

A New European Bauhaus Conversation With Yvonne Farrell, Shelley McNamara and Orla Murphy

Hosted by the Royal Institute of Architects in
Ireland and supported by the Department of
Housing, Local Government and Heritage
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Facilitator and co-author Chris Chapman

RIAI



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Aitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage







Candle Community, Ballyfermot, Co. Dublin, McGarry Ní Éanaigh Architects, RIAI Award Winner, Photo: Richard Hatch

**Architecture is “a visual,
physical, narrative of hope”**
Shelley McNamara FRIAI -
Grafton Architects quoting
Mary Robinson, former
President of Ireland and
UN High Commissioner for
Human Rights

Conversation introductions.

Minister of State Malcolm Noonan TD, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is delighted to support this joint New European Bauhaus conversation with the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI).

The New European Bauhaus initiative has a strong focus on sustainability and the EU Recovery and Resilience Plan and I can't overstate the importance of incentivising sustainable compact development in our towns and urban neighbourhoods as we look to progress Ireland's Programme for Government initiatives in this regard.

The development of the Irish National Policy on Architecture has taken place in parallel with EU initiatives and recovery plans such as the New European Bauhaus, the EU Urban Agenda and the Green Deal, which support social cohesion, sustainable development and building well for everyone. The development of our National

Policy on Architecture will respond to this European context as well as the broad national environmental policy context, all of which highlight climate change as a key issue to be addressed.

A particular action of the Irish Programme for Government is to "encourage traditional building skills in devising an apprenticeship programme with the sustainable construction sector, focusing on heritage disciplines and crafts" and this is something I am progressing along with the Heritage Council. This will be hugely important as we work towards addressing these challenges of climate change adaptation and mitigation as well as moving towards a circular economy.

Conversation introductions.

Ciaran O'Connor, FRIAI, RIAI President

Founded in Weimar in 1919, the original Bauhaus grew out of the crisis of World War I, and the German experience of that in particular. Now we have a green crisis, which we must repond to. This is why the New European Bauhaus is very important, but it has to be a Europe-wide initiative.

The German writer, Goethe said "unity with diversity" and this is exactly what we need. Ireland is only 1% of the European population but we are punching well above our weight with architects such as our Pritzker Prize recipients Grafton Architects, and Orla Murphy, a NEB Community Ambassador. We need to achieve the same in Irish architecture as Seamus Heaney and others did in Irish literature. And we will work with everyone to do that – I am committed as State Architect to work for this also. Our forthcoming new National Policy on Architecture will play an important role in this.

We need to have an understanding of what a beautiful country we have in Ireland and apply a poetic pragmatism of how to bring this forward. Ireland is like a great oak tree. It is anchored deep down, and it reaches far out in its cultural ambition.

But what about architecture in the consumer age? Is it just a commodity? Is it just a product like so much else? Or is it necessarily beyond itself – I believe it is. And I think it is as equal as music and as poetry, as important to us beyond just existing. Architecture must be integral to all that is made. I remember being asked by the Taoiseach, when I was appointed State Architect in the middle of a recession, "what are you going to do?". I replied: "I've got to think like a poet, but act like an accountant."

We have to be open to ideas rather than ideologies, and the brains and beauty that architecture has. I would like to finish by quoting Goethe again, who described architecture as frozen music.

Conversation introductions.

Kathryn Meghan, CEO, Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI)

The ambition of EU Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, for a *New European Bauhaus* is an invitation to re-evaluate how we design and deliver our built environment. It recognises the key role for the architectural profession to contribute to the shaping of a new sustainable future.

However, it will take a major shift in how we think about the built environment and what is prioritised when commissioning buildings. The RIAI will work with all our partners – government, public and private client bodies, and our fellow built-environment professions – and support our members in delivering this new future. We know that architects have the skill to reimagine our built environment and to design and deliver new solutions, but it is critical to have in place the structures that allow this change happen. Public procurement needs to drive innovation and support new and emerging practices and thinking.

We have to put quality at the centre of our built environment ambition. We must resource our projects both in terms of building for quality and having the correct (and sufficient) professional advice. We need to build right and build once. It is the most sustainable way.

Public and private sector collaboration will be vital in achieving the transformational change that is required to deliver on President von der Leyen's vision and the RIAI is very pleased to be supported by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in holding this Conversation on the New European Bauhaus.





Georges Place infill housing, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, RIAI Award Winner, DLRArchitects with A2 Architects, Photo: Marie-Louise Halpenney

A New European Bauhaus Conversation.

The concept of a conversation around the opportunities of the New European Bauhaus emerged through the consultation on a National Policy for Architecture. As the drafting of this new policy got underway, the world was struck by a pandemic, which has dramatically changed how we live and fundamentally changed how we see our built and natural environment.

Our conversation drew on the vast experience and knowledge of some of Ireland's leading practitioners: internationally-acclaimed architects Shelley McNamara and Yvonne Farrell of Grafton Architects, the curators of the 2018 Venice Biennale on the theme of 'Free Space', and architect Orla Murphy of the innovative Free Market project on Irish towns in the 2018 Biennale. Orla Murphy is also a member of the NEB high-level roundtable. The design of the New European Bauhaus event was based on the legacy of this past exhibition.

Our speakers picked up where they had left off their respective conversations, they re-visited the feedback and critical thinking that was gathered from the experience of the Biennale and used it as the inspiration to turn our attention to the consideration of how architectural practice and collaboration might evolve where we had to collectively respond to the 'Earth as the Client',

what did we need to do, fix and aspire to? These discussions reflected on the principles of creating the New European Bauhaus - a culture of building well for everyone.

On this subject, Orla Murphy's opening thoughts were focused on the fact that society is in a period of disruptive change. This provides the possibility of systematic or cultural change, which is required to deal with climate change. The reduction in the production of CO2 is a priority for society and how each citizen can visualise their role in the decarbonisation process. It requires an understanding of the need for change to be transformative and just and to be co-created by each citizen, leaving no one behind. Ireland has much to do in terms of reducing our dependency on cars and upgrading our housing stock. However by getting started other benefits will become apparent, such as social cohesion and well-being, a reduction in childhood obesity, environmental improvements in air quality. Such transformative change is not only making a difference to climate change but also improving quality of life.

Yvonne Farrell's theme of the 'Earth as the Client', considered the unique context of Ireland in Europe as an island in the Atlantic surrounded by water, with settlements founded

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by water. She spoke of how the issue of water and its management needs to become a priority for future sustainability. As part of this conversation the individual's responsibility to climate change was stressed. Yvonne highlighted the interconnection of expertise and creativity as a way forward. The New European Bauhaus brings new possibilities and has the potential for architecture to imagine beyond the provision of essential infrastructure through the design of something beautiful and sustainable as well as functional.

Shelley McNamara continued the narrative of the Venice Biennale of 'Free Space' and the idea that space is a common good that gives pleasure to living. She highlighted ideas that have informed the practice of Grafton Architects, such as respectfully adding value, avoiding demolition, conserving resources, and emphasising construction as a cultural process, which indicates where we place our values. Shelley wondered how these ideas pass to the next generation, who will live through climate change and how do we meet their requirements for housing, equality and justice. Reflections from the experience of the Venice Biennale included consideration of a disconnection between planning authorities and the resources in their care. Shelley suggested that this represents an opportunity to unleash

the talent of architects through town pilots such as 'Free Market', which has the advantage of operational scale and engagement of many stakeholders.

The RIAI, with the support of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, hosted this conversation as an on-line event. The architectural audience represented working groups within the RIAI, which produce innovative policy and solutions on a wide range of sustainable practice issues and the delivery of quality.

This submission to the New European Bauhaus is supported by key contextual information on policy and practice in Ireland. It combines the material presented by our key speakers with the thoughts and feedback from participants generated during the event for future consideration and inspiration of the New European Bauhaus.

"What are some words that might be helpful to give a sense of focus and priority to an RIAI and DHLGH submission?"

[illegible]



Free Market, the Irish Pavilion at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale, went on national tour in 2019 and conducted town workshops in Castleblayney and other Irish towns. RIAI Award Winner. Photo: Paul Tierney.

Key points raised in the conversation.

"What we have to do is convince people that we take these two responsibilities seriously, that we are able to be both pragmatic and poetic people."

Ciaran O'Connor FRIAI, RIAI President

Three desired outcomes for the Bauhaus in Ireland:

Our Bauhaus conversation showed the need for collaborative, inclusive, efficient structures and processes that support a culture of building well, to co-create sustainable, liveable, walkable, high quality, culturally rich neighbourhoods, providing a path towards:

Architecture- and user-led, sustainable compact development and a fully circular economy.

"Imagine towns that work together within regional clusters to share food, water, transport and energy resources; that are designed to be resilient and to embrace a circular economy, built on evidence-based research and connected to local knowledge."

Orla Murphy, MRIAI,

NEB Community Ambassador and High-Level Roundtable Member

"I couldn't overstate the importance of incentivising sustainable compact development in our towns and urban neighbourhoods."

**Malcolm Noonan TD,
Minister for Heritage**

A socially connected, just and inclusive society, which harnesses the creative energy and practical contributions architecture makes to people's places and cultures.

"We need to change basic structures in order to facilitate the kind of lives that everybody is saying that we want, which is one of equality and justice."

**Shelley McNamara, FRIAI,
Grafton Architects**

"We know that architects have the skill to reimagine our built environment and to design and deliver new solutions, but it will be critical to have in place the structures that allow this change happen."

Kathryn Meghen, RIAI CEO

"Imagine a Europe that supports, cares for and listens to those less frequently heard; one that renovates existing buildings to make homes, schools, places of culture that are carbon neutral, beautiful and distinctive; one that builds resilience to extreme weather events using nature based solutions; one that attracts people of all ages to live good quality, socially connected lives."

Orla Murphy MRIAI

A renewed (more integrated) relationship with nature, acting responsibly in relation to climate and biodiversity challenges, with improved public health outcomes

"What is interesting is the relationship between the New European Bauhaus's call for creative and interdisciplinary initiatives to design future ways of living."

**Yvonne Farrell, FRIAI,
Grafton Architects**

"We need a change of mindset. We don't just need a change in our climate approach."

**Shelley McNamara, FRIAI,
Grafton Architects**

Three specific Bauhaus aims for Ireland distilled from the conversation.



Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara, Co-founders of Grafton Architects and recipients of the RIAI Gandon Medal for Lifetime Achievement (2019), the RIBA Gold Medal (2021) and the Pritzker Prize (2021)

Beautiful

- Valuing and supporting Ireland's unique heritage and landscape
- Realising the potential and uniqueness of each town and urban village
- Designing attractive infrastructural projects with strong community-led creative and cultural components

"Goethe said 'Architecture was like frozen music'. It is equal to music and poetry, as important to us beyond just existing.... architecture must be part of our culture, as much as Mozart's music is or Seamus Heaney's writing is."

**Ciaran O'Connor, FRIAI,
RIAI President, State Architect**

Sustainable

- Implementing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals at local level and measuring progress
- Working cost-effectively with existing buildings and urban sites to create a diverse range of 21st century living typologies
- Incorporating energy generation within urban regeneration

"Imagine livable and walkable towns and cities, where, while embracing their cultural distinctiveness, towns, cities and buildings can be designed and renovated to become net positive energy places."

Orla Murphy, MRIAI

Together

- Draw from the talent pool of architects to drive innovation and inclusiveness in our built environment
- Promote collaboration, multi-disciplinary approaches that break down silo thinking, locally and nationally, with strong public sector architectural leaders
- Working inter-generationally and across disciplines in shared appreciation of our built and natural environment

"To appreciate, understand, embrace the existing while respectfully adding value."

Shelley McNamara, FRIAI

Summary of ideas from our participants.

- Implementing the New European Bauhaus principles - Beautiful, Sustainable, Together
 - through a series of pilot initiatives designed to deliver vibrant towns and sustainable 15-min urban neighbourhoods through use of existing underused building stock, as well as vacant and infill sites.
- Using the new National Policy on Architecture as a major driver towards built environment quality for everyone, promoted by architects and multi-disciplinary design services in every local authority, as well as network of civil society organisations
- Training and supporting local communities in participatory processes to maximise potential for locally led change to well-loved but challenged places
- Establishing workforce development initiatives in relation to traditional building skills, retrofitting expertise and creative education hubs, introducing the concepts of heritage-led regeneration, energy communities and digital innovation and communication

Opportunities and Challenges in implementing the Bauhaus in Ireland.

- Enable participation, inclusion and collaboration, more effectively, to help society understand their role in climate action, to adjust the built environment to the climate crisis, to embrace digitalisation and consider opportunities of a post-Covid society.
- Reform procurement and contracting processes to support quality outcomes and broader access
- Create and innovate for a holistic built environment and collect public health datasets to support evidence-based decision making.
- Increase support for understanding existing resources and their potential for reuse, repair and re-imagining.



Nano Nagle Place, Cork, RIAI Award Winner, JCA Architects,
Photo: f22 Photography



Inspiration for the New European Bauhaus.

Our conversation has identified a wealth of available resources and examples from Ireland

Online Resources & Programmes

- Discussion Document – National Policy on Architecture ✨
- RIAI Designing a Lasting Localised Recovery ✨
- RIAI Guide: Sustainable Design Pathways ✨
- RIAI Town and Village Toolkit ✨
Image 4
- RIAI Old House New Home ✨
Image 2
- Heritage Council Historic Towns Initiative ✨
- Heritage Council Collaborative Town Centre Health Check ✨
- Irish Architectural Foundation Reimagine ✨
- Irish Architectural Foundation National Architects in Schools Scheme ✨
- Arts Council Engaging with Architecture ✨
- Creative Ireland ✨
- Centre for Irish Towns (CfIT)
- Architectural Association of Ireland ✨
- Irish Architectural Archive ✨
- Irish Georgian Society ✨
- Space Engagers ✨
- Fab Lab Limerick ✨
- Waterford Architecture Festival ✨

Examples of Good Urban Design Practice

- 16th International Architecture Exhibition 'Freespace', La Biennale di Venezia 2018 ✨
Image 1
- Clonakilty 400 Urban Design Masterplan, Cork County Council [RIAI Town and Village Toolkit, Chapter 2] ✨
Image 5
- Free Market ✨
- Westport 2000 Masterplan Vision, Mayo County Council [RIAI Town and Village Toolkit, Chapter 6] ✨
- The Amager Bakke combined heat and power (CHP) complex in Copenhagen by BIG-Bjarke Ingels Group features recreational facilities – a ski slope - and an environmental education centre. ✨
- Sustainable Design Pathways
Image 3



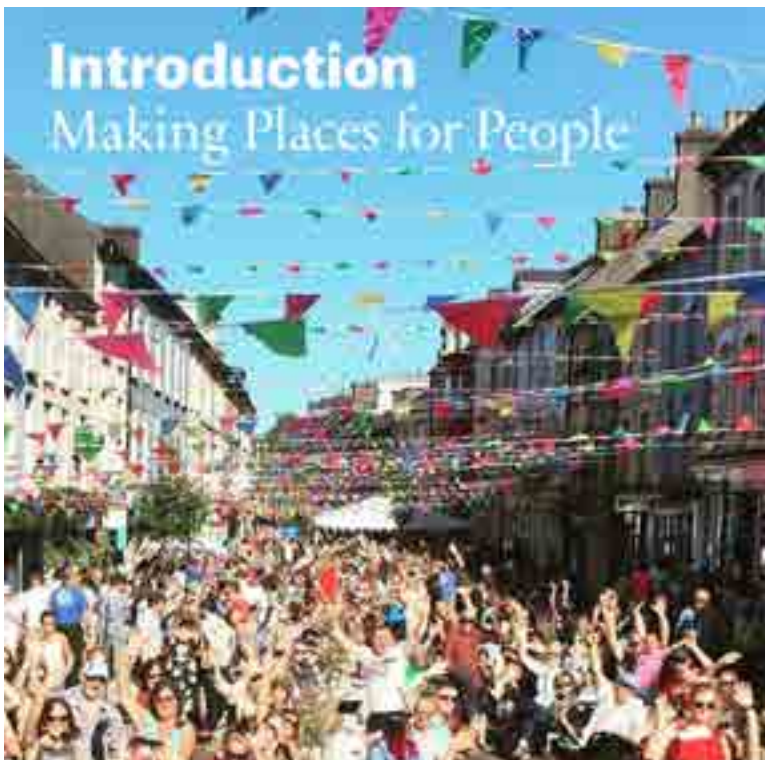
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'The Sentinel', Westport, RIAI Award Winner, Municipal Architect Simon Wall, Mayo County Council with Sculptor Ronan Halpin, Photo: Michael McLaughlin.

Acknowledgements

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The conversation was facilitated by Chris Chapman, [Change Exploratory](#) ✨

RIAI,
8 Merrion Square,
Dublin,
D02 YE68,
Ireland
info@riai.ie
riai.ie

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Custom House,
Dublin,
D01 W6X0,
Ireland
architecture@housing.gov.ie.

Report designed by [M.CO](#) ✨



Monkstown Village Project, Co. Dublin, ,RIAI Awards Commended, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Architects Department, Photo: Donal Murphy