Homes & Possibilities

MICHAËLE CUTAYA REPORTS ON ‘NIMBLE SPACES, WAYS TO LIVE TOGETHER’, VISUAL, CARLOW (1 MAY).

‘NIMBLE’ Spaces, Ways to Live Together’, held at Visual, Carlow on 1 May, was a day-long conference of alternating talks, panels and workshops. The event brought together a wide range of practitioners to share different ways to think, design, build and inhabit our living spaces. The conference was a component of Nimble Spaces “an enabling design process” started in 2015 by independent curators Rosie Lynch and Hollie Kearns in Callan “that supports adults with a disability to work creatively with artists and architects through design collaborations and workshops”.

The urgency of re-thinking our approach to housing was vividly exposed in Rory Hearne’s opening talk ‘What role for housing in a Republic?’. A lecturer in political and economic geography at Maynooth University, Hearne presented some of his research and findings on the housing crisis in Ireland. He stated that one cause for the lack of affordable housing has been the steady privatisation of public houses since the 1980s. He addressed such issues as rising rents, the lack of tenancy rights and high vacancy rates, as well as the looming wave of repossessions. He concluded that we needed to “move away from a housing system based on promoting finance-led owner occupation and speculative investment and implement policies that provide genuinely affordable, high quality, long term secure housing as a home”.

The rest of the day was rich in suggestions about how to address these issues, with presentations from Germany, the UK, Lebanon, the US and Ireland. Three panels of architects, academics, developers, artists, community workers and users presented an exciting variety of projects and research. The first panel, ‘Coming Together: Economies and Ecologies’, was focused on affordability and sustainability with an emphasis on co-operation. Dougall Sheridan, lecturer in architecture at the University of Ulster, presented the Building Groups (Baugruppe) in Berlin, which have emerged over the last decade and now represents 10% of all new buildings. ‘Themed’ groups of Berliners come together over shared concerns (elderly people, families of children with disabilities etc.) to form a cooperative and hire an architect and a builder to custom-design blocks of apartments. These are usually built to custom-design blocks of apartments. These are usually built to custom-design blocks of apartments. These are usually built to Passivhaus standards, with shared facilities and costs that average 25% less than the market. These Baugruppe have become major players in the housing system in just a few years. This building together was inspired by the multiple communities and squats that developed in Berlin in the 1960s and 1970s, many of them led by artists.

Dermot Sellars and Trish Brennan gave examples of co-operative housing and regeneration projects in Ireland and Aaron Koffman presented the developer’s view of affordable and sustainable housing in the US. Imad Gemeyal, an architect from Beirut, stole the show in challenging the building obsession of his compatriots. He recounted how the US and Ireland. Three panels of architects, academics, developers, artists, community workers and users presented an exciting variety of projects and research. The first panel, ‘Coming Together: Economies and Ecologies’, was focused on affordability and sustainability with an emphasis on co-operation. Dougall Sheridan, lecturer in architecture at the University of Ulster, presented the Building Groups (Baugruppe) in Berlin, which have emerged over the last decade and now represents 10% of all new buildings. ‘Themed’ groups of Berliners come together over shared concerns (elderly people, families of children with disabilities etc.) to form a cooperative and hire an architect and a builder to custom-design blocks of apartments. These are usually built to Passivhaus standards, with shared facilities and costs that average 25% less than the market. These Baugruppe have become major players in the housing system in just a few years. This building together was inspired by the multiple communities and squats that developed in Berlin in the 1960s and 1970s, many of them led by artists.

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