

EU Transformations: Ireland Project Scenario

University College Dublin & Sculpture in the Parklands,
Lough Boora, Co. Offaly

Bogs are the liveliest elements in the European landscape, not just from the point of view of flora, fauna, birds and animals, but as storing places of life, mystery and chemical change, preservers of ancient history. They are essential to the whole eco-system for water regulation, humidity, ground water and climate in general.

Joseph Beuys ¹

Over 2008-2010, University College Dublin completed a series of collaborative land art interventions with Sculpture in the Parklands (Lough Boora Parklands, Co. Offaly) as part of the Transformations Project. The project realised artist residencies, new public sculptures, performances, academic conferences, educational programmes and web deliverables documenting and promoting the artistic programmes of the project.

Scenario description

The Lough Boora Parklands (Fig. 1) are a unique public landscape feature in the Midlands in Ireland. The parklands are a creative regeneration of decommissioned cutaway bogs used for industrial peat harvesting by Bord na Móna (the semi-state body in Ireland responsible for managing the industrial harvesting of peat and the maintenance and conservation of peatlands and peat resources). These ancient bogs (some over 10,000 years old) had been industrially exploited since the 1940s, and the peat harvested here played a central role in the fueling of early Irish industrial development of the 20th century. The post-industrial landscape that exists today is a mixture of manmade intervention and natural reclamation by native flora and fauna, animals and birds, all co-existing to produce both an unusual and unique landscape resource now protected and managed as a public parklands. The parklands are also notable for being the site of one of the earliest Mesolithic archaeological sites found in Ireland and may be the site of the earliest evidence for human agency on the island.



Fig. 1. The Lough Boora Parklands, Lough Boora, Co. Offaly. Photograph by Kevin O'Dwyer.



Fig 2. Sculpture in the Parklands, Lough Boora, Co. Offaly. Featuring 'Sky Train' (2002) by Mike Bulfin and '60 Degrees' (2002) by Kevin O'Dwyer. Photograph by Kevin O'Dwyer.

In 2002, Sculpture in the Parklands (SIP) was established under the direction of artist Kevin O'Dwyer as a venture within the Lough Boora Parklands. SIP's mission is to inspire and support local, national and international artists in creating artworks responding to and embedded in the post-industrial heritage and unique landscape of Lough Boora, Co. Offaly. SIP's aims are:

1. To commission significant artworks, both permanent and temporary by Irish and international artists.
2. To build an awareness of the arts within the community, educational institutions and business community through public participation and interaction.

The project was initiated through an international land art symposium where 7 Irish and international artists realized 8 site-specific artworks that today are the core of SIP's collection of works (see Fig. 2). Although SIP is known popularly for large-scale sculpture commissions which stand in stark contrast to the sheer flat landscape of the cutaway bogs, from early on O'Dwyer gave equal priority to the commissioning of art work in multiple media – painting, photography, live art, performance, writing and film. This decision has produced a robust collection of land responsive art, engaging both the monumental and the ephemeral as elements which equally constitute any understanding of place or landscape. In the words of Kevin O'Dwyer:

*The vision for Sculpture in the Parklands is to continue to invite Irish and international artist to create significant site specific works of art while living in the community as artists in residence. In addition to permanent sculpture and time-based work, the project has a commitment to commissioning video artists, composers, choreographers, and performance artists to interpret and document this unique landscape, folklore and industrial history.*²

Today, SIP's collection includes many notable Irish and international artists from Denmark, the Netherlands, USA, Japan and Canada, and as a premier component of the Lough Boora Parklands, the sculpture park is both a public resource for the local community and increasingly a destination for visitors and tourists.

Project partners

The primary partner institutions for the project were University College Dublin School of Archaeology and Sculpture in the Parklands (see Fig. 3). Within University College Dublin, the project team consisted of Prof. Gabriel Cooney, Pat Cooke (School of Art History and Cultural Policy) and Dr Ian Russell. Under the direction of Kevin O'Dwyer, the partnership with Sculpture in the Parklands involved relationships with the Lough Boora Parklands Group and Bord na Móna, as well as support from Offaly County Council and the Arts Council.



Fig. 3. From left to right: Kevin O'Dwyer (Director, Sculpture in the Parklands), Prof. Gabriel Cooney (Chair, University College Dublin School of Archaeology), Pat Cooke (Director, University College Dublin M.A. programme in Arts Management and Cultural Policy) and Dr Ian Russell (Post-doctoral Fellow, UCD School of Archaeology and Humanities Institute of Ireland), Mesolithic site at Lough Boora, Co. Offaly (2008).

Project description

Overseen by faculty from University College Dublin (UCD), the project took the form of a series of artistic interventions within SIP. Building on pre-existing collaborations and synergies between Kevin O'Dwyer and faculty at UCD, the project was conceived as a way to undercut the urban:rural bifurcation of landscape by bringing together urban-based academics with rural arts practitioners and communities. Fashioning a conversation around a series of collaborative artistic interventions in the landscape, the project facilitated a deeper research engagement with the relationships between artistic creativity, heritage, archaeology, place-making and community conceptions of landscape.

The UCD-SIP project was designed to explore the multiple ways in which people encounter, sense and share places and landscapes. Engaging artists, performers, musicians, writers, academics and local communities, the various components of the project illustrated the many different methods that creative practitioners manifest and articulate understandings of place. While allowing for this diversity in artistic and academic method,

the project also sought to bring these various perspectives into active conversation. This effort culminated in the Art in the Land Conference hosted by SIP in September 2010. The proceedings featured presentations by artists participating in the various residencies, faculty from the UCD Schools of Art History and Cultural Policy and Archaeology and international scholars and thinkers. The programme of events also featured performances by artists, dancers and musicians supported by the Transformations project.

Throughout the project and in keeping with the best practices of SIP, the project team endeavoured to engage the local community in the conception, installation and mediation of art works as well as the critical reflection and appreciation of the pieces. Workers from Bord na Móna as well as the local community participated in installation works, educational programmes and were invited to various performances and talks throughout the duration of the project. To extend the impact of the project beyond the life of Transformations, Russell worked with O'Dwyer to document both current and previous artist residencies through short video podcasts. A YouTube channel was established for SIP, and plans are underway for facilitating mobile media tours of the grounds of the park.

Artists & art works

The project realized semi-permanent, temporary and ephemeral art works, installations, and musical and dance performances by local, national and international artists within SIP and UCD. The first of these installments was initiated outside of the Transformations project but it established the collaborative relationships that beget the Irish project scenario. In 2008, the commissioning of Kevin O'Dwyer by UCD as artist-in-residence for the Sixth World Archaeological Congress brought O'Dwyer in direct conversation with the scholarly communities of the UCD Schools Art History and Cultural Policy and Archaeology.³ O'Dwyer's realization of a permanent public sculpture for UCD's Belfield campus acted as a distillation of academic discourses at the Sixth World Archaeological Congress. It also occurred in parallel with the hosting of the World Peat Conference in Tullamore, Co. Offaly featuring a major international exhibition curated by O'Dwyer with Ruairi Ó Cuív entitled *Peatlands*.⁴ The conversations that arose out of these concurrent projects realized a shared interest in the role of artistic creativity in the negotiation and becoming of landscapes, and it was decided to put forward a proposal that a formal collaboration between O'Dwyer (as director of SIP) and faculty at UCD be established as a project scenario for the EU Transformations project. Once initiated, the project realized, documented and mediated art installations, performances and events occurring within SIP on a yearly basis in 2009 and 2010. The project culminated in the Art in the Land conference in September 2010, allowing for academic and artistic investment in local, rural communities in Offaly through public lectures, performances and events.

In 2009, two artist residencies were established. Julian Wild, a London-based artist, spent 2 years sorting and collecting scrap metal from the industrial workshops of Bord na Móna in Lough Boora. As a kind of informal archaeology, Wild's process knitted together both artefacts of industry with whimsical fabricated forms to yield a new material assemblage, fabricated and welded in collaboration with the workers of Bord na Móna. The final piece 'System No. 30', a disk that playfully skips along a waterway (perhaps once used to drain these bogs for industrial harvesting), is both a playful distillation of industrial agency and a creative remediation of detritus and waste, both celebrating embedded heritage and effecting a new heritage in monumental form. (see Fig. 4).⁵



Fig. 4. 'System No. 30' (2009) by Julian Wild, Sculpture in the Parklands, Lough Boora, Co. Offaly. Photograph by Kevin O'Dwyer.

Countering the verticaility of Wild's piece, Alan Counihan's project 'Passage' inverted the dominant directionality of the monumentality of SIP and cut down into a turf bank within SIP utilizing disused rail lines and fencing from the Bord na Móna workshops. An Irish artist, Counihan is interested in themes of embedded memory, identity and materiality. In 'Passage', Counihan intends the formal gesture of the piece as a direct evocation of the sense of moving down through the layers of bogland (see Fig. 5). Through this, the viewer may be moved to sense the previous encampments and memory caches embedded in the bogs.⁶



Fig. 5. 'Passage' (2009) by Alan Counihan, Sculpture in the Parklands, Lough Boora, Co. Offaly. Photograph by Kevin O'Dwyer.

In 2010, two additional artist residencies were established. Alfio Bonanno, a Danish sculptor, was drawn to the deep, dark landscape of peat that references what once would have been an ancient bogwood forest. In building his work 'From Earth to Sky', Bonanno collected 4,000 year old bogwood timbers from around Lough Boora to erect a conical shelter supported by a steel inner core over a flow of water to an underground stream, as a poetic statement of the inter-dependencies of both the ecological and industrial heritages within the understanding of Lough Boora at this contemporary moment (see Fig. 6). Well known as an environmental sculptor, Bonanno has often drawn on natural and manmade materials to evoke sense of ancient times and of humanity's place in the world. In Bonanno's own words, 'One of my earlier environmental sculptures from 1982, "Granite Environment" incorporated stones from ancient burial grounds in an area undergoing redevelopment in Denmark where they were found. I see the present Irish work being made here in County Offaly as a continuity of this earlier work, in that both reference archaeology and our human links to ancient culture. This piece is an homage to our ancestors and the physical layered landscape of peat, clay and stone they lived upon.'⁷



Fig. 6. 'From Earth to Sky' (2010) by Alfio Bonanno, Sculpture in the Parklands, Lough Boora, Co. Offaly. Photograph by Kevin O'Dwyer

In the residency of artist Nigel Rolfe, the project expanded beyond the bounds of material, site-specific sculpture. A Dublin-based performance artist, Rolfe has developed an international reputation over the last 30 years for his careful execution of aesthetic gesture through the interaction between his body and the material world. In addressing the Lough Boora Parklands, Rolfe and Russell began a



Fig. 7. Nigel Rolfe, Lough Boora, Sculpture in the Parklands, Co. Offaly, August 2010. Photograph by Ian Russell

conversation around a photo of artist Joseph Beuys running across Irish bogland during his visits to Ireland in 1971 taken by Caroline Tisdall. The work *Eine Aktion im Moor* (Bog Action) physicalised the rich diversity of the bogscape by enveloping the artist in its fabrics. The legacy of Beuys' work presents not so much a history or past of art in bog landscapes but a call to engage with and embrace the possible futures of such spaces. Rolfe over a series of residential visits to the parklands, explored these possible futures of the bog space, creating a series of works in performance, video and photography (see Fig. 7). In Rolfe's own words:

My actions remarked on works I had made in Ireland more than 25 years ago in ancient sites and under footed bogs. Using the human body not only as a marker but somehow an idea resonator and force field. Performed in place with the audience of nature and the blowing wind, direct works in the landscape.

This idea of being in specific cultural space is very central to my practice and "alive in the land" unquestionably a certain foundation for my outlook. Humanism and socialism are stepping stones which are built on this archaeology of land and man within it. I come from the land itself and need to remind myself of these relations.

Working directly body to bog in Boora Parklands in Offaly raises for me my concern and observation of the very land our mother, our rape and failings as we plunder her. The need is to put something back, to repay this core.

Entering directly into this tissue, embracing it and making direct bridges body to the earth. The turfs dark tones and hues set against bodily vulnerability, more than upon, somehow within.⁸

Continuing in the intention to expand beyond semi-permanent sculptural commissions, SIP facilitated the recording and release of an original musical composition, 'Black is the Earth' by Adele O'Dwyer. The piece is a musical celebration and exploration of the many ages of landscape that exist as a palimpsest in Lough Boora. The recording of the work featured performances by Iona Petcu-Colan (violin), Adele O'Dwyer (cello), Dermot Dunne (acordion) and Bernard Reilly (percussion), and the release was officially launched as part of the Art in the Land conference hosted by SIP in September 2010. Additional performances also featured as part

of the arts programme of the Art in the Land conference. In particular, Legitimate Bodies dance group was invited to offer a performance at the conclusion of the proceedings. The piece built on their experiences realizing performances in and around the sculptures and landscapes of SIP.

Continuing outcomes

The few years of collaboration between UCD and SIP both before and through the Transformations project have been very productive both for the artists and academics involved as well as the local communities in Lough Boora, Offaly. Realizing artistic projects through an interdisciplinary environment, the UCD-SIP project is evidence of the unique insights and valuable social connectedness that can be achieved through embedded artists-in-residence, useful both in developing scholarly research as well as local and community narratives. While realizing these works, the project team, under the guidance of O'Dwyer, produced extensive documentation of the process through photograph, video and audio interviews. These materials have made it possible to produce a series of video podcasts that both act as introductions to the various project components but will also survive the project to provide insights into the perspectives and conceptions of the Lough Boora landscape in the early 21st century and help reveal opportunities for its future.

NOTES

- 1 — Joseph Beuys as quoted in Tisdale, C. 1979 *Joseph Beuys*, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, p.39.
- 2 — O'Dwyer, K. 2011 'Sculpture in the Parklands' sculptureintheparklands.com <http://sculptureintheparklands.com/aboutus.htm> [Last accessed: 12 February 2011].
- 3 — Russell, I. 2008 'Kevin O'Dwyer' amexhibition.com <http://www.amexhibition.com/kevinodwyer.html> [Last accessed: 12 February 2011].
- 4 — Russell, I. 2008 'Estranged Lands: The arts of the Peatlands' in K. O'Dwyer & R. Ó Cuív (eds.) *Peatlands, Sculpture in the Parklands, Lough Boora Offaly*.
- 5 — More information at: www.sculptureintheparklands.com/julian.htm
- 6 — More information at: www.sculptureintheparklands.com/alan.htm
- 7 — Bonanno, A. 2010 'From Earth to Sky: Press Release' Sculpture in the Parklands, Lough Boora, Offaly.
- 8 — More information: http://sculptureintheparklands.com/nigel_rolfe.htm

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Experience and dynamics of landscape

Landscape Studio: interventions in Jelgava heritage landscape

Cultural landscapes are changing and developing over time. This is seen through Jelgava city historic landscape changes. New dynamics and expressions in landscape can be given by public art actions. Art in the public space today plays increasing role not only to enrich the site but it is fundamental to promote local value, enchain local economic growth, and be an attraction point and part of everyday life.

Jelgava scenario is linked with Latvia University of Agriculture what came to utterance through landscape architecture student participation. Latvia University of Agriculture is the only university in Latvia offering higher education in landscape architecture. University consists of 9 faculties which are located in Jelgava and presents of 7800 students make Jelgava a student city.

Jelgava is located 40 km from Riga, the capital of Latvia. The city is known as the former capital of the Duchy of Courland, and was the capital of the Courland Governorate until 1919. The city's historical centre and public buildings were heavily damaged during Second World War, almost 90% of the city was destroyed. During the Soviet time city face has changed and lost its old character. It is important to link the rich history of the city with life of today.

The rich cultural environment and heritage setting merge historical background, cultural landscape and people in the framework of the project. Exactly these characteristics taking into consideration is created Jelgava scenario as the space of artistic intervention by opening the intervention on public art to alternative places. The scenario conceptually integrates the artistic and cultural heritage and the natural setting into a unified whole. It is led by experimental approach that tends to raise the potential of the existing cultural and environmental heritage. Fundamental is to encourage integration of environmental, installation, site-specific based artworks and emerge them in Jelgava historic landscape.

In the framework of the project is created Landscape Studio module. Landscape Studio work mainly on an experimental approach base, through personal experience, research, thinking, and feeling, expressing and acting in landscape. The studio works on two interweaved lines: thought and action. The aim is to create a place for exploring relationships of history, landscape, art and community through audio-visual, site-specific and environment art works, exhibitions, lectures and experience sharing. Therefore scenario development is organized in several levels by university as seminars, symposium, activities and discussions in groups, workshops, and research works. In the process of work are involved students, curators, academics from Latvia, Portugal, Estonia, Finland and Slovenia, and collaboration with Jelgava city municipality members. It tends to promote international, interdisciplinary exchange and collaboration.

Landscape Studio brings opportunity to get acquainted with wide range of artist's views and art intervention at the current international scene. Landscape Studios artistic interventions involve young and experienced professionals from wide range of fields such as architecture, landscape architecture, archaeology, design, installation and sculptural art, and cinema studies.

Landscape Studio aimed to create an experiential city place through short term actions and artworks. Participants' of Studio were asked to compel