision to help the community.

Provocateur

The provocateur reacts often with design to something which they want people to think about. For example, by creating a cart in the street, WeCan provokes the public to wonder what it is. The intention was indeed for the cart to attract attention and receive as much engagement as possible. Then during Bandon culture night, WeCan provoked a different audience by showcasing the roll of paper ideas from a previous visit to Bandon. The idea being that 'the powers that be', referred to by a councillor in an email thread, would see what the people of Bandon had originally written. By putting this public dialogue out there, WeCan anticipated that people would react to it.

This is done again with the creation of a symbolic sign in the window of a vacant property. The sign reads 'CINEMA', a key subject of the discourse on the various encounters with the community of Bandon. The public can connect with the sign because they are the creators of that information. The idea it is for the sign to catch people's attention and inquisitively go over to see what it is about and if it is real.

Once they reach the building they are greeted with, what at first glance appears to be a planning permission, but is simply a notice providing information about the sign (see appendix 1), and secondly, a poster engaging with the audience in an informal dialogue. (see appendix 2)

Support Architect

The support architect is one that enables community groups to realise things otherwise not possible without the help of a spatial agent. An example of this would be helping community groups secure funding for projects by using design skills to put together proposals for them. Perhaps a group already has an idea of what they want but lacks the means to draw up the idea. One of the members of creative Bandon, following on from our Bandon culture night event, purchased a community engagement workbook for children in schools. The workbook was about the built environment and how we shape our cities, the downfall was that it was specific to America. With my drawing skills, that all architects have in some form or another, I was able to reconfigure the workbook so that it would be specific to Bandon. This in turn meant that by completing this work for Creative Bandon they were able send them to schools in the area along with the research questionnaire. It acted as an 'in' for the research project, while providing a valuable tool for them to be able to use in the future to enable community engagement on all levels. Another way of looking at the support architect would be to describe them as community enablers (Hyde, 2012)

Figure 15
The cart being constructed by the WeCan team. (Prendergast, 2022)

Figure 16
The Sign being sewn out of a re purposed set of curtains.

Figure 17
The Cinema sign being hung
(Prendergast, 2022)

Designer/Maker Architect

The architect as the designer is the most obvious mode of working in public perception, and perhaps the medium architects are most accustomed to from early years of practice. To tie this in with the maker further strengthens this role as it gives the young architect great agency over a project. The members of WeCan built all the props and tools throughout the course of the events in question (see fig. 15). Being able to make things as a designer also adds another dimension to your understanding of how thing are made and therefore how they are designed. One learns about the affordance of materials and their limits by research. The *DIY* attitude allows repurposing of material, something that needs to exist in all forms of building. An example of this would be the sign being made from an old set of pink curtains. (see fig. 16)

Conclusions

The concluded results are showcased in a long drawing or leaflet that folds out into a timeline of events with a description and reflective questions and notes throughout. It documents the process and critically reflect on key happenings that influence certain aspects of each step. This mapping of the timeline and process of working aims to inform future ways of working both for me and for other architecture students and graduates that share an interest in community-engaged architecture and aiming to inform others of the strength of this method of working. This is particularly important at a time when architecture is struggling to compete with capital and developer-driven built environments that do little to engage small communities and people-powered places, and where planning and the appeal system have their problems.

As a practitioner, it would be imperative to reflect on this timeline and possibly build on these processes of navigating various spheres of communities and government entities in the years to come. In this sense, the research provides the reader or user of the document with a framework for the implementation mapping of a project, key correspondence and key events that accompany it.

Alongside this document, we will be able to present some of the work to the Municipal District Council of Bandon. Since I have built up a repour with a number of the councillors, I have been invited to present my work in Bandon to the Municipal Districts Council Members. Another relationship has been established with the members of Creative Bandon which I would like to continue building on. This piece of research has given me the opportunity to forensically analyse how a small town such as Bandon functions socially and politically, and the governance systems that exist at a small and larger scale. I am certain that this work, together with my participation with WeCan, will enable me to actively investigate more community-engaged projects with confidence both in Bandon and other towns around Ireland.

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Table of Figures

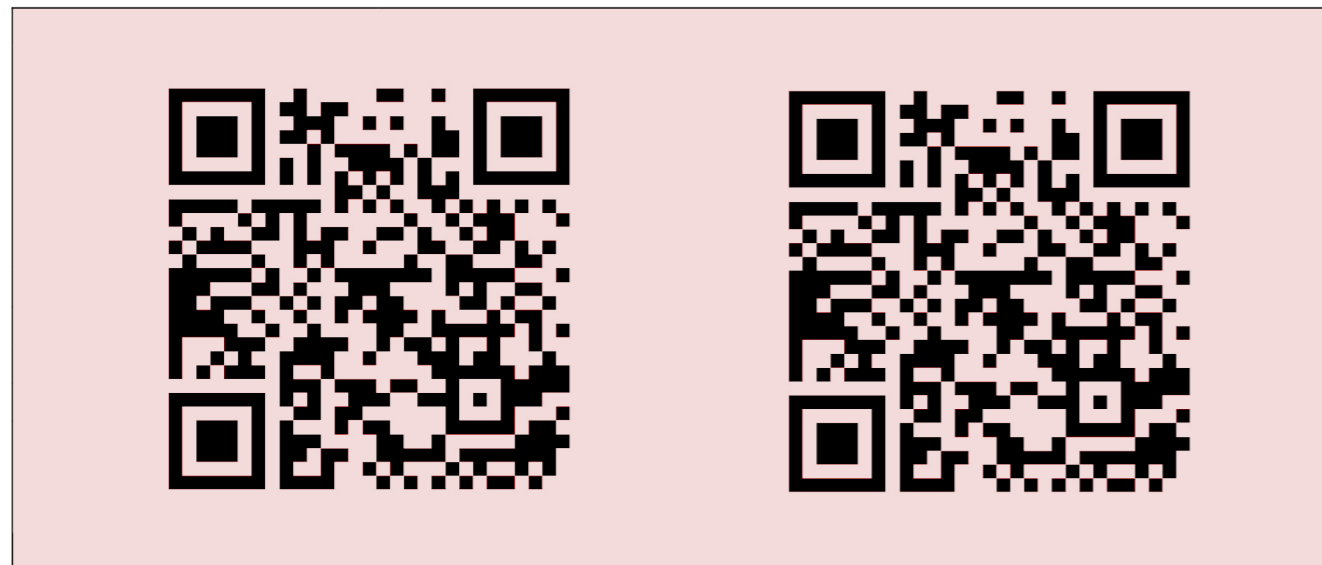# BUILDING VACANCY AND THE USE OF PUBLIC SPACE IN BANDON

Research project conducted by Finbarr K D
(To be completed by the public)

- The people of Bandon have been asked to fill out a survey
- Surveys can be found in Warren Allen Coffee and Hickeys Newsagents
- Once completed, please post the forms back through the letterbox of this building 100 south main st

1.1. Applicant: Public research project conducted by Finbarr Kinmonth Duerden MA TU Dublin

Address	100 South Main Street, BANDON
Eircode	If you have got this far thank you for taking the time to read this. Your opinion matters and is important to this project. Sadly this is not a planning permission notice for a new cinema, but by filling out the form you will contribute to a body of work which aims to gain a better understand the complexities that cause building and spaces to be left vacant/underutilised. Theres not one single solution and that is why **your opinion matters** !
Telephone No.	
Mobile No. (if any)	
Email Address (if any)	

1.2. QR CODE AS FOLLOWS :

If you are reading this then **thank you** for *stopping !* There is a survey which follows on from this about **building vacancy and the use of public space in Bandon**, you can either scan the **QR** code or fill out the paper form which you can find in Hickeys or the Warren Allen Coffee shop across the road.

This sign follows on from the **West Cork Architecture Networks** event that took place in the old TSB building during **Bandon culture night.** Finbarr, one of the members of **WeCan** as part of his MA is doing research on **building vacancy and the use of public space in Bandon.** We e would grately appreciate if you would take the time to offer you 're very important opinion on these topics
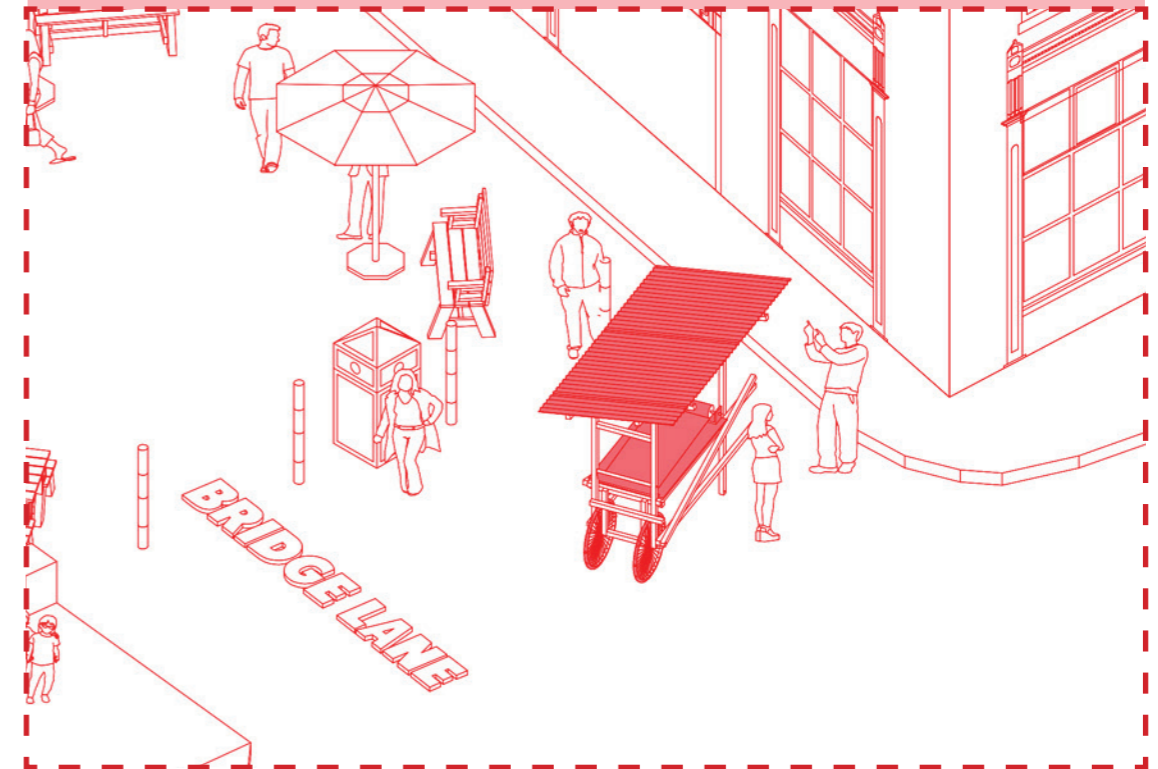
YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Thank you for reading this far
le cheile WeCan

Part B ADRS

Finbarr Kinmonth Duerden

Reframing modes of working
as a young practitioner
towards a bottom-up approach
in architecture.

1

INTRODUCTION

This booklet explores ways of engaging with communities in rural Ireland. By reflecting on a year of community engagement work, I aspire to showcase ways of operating as a young practitioner with the aim of empowering others who too have an interest in this field of work.

The booklet is foregrounded primarily by *Melanie Dodd's PHD: Between the lived and the built, foregrounding the user in design for the public realm'*

This body of research reflects on a year of work in contrast to Dodd who reflects on 12 years of practice. Looking back on such a short period should exemplify how much is possible with little to no prior experience in the field and empower others to see the potential in themselves.

In semester 2 we had a brief to design an extension for a school in Sligo. I attempted to foreground the user's intelligence in my project. Then during the summer I became part of the West Cork Architecture Network (WeCAN), an architecture collective who's purpose is dual fold, 'To ENCOURAGE engaged and energetic discourse involving the wider community, while also CELEBRATING the discussion and engagement of rural architecture.'

The booklet is broken up into 5 sections. I will begin by exploring the alternate modes of working or acting as a young practitioner. This will be followed by four questions that arose from four key events over the year of 2022:

1) How do you engage a school with architecture ?

2) How do you engage the public with architecture ?

3) How do you use a building for community engagement ?

4) How do you get people talking about architecture in your absence?

The aim of this booklet is to exemplify how important it is to connect with local community groups in the effort to affect positive change in rural towns and communities. Examples throughout show how effective an asset-based community development approach can be and how well suited we are as young practitioners to adapting these personas and modes of working.

2

ALTERNATE MODES OF WORKING AS A YOUNG PRACTITIONER

activist

'The activist as a creative practitioner therefore is one who uses tools and techniques of art and design production to pursue a cause, often an issue of controversy, protest or dissent, and often socio-political in subject' (Dodd, 2011, p. 59)
This is an essential tool for every architect, even if it is very subtle in your work !

designer/maker
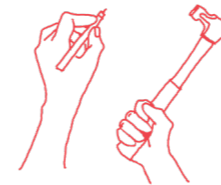
As a young practitioner you have to design within your means. If you can make your proposal yourself then that will cut the cost of the project drastically. The link between designing and making adds another dimension of understanding to a project. I personally find joy in making things so it ads more excitement and enthusiasm to a project for me.

provocateur

Community engagement can only exist with a response from a community, be it good or bad, a response is essential. The provocateur does this very well aided by both the designer/maker and the activist. 'Provoke a response' features in the answers to all of the questions in this booklet.
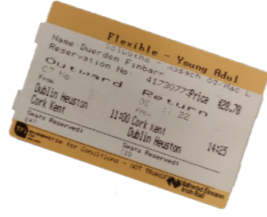
professional

There are many project which are not possible without gaining peoples trust and seeking permission. It is the role of the professional to build this trust with people in communities and to carry out all the necessary admin work. Communities require honest ethical working habits to co-create and run projects together, we as architects have a responsibility and duty of care.

support

The support architect is one that helps communities out with projects, sometimes not producing anything but being the catalyst that joins the dots. This might include helping with funding streams or creating drawings for community groups. This actor might be referred to as a community enabler. Asset based community development requires the support architect.

3

During the second semester of the M.Arch we had a brief to create an extension to a Sudbury School in Sligo. In this project I attempted to foreground the users intelligence and produce an extension with a bottom-up approach. I did this through drawing and presentation techniques that were easily accessible by everyone of all ages. By DESIGNING/MAKING a wooden model of the site with the brief as scaled wooden movable blocks it created a focal point in the room for students and teachers to refer to. Being durable I was able to leave it with the school while I wasn't there and they were able to come up with ideas in my absence. This SUPPORTED the schools ethos of exclusivity and allowed everyone to play a part in the co-design of the project. The drawing of the existing tree house was done in conjunction to this to PROVOKE a response. A video of the construction of the tree house captivated the students. Renders and axonometric drawings are easy for everyone to understand as a presentation technique. Know your audience! Make it accessible !
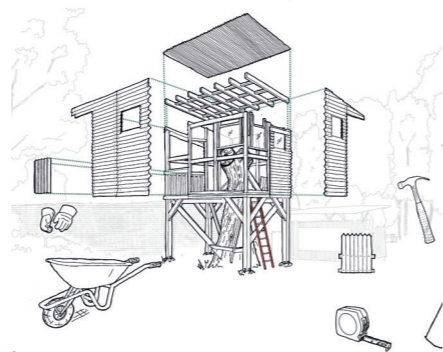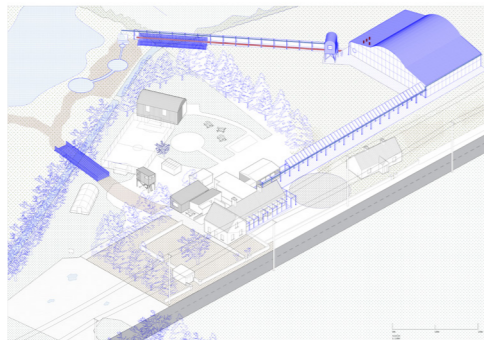
4

HOW DO YOU ENGAGE THE PUBLIC WITH ARCHITECTURE ?

During the summer The West Cork Architecture Network visited 7 towns in Cork county during, what we called, The Summer Road Show. The cart we made meant that we could show up without permission with a movable covered table and record conversations with the public, this in itself was a form of ACTIVISM. The cart had to stand out to PROVOKE a response and make people stop, it was largely successful at doing this. It had to be transportable on a car, so was designed to fit flat on a roof. People were impressed that we had DESIGNED/MADE it ourselves and as a result gave us their time and opinions about their towns. We recorded these conversations on a 60 meter long roll of paper that we would role on as the public wrote, drew or had us write for them.

By exhibiting that roll of paper to the public it was a way of SUPPORTING communities that were not having their voices heard, another form of ACTIVISM. Figures of governance also had the opportunity, in later events, to view that democratic open forum, that was the roll of paper. It acted as an anonymous public consultation between groups otherwise not listening to one another.
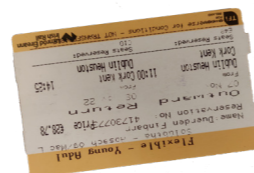
5

HOW CAN YOU BEST USE A BUILDING FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Connecting with a community groups or a member of the community makes the process of securing a building to hold an event in a lot easier. We were asked to come back and hold an event in a building by Creative Bandon, a community group that aims to build pride and confidence in the community through the arts. Being PROFESSIONAL early on when you meet a community group that is enthusiastic about what you do is essential. Keep in touch with these groups because they make everything happen. It was thanks to them that we got sponsorship from the local hardware shop, they also shared our posters on their social media pages and invited people to the event. Communities have trust in their own members to recommend events.

By positioning the Cart outside it PROVOKED people to stop and investigate what was going on. The DESIGNER/MAKER has to be smart about what they produce for the event so minimum intervention with maximum effect is important. We did this by making simple tables and hanging paper from the walls all accompanied by two projects, some lights and speakers. We supported people from the community by giving them a voice much like an ACTIVIST, people were invited to write on the walls about their town. Members of the council attended the event and saw what people had written, this is an effective way of engaging governance in conversations they might otherwise not have. All kept as informal as possible.

6
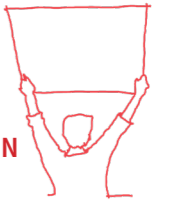
HOW CAN YOU GET PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE IN YOUR ABSENCE

The objective of the creation of the sign was to provoke a response from the public in the absence of the initiator to listen and record the discussion. Simply put, make people stop, PROVOKE a response and record that response.
The biggest difficulty was trying to secure a vacant building to hang the sign in. Many phone calls and emails were sent and in the end a private landlord

was able to offer the building up for 3 weeks. Hanging the sign behind glass avoided having to get planning permission. A google survey was then created along with two provocative posters, one of which was made to look like a planning application. On them a QR code took you to an Online questionnaire. The questionnaire covered vacancy in Bandon meaning the erection of the sign in

a vacant property all the more pertinent. It was designed to be as provocative as possible. The sign was made out of an old pink set of curtains to evoke the feeling of a cinema. This made the sign durable and easy to transport, there was an intensional feeling of it being reminiscent of a activist's banner. On reflection the Online survey was effective and garnered a response from over 120 people. Only one physical survey was filed out all the rest were Online.

Like previously the relationship with a local community group to help secure this building made it so much easier. Their connections with councilors made the admin far easier than if i had to built trust and relationships from scratch. Each event built on the last so none of this happens over night, it was the result of a summer of communicating with community groups and going for coffees with councillors and locals. This is where the role of professional is most prominent.

HOW CAN YOU GET PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE IN YOUR ABSENCE

Another way of getting people to talk about architecture in the absence of the architect is to create worksheets. The worksheets created in collaboration with Creative Bandon were for school children to engage with how their town functioned.
The workbooks explored who was responsible for carrying out which tasks in the town as well as how they could better work

together and collaborate.

These workbooks function to educate children about how towns work and can go on to give the future population of these places a more engaged population of people who are interested in making changes and improving their town. The workbooks engage kids but also the parents and friends of the kids.

TO CONCLUDE

The aim of this handbook is to show young practitioner the potential in their skills and these alternate modes of working. Ways of working with what is existing, an asset based community development approach is needed in these situations to build pride and self-worth

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Mobile No. (if any)	matters and is important to this project. Sadly this is not a planning permission notice for a new cinema, but by filling out the form you will contribute to a body
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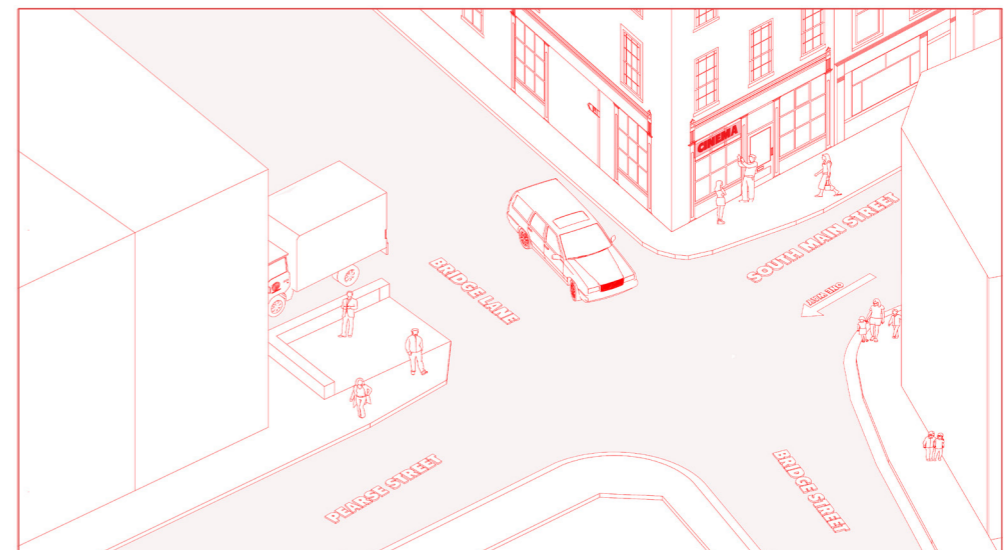
Decorate a shopfront for Bandon!

- Add a sign
- Fill the window display
- Paint it
- You are the designer GO WILD!

NAME _____ AGE _____
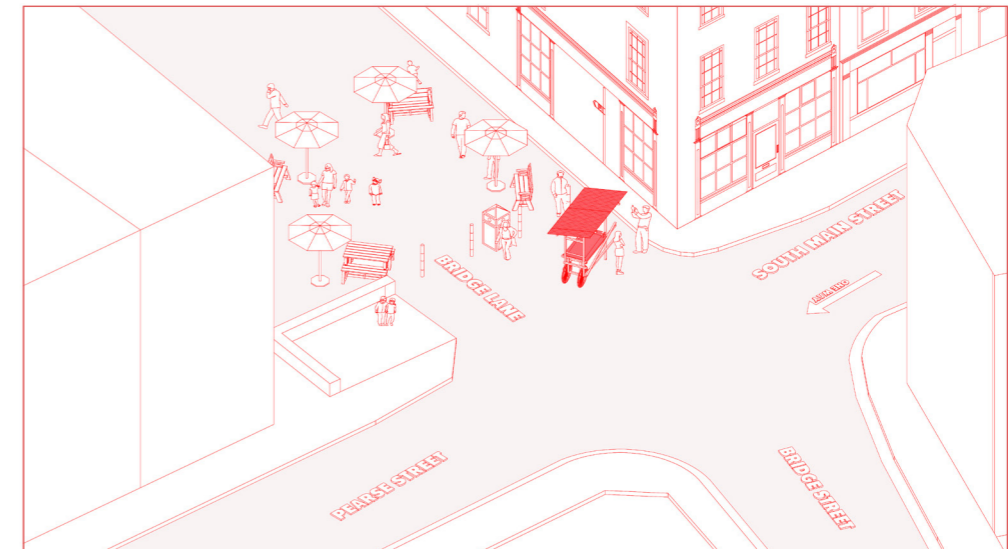
Summer Road Show Bandon visit

Cinema sign hung

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