

INTRODUCTION SUNDAY 12th OCTOBER

Colleagues, as we look forward to the next 175 years of the Institute, today is a day of celebration of the work that we do and the contribution that we make to society.

Irish Architecture has developed a critical mass that makes it a world-leading endeavour. No matter where you look, you will find it difficult to meet the match of the achievements that we will celebrate over the next two days. If we could broaden the vision of what Irish Architecture means and does, and communicate it to the outside world, we could easily demonstrate the primacy of the architectural culture that we have developed. What we will see is the very best of what we do. What we will not see as clearly is the general level of excellence of the work of architects and technologists in Ireland. The conference may not be the place to communicate that overall standard, but celebrate it we must, to show how the culture of the vision of our country has developed so much.

The future direction of Irish Architecture must surely be as an integral part of the cultural identity of our society. We have not yet succeeded at that integration and the identification of Architecture as a core value of our culture is not embedded into our image of ourselves. If we consider how much we identify with words and music, we should be able to add to that matrix of culture our built landscape, which includes buildings, infrastructure and our communal shared places. This aspect of cultural integration is encapsulated in the GPA and Government recognises the value of a high-quality environment to the success of the smart economy and to our competitiveness.

To an extent, our biggest contribution to our society is in our role as place-makers. These places that we make are the foil to the lives of our citizens. We make them seamless, dignified, comfortable and beautiful. Few other than architects have the breadth of training, the skills and the vision to make this happen – perhaps not on their own, but certainly as team leaders who can harness the skills and energies of others. That is where our next wave of energy will peak. It is no coincidence that the public choice winner from the Annual Awards this year was not a building, but a suite of public spaces in a country town.

Our own society is in a state of constant flux. The changes to the regulatory environment pose their own challenges. As things change and our population grows, we must ensure that our growth is dictated by an agreed vision of what our country will look like rather than the cyclical nature of the market.

Eurostat forecasts that we will have an additional million people within 21 years. They will need homes, schools, hospitals, transport and places to work. There is also a significant challenge in meeting the needs of an ageing population. We have the opportunity now to plan for this growing and changing population in a way that respects the delicate balance of our impact on the planet and that provides for excellence in urban, rural and architectural design. For this to happen we must work with Society, Government, Planning Authorities, Industry and the professions to learn from the past so as to create the best built environment possible.

At its most basic, the task for the future is to produce the right buildings in the right places of the right quality for the right price.

Before we go any further and in the spirit of celebrating excellence, I know that it is one of the deadly sins, but the great achievement of Sheila O'Donnell and John Toumey in being awarded the RIBA Gold Medal fills me with pride.... And obviously emotion. Congratulations.

Today we will start with Christine de Baan, who will look at cultural identity and internationalization, success and culture and entrepreneurship.

As the 'fons et origo' of so much of our architectural culture, Mies van der Rohe and Louis Kahn were very privileged to have Cathal O'Neill and Noel Dowley as members of their respective teams. Today we will hear Cathal and Noel talk about their times with the greats.

After lunch, Shane O'Toole will relate his treatise on the RIAI 175 and Niall Scott will look at the integration of Art and Architecture, with particular tributes to Patrick Scott and, of course, Dr. Ronnie Tallon.

So here we have past and present. Looking to the future, we have a look at the work of emerging practices who continue that great tradition of learning and innovation. They might loosely be termed emerging architects, but what they have in common is commitment, love of architecture and, let's face it, youth! They are our future and the future of the profession.

We will have time tomorrow to look at the areas of practice that we need to address and we have, for the first time, a broad programme of parallel events that allow us to share our knowledge more than ever. Architecture is a very broad church and gets broader all the time.

Thank you all for coming, I hope that you enjoy what is the fruit of many peoples' labour. I would like to thank our staff, our sponsors Gerflex flooring and Plan expo, for the use of the hall. The people who worked on the conference are particularly important to us today – Emma Donoghue, Michael Hayes, Aideen Lowry, Paul Kelly,

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Aideen English, Michelle Fagan, Coimhan Murphy, Claire McManus – and for doing all the hard practical work and keeping us on the straight and narrow – Catherine Bolster and Kathryn Meghan.

The inaugural meeting of the RIAI took place on 1st October 1839. Let us celebrate our collegiate achievements and enjoy the excellence that we take for granted.

It might be appropriate to quote from Paul:

“whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Paul 4:6-9

Enjoy