

MICROCINEMA AND FILMMAKING HUB AT THE LIBERTIES CREATIVE CAMPUS



An amendment to the current plans
Proposed by Mark Shiel and Brendan Kredell
Media Urbanism, Ltd
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Media Urbanism is a forward-looking, solutions-oriented company, focused on growing and improving the interaction of media, the arts, and cities.

One of the greatest challenges of the 21st century is to make cities and towns that are creative, sustainable, inclusive, and diverse. In approaching this challenge, we focus on increasing the benefits of media and the arts to cities and towns, working with citizens, organizations, government, and businesses to increase the contribution of media and the arts to the urban economy, society, and everyday life.

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Goals of this proposal

- 1. Improve quality of life for Dubliners, especially in the Liberties
- 2. Increase social cohesion through art and communication
- 3. Support artists' and community-based filmmaking
- 4. Ensure the city's arts provision keeps pace with technological change
 - 5. Increase educational opportunities
 - 6. Increase cultural tourism

I. MEDIA AND PUBLIC SPACE AFTER COVID: REBUILDING COMMUNITY, SOCIETY, AND THE CITY

In every major social crisis of the past one hundred years, people have predicted the end of cities and worried that life would never be the same again. After 1918, 1945, 1968, 2001, 2008, cities always came back, often stronger than before. Post-Covid will be the same.

There will be a release of pent-up demand, a re-engagement with the city, its public spaces, communities, and everyday life. The key will be to harness their natural energy.

Every successful city for three thousand years has invested in the arts and made them prominent, for quality of life, productivity, and social cohesion. In modern times, moving images have been the key. The death of cinema has been greatly exaggerated. Big tech and start-ups propose the future is mobile and streaming, but after Covid making and enjoying visual media in public space will be an important way of rebuilding community, society, and the city.

Commercial cinema will look after itself. To address an urgent public need, cities should invest in artists' and community-based film and video.

This investment will produce multiple direct and indirect social, cultural, and economic benefits for artists, filmmakers, and their audiences, for community groups and local institutions, for city government, and for the city's image and self-image.

II. BRIEF SURVEY OF DUBLIN'S MOVING IMAGE LANDSCAPE

Even before Covid, Dublin's moving image landscape was increasingly homogeneous. Its commercial cinemas – the big chains plus the IFI and Lighthouse - served mostly narrative feature films. The Project Arts Centre and IFI sometimes showed experimental films, and the Lighthouse showed low budget shorts, but these were not their main focus. Filmbase, the filmmakers' resource centre, closed in 2018. Supports and opportunities for local artists to make and exhibit film and video were lacking, as were prospects for community-based filmmaking on social issues. Dublin has been lagging behind other major cities in this area.

The Liberties Creative Campus can fill these voids with a microcinema and filmmaking hub. This would cater for:

- The city's growing activity in artists' film and video and experimental film – existing Dublin groups deserve more support and have considerable scope for growth (eg. Artists' and Experimental Moving Image, Experimental Film Club, Experimental Film Society, Solus Film Collective).
- 'Participatory video' made by community groups and local residents to address Dublin issues – poverty, unemployment, homelessness, mental health, addiction, antisocial behavior, migration, place and identity, heritage, planning, gentrification.

This would complement Dublin City Arts Office's commendable existing work, giving moving image media due prominence in the 21st century.

Beneficiaries would include:

- filmmaking youth training already provided by Screen8 at the Digital Hub.
- activities in other Dublin region arts institutions and groups, eg. Axis, Draíocht, The Exchange, IMMA, Visual Artists Ireland.
- links between central Dublin and nearby third-level institutions around media arts and social sciences (TCD, DCU, TUD, UCD, NCAD, DLCAD, Maynooth).
- Dublin's visual arts scene as a whole – it is thriving, but moving image making is a specific sub-discipline that is less well-supported than painting, sculpture, and design.

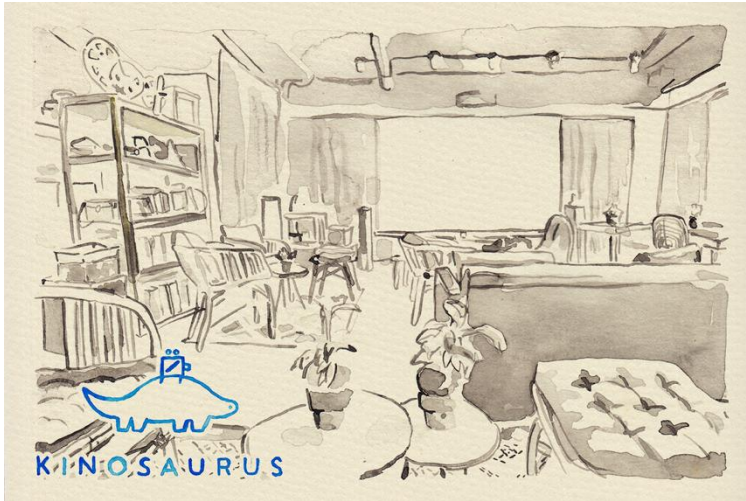
III. THE EXHIBITION SPACE: MICROCINEMA

The global supply chain of film production and distribution has long informed the architecture of our cinemas. Commercial demands informed everything from the siting of cinemas to their seating capacity. The digital turn lowered the capital costs required for start-up, making it possible to build and operate screening spaces at a significantly lower cost. In turn, this means that cinemas themselves can be built at smaller scale. In cities around the globe, such microcinemas serve as important hubs for local artists and filmmakers. The adaptability of microcinemas enables an approach to programming and curation that is much more artist- and community-oriented than possible in larger cinemas.

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We note that the brief for the project elevates the importance of community to one of the design principles for the project. In particular light of this, we submit that plans should be modified to specifically include a dedicated microcinema within the campus. Such a space would provide a natural venue for various streams of programming that can be addressed to the different constituencies that the Liberties Creative Campus hopes to serve visual artists, community organizations, film festivals, and youth groups would all make use of the space. This diversity of use serves the important purpose of activating the space and realizing the goal of the design brief to create spaces that “meet a local need and create a vibrant shared place (for artists, visitors and locals).”

MICROCINEMA EXAMPLES



Clockwise from top left: Kinosaurus (Jakarta); Luminal Theater (Brooklyn);
Cinema Detroit (Detroit); Filmhuis Cavia (Amsterdam)

IV. THE WORKSHOP SPACE: A FILMMAKING HUB

We envision the Liberties Creative Campus as an important hub for multiple kinds of film and video practice. Filmmaking supported by the Liberties Creative Campus would be of two broad types:

1) Artists' film and video, and experimental film

- There are several groups in Dublin producing interesting work, with scope for growth and greater coordination. The hub would act as a resource and advice center, gathering point, and production facility.
- With the microcinema as an exhibition venue, this would constitute significant new support for this field while enriching Dublin's art scene as a whole.

2) Participatory video

- The filmmakers would be local residents, supervised by experienced personnel, and creating short documentary films on social issues out and about in the city. The hub would provide them with basic training on cameras, sound equipment, and video editing. Screenings of the resulting films would become community events at the microcinema.
- Participatory video has a fifty-year track record of adding value and providing insight in urban and rural development around the world. It aids communities by increasing their visibility and focusing public attention on the issues that concern them. It aids city government by providing a more accurate community-driven reflection of people's lives, social problems, and diversity. See sources below for examples.

Locating both types of filmmaking in one facility will lower the risk of alienation between artists and local residents, the creative campus, and the surrounding neighborhood, increasing transparency and inclusivity. At a minimum, space would be required for video editing workstations, a sound recording booth, and equipment storage. Ideally the hub would also include small studio space. Hardware costs would require further research, but a variety of 4K DV cameras would be required, suitable for use both by novices and experienced videographers. PV can also be done on an ultra-low budget using local residents' own mobile technology (smartphones and cameras), with results of a lower technical quality but also informative and empowering (eg. the Bilbao-based Ubiqa).

V. SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR AMENDMENTS TO THE EXISTING PLANS FOR THE LIBERTIES CREATIVE CAMPUS

OBFA's plans for the Liberties Creative Campus are an excellent first draft. We respectfully suggest some improvements.

The proposed sites are appealing, though differently – Merchant's Quay is more central and visible but adaptive reuse of an older building, some of whose spaces may not be ideal; Bridgefoot Street allows for a new build and more of a statement but is less central and relatively secluded, set back from the river.

- Bridgefoot Street seems slightly more favorable for a microcinema and filmmaking hub – the plan for a mini theatre on the ground floor is a start, but ought to be bigger (30-50 seats for a microcinema) with mini-studio/teaching room, editing suites, and filmmaking storage; these would probably require one of the sets of four workspaces currently planned for the upper floors.
- Merchant's Quay has no mini-theatre and its larger theatre is currently configured for theatrical performance with a large apron stage and seating on three sides; moving image exhibition would require redesign of the seating, or flexible seating, reduction of the wings, and installation of a permanent or retractable screen; alternatively, one of the multi-purpose rooms or workspaces might be redesigned for microcinema use; on this site, 2-3 workspaces together would suffice for the filmmaking hub, or the cluster of small rooms in the basement which have the advantage for filmmaking of being secluded and (presumably) quiet.

Adding moving image provision of this kind would not be removing workspaces from the campus; spaces for moving image would still be workspaces; so there would be an increase in the range of types of workspace provided.

- By our count, there are 41 artists' studios in central Dublin that are publicly-supported and competitively allocated – 4 at IMMA, 11 in the Fire Station, 26 in Temple Bar Studios; OBFA's plans propose 13 more for Merchant's Quay and 12 for Bridgefoot Street.
- Notwithstanding the impressive consultation process underpinning the plans, and the demand for studio space that clearly exists among artists, we believe that either site would benefit from the dedication of a small number of workspaces for moving image use.
- There would be further implications in the need for purchase/leasing of filmmaking equipment, and for staffing (e.g. AV technicians, moving image curators), but the new facility would see Dublin catch up with other cities in moving image provision and the rewards would be significant.

Sources on Participatory video

[Kelley, M, Collaborative Digital Techniques and Urban Neighborhood Revitalization, Social Work , April 2011](#)

[Hearne, R. and M. Murphy, Participatory Action Research: a Human Rights and Capability Approach: A PAHRCA HANDBOOK for NGOs and Vulnerable Groups, ReInvest Project and Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute, 2019](#)

[David Montero Sánchez, Rethinking participatory video in the times of YouTube, Media, Culture & Society, 43:1, 2021](#)

[Chávez, V. et al, A Bridge Between Communities: Video-Making Using Principles of Community-Based Participatory Research, Health Promotion Practice, 5:4, 2004](#)

[Lunch, N. and C. Lunch, Insights into Participatory Video a Handbook for the Field, InsightShare, 2006](#)

Dublin-based artists' film and video, and experimental filmmaking groups

[Artists' and Experimental Moving Image \(Dublin\)](#)

[Experimental Film Club \(Dublin\)](#)

[Experimental Film Society \(Dublin\)](#)

[Kunsthau ACUD \(Berlin\)](#)

[Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers](#)

Sample microcinemas (pictured in this document)

[Luminal Theater, Brooklyn](#)

[Filmhuis Cavia, Amsterdam](#)

[Kinosaurus, Jakarta](#)

[Cinema Detroit, Detroit](#)

The authors of this briefing document have no affiliation with any of the organizations or businesses named within it.

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