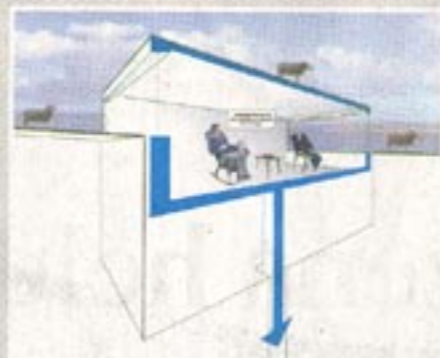


FUTURE VISIONS: 'daring' Irish entry to feature at prestigious Venice exhibition



Among Ireland's entry for the 10th Architectural Biennale in Venice are: (clockwise from top left) developing the vast Boora bog in the midlands; a high-speed rail connecting Ireland to the UK; "sinkable" holiday homes; "tower-houses"; vertical sprawl; and a design that minimises land usage.

Architects envision Ireland in 2030

FRANK McDONALD,
ENVIRONMENT EDITOR

Sinkable holiday homes in Co Donegal that are only visible when occupied, high-speed trains linking Dublin and London and a new city in the midlands are among the ideas Ireland will be showing at this year's Venice Biennale.

The Irish entry, "From Sub-Urban to Super-Rural", features projects by nine architectural practices and has been billed as "the most daring and ambitious entry yet" for the prestigious international architectural exhibition, opening on September 10th.

The architects involved are seeking to present alternative models of development to the haphazard sprawl that has engulfed Ireland over the past decade, with the great majority of our record output of new homes built

outside the principal urban centres.

"This free market, unsustainable solution to housing throughout the island has resulted in suburban sprawl - choking our urban centres, devastating the countryside and destroying our traditional sense of community," according to curators FKL Architects.

They note that one-third of all the homes in Ireland have been built since 1995, mostly siting on their own piece of land, with gardens to front and rear. And with an 80 per cent level of home ownership, houses have become highly successful consumer products.

Presenting a group show for the first time in Venice, Ireland has responded to the 10th Architectural Biennale's theme of "Cities, Architecture and Society" by looking forward to 2030 and making some predictions and possible solutions for the next generation.

"Architects are not soothsayers, but somebody needs to fill the visionary vacuum and illustrate some of the characteristics of success that should mark our society a generation hence," according to Shane O'Toole, the Irish commissioner for the 2006 Biennale.

One of the most radical new ideas is "Tall House" by dePaor Architects. It suggests a blanket ban on building more houses in the countryside. "From now on, you can only build up or down - not out", resulting in the replacement of bungalows with "tower-houses".

Otherwise, at current levels of output (20,000 a year, on average), "half-a-million new one-off houses will be built in the landscape between now and 2030, consuming 250,000 acres and a road frontage equivalent to four times the coastline of Ireland".

Letterkenny-based MacGabhann

Architects proposes seasonal homes on pontoons in the sea that could be towed into derelict Co Donegal harbours for winter storage. Another of their ideas is hillside "sinkable" holiday homes using a hydraulic system.

In Heneghan Peng Architects' "ElastiCity" project, high-speed trains would travel from Dublin to London in two and a half hours and onwards to Paris. By contrast, Boyd Cody Architects target the vast Boora cutaway bog in the midlands, which occupies a land area equivalent to Dublin.

Other architects participating in Ireland's entry for the Venice Biennale, which has been organised by the Irish Architecture Foundation with the support of Culture Ireland and the Arts Council, are Bucholz McEvoy, FKL, Henchion+Reuter, ODOS and Dominic Stevens.