# The Adaptive Governance Lab: Learning about Government in the Architecture Design Studio

For the past three years the School of Architecture at the University of Limerick has offered an advanced urban design elective course for 3rd and 4th year students on the topic of design and governance called "The Adaptive Governance Lab". The course is a studio and field based teaching and learning environment which brings together architecture students, local government officials and community leaders in action research projects addressing urban and rural areas. The areas selected for research are 'lost' areas- areas which appear to have intractable problems or which have not developed to their full potential. The study areas are at the scale of a neighborhood, village or district and have significance in terms of the public realm, particularly at the level of infrastructural development of movement systems and amenity spaces. The places examined to date include Terryland Forest Park and Woodquay in Galway City, the train station precinct, the city centre , and the Southill and Rhebogue areas of Limerick City and the towns of Swinford, County Mayo, Shannon, County Clare and Rush in north County Dublin. The group works together to collaboratively develop design processes which can assist government in managing change in the fabric of communities and in the natural and built environment of these places.

**DESIGN AND GOVERNANCE AT SAUL**

The techniques being employed in the Adaptive Governance Lab have developed from research submitted to the University of Limerick for a Masters in Architecture (Urban Design) in 2010 entitled "Developing a Living City Process". The research project, which was carried out by the author, investigated the way in which decision making processes of local government affect the physical and social quality of public space in Galway City from my perspective as an architect working in local government. It focused on enabling an interdisciplinary approach to the formation of a brief for the re-design of a road, the orbital route, in Galway. The research concentrated on defining a systemic way of enabling creative thinking and using design processes to coordinate local authority direction in managing the development of infrastructure

**ROSIE WEBB**
University of Limerick

projects - the Living City Process. The process involved the creation of two types of maps, case study analysis and presentation of those on a website and discussion forum. In the research, mapping was identified as a creative practice which has the potential to be incorporated into current development planning practices to enable interdisciplinary thinking and to better link top down and bottom up planning. I was invited to develop the research further through teaching the elective course in the School of Architecture. The research methodologies have developed into the mapping techniques and processes being employed in the Adaptive Governance Lab- called Strategic Mapping.

**COLLABORATIVE LEARNING**

In the Adaptive Governance Lab, architects learn about governance, public servants learn about design and together they develop new processes which combine design and governance to facilitate effective collective action.  Architects have the ability and the responsibility to positively influence the development of the society in which they are situated. Architecture distinguishes itself from the act of merely building as a human social art, a force for repairing the fabric of the human community and the natural world. As a social art, architecture must effectively reflect the values and needs of society. Therefore, an essential part of an architect's education is building an understanding of the responsibility that architects accept in shaping the environment. Architects must have an understanding of the bigger, broader societal responsibilities that their work addresses. If architects are to fulfill the role of thought leaders in society, they need to utilize their ability to dream about and visualize a better world to engage with the mechanisms of government.  Equally public servants benefit from learning about design intelligence and design methodologies. An essential part of the education of a public servant is developing an understanding of the problems of governance not just as the problems of  regulatory and statutory systems but as the problems of facilitating collective action. Government, at its core, is about the things we do together because we can't do them alone.[1] If you can design governance systems and services better, you can depend on better outcomes for public action. Engaging in collaborative design processes allows a momentary step away from the minutiae of everyday bureaucracy to look at the bigger picture, to stop for a moment to remember why we are doing what we are doing. It allows us to connect what we are doing with what colleagues in other departments are doing as well as the spontaneous interests and actions of the public at large. If public servants are to fulfill their role as the facilitators of collective action, they need to engage with the processes of design to imagine with specificity the kind future we are collectively trying to attain. Those who imagine the way the world might be and those who operate the machinery of collective action need to find time to work together and think strategically about the way that we as a society live together. If you can imagine a better future together the path to that goal becomes clearer and more direct. In unlocking the collective imagination, design workshops can strengthen civil society and civic engagement and can refocus government on effective collective action.

**DESIGN WITH COMMUNITIES**

For architecture students and public servants, working with communities exposes them to the social order that exists. Community design workshops compel a student and a public servant to leave the abstract world of the classroom and bureaucratic duties to enter the real world of the community at that point in time to understand and experience the societal drivers for change. The exchange

GLOBALIZING ARCHITECTURE / Flows and Disruptions

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that takes place in a design workshop between willing, interested, observant, rigorous and questioning amateurs and the professionals entrusted with developing the fabric of our communities and environment is highly valuable to all parties. Dealing with the specifics of the real challenges and concerns that emerge makes retreat into the assigned roles of "professional" or "official" a functional impossibility if difficulties are to be resolved. For citizens, community design workshops assist them to imagine what they want, to imagine themselves in that place, to challenge pre-conceived notions. The professionals are there to listen to them, to work with them to inform their understanding of their community and environment, to convey what advantages design can bring to a situation. The citizen is asked to be critical about proposals, to engage in a conversation about spaces and organizations, so that people can begin to imagine a better version of their neighborhood. The role of the designer in this process is to put some proposals on the table to provoke discussion. It is not necessarily to come up with all of the answers but to present and frame the kind of questions that get people thinking about solutions. The role of the professionals as the facilitators of discussion about possibilities rather than presenter of pre-determined solutions, of testing out and tinkering with possible futures together, mitigates against the retreat into entrenched positions and allows for the emergence of a shared objective and community focus for collective action.

As an institution devoted to the development and dissemination of knowledge in society, the University has a strategic role in both research and teaching of design and public administration techniques. The distrust of political motives that can accompany governmental efforts to consult with communities is less evident with the independence an academic position fosters. The University has a responsibility to test out ideas, and the luxury to be able to take risks at a remove from the political environment. At the same time, the lofty ideals generated by academia can be dismissed as utopian without access to practical application. The university and the public authority benefit from partnership and from the public good will towards students which provides a furtive environment for experimentation with new techniques and methodologies to solve real world problems.

Figure 1: Open Crit during the Design with Communities week, Woodquay, Galway City Fall 2013.
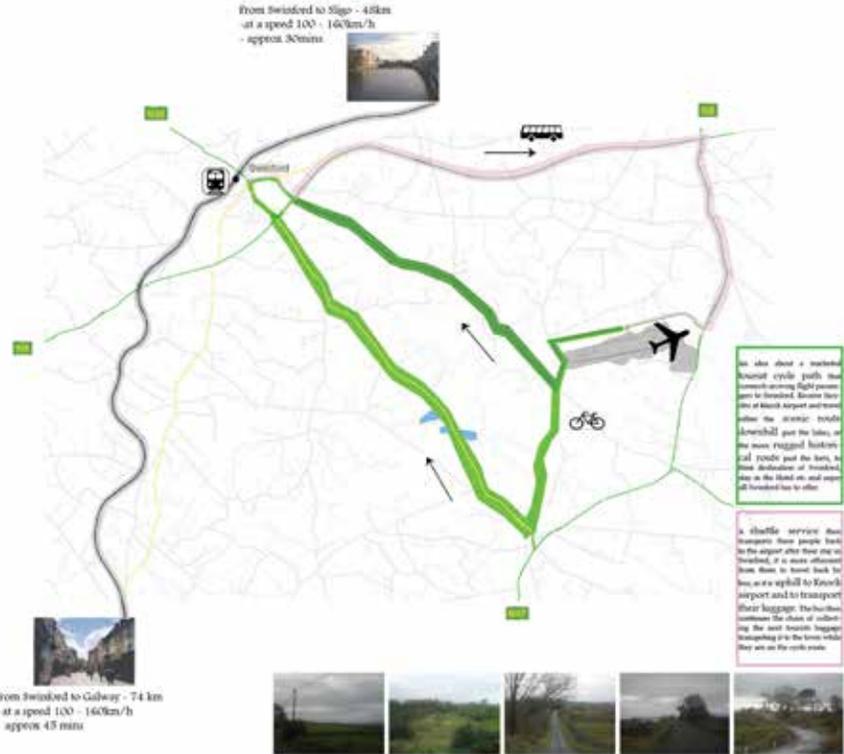
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Figure 2: Reflective Mobility Map of Swinford, County Mayo,illustrating the air and rail connections to the town Fall 2011, by  Deborah O'Shea.

## DESIGN THINKING AND GOVERNANCE

The Adaptive Governance Lab is premised on the idea that design thinking has much to offer the implementation of sustainable development and governance. Design thinking, in its widest sense, can serve to unlock a more proactive, holistic understanding of what developing our environment means. One of the most concise definitions of design thinking is found in Wikipedia: "The ability to combine empathy for the context of a problem, creativity in the generation of insights and solutions and rationality to analyze and fit solutions to the context."[2]  The design studio and its thinking processes are disorderly and require the building up of often disparate ideas. The process involves gathering information, analyzing knowledge and offering solutions while simultaneously exploring the present and future parameters of a problem and its resolutions. Designers make educated guesses, employing scenario planning and forecasting to think of many possible alternatives which they visualize in compelling narratives to future test ideas. They create evocative and often provocative visions of the future. The adaptive governance lab uses the structure of the architectural design studio and the methods and techniques of design thinking it fosters to develop more innovative, less bureaucratic governance processes.

A key objective of the Lab is the testing and practical application of emerging research tools and techniques to develop new governance processes and behaviors which link top down and bottom up planning. The Lab provides a forum in which to ask deeper questions about the role of government in the 21st century but also to extract insights into the role of the specialist/professional in an increasingly less hierarchical world. The Adaptive Governance Lab ethos rejects the notion of the designer as an elitist stylist of consumer products and the perception of the public servant as a conservative bureaucrat incapable of innovation in favor of human centered design and human centered approach to innovation in governance.

**MOBILITY**

*Projective Map*

The proposal is to reopen The Western Rail Corridor. Part-time transformation into a recreational amenity, will lose the focus of reopening the rail line in the long term. The danger is that it will be seen as something that's working fine as recreational space, therefore why change that and reopen the rail line. The advantages are far greater if the Western Rail Corridor was reopened. All the towns along its route would benefit hugely from it, including Swinford, which would be reconnected to Sligo and Galway, along with a reconnection to the whole Irish rail network. People could live in Swinford and easily commute to these cities for work. Students could easily travel to Sligo IT, GMIT, NUI Galway and UL. It would also become a major tourist attraction, enabling tourists to view the distinctive scenic landscape of the west and to experience its towns like Swinford along the way.

Swinford should capitalise on the fact that it is only six kilometres from Knock Airport. Arrivals into the airport should be drawn to Swinford for their first destination. This tourism would make the town thrive again. Proposed is a marketed system of a tourist cycle scheme, allowing people to see Swinford rural beauty in a slow pace entering into the town.

By Deborah O'Shea

From Swinford to Sligo - 48km
- at a speed 100 - 160km/h
- approx 30mins

From Swinford to Galway - 74 km
- at a speed 100 - 160km/h
- approx 45 mins

Collaborative participatory design processes are employed to change the relationship between the professional and the public, to move from the burdensome expectation to fill the role of the brilliant master-planner who imposes their vision unilaterally to the liberation of acting as a design facilitator whose role is to enable diverse groups of participants to organize themselves. Design processes and visual communication are used to better organize the vast array of official information, to build up distributed intelligence about places and parallel processing of information to enable networked, regional knowledge. This technique enables a shift from hierarchical decision making to intelligent, adaptive networks of evidence based, consensus decision making.
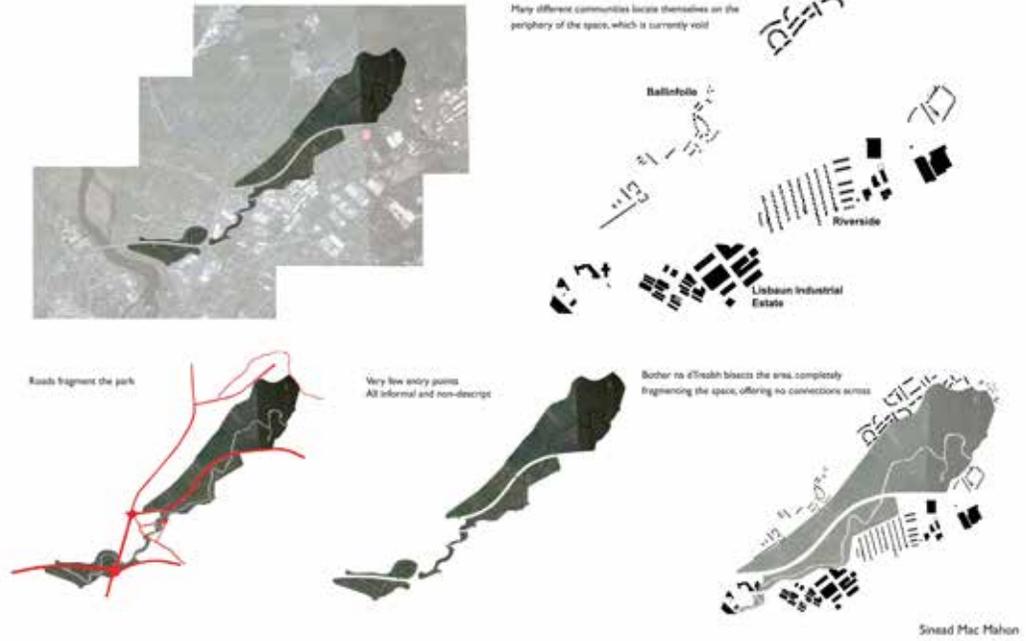
**THE ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE LAB**

The Adaptive Governance Lab provides practical experience and application of emerging sustainable urban design practice with an emphasis on the use of mapping as a tool in planning and development processes. It involves architecture students in working directly with operational managers in local governance and neighborhood community leaders on real issues articulated by the community. The course is contained within two, one week long periods in the first and sixth weeks of the University term. Readings, lectures and case studies provide a conceptual and theoretical grounding for understanding the link between public space, governance and design at the start of each week. Field trips and community meetings are undertaken midweek to allow interaction with official and unofficial sources of information, and to assist in the gathering of source material for analytical assessment. Workshops and Design Critiques are offered throughout to introduce practical applications and methods of producing creative design based mapping. Interaction between architectural students, local authority personnel and community leaders provides a basis for developing an understanding of critical issues affecting the development of a particular place. The course advances

Figure 3: Projective Mobility Map of Swinford, County Mayo, suggesting the un-development of existing rural roads to facilitate cycling and bus connections to link the town to these infrastructural assets. Fall 2011, by Deborah O'Shea.

Landscape - Reflective Map
Existing Terryland Forest Park
Potential to connect and act as one shared green spaceh not fulfilled

Sinead Mac Mahon

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Figure 4: Reflective Landscape Map of Terryland Forest Park, Galway which highlights the communities which surround the park, the limited access points and the fragmented nature of the park Fall 2010, by Sinead McMahon.

research on the use of mapping as a method of characterization of place and of assisting in building the physical and cultural fabric of communities. Through the coursework generated, the architectural students and local authority participants explore the potential of mapping to link technical with social and cultural concerns in the conceptualization and creation of places. Together they investigate the ways in which mapping processes can facilitate both interdisciplinary practice in design and bottom up, collaborative approaches to place-making. Through practical application, mapping as a creative practice is tested in terms of its ability to assist evidence based decision-making and enhancement to the quality of physical infrastructural provision. Collaboration with local authority participants on the course informs the research and evolving mapping practices.

STRATEGIC MAPPING

The Adaptive Governance Lab employs the methodology of Strategic Mapping which encompasses both an analysis based on realities and proposals which reflect a utopian aspect. The term collectively refers to the mapping techniques and the collaborative workshops set up to facilitate the making of the maps. Strategic Mapping evolved from research for my 2010 Masters Project "Developing a Living City Process" which documented various mapping techniques being used as tools for visualizing, recording, representing and creating places. These include but are not limited to the detailed and intensely local maps created by Tim Robinson, mathematician, abstract artist and cartographer working in the West of Ireland, several web-based mapping fora created by Chicago based groups including "Maps in the Public Square" by Chicago Metropolis 2020 and Chil.us by UrbanLab, Everyblock.com a hyperlocal news website created by journalist Adrian Holavaty and OASIS.nyc a public private partnership of more than thirty agencies which provides interactive mapping tools of open space in New York City, Parish Maps initiated by the UK charity organization Common Ground, and Yellow Arrow, a 'deep map' which initiated as a street art project in

Manhattan and expanded to become a global public art project involving over thirty five countries. Identifying mapping as an alternative planning process was heavily influenced by the writing of James Corner in his essay "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention" in which he espouses a new way of practicing urbanism through the making of maps, a process which must involve inquiry, research and criticism to be effective in a diverse, democratic society:

> "It is in this participatory sense that I believe new and speculative techniques of mapping may generate new practices of creativity, practices that are expressed not in the invention of novel form but in the productive reformulation of what is already given. By showing the world new ways, unexpected solutions and effects may emerge."[3]

Strategic Mapping employs the simultaneous exploration of parameters and resolutions of often ill defined problems. These two processes involve an analysis of site or learning about context, empathy for what exists at the moment in our environment and our society and imagination and innovation about what could exist in the future, all fundamental methodologies of the design studio. In strategic mapping, two types of maps are produced corresponding to those processes, Reflective maps and Projective maps. Reflective maps involve creating conceptual diagrams about the city and its neighborhoods to highlight what is already there and how it works, what makes that place unique. Projective maps suggest social micro planning proposals addressing a concept about how we might begin to behave with an immediate and easily achievable action whilst maintaining the long term goal as the strategic end point. The maps isolate, highlight and make visually clear an idea or concept pertinent to one of seven broad themes common to urban development; Water, Landscape, Energy, Exchange, Performance, Community and Memory, and Mobility. Proposals promote random tinkering and prototyping, experimenting with our built environment to suggest an evidence-based strategy for future development.

Figure 5: Projective Landscape Map of Terryland Forest Park, Galway suggesting the creation of walking routes to connect communities across the park and the holding of a Ciclovia event in the Park Fall 2010, by Sinead McMahon.

Information gathering forms an integral part of the strategic mapping process to allow communities and stakeholders to participate in the discussion. Information, both formal and informal, is collected from official sources and amateurs at the first community workshop and field visit which are led by local leaders. This part of the process enables the "experts" to listen and to gain a feeling for what is happening on the ground, to document what is already being done spontaneously, to begin to highlight pro-social behavior that can be supported and encouraged, to uncover the fears and concerns of the community and to identify local champions for policies and projects that might emerge from the process. The maps act as props to encourage civic engagement in conversations and instruments for learning about places. This methodology discourages the making of declarations, which tend to shut down possibilities in favor of a dialogue in which government is part of the conversation rather than the broadcaster of a pre-determined solution for approval during the statutory consultation process. Participation, collaboration and citizen discussions draw out any divergence between the immediately felt need of individuals and the moral obligations of the larger group. The idea is to promote practices which become a framework for active design creativity and consensus building. The maps provide multiple readings rather than an expression of a single vision for the city and channel public participation to feed into the decision making process.

The outcome of the course assignments are the coordination and collective presentation of the series of strategic maps for public presentation at community meetings. The Strategic Maps are then made available to the communities and Local Authorities for exhibition in a physical and virtual format on the SAUL website.

### THE FUTURE FOR THE ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE LAB
In his 1968 essay "The Right to the City" Henri Lefebvre takes a clear position on the capabilities of professionals to effect local development and urban life;

> "The architect, the planner, the sociologist, the economist, the philosopher or the politician cannot out of nothingness create new forms and relations. More precisely, the architect is no more a miracle-worker than the sociologist. Neither can create social relations, although under certain favourable conditions, they help trends to be formulated (to take shape). Only social life (praxis) in its global capacity possesses such powers- or does not possess them. The people mentioned above can individually or in teams clear the way; they can propose, try out and prepare forms. And also (and especially), through a maieutic nurtured by science, assess acquired experience, provide a lesson from failure and give birth to the possible."[4]

The collective learning and creative mapping processes employed in the Adaptive Governance Lab provide the type of favourable conditions for collaboration to which Lefebvre refers. Through the methodology of Strategic Mapping, forms are proposed, tested out and represented for discussion. Imagination is deployed to propose new ways of living in the city and to make the way clear for local actors to work with their government to effect changes which enable the lifestyle they envisage for themselves. The time for collaboration is very limited due to the current format of the course as an elective module and the informality of participation and availability of time from operational managers in the Local Authority. Even so, a number of interesting initiatives have already developed on foot of the mapping exercises in its short lifetime. These initiatives include the production of a digital based map of the 'Off the Beaten Track' tour through Terryland

Forest Park by a participant in the process in Galway, piloting of a 'Ciclovia' event by the Galway Transportation Unit as suggested in the Landscape Projective map for Terryland Forest Park, proposals to provide a viewing platform in a disused historical windmill in Rush, and the organization of a "Small Town Utopia" conference to envisage and debate the future of Swinford and other small towns in rural Ireland. The residents of Rhebogue, Limerick are progressing proposals for a 'cycle street' in their neighborhood with Limerick Smarter Travel staff they met through the Adaptive Governance Lab in 2012. In Womodquay, Galway, proposals for a programme of five temporary events installations in the area's public spaces has formed the basis of an application for grant aid which was submitted by a collective group consisting of residents and business associations, local schools, area sports and heritage clubs and the Galway Men's Shed and which is actively being facilitated by local government officials working in areas such as access, social inclusion, active transport, sports partnership, social inclusion, forward planning, infrastructural development and architects sections. This cooperative group of design champions connected through the community workshops and open critiques which formed the field studies for the Adaptive Governance Lab in the Autumn of 2013.

The course content and processes have greatly influenced the thinking and contributed to the content of a number of thesis projects for participating architectural students. The activity of the course has contributed to the ethos of the School of Architecture at UL which has been to promote the practical use of architectural intelligence to change the nature of society. It has enriched the ongoing conversation at SAUL on the role of architects in society with both core staff and visiting lecturers and provided topical guest speakers for the weekly lecture series. The course has recently engaged with the Limerick Local Authority in providing community design workshops for the Smarter Travel Project for Limerick City and County. The current format of the course in terms of its time limitations and the formalization of local authority staff participation are areas to be addressed to improve the long term effectiveness of the processes for communities and the planning and development systems.

In Ireland, an interesting exchange between governance and design has begun, facilitated by the Lab practice, which prompts both practices to consider their roles and responsibilities in the shaping of urban life. The methodologies developed by the Adaptive Governance Lab have been tested in rural and urban Ireland in various communities facing different types of problems. To what extent outcomes are replicable outside of Ireland or in other governmental systems remains to be seen. The Adaptive Governance Lab is continuing to refine its methodology, using architectural techniques to enable co-production of the public realm and to steer architectural practice, governance and citizens toward their responsibilities as articulated by Henri Lefebvre in "The Right to the City";

> "It is incumbent on the social force capable of creating urban society to make efficient and effective the unity of art, technique and knowledge."[5]

**ENDNOTES**

1. Jennifer Pahlka executive director of Code for America credited Tim O'Reilly with this quote in her TED Talk "Coding for a Better Government" recorded in March 2012.

2. Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Design_Thinking, October 18, 2012

3. Corner, James, "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention" in *Mappings*, ed. Denis Cosgrove, 1999. p.217.

4. Kofman, Eleonore and Elizabeth Lebas Translators and Editors, *Writings on Cities: Henri Lefebvre*. 1996, p.150-151.

5. Kofman, Eleonore and Elizabeth Lebas Translators and Editors, *Writings on Cities: Henri Lefebvre*. 1996, p.157.