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Everyday Discoveries in Helsinki and Dublin: How PIVOT Dublin and the Institute of Designers in Ireland engaged in an open and participative competition as part of World Design Capital 2012

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Abstract

Design Forum Finland invited the Institute of Designers in Ireland (IDI) to take part in the International Design House Exhibition as part of World Design Capital Helsinki 2012. The IDI was asked to work with Design Forum Finland and Imu Design in the event that takes place during Helsinki Design Week 2012.

In 2010 Dublin City Council formed a group called PIVOT Dublin to bid for World Design Capital 2014. Dublin has been investigating different ways of utilizing design to make changes and drive innovation in the City. PIVOT Dublin provides an ongoing flexible mechanism for design projects, actions and collectives and discussions.

Rather than select an Irish Designer and send them to Helsinki with a container of objects, The IDI decided to work with PIVOT Dublin to select a team of designers to represent Ireland in 2012. Imu Design was invited to Dublin to take part in a multi-disciplinary design workshop, which took place during Ireland's Design Week.

The paper will focus on this innovative process of open, participative public service procurement. The methodology and collaborations between the participants, their disciplines and the two cities is analyzed. The process has been rich and the results will be rewarding.

Introduction

In April 1961 the report of the Scandinavian Design Group entitled "Design in Ireland" was written. It provided a road map of what Ireland should do to promote design on the island. The report was commissioned by Córas Tráchtála Teo (CTT) the Irish Export Board, given responsibility by the Government of the Republic of Ireland for the improvement of standards of Industrial Design. CTT looked to Scandinavia to find the answers.

In 2011, fifty years later, Ireland replied with PIVOT Dublin, Ireland's 2014 World Design Capital bid. The bid book told the wider world what we had been doing about design in Ireland since the visit by the Scandinavian Design Group and announced what we proposed to do in the coming years.

Members

The Scandinavian Design Group consisted of six members, two each from Norway, Sweden and Finland. I accept that Finland is a Nordic country and is not part of Scandinavia but in Ireland the group was titled the Scandinavian Design Group.

One of the members of the Scandinavian Design Group was Kaj Franck who is described in the report as the Head of the Design Department at Arabia Ceramic factory and Notsjö Glass works, Finland, as well as Art Director at the Finnish School of Industrial Art. Another Finn, Timo Sarpaneva was also selected to be part of the group but could not travel as the dates clashed with an earlier commitment.

There is an important point in the Introduction.

“No professional fees were accepted by the members of the Group on the grounds that they wished the assignment to be regarded as a contribution to the furtherance of improvement in design and as a gesture of their goodwill towards our undertaking.” (Design in Ireland: Report of the Scandinavian Design Group in Ireland, 1961, page xiii)

The report concerned itself with many things, principally design education and the recommendation of setting up on an Irish Institute of Visual Arts.

One of the things that the report did not propose was the establishment of an Irish Design Council. This may have as much to do with the funding of the report being from a State organisation as much as the opinions of the group themselves.

IDI

Since the publication of the report in 1961, design promotion on the island of Ireland has fallen to a number of different design organisations such as the Institute of Designers in Ireland (IDI). The IDI was formed in 1972 as the Society of Designers in Ireland.

“The Institute of Designers in Ireland is the professional body representing the interests of Irish designers. Its function is to promote high standards of design, to foster professionalism and to emphasise designers’ responsibility to society, to the client and to each other” (www.idi-design.ie/about, 2012)

Design Promotion in Finland and Ireland

It is interesting to compare design promotion in Ireland and Finland. The Arts Council of Finland and Ministry of Education published the document ‘design 2005! Government Decision-in-Principle on Finnish Design Policy 15.06.2000’. Writing in the foreword, the Minister of Culture states:

Finland has to make design and its widespread application one of its key know-how areas. It is only through such diffusion that design can gain significance as a factor promoting the quality of everyday life, job creation, cultural identity, Finland's image abroad and the competitiveness of Finnish business. ('design 2005! Government Decision-in-Principle on Finnish Design Policy 15.06.2000', 2004, Foreword)

The report continues, 'Design will provide a basis for Finns' well-being and satisfaction.'

The aim was that by 2005, 30 per cent of possible users of design would enlist the services of qualified designers and that 50 per cent of Finnish enterprises would take design into account in their strategic planning. It was hoped that by 2010 these figures would rise to 50 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively.

By way of comparison, in 2007 the Centre for Design Innovation in IT Sligo published a survey of design and innovation amongst Ireland's SMEs. They found that only 15 per cent of Irish SMEs use design strategically. This is significantly below the target that Finland had established for 2005.

This point is underpinned by the Irish Advisory Council for Science Technology and Innovation (ICSTI Statement, Design and Development, 2002, p. 13), which states, 'Research by Shannon Development indicates that fewer than 18% of companies use design in a conscious way.' Ireland falls significantly behind its European counterparts in terms of the strategic use of design.

Ireland's Role in International Design Organisations

The International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (Icsid) forms part of the triumvirate that make up the International Design Alliance (IDA), the others being the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (Icograda) and the International Federation of Interior Architects/Designers (IFI).

Between the publication of the Scandinavian Design Group in 1961 and Ireland's bid for World Design Capital 2014, Ireland and Irish designers have maintained close relationships with the international design community. Irish designers have held several key posts in the design organizations that make up the International Design Alliance (IDA).

Mary V. Mullin was Icsid Executive Board Member between 1975 and 1977 and Icograda General Secretary from 1987 to 1999. Raymond Kyne was an Icograda Board Member from 1981 to 1987 and Icograda President from 1983 to 1985. Denis Handy was IFI President from 1995 to 1997. All three are distinguished members of the IDI.

Creative Dublin Alliance

Dublin celebrated its millennium in 1988. The City began when people set up a trading post where the River Liffey meets the Irish Sea. Local and International trade have always been significant but now foreign direct investment is seen as critically important to Dublin. Multi-national companies are sought after and many are based in Dublin. Examples include Google, Facebook, and Twitter. Likewise the City has sought numerous twinning relationships and has recently added Beijing to Barcelona, Liverpool and San Jose to the list of twinned cities. Cities now seek designations of all types. Dublin has been designated City

of Science 2012 and is a Unesco City of Literature, both prized titles that the city has worked hard to achieve.

The Dublin Development Economic Action Plan was published in 2009. It concentrated on the three pillars of Leadership, People and Place. Following on from its publication, the Creative Dublin Alliance was founded. The Alliance comprises the heads of the local authorities, educational institutions, and experts drawn from the business and financial sectors. It promotes ways of working that demonstrate that Dublin is an open, interactive and participative city. In essence The Creative Dublin Alliance is a think tank, a skunk works where ideas about cities can be discussed, developed, designed, prototyped and if successful, implemented.

The Creative Dublin Alliance has initiated several projects. They include the Dublin Brand and Identity Project. This project looks at the Dublin's reputation and the management of that reputation. Initial phases have been undertaken with Dublin City Council in conjunction with masters students from the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and University College Dublin (UCD) together with the brand agency, Brand Union. Other projects include the Dublin City Indicators and Benchmarking, Innovation Dublin and Your Dublin Your Voice. The most recent project is entitled PIVOT Dublin, Dublin's bid for World Design Capital status.

PIVOT Dublin

On the 21st July 2009, Icsid announced that Helsinki and Eindhoven had been shortlisted of World Design Capital 2012. Ali Grehan, Dublin City Architect credits this as the moment that Dublin decided to bid for World Design Capital. PIVOT Dublin was set up as a joint venture between the four local authorities of the greater Dublin area: Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, South Dublin County Council and Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. The City Architects Division of Dublin City Council led the bid.

Dublin was shortlisted for World Design Capital 2014. The designation was ultimately awarded to Cape Town. The process of making the bid brought the public who consume our designs, the business community who commission them and the design community together in a structured and convincing way, not previously seen.

There was always the understanding that the bid may not be successful in terms of World Design Capital designation. To this end the bid was concerned not just with what would happen if the City were designated, but crucially what the legacy would if it was not.

Interviewed for the PIVOT Dublin bid book, the noted visual communications designer David Smith said,

That is what I would love to emerge from it, the legacy. That we use design to make a difference. If that came out of it at the end, win, lose or fail, that would be the best thing that we could have gotten for our city and the bid certainly presents that opportunity. (PIVOT Dublin Bid Book, 2011, Page 110)

The PIVOT Dublin bid submission addresses these concerns. It describes the legacy in terms of passing on.

Central to this strategy is the commitment that for every input to PIVOT Dublin there will be a corresponding output. What we learn, create and solve, we will pass on. Our City will be the pivotal point where life is breathed into ideas. We will make Dublin a live test bed for design projects, a site

of exchange between participants, and a point of interchange from project to reality. (PIVOT Dublin Bid Book, 2011, Page 128)

Letter of Invitation

In July 2011 another letter arrived from one of the Nordic countries, this time from Finland. It came in the form of an email from Design Forum Finland and was addressed to His Excellency Dermot Brangan, Ambassador at the Embassy of Ireland, Helsinki. The email expressed the wish that the Institute of Designers in Ireland would take part in the World Design Capital Signature Event, Everyday Discoveries, International Design House, Exhibition & Event, in Helsinki in September 2012. The attached document explained

The World Design Capital International Design House exhibition allows many design effective cities from around the world to collaborate with the World Design Capital designated city to communicate their success stories and values by sharing best practices with a national and international audience. (Design Forum Finland, July 2011)

The invitation had been to a country yet the text referred to design effective cities. Helsinki is known as a designated World Design Capital yet the cities of Espoo, Vantaa, Kauniainen and Lahti are also included.

Cities are economic regions and capital cities are strong players in attracting Foreign Direct Investment. Dublin entered the World Design Capital bid process but in reality it considers itself a region and sometimes if you listen to Dubliners, the Country. We did not get concerned about who was been invited, Dublin or Ireland.

Ali Grehan the Dublin City Architect and myself as a former President of the Institute of Designers in Ireland met to discuss the proposal and to agree an initial response.

In reading the email and attached documentation the workings of the project were clear, but what was the intent? We asked ourselves what should we do? Do we personally select objects that we think are representative of Irish Design? Do we ask someone else to, and if so, how do we select who selects the objects? The invitation outlined that Imu Design, a group of three young Finnish Designers, had created the concept and themes. What would their role be? And how would we link with them?

The Scandinavian researchers Steiner Kvale and Svend Brinkmann's book on qualitative research interviewing, begins with the phrase 'If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?' (Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing, 2nd ed., 2009, p. xvii) In Kvale's earlier book, as a counterpoint to quantitative interviewing, he states, 'The basic subject matter is no longer objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted.' (InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing, 1996, p. 11)

We wanted to develop a meaningful relationship. Our first task was to contact Helsinki and ask for more details. What became obvious through emails and telephone conversations was that Design Forum Finland had an open mind in relation to the exhibition.

Procurement

Selecting a design team would be an exercise in public procurement with the need to promote and advertise the process. We decided that we would hold an open workshop to select a team that would represent Ireland in Helsinki.

The first theme of the PIVOT Dublin bid was Connecting Cities. “We will explore how we can make, or remake or simply “dial up” connections within cities and between people.” (PIVOT Dublin Bid book, 2011, Page 130)

The connections can be seen to be between Dublin and its people but also between Helsinki and Dublin and both of their peoples.

A key word used in the Everyday Discoveries document is collaboration. A conventional response might have been to say yes, we would like to take part and thank you for inviting us. We could then find a shipping container, fill it full of objects from Ireland and send it to Helsinki, send someone over for the grand unveiling, make a speech, drink some wine and let the people of Helsinki observe our objects. And who knows? Perhaps that would have been interesting.

What the PIVOT Dublin bid process told us is that there are interesting people doing things in Dublin in interesting ways, working in inter-disciplinary, loosely structured practices and collectives. We thought it would be more vibrant, rich and stimulating to find out which of these could find and tell an interesting story that we could share with Helsinki.

We decided to hold a daylong workshop to select a team. This team would work with Imu Design to make the project a success. We asked Imu Design if they would be interested in coming to Dublin. They said yes.

Design Week – Design Week

The Everyday Discoveries event takes place during Helsinki Design Week in September 2012. We decided to hold our Workshop in Dublin during our Design Week 2011.

Design Week in Ireland is an all island event that takes place annually in early November. It aims to highlight the social, economic and cultural role that design plays on the island. By holding the event at the end of our Design Week we stimulated more connections.

The Everyday Discoveries concept denotes four themes. Activism, Play, Story and Memory. We decided that we would give the potential teams an overview of each of the themes.

Dublin Contemporary

Dublin Contemporary was a large scale visual arts exhibition that took place in Dublin in 2011. To add to the richness and cross pollination we invited potential participants to attend Dublin Contemporary on Sunday October 16th where we organised four talks, one on each of the themes, followed by a tour of the exhibition and a question and answer session with Ali Grehan and myself.

Mark Clare spoke about Activism, Kathryn Maguire discussed Play, Louise Lowe and Owen Boss spoke about Story and Bairbre Ann Harkin spoke about Memory. It was followed by a talk and tour given by Jota Castro, the Dublin Contemporary 2011 curator.

Whilst we were not going to set a challenge based on these themes, we wanted to get the participants to think in the abstract rather than about physical objects.

World Design Capital Designation 2014

The announcement of the World Design Capital 2014 designation was made in Taipei, Taiwan at the IDA Congress on the 26th October 2011. Our event was planned as a demonstration of our continuance of the PIVOT Dublin project, regardless of the designation outcome.

Description of Event

The event was promoted through the PIVOT Dublin, the Institute of Designers in Ireland and Dublin Contemporary 2011 websites as well as through an active social media campaign. The competition was open to creative people of all disciplines and inter-disciplinary teams were encouraged. One criterion was that each team should include at least one member of an Irish design organisation.

Forming Teams

We set a limit of ten teams and got valid applications from twelve teams. We had hoped for inter-disciplinary teams. We were a little surprised by the diversity of what we got.

We expected architects, graphic and interior designers. We were sure we would get some people with multimedia experience. We got all of those. But we also got the unexpected titles of journalist, political analyst, performance artist, urban planner, sketch writer, craftsman, film composer, inventor as well as mechanical and structural engineer, not to mention the composition of the winning team.

The Brief

There were a number of issues concerning the make up of the brief. The first was the fact that as the participants were giving freely of their time we did not want it to be seen to be an attempt by Dublin City Council to get free ideas from groups of talented people. By way of example there were fifty-one participants who worked for eight hours on the first day of the challenge. Taking an hourly rate of €100 per hour would equal just over €40,000 of design services.

The second issue was one of amalgamation of ideas. We did not want to select an idea; we wanted to select a team of people to work on the project with Imu Design in the design and development of the exhibition in Helsinki. We were concerned that if the teams investigated the actual problem and came up with twelve different ideas, then there was a possibility that the final solution could be influenced by an amalgamation of some of the ideas. Rather than risk issues of IPR ownership and plagiarism we decided we needed a separate but related subject.

Provoking the Everyday!

We wanted a brief that was flexible, related and challenging. If it was too rigid it would constrain the teams. We were conscious to not make it too architectural. From previous experiences we know that if you set a challenge with the word Identity then what you typically get back is a design of a monument from an architect and a logo from a visual communicator. We were looking for a response that was more nuanced.

When Dilki De Silva, Secretary General of Icsid was in Dublin as part of the World Design Capital Jury Visit in June 2011 she stated that she thought our bid was “Provocative”. This word was much discussed after Dilki left. We decided on the theme for the day. The title would be “Provoke the Everyday”. Teams would be asked to work together to develop and present ideas that provoked the everyday.

The Challenge

We located the challenge underneath the Dublin City Council Offices in Wood Quay where the original Viking settlement was built. The backdrop of the room is the City Wall dating from 1100AD. It all seemed another link between Ireland and the Nordic countries.

We outlined the challenge and the teams worked on it for the duration of the day. We decided that the work should take place on the Saturday and the presentations would take place on the Sunday. We were conscious that the teams might work all Saturday night and arrive exhausted on Sunday. We requested that the teams submit an abstract on Saturday evening that they would state the ideas that they would structure their presentations around on Sunday.

Elina and Krista Take Dublin

On Saturday night Elina Aalto and Krista Kosonen from Imu Design gave a presentation of their work to an invited audience in the offices of Red & Grey Design, who had designed the PIVOT Dublin bid book. An informal discussion took place about the nature of Helsinki and what separates Finnish design from the rest of the Nordic countries.

When they returned to Helsinki they wrote a blog about their experiences.

There are definitely differences between the Irish and the Finns. For one the taxi drivers in Helsinki don't say, "God bless you" to customers. The Irish are good at talking, the Finns are good at listening. The Irish seem to be very united and happy while we can sometimes be a bit melancholy and bickering. But there are also a lot of things we have in common. We are both at the fringes of Europe. Envyng but also at same time challenging our bigger, richer neighbor countries. We like to drink (although none of that last weekend mind you). Every Irishman (woman) should have Finn who would patiently listen and every Finn should have an Irish person to keep up the conversation. (<http://wdchelsinki2012.fi/en/blogs/2011-11-14/elina-and-krista-take-dublin>, Accessed November 2011)

Already we had some appreciation of our respective nations and their cultures.

The Presentations

On the Sunday each of the teams gave a presentation that was strictly limited to ten minutes. The judging panel consisted of Elina and Krista from Imu Design in Helsinki. Bob Gray from Red and Grey Design, Ali Grehan, Ruairí Ó Cuív, Public Art Manager, Dublin City Council as well as myself.

Team 1 consisted of Gearóid Carvill Architect, Nicky Hooper Artist / Designer, Ciarán Walsh, Journalist, Andrew Brady Architect and Renate Henschke Fashion Designer. The team is formed around the nucleus of ABGC architects who practice in a trans disciplinary environment.

The proposal they presented involved repurposing existing phone boxes and incorporating them back into the city. Subsequent to the Design Workshop the team have been working on developing their concept. They have been working with both local authorities and phone services providers to develop the proposal into a working entity.

Additionally they have been working together on further speculative collaborative projects. Of its own this is a significant development.

The winning team was Team 6 and consisted of: Steven McNamara: Graphic Designer / Photographer / Architect, Clive Bright: Carpenter / Painter / Farmer, Chris Hingel: Graphic Designer / Illustrator, Iseult O'Cleary: Architect / Furniture Designer, Dónal Adams: Musician / Compute Scientist / Programmer. We wanted an inter-disciplinary team. And we got it.

Their approach to the design and presentation was thoroughly odd and thoroughly engaging. The team left the Wood Quay Venue and observed that some metal objects that projected from the Liffey Quay Wall as ladders looked like snail eyes. Taking a photographic frame they asked Dubliners to look through and observe the "snail". They documented and presented their responses. It was simple, wilful and amusing. It was evident that the team was creative, energetic, had wide ranging and complimentary skills and worked well together.

The winning team have since developed presented ideas about the Everyday Discoveries Event to PIVOT Dublin and the IDI. In 31st January 2012 the proposals were sent to Helsinki. At this stage they remain confidential but will be revealed in September 2012.

Leningrad Cowboys go America

The Interaction Design Conference IxD12 was held in Dublin in February 2012. It was the first time it had been held outside of America. One of the key reasons that the conference was awarded to Dublin was the support received from PIVOT Dublin.

IxDA12 was held in the Convention Centre Dublin. Interestingly the Convention Centre was designed by Kevin Roche. Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo, and Associates was formed after the death in New York City of Eero Saarinen, in 1961, the same year the Scandinavian Design Group arrived in Dublin.

As a member of the organization committee I was interested to note that there were six delegates from Finland. Conscious that I was developing this paper and visiting Helsinki I decided to find out more about them. What do Finns do when they are abroad as a group? What are they learning from us? How can we learn from them? We could ask them. Would they tell us the truth or would they tell us what they think that we want to hear? One way is

to follow them. In the old days we could put on a dirty mackintosh and follow them around Dublin, observing what they observed. That is no longer necessary. We have Twitter.

I saw a person proudly displaying the word Helsinki with their hash tag. I decided to follow him and his Finnish friends on Twitter. So what does your average Finnish interaction designer do in Dublin?

The self-titled Team Finland ate some tasty burgers; they took photographs of graffiti along the quays and took photos of buns in the Convention Centre. And they used Twitter, Foursquare, Flickr and Instagram as methods of delivering the content to a wider, unknown audience.

Interestingly all the Tweets were in English, even when the Finns were essentially answering and forwarding Tweets to each other. I observed that when they went back to Helsinki they spent a few moments tweeting in Finnish before rapidly returning to English. Having done my twitter research I decided to speak to the Finns in person. Initially were reserved. Later in the Guinness Storehouse they were much more loquacious. The conversation was amusing, interesting, wide-ranging and rapidly turned to the subject of the Alternative Design Capital 2012.

Discussion

The Scandinavian Design Group Report of 1961 is held in high regard in Ireland. In Ireland we like to commission, write and read reports. Then we like to commission write and read reports into what happened to the previous reports.

The report of the Scandinavian Design Group concludes as follows:

We would finally note that we have considered the possibility of adapting existing bodies to this purpose, but it is our opinion that no existing organization or association in Ireland could cope with the problems involved in the development of design in Ireland, and consequently a new body must be brought into existence. (Design in Ireland: Report of the Scandinavian Design Group in Ireland, 1961, page 55)

PIVOT Dublin may be that body. It has taken fifty years since those words were written for PIVOT Dublin to be established. Numerous attempts have been made and many have failed, merged, been absorbed, modified and failed again.

What makes PIVOT Dublin different is the multiplicity of approaches, connections, shared responsibilities and its organic nature.

The response taken to the Everyday Discoveries invitation demonstrates a more sophisticated form of interaction by creative people in different cities, involving a multiplicity of organisations and individuals utilising physical and virtual presences and relationships. This model shows how open participative and engaged cities can create more meaningful relationships, between themselves and their citizens.

PIVOT Dublin does not solve things or provide things. That's not its role. It provokes them. The results will be seen during Helsinki Design Week 2012

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