

Institution: Queen's University Belfast		
Unit of Assessment: 13		
Title of case study: Making Ireland Modern (MIM)		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Gary A. Boyd	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor	Period employed by submitting HEI: 2013 – now
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact



Infra-Éireann Venice 2014



Making Ireland Modern Dublin 2016.



Making Ireland Modern Galway 2016.

Making Ireland Modern (*MIM*) was a research and design project that established and communicated the overlooked significance of modern architecture and infrastructure in the realisation of the new Irish State to a global, national and local audience. Developed after winning an open competition for Ireland's pavilion for the 2014 Venice Biennale, the exhibition was selected and expanded for Art: 2016, the Irish State's national centennial celebrations. In 2018, it was further recognised in a Getty Foundation *Keeping it Modern* grant (the first and, to date, only awarded in Ireland) to conduct further research into conserving St. Brendan's School (1978), one of the buildings showcased in the project's exhibitions/publications.

2. Underpinning research

Originating in 2013 and designed, curated and led by Boyd and John McLaughlin (of John McLaughlin Architects and University College Cork), *Making Ireland Modern (MIM)* was a cross-disciplinary, inter-institutional, inter-media design and research project. Combining research about architecture with research through architecture it conveyed to a variety of public and professional audiences a hitherto underexplored spatial, cultural and historic narrative. This was realised through a series of manifestations: a physical pavilion and exhibition with four place-specific iterations [R1]; a book [R2]; an academic paper [R3]; a series of public events; and sundry ephemera, including a website.

Critical to the dissemination of this message was the research design and curation of the pavilion itself and its exhibited contents. Boyd and McLaughlin commissioned a group of ten researchers (one per infrastructural episode from across the island of Ireland and North America) to retrieve, examine and analyse archival material and generate an evolving narrative for both the pavilion and subsequent publications. Simultaneously, following research into a series of 20th-century architectural precedents, the pavilion was conceived and designed as a synecdoche of infrastructural architecture: an extendable and demountable, open matrix, frame construction made from timber and measuring 12.5 x 5 x 6 metres for its initial international Venice iteration (*Infra-Éireann*) (and made larger at 12.5 x 7.5 x 6 metres for the subsequent MIM national tour). Presenting ten infrastructural episodes spanning a period of one hundred years from 1916-2016 within its structural bays, the design of the pavilion embedded research within a number of different ways: within its form, structure, and organisation as well as the curation of the drawings, photographs, scale models and other assembled artefacts which explored a range of

infrastructural scales from the detail design of objects to that of entire landscapes and territories [R1].

The book *"Infrastructure and the Architectures of Modernity in Ireland"* (edited by Boyd and McLaughlin) was published by Ashgate in 2015 and then again by Routledge (in paperback) in 2017. Each of the researchers cited above authored a chapter on the infrastructural episode identified by Boyd and McLaughlin: negation/postal service; electricity; health; transport; aviation; television, education, telecommunications, motorways and data. Each chapter sought to examine the episode and its attendant architectures within broader, historic, cultural, political and economic contexts that it both influenced and was influenced by [R2]. Boyd and McLaughlin's introductory chapter offered an overview of the process of modernity in Ireland and its historic relationships globally [R3]. Their individual, sole-authored chapters (1 and 10 respectively) also considered the continuing importance of the steel frame in the production of modernity which in turn contributed to the design of the pavilion[s]. Boyd's chapter foregrounded the relationship between space, time and modern institutions that underpinned many of the aspects contained throughout the rest of the book [R4].

In 2018, Boyd and McLaughlin published a peer-reviewed, open-access journal article, "'no fixed form': The Infra-Eireann - Making Ireland Modern Pavilion and the Sites of Modernity". Counterpointing the social histories contained in *Infrastructure and the Architectures of Modernity in Ireland*, it reflected on the research through design aspects of the pavilion, exploring the metaphorical meaning and physical use of the frame, the design's demountable and expandable modularity, and specific aspects of technology (including the Sherpa fixing which allowed rapid and flexible assembly and disassembly) deployed to achieve this [R5].

3. References to the research

[R1] Boyd, G. A. and McLaughlin J. (designers, curators, commissioners) *Infra-Éireann/Making Ireland Modern*; pavilions and exhibitions: Venice; Galway, Cork and Dublin. Research output: design object/exhibition. See <http://makingirelandmodern.ie>.

[R2] Boyd, G. A. and McLaughlin J. (editors), *Infrastructure and the Architectures of Modernity in Ireland* (Ashgate, 2015; Routledge 2017). (ISBN: 9781472446862 Hardback; 9781138572362 Paperback; 9781315252254 Ebook). Research output: book. See: <https://www.routledge.com/Infrastructure-and-the-Architectures-of-Modernity-in-Ireland-1916-2016/Boyd-McLaughlin/p/book/9781138572362>

[R3] Boyd, G. A. and McLaughlin, J. (authors) 'The Telephone and the Parthenon' in *Infrastructure and the Architectures of Modernity in Ireland* (Ashgate, 2015; Routledge 2017) pp 1-7. Research output: book chapter.

[R4] Boyd, G. A. (author) Chapter 1, 'The General Post Office and a collapsing of time' in *Infrastructure and the Architectures of Modernity in Ireland* (Ashgate, 2015; Routledge 2017) pp 9-29. Research output: book chapter.

[R5] Boyd, G. A. and McLaughlin, J. 'no fixed form: The *Infra-Éireann – Making Ireland Modern* Pavilion and the Sites of Modernity' (2018). Output: peer-reviewed journal. *AJAR – Arena Journal of Architectural Research*. 3, 1. P.1-19. <https://ajar.arena-architecture.eu/articles/10.5334/ajar.60/> Research output: peer-reviewed paper. Last accessed 5th January 2021.

4. Details of the impact

MIM exposed to new international, national and local audiences, the hitherto under-acknowledged importance of architecture's role in developing the physical and cultural identity of the new Irish State. The project's significance and impact are firstly corroborated by the wide range of funding it enjoyed from a diverse group of supporters from both the public and private sectors. As well as *Culture Ireland* and the *Arts Council of Ireland* – both outward facing arts organisations (collectively funding the Venice pavilion for EUR320,000) – other key funders and supporters of the research included international and national cultural institutions and industrial and professional agencies: Royal Institute of Irish Architects (RIAI) (EUR10,000); the Government Policy on Architecture (EUR20,000); the Irish Architectural Foundation (IAF); the Architecture Association of Ireland (AAI); ESB Ireland (EUR20,000); the Office of Public Works (OPW); Siemens-Schuckert (Germany); Sherpa Connectors (Austria); Cement Manufacturers Ireland (CMI); Galway International Arts Festival (GIAF); Culture Night Cork; Open House Dublin; and the ARUP's Trust

(EUR5,000). The innovation and originality of the project allowed two of its principal governmental funders, *Culture Ireland* and the *Arts Council of Ireland*, to select *MIM* for highly prestigious public international and national events:

'La Biennale di Venezia [is] ... the world's most important international showcase for contemporary arts and architecture ... Selecting which projects and individuals [solely] represent Ireland, therefore, requires a highly rigorous process in the pursuit of the highest quality in concept and execution. The project Infra-Éireann [MIM] was chosen after a highly competitive open competition by a prestigious international expert panel of architects and curators because of its innovative and creative response' (Director, *Culture Ireland*). [S1]

The Venice Biennale is the biggest architectural exhibition globally. The 2014 event was visited by over 350,000 individuals. *MIM*, the Irish nation's pavilion, was widely covered in the global architectural press and media, featuring in publications such as *Abitare* (Italy), *The Cairo Observer* (Egypt), *ArchDaily* (international), *Fumiemeve* (Japan), and had four pages in *The Architect's Journal* (the UK's leading architecture periodical) [S2]. Writing in the *Architecture Record* (USA), renowned American architecture writer and critic Sarah Williams Goldhagen described it as 'beautifully conceived [showcasing] ten major infrastructural episodes that advanced the country's development'. The *Cairo Observer* noted:

'[it] wastes no words, space or time to deliver a direct ... view of the country's history of modernism that is somewhat on the margins of the canonical histories of modern architecture. There are no polemics here, just good research.' [S3]

Nationally, Frank McDonald, Ireland's foremost architectural critic wrote in the *Irish Times*:

'Housed in an elegant framework ... the projects featured here go beyond engineering or architecture to assume cultural, social and political significance.' [S4]

'Following the success and reputation of the *Infra-Éireann* [MIM] pavilion in Venice in 2014', the Arts Council – whose remit is to promote *public* 'knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts' – invited the project to be developed for a national audience within Ireland (touring three cities: Galway, Cork, Dublin). The pavilion was physically extended to display more artefactual material, and a series of public engagement events organised to form one of the major strands of ART: 2016, the Irish State's cultural celebration of the 1916-2016 centenary. The funding awarded was EUR150,000, one of the most significant made by the Arts Council of Ireland to what it describes as the 'artform' of architecture. [S5]

As part of ART: 2016, the pavilion and exhibition featured in both local and national media, including a special edition of RTÉ Radio 1's *Inside Culture* (22 August 2016). Throughout its tour, it engaged with specific groups within local communities through workshops, talks, site visits and other public events. These engagement programmes were embedded within larger events and organisations, the attraction of the message of the pavilion to a wider audience is made clear by its inclusion in the Galway International Arts Festival (GIAF), Culture Night (Cork), and Open House (Dublin) programmes. Overall visitor numbers for Galway International Arts Festival, 11-24th July 2016 were 200,000. Over 200 people attended specific scheduled public events at the pavilion; 6,048 people visited the pavilion in St. Peter's Arts Centre Cork, between 8th September and 1st October 2016; with 807 attending the 5 scheduled (pre-booked) public events. 100 attended the oversubscribed *Concrete Logic* symposium in Dublin November 2016. Boyd and McLaughlin also gave a public lecture to the Architectural Association of Ireland (consisting mainly of practitioners + members of the general public, estimated attendees 150) on 17th November 2016. For the architecture profession, 'The *MIM* research and projects and their later outputs (the *Keeping Ireland Modern* symposium and the *Birr at 40* exhibition) have been of significant interest and benefit to our members as part of our core mission in promoting architecture within the public realm' (CEO, Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland (RIAI)). [S6]

The appreciation by the staff of the architectural history of Merlin Park Hospital (a former TB sanatorium showcased in the exhibition) was substantively altered due to the research and they subsequently developed their own exhibition:

'Since your visit to Merlin our architecture and social history is much more important to us. In recent weeks we received an award as winner of the Galway City Tidy Towns and Garden

Competition – Public and Commercial Building, Civic Buildings section. Thank you and John and Gary for giving us an awareness of our architecture. Their speech here in Merlin on 12th July was so unusual not like anything we ever had before on site. I have since showed the recorded version to Catering Staff etc. who were working on the day' (Letter from the Medical Directorate of Merlin Park Hospital). [S7]

On the 13th December 2016, along with a delegation from the hospital, Boyd was invited to present Michael D. Higgins the President of Ireland with a copy of *Infrastructure and the Architectures of Modernity in Ireland 1916-2016*. The book was reviewed in the general and professional press nationally and internationally. The *Irish Times*:

'... important addition to the historiography of twentieth-century Ireland ... an invaluable resource to anyone interested in the architecture of that period ... vivid and compelling stories of nation building, it deserves to find a wide readership ... looks set to become integral to any future study in the field: a new piece of intellectual infrastructure'. [S8]

MIM's international success in exposing the significance and pivotal role of Ireland's modernist architecture has been further evidenced by the award of a John Paul Getty Foundation *Keeping it Modern* (KIM) grant (EUR124,000) to research the conservation of a previously overlooked building which featured in *Infra-Éireann/MIM – St Brendan's School, Birr* (1978). One of only ten recipients of a KIM award in 2018 globally and the first and only to be awarded in Ireland [S9], this follow-on project (2018-21 project-leader Boyd) directly owes its existence to the research cited above. It is being carried out in collaboration with an award-winning Irish architectural practice, the Irish governmental Department of Education and Skills and the school's board of management to produce a Conservation Management Plan (CMP). This evaluates aspects of the building's cultural and architectural significance as a modernist educational paradigm and their tolerance for change, to form a series of strategies and policies to manage its future as a working school and improve its environmental conditions and energy use for the twenty-first century.

From relative obscurity, the building is now globally recognised, a recognition which, through the execution of the Getty award, will positively influence its future and the educational experience of its future students, as well as forming a potential model for other conservation programmes for schools of the same epoch both in Ireland and internationally. An idea of the reach and impact of the research from international to local is given by the fact that the news of the Getty was broken almost simultaneously in the *Los Angeles (LA) Times*, the *Sunday Times (Ireland)*, the *Midland Tribune* (Birr) and the *Irish Times*. The title of the last of these, 'Tractor Shed or Landmark of Irish Modernism?' is significant in demonstrating the change in public perception of St. Brendan's School since before the research was undertaken [S10]. When completed, the St. Brendan's CMP will become part of the Getty Foundation's *Keeping it Modern* report library, a global resource on the conservation of modernist architecture.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[S1] Testimonial: Director *Culture Ireland*, 6th December 2019. *Culture Ireland* and the *Arts Council of Ireland* jointly funded the Venice pavilion at EUR320,000. Involvement with delivery of impact: director of the funding agency and on the selection panel.

[S2] *Architect's Journal* 6th June 2014, 46-49. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/first-peek-inside-the-irish-pavilion-at-the-venice-biennale/8663668.fullarticle>.

[S3] Sarah Williams Goldhagen, *Architectural Record* (USA), print edition, June 18th, 2014; *Cairoobserver*, print issue, 12 July 2014.

[S4] Frank McDonald, *Irish Times*, print issue, 14 June 2014.

[S5] Testimonial: Director of the Arts Council of Ireland 3rd December 2019. Involvement with delivery of impact: director of the funding agency and on the selection panel.

[S6] Testimonial: CEO, Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland (RIAI). Involvement with delivery of impact: minority funder of the *Infra-Éireann/MIM* projects

[S7] Testimonial: Medical Directorate, Merlin Park, Galway (correspondence with Tara Kennedy (*Making Ireland Modern* team-member)). Their exhibition was publicised within the Health Service Executive's (HSE) internal newspaper *Health Matters* and also in the local newspaper *Galway Tribune* on (03/02/2017) (see supporting evidence). Involvement with delivery of impact: observer.

[S8] Hugh Campbell, *Irish Times*, on-line edition, December 2015. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/infra-eireann-infrastructure-and-the-architectures-of-modernity-in-ireland-1916-2016-1.2487027>.

[S9]

https://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/current/keeping_it_modern/grants_awarded_2018.html Last accessed 5th January 2021.

[S10] *LA Times*, 'Getty Announces 2018 grants funding architectural conservation worldwide including projects in Cuba and Lebanon'. 11 October 2018; the *Sunday Times*, Offaly pretty school wows Getty judges. 21 October 2018; *Midland Tribune* (22 November 2018) Environmental & Conservation research plan to be developed for St Brendan's School, Birr, p.48. *Irish Times* <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/tractor-shed-or-landmark-of-irish-modernism-1.3661583>.