

Press Release Tuesday August 29, 2006

Irish exhibition for Venice Architectural Biennale imagines a super-rural Ireland in 2030

One third of all homes in Ireland have been built since 1995, the great majority of them outside the major urban centres. This free-market, unsustainable solution to housing throughout the island has resulted in sub-urban sprawl: choking our urban centres, devastating the countryside and destroying our traditional sense of community. But are there new models for development that have been overlooked?

The nine Irish architectural practices that are representing Ireland at the prestigious Venice Biennale 10th International Architecture exhibition from September 10th think so. Curated by FKL Architects for the Irish Architecture Foundation and supported by Culture Ireland, the Arts Council, the Devey Group, the RIAI and Tegral, Ireland's exhibition in the 2006 Venice Architectural Biennale features nine projects and scenarios that imagine and illustrate a vision of how our SubUrban island can evolve into a 'SuperRural' one between now and 2030.

Fluidcity by Dominic Stevens Architect is a river Shannon-borne caravanserai of amenities, bringing the city to a much increased riverside population once a week. MacGabhann Architects' Tideaways proposes 'sinkable' seaside holiday villages in Donegal that are only visible when occupied, disappearing into the ground when nobody's at home. Heneghan Peng suggest building a high-speed rail bridge from Rosslare to Fishguard to turn Dublin into an ElastiCity stretched along the Irish Sea instead of a blob spreading out over the midlands. Demographics (Henchion+Reuter Architects) suggests concentrating Ireland's population strictly within a five city penta-zone that could support Danish-style high-speed trains to 'shrink' Ireland - travel time from Dublin to Sligo would go from 3h20m to 48 minutes!

While some of the exhibitions propose solutions, others pose questions. 26+1 by Boyd Cody Architects asks what we would do if we could start from scratch with an extra, empty county. dePaor Architects' tall-house looks at the impact a planning law change to ban all footprint extension outside urban areas might have: what if you could only build up or down, not out?

And what if we do nothing at all? Vertical Sprawl by ODOS Architects is a cautionary tale, in comic-book style, of what happens when horizontal suburban expansion is no longer possible in 2030.

SUPPORTED BY

Architectural Association of Ireland, The Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin City Council, Irish Architectural Archive, Office of Public Works, Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland

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Ireland's entry has been commissioned by the Irish Architecture Foundation at the invitation of Culture Ireland. Culture Ireland Director Mary McCarthy noted '*as a newly formed body, Culture Ireland is delighted to partner with the Irish Architecture Foundation in raising these pertinent questions which are shaping Ireland's contemporary culture.*'

To coincide with the opening of Ireland's entry in the Padiglione Italia, Giardini di Castello, Venice, a special section of the Irish Architecture Foundation's website has been created and will go live on September 6, 2006: www.architecturefoundation.ie

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EDITOR'S NOTES

SubUrban to SuperRural: Ireland at the Venice Biennale 10th International Architecture Exhibition

Nine projects by nine architectural practices.

Boyd Cody Architects: 26+1

A vast, ex-bogland landscape, as big as greater Dublin, which would be equivalent to the 16th-largest county in the Republic and currently has a population of 0 (versus 1.2m for Dublin), will come free in the midlands Boora Complex by 2030. What would you do, faced with future food and energy shortages, with a new county if you could start from scratch?

Bucholz McEvoy Architects: Learning Landscape

A mapping of 19c/20c national schools in the midlands and the work of the Land Commission prompted two thoughts - that big moves can transform the landscape and the life it supports; and everybody lives an urban life now. As Ireland's future lies within a global economy, trading on ideas (which we haven't managed to date), can we invent a 'learning landscape' - something as powerful as Singapore but where, instead of living in skyscrapers, people can continue to live on the land while contributing to the global knowledge economy?

dePaor architects: tall-house

At current levels of output (20,000 per annum, on average), 500,000 new one-off houses will be built in the landscape between now and 2030, consuming 250,000 acres and a road frontage equivalent to 4 times the coastline of Ireland that would take 10 days to drive past. It's just not sustainable, so why not change the planning laws to ban all footprint extension outside urban areas as and from 2006? From now on, you can only build up or down - not out. Development pressure soon leads to demolition of bungalows and the development of new typologies - tall-houses - that curiously look not dissimilar to the tower-houses of old.

FKL architects: Hinterland

Develop the hinterlands of the national motorway network planned under Transport 21 for housing, so that everybody can live sustainably in the country but still work in town. Individual plots of 1.5 hectares within 3.3km of the motorway would support a house, vegetables and bio-fuel crops to support a local car culture that links to hubs, whence people commute to towns by bus on a motorway/dual carriageway QBC.

Henchion+Reuter Architects: Demographics

If the 1.6m population increase expected by 2030 were concentrated strictly within a 'penta-zone' linking Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Sligo and Belfast, it could support high-speed trains, similar to those currently in Denmark, that would 'shrink' Ireland - travel time from Dublin to Sligo would go from 3h20m to 48 minutes!

Heneghan.peng.architects: ElastiCity

Dublin-London is the world's second busiest air route. Short-haul flights are fuel-inefficient and may not be viable by 2030. Using oil-rig technology, build a bridge from Rosslare to Fishguard: high-speed trains travel Dublin-London in 2.5 hours and on to Paris. The power of this 'magnet' turns Dublin into an elastic, stretched city along the Irish Sea, instead of a blob spreading out over the midlands.

MacGabhann Architects: Tideaways

Holiday homes are killing the Golden Goose of tourism. Tideaways, based on an analysis of the Rundale system, includes seasonal homes in the sea on a pontoon that are towed into derelict Donegal harbours for winter storage and hillside 'sinkable' houses on a hydraulic system, linked to the pontoon, that rise and fall with the tides. When nobody's at home, the empty sinkable house collapses on its hydraulic ram, disappearing from sight into the ground. Its grass roof becomes part of the landscape you can walk over.

dominic stevens architects: Fluidcity

The Shannon-Erne River system can support a population of 240,000 (compared to the 80,000 of Limerick, Athlone, Rooskey and Carrick today). People live in the countryside, facing the river. Much like the travelling cinema bus today, a river-borne caravanserai arrives once a week, bringing the city to your doorstep...

ODOS architects: Vertical Sprawl

A cautionary tale, told in the form of a comic book from 2030, of what happens when horizontal suburban expansion is no longer possible. In 2030, the sky is the limit...

The Irish participation at the 2006 Venice Architectural Biennale also features *Detached*, a short film by Jennifer Keegan (4m20s), shot on the outskirts of Tallaght.

The accompanying catalogue features essays by Frank McDonald and Constantin Gurdgiev.

Commissioner: Shane O'Toole for the Irish Architecture Foundation

Deputy Commissioner: Ciarán Ó Gaora

Curators: FKL architects (Michelle Fagan, Paul Kelly, Gary Lysaght)

Exhibitors: Boyd Cody Architects, Bucholz | McEvoy Architects, dePaor architects, FKL architects, Henschion+Reuter Architects, heneghan.peng.architects, MacGabhann Architects, ODOS architects, dominic stevens architect.

Contributing Writers: Constantin Gurdgiev, Frank McDonald

Film: Jennifer Keegan

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For more information, see:

www.architecturefoundation.ie (Download the 144-page SubUrban to SuperRural catalogue here. Site live on September 6, 2006.)

www.cultureireland.gov.ie

www.labiennale.org

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