



Your City Your Voice Belfast, Community Consultation for Quality of Life Local Project Report, Belfast

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Community Consultation for Quality of Life Local Project Report, Belfast, June 2023



Urban Room, Public-Engagement Pilot: 2 Royal Avenue, Belfast, September 2022



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Your City Your Voice Belfast events - hosted on weekdays, weekends, and evenings- were made possible by the added support of MayWe Events Ltd, 2RA operators, with Eimear Burton, Venue Manager, and Ruby O'Rourke, Events and Marketing Manager, and their superb team, along with Rym Akhonzada of Yallaa CIC cafe.

Special thanks are reserved for the diverse organisations that hosted workshops in the Belfast Urban Room, presented in this report, and all the participants we can't name who made the pilot a success.

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Project partners

Quality of Life foundation

<https://www.qolf.org/>

Commonplace Digital Ltd

<https://www.commonplace.is/>

Urban Symbiotics

<https://urbansymbiotics.com/>

Ulster University

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/>

University of Reading

<https://www.reading.ac.uk/>

The University of Edinburgh

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/>

The University of Cambridge

<https://www.cam.ac.uk>

Belfast City Council

<https://www.belfastcitycouncil.gov.uk>

May We Events

<https://www.maywe.co.uk>

UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence

<https://www.housingevidence.co.uk>



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1. Introduction

On behalf of our national and local team, I am proud to present this report on the **Your City Your Voice Belfast** (YCYVB) Urban Room; consultation research that included a month-long public pilot in Belfast during September 2022, and which has continued to gather feedback and lessons to share. YCYVB is part of *Community Consultation for Quality of Life* (CCQOL), an *Arts & Humanities Research Council* funded UK-wide project, led by *University of Reading* with *Ulster University*, *Cardiff University*, and *The University of Edinburgh* as Co-Investigators. CCQOL seeks to develop new map-based models of community consultation (as more effective, early engagement); face-to-face and digital places for people to share their views more easily and safely about what they value in their local area, to help improve quality of life for everyone.

*Welcome and
Thank you*

“Urban Rooms” are in-person experimental public elements of the CCQOL project, with sequential pilots in Reading, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast carried out over a month each during 2022. The Belfast ‘room’ took place in partnership with *Belfast City Council* in *2 Royal Avenue*, a Council owned and operated public venue in the city centre. Our month-long residency included a mix of daily activities hosted by YCYVB and *Belfast City Council* with *MayWe Events Ltd*. Our physical space, as with all UK-wide pilots, accompanied a bespoke online platform, hosted by project partner *Commonplace Digital Ltd*. We also adapted six *Quality-of-Life* themes from project partner and UK-Charity *The Quality of Life Foundation*, which are applied to digital maps to create a shareable resource that might inform better quality placemaking and public input into built environment decisions affecting local areas in planning and development.

Together with an *Inclusive Toolkit*, created by the CCQOL team with project partner *Urban Symbiotics*, our research aims to create opportunities to better assess social and environmental value through collective and co-created knowledge with “quality-of-life” as a central and positive approach to:

- Promote a holistic view of land use, using maps and open data for more democratic decision-making in planning.
- Develop best practice guidelines for community consultation and engagement; to widen participation to, for example, tackle social justice and liveability issues.

Finally, this report is itself a representation of collective efforts and activities with the many partners and visitors who helped inform our initial findings, maps, and surveys in 2022-23.

Thank you,
Dr Saul M Golden, CCQOL Co-Investigator and
Your City Your Voice Belfast Project Lead



2. Overview: National Project & Local Pilots

Community Consultation for Quality of Life (CCQOL)

Community Consultation for Quality of Life (CCQOL) connects lessons on public consultation aspects of planning and urban development policy and practice across all four UK regions. The project began in June 2021 with all four partner universities working in collaboration with each other and with national and local Advisory Boards. The project focuses on evidence-based frameworks for digital and physical engagement with the public and public-private-professional parties for planning decision-making about built environment development in complex dynamic urban-rural development contexts. The project aims to foster more holistic and adaptable guidelines that contribute more effectively to development decisions from strategic levels to localized initiatives, include more marginalised groups and co-design/delivery frameworks within statutory processes.

The wider CCQOL research project is framed by the following questions:



CCQOL **Community Consultation For Quality Of Life / CCQOL**

Research Questions:

1. How can community consultation
 - be made more **useful and effective** across the diverse policy contexts of the UK?
 - be made more **representative and inclusive**?
 - be undertaken for areas that have not yet been developed, when **'future users'** are not known.
 - Be made into a **long-term** project that fosters ongoing civic debate?
2. What are the relative benefits of **online and physical community consultation**? What format could community consultation take in a pandemic?
3. How can **social value mapping** inform the process of community consultation?
4. What **terminology** is needed to describe inclusive, empowering 21st century community consultation?

CCQOL pilots in each UK region were created as opportunities for local people to share their own feelings about what they value in their city and neighbourhood areas. Each pilot used bespoke digital maps to measure and assess how people viewed and were consulted about local changes and what aspects of their neighbourhood and/or city they valued – seeking to engage with positive discussions based on social and environmental value through Quality-of-Life mapping, rather than more negative-comment-driven approaches.

As with the research questions and initial stages in 2021-2022, CCQOL Co-Investigators in each region worked through a common process of co-developing pilots with local input. More CCQOL project information and publications can be found at: <https://ccqol.org/>

CCQOL Urban Room Pilots, a UK-wide mapping networking

Belfast followed pilot urban rooms in Reading, Cardiff, and Edinburgh run by partners in England (University of Reading), Wales (Cardiff University) and Scotland (University of Edinburgh). Each 'Room' developed a unique focus under the CCQOL research scope:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. Reading (March 2022): | Your Place Our Place |
| 2. Cardiff (May 2022): | Community Voices (Lleisiau Cymunedol Caerdydd) |
| 3. Edinburgh (June 2022): | Our Edinburgh Neighbourhood |
| 4. Belfast (September 2022): | Your City Your Voice Belfast |

Each project in turn sought to find out what can make local voices more effective to engage and help better inform development at city and neighbourhood scales. Methods varied across the rooms in response to local contexts and people, especially aiming to work with those who have been excluded or have not had an opportunity to contribute views effectively in the past. Information gathered through all online maps and surveys will be used to visually represent and compare views and participants across the pilots to draw out, compare, and contrast lessons in a next stage of national and project-wide reports.



UK-wide connections between the urban rooms (Reading, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Belfast).

Belfast Pilot: Your City Your Voice Belfast (YCYVB)

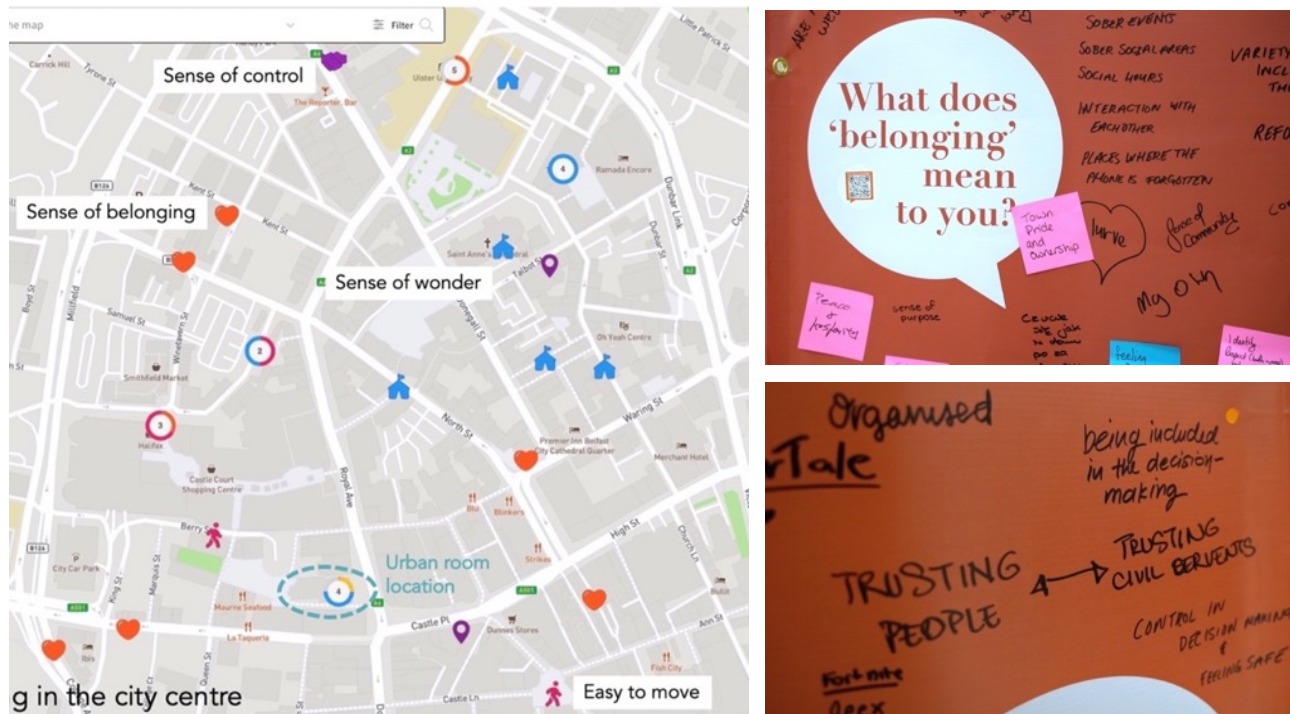
“Your City Your Voice Belfast” developed as the theme for our Belfast Pilot through several months of pre-discussion with our Local Advisory Group from local and regional government, and from charitable/community organisations. For Belfast **we focused on finding ways to open conversations about the changing city**, working with many partners including a key collaboration with Belfast City Council to broach subjects from future housing and shared public spaces to climate change, ageing, youth, and more broadly inclusive and sustainable future development.

The **2 Royal Avenue** location had **over 6,500 visitors** during September 2022, the total of people through the doors for combined BCC-2RA and YCYVB events, and public café patrons, according to our BCC partners MayWe Events Ltd. This combined effort helped us engage around **2000 people within our urban room space itself, 284 of whom were directly involved in co-hosted events with over 50 organisations in 23 days.**

Through CCQOL partners, The Quality of Life Foundation, we took as a central conversation piece and urban room exhibition the previously noted “Quality of Life Framework” themes:

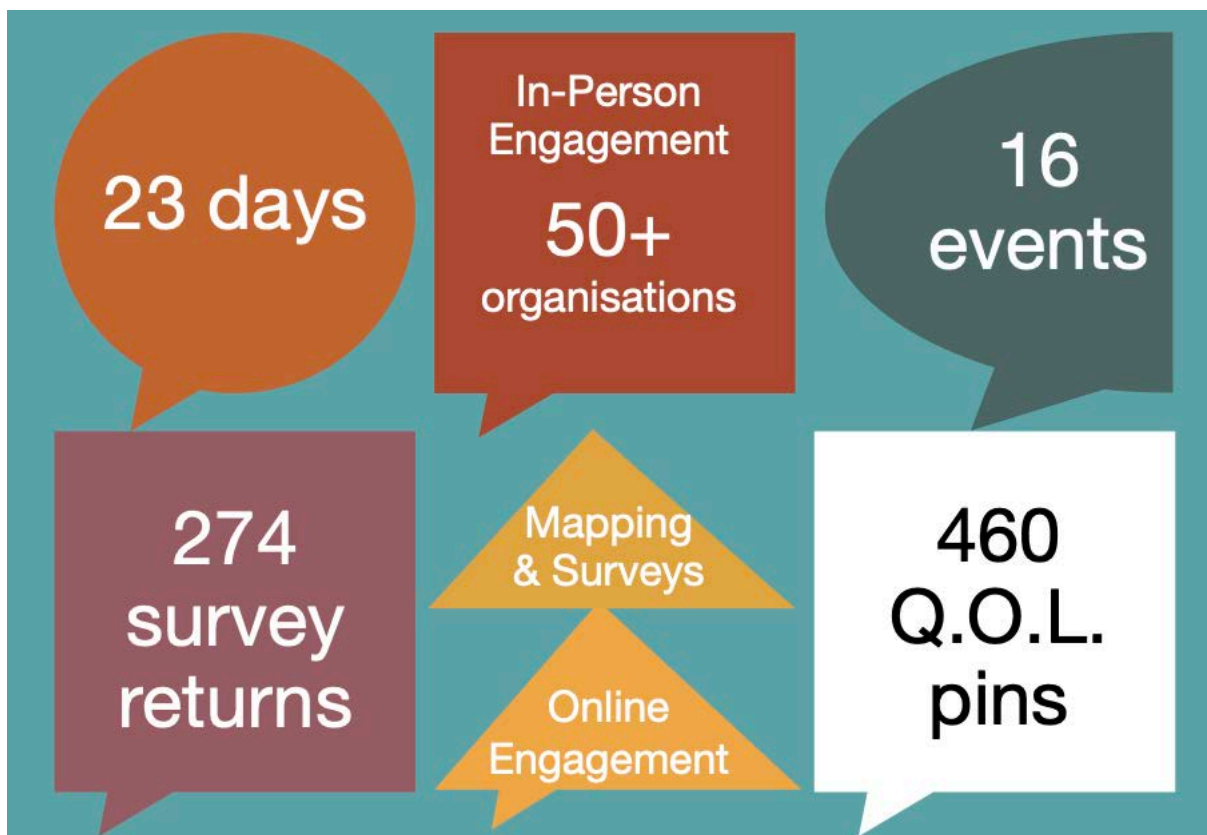
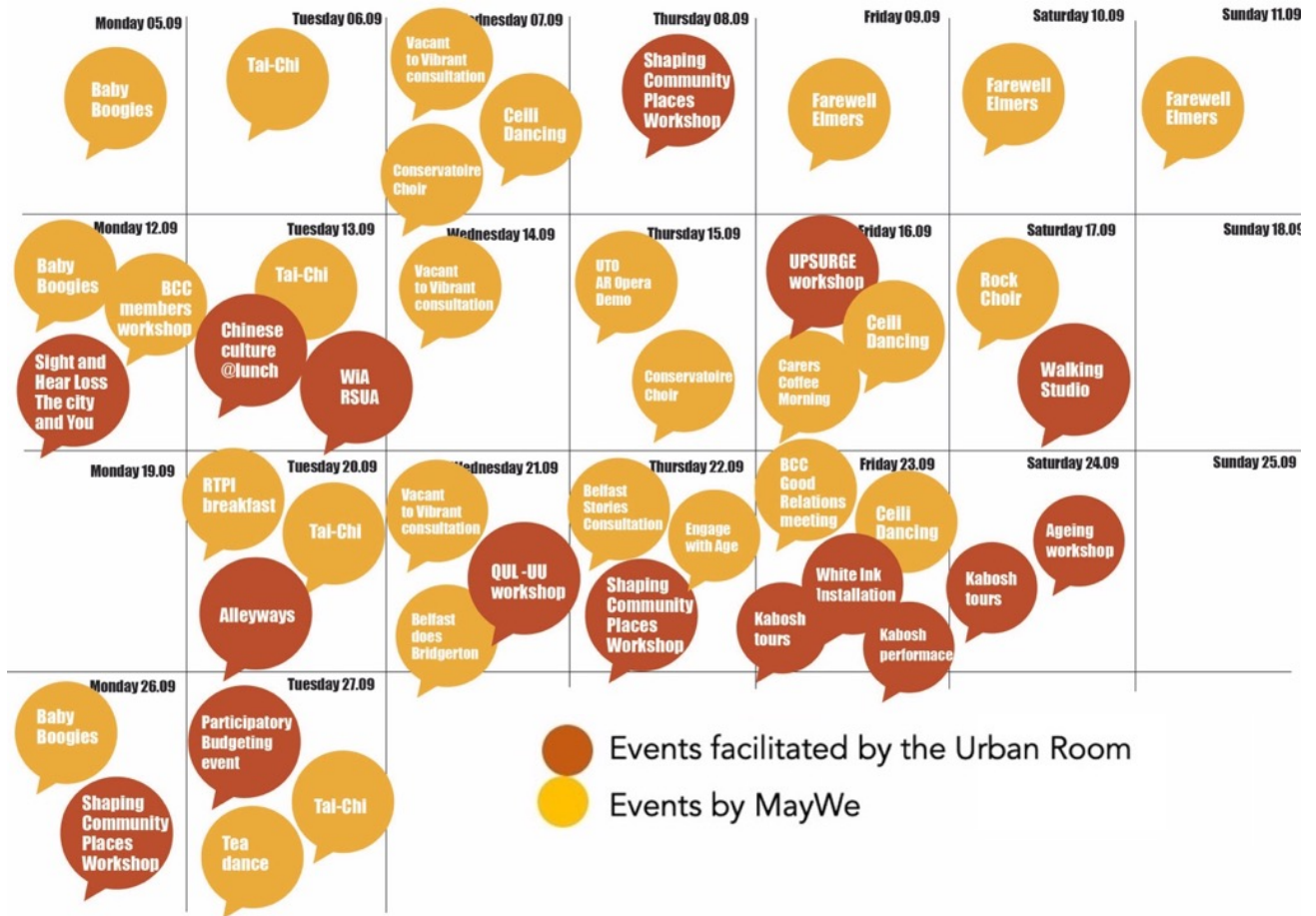
Control, Health, Nature, Wonder, Movement, and Belonging

We applied these themes to both our physical space and to our online mapping and digital platform, with over **2383 unique online visitors** (from all traffic within/without the room), who helped us create a unique series of Quality of Life maps (example below) and to gather survey data on consultation, which are presented and discussed further in this report.



1. Outtake of Belfast YCYVB participant contributions (digital/in-person) on QOLF themes, Authors.

Key Statistics: Hosted YCYVB Events & Digital Contributions



2. Top: Your City Your Voice Belfast diagram of co-hosted activities (5-27 September 2022); Bot: Results of Urban Room data collection and in-person/online mapping activity through related events Authors.

The venue: 2 Royal Avenue, A Shared Cultural Space

2 Royal Avenue is a listed building in the heart of Belfast City Centre. Designed by well-known Irish architect W.J. Barre between 1864-1869, the building was originally constructed for the the Provincial Bank of Ireland with an elaborate seven-bay façade giving it a strong identity in its central location. A key interior feature is a beautiful columned circular dome over an octagonal arcade.



8. Right: Location of 2 Royal Avenue marked on the map of Belfast city centre. Left: 2 Royal Avenue, Listed exterior and interior domed arcade. Authors and Googlemaps (annotated by authors).

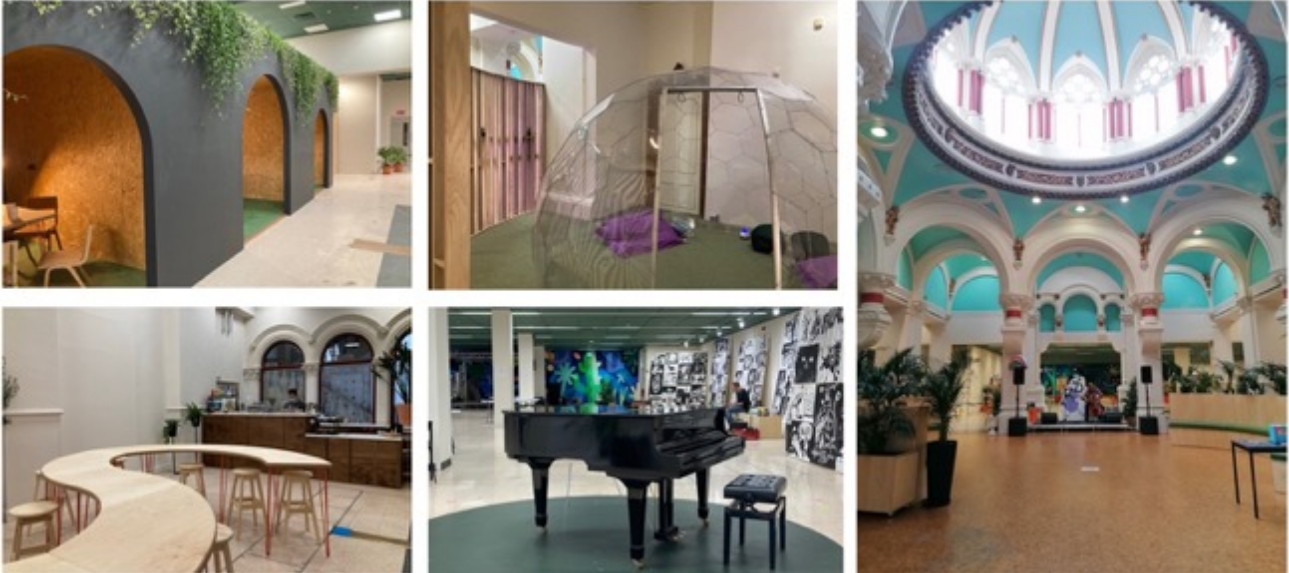
In the 1990s the building was converted into a *Tesco* store that closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Belfast City Council purchased the building and chose to repurpose its existing spaces as a public meanwhile-use cultural venue - part test-bed for a new approach to heritage and culture-led enterprises over a number of years, and part of the Council's own attempts to improve its process for engaging with people about the future development goals for the city centre.



9. 2 Royal Avenue (2RA) Repurposed Use and Functional spaces from scoping visits, Authors.

The Council also incorporated bespoke accessible areas with inclusive considerations that could be used for dedicated events or at other times were open for anyone to use; these included:

- A Sensory Dome (a quieter separated domed area just inside the front entrance with ground cushions, integrated lighting, and visual separation),
- Shared work spaces (built-in timber meeting/work spaces) and Cafe style social benches,
- Children’s games and books, and a Music Area including a Grand Piano - free to use.



10. Existing 2RA inclusive space, clockwise from top left: Meeting pods, Sensory dome, main 2RA Listed domed gallery, Piano, Cafe Seating benching, Authors.

Our Urban Room Team and Key Venue Partners

The core Urban Room team consisted of:

CCQOL-Your City Your Voice Belfast Project Lead, Dr Saul Golden, and

Belfast Community Partnership Specialist Research Associate Dr Anna Skoura.

CCQOL Research Associate Dr Ruchit Purohit, with his experience from helping to set up and run the previous three rooms at Reading, Cardiff, and Edinburgh.

Project Ambassadors: Alannah Ferry, Emmet Donaghey, Claire Thompson, and Katie Thorogood.

2RA staff and operators, MayWe Events Ltd

Management company, *MayWe Events Ltd* runs the venue and oversaw a 2-year pilot programme of events from late 2020 - after COVID-19 lockdowns - until November 2022, including music, community activities such as mother and toddler groups, open areas for arts exhibitions, free meeting spaces with wifi, a locally run café, and accessible amenities via a limited-budget fit-out.

The shared nature of the project benefited from BCC and their MayWe Ltd’s support well before our residence. MayWe Directors Lois Kennedy and Sarah-Jane Montgomery, together with their 2RA Venue Manager Eimear Burton and Events Manager Ruby O’Rourke worked with us to develop our calendar (see programme of events) and then supporting staff and security were on-hand each day (including evenings/weekends).

During the 23-day room residence at 2RA and follow-on events in October-November, the core team worked in shifts to setup different events, meet 2RA visitors for face-to-face discussions, facilitate workshops, and gather digital survey and mapping data using wifi connected tablets or assisting people to access the Commonplace-YCYVB website through their smartphones.

2RA cafe partners - Yallaa CIC

Following the example from the other urban rooms, YCYVB offered free hot drinks through a funded agreement with the operators of 2RA’s in-house café, Yallaa CIC, a social enterprise supporting Arab Culture in Northern Ireland. We partnered with Yallaa CIC’s Director Ram Akhonzada and, taking lead from the Edinburgh example, printed bespoke offer cards to entitle anyone completing one of our online surveys while in the 2RA venue to a choice of free hot/cold beverages.

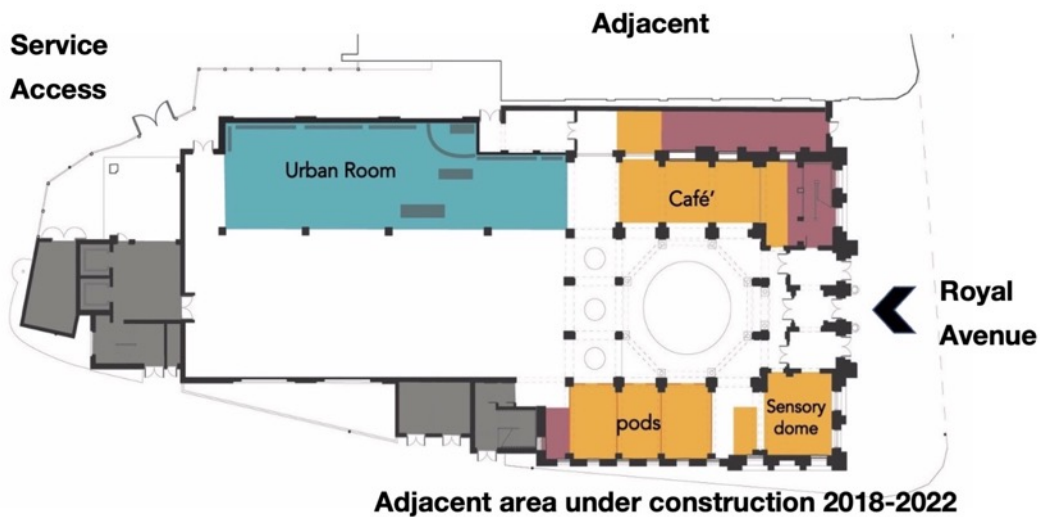
Yallaa’s team became de-facto ambassadors for YCYVB – helping us increase the data collected by directing customers to our exhibits and team for surveys and completing our mapping themselves. A small portion of the urban room budget, such enticements - as catering for community events - are often key draws for people to stay and participate, though each card and similar type offerings are always kept separate to the completion of surveys.



11. Yallaa Cafe area and existing informal bench seating, Authors.



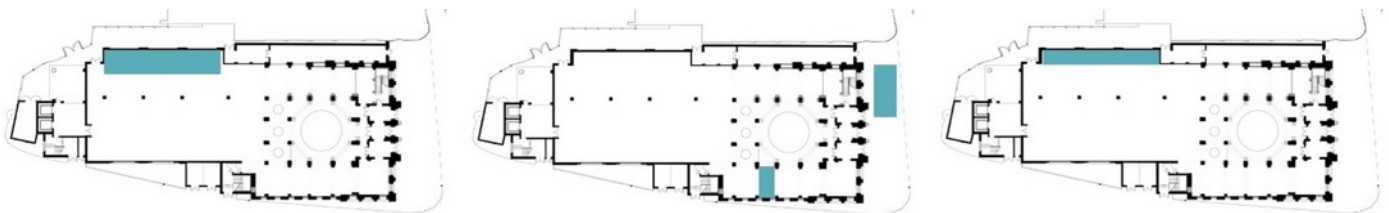
12. Posters advertising the YCYVB-Yallaa Cafe partnership incentive, Authors.



14. 2RA Ground floor plan with urban room, September 2022, Author annotated. Areas Uses shown: Yellow – 2RA dedicated social/shared spaces; Red-Grey – Office & Stores; Turquoise – YCYVB dedicated exhibition and base area (see variations below); White – flexible use activity areas.

Layout Iterations

Examples below and overleaf show different areas of the building used for meeting visitors, during different size events; when large talks, dances, exhibits were in use or when only small areas of 2RA were required by other users or for co-hosted events. Lessons were also taken from previous Room pilots to incorporate varying formal to casual seating areas.



15. Turquoise areas show YCYVB Hub (meet & greeting) variations to accommodate other 2RA events, Authors.

YCYVB Adaptation for Visually Impaired

A YCYVB adaptation followed from one of the first workshops, *Sight and Hearing Loss in the City*, with advice to create a more visually impaired friendly space in a less trafficked area with reduced brightness, using contrasting furniture and signage (see below).



16. Small changes to YCYVB/2RA addressing visitor/participant feedback on inclusive spaces, Authors.

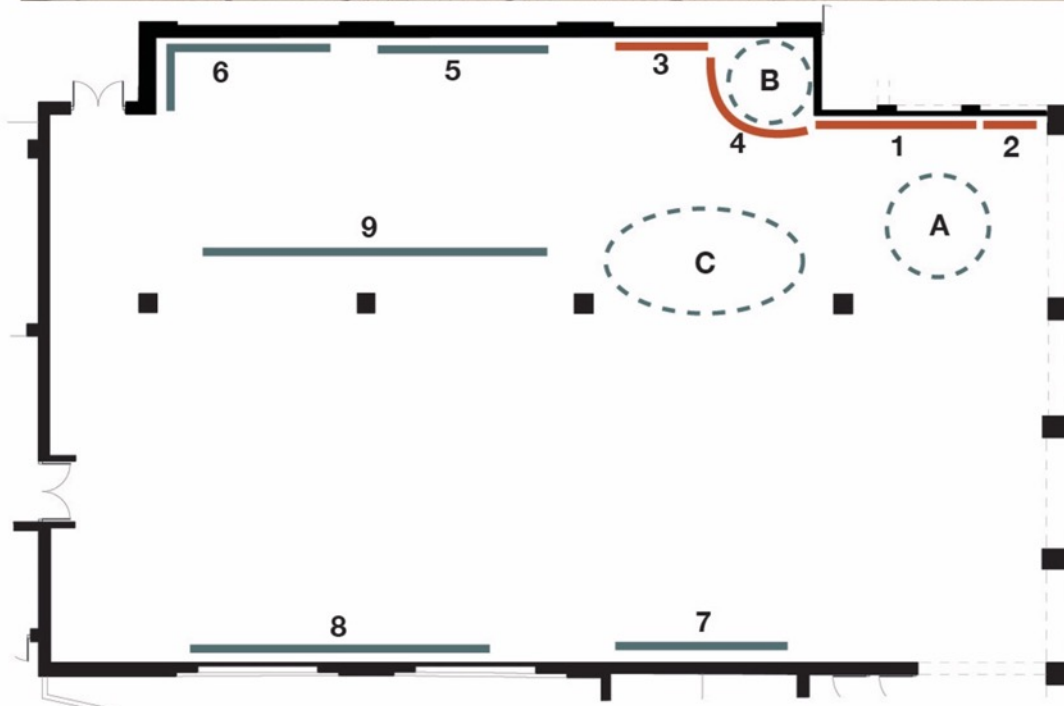


17. YCYV flexible spaces for conversations and in-person engagement & data gathering. Existing furniture and 2RA fixtures repurposed as informal to more structured uses, Authors.

Urban Room Ongoing Exhibitions

Another key aspect of activating the urban room areas was to develop a diverse exhibition that could always remain in place, complimenting other exhibits within 2RA.

We divided the available area to provide project content, information about CCQOL themes with project maps to elicit physical contributions and discussions with guests. The most prominent wall featured Quality of Life Posters and a map of Belfast, interactive elements (see overleaf), which used consistently in all workshops to elicit contributions (discussed with learning outcomes in later sections of this report). Other areas were left for exhibiting the work of local partners and artists.



Exhibition and spatial organisation of the Belfast Urban Room: 1. Quality of Life Posters; 2. Belfast map; 3. Posters with quotes; 4. Ulster University and CCQOL banners; 5. Model Citizen exhibition; 6. Streetspace exhibition; 7. Smithfield exhibition; 8. 9ft in common exhibition. A: Climania board game area; B: office for urban room staff; C: sitting area for helping with surveys

18. Top – visitor contributions to the Quality of Life Themed YCYB display (1 on the bottom plan), Authors.

Guest exhibitions

Our Room hosted four exhibitions linked with the research subject, ethos and themes about Belfast city and community engagement in improving overall quality of life.

- Architect John Donnelly, through his *Modelcitizen* exhibition, displayed intricate plaster models of Belfast's architecture. (<https://modelcitizen.ie/>)
- Dr Agustina Martire, through her Queen's University MArch *Street Space* studio (www.streetspaceresearch.com/), shared work examining the role of diverse streets in improving cities as shared spaces.
- *9ft in common* (<https://9ftincommon.com/>), a group mapping and analysing Belfast alleyways presented projects and artwork about these undervalued areas of the city, and
- Co-investigator Dr Saul Golden, featured Ulster University MArch student analysis of city centre empty spaces surrounding 2RA venue and areas close to Ulster University.



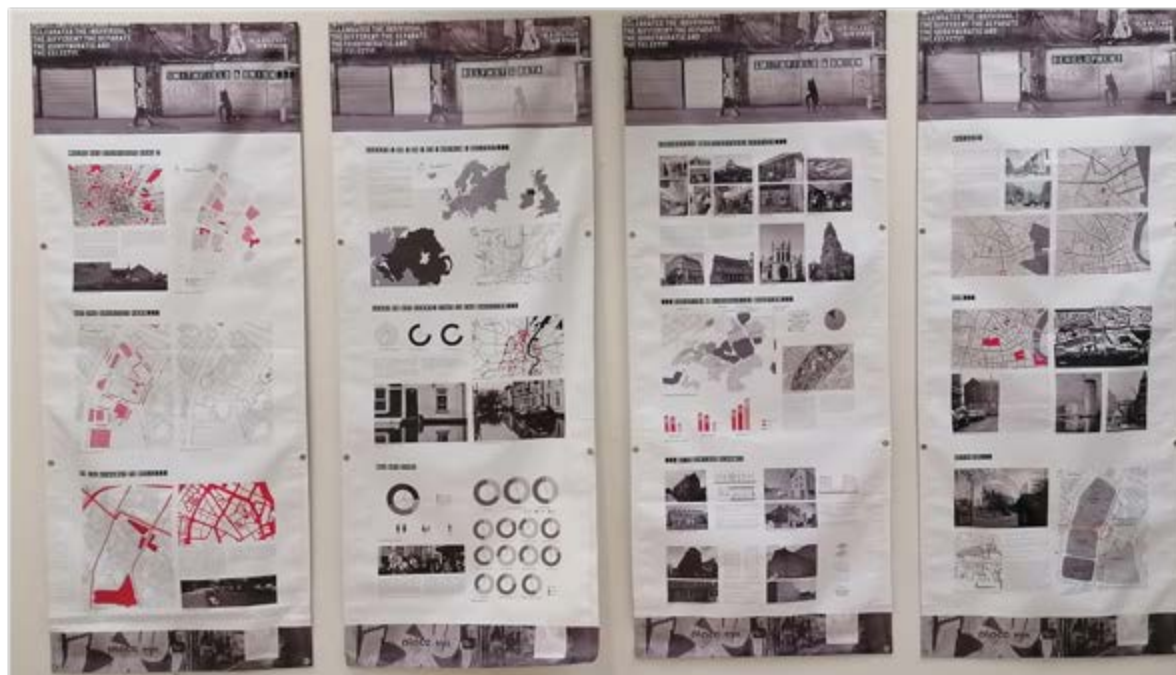
John Donnelly



Dr Agustina Martire



9ft in common



Ulster University MArch Living City-City Living Studio Exhibit, Dr Saul Golden

3. YCYVB Program: Events & Mapping

The urban room programme built up slowly at first, through the previously described networking processes and coordination with our Local Advisors, Belfast City Council, and MayWe Events Ltd. From our initial list of potential contacts, which expanded through additional recommendations and word of mouth during late Spring 2022, we contacted over 98 groups including face-to-face visits across Belfast. From this effort, we were fortunate to welcome over 50 local, national, and some international groups and organisations to join a Project Delivery Group.



The Project Delivery group took over from the more strategic Local Advisory Group at this stage, Summer 2022 to help further shape the room layout and the type of events we could host in the 2RA space. Our final calendar organization included all but one activity as public events. By late August we established the following calendar of events, 16 of which were directly hosted by CCQOL and Your City Your Voice Belfast, with other activities not shown (on exhibition days) booked through the Belfast City Council-MayWe Events cultural programme for 2RA.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

	TUESDAY 06.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30	WEDNESDAY 07.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30	THURSDAY 08.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30 ⚙️ Shaping Community Places Workshop 11.00-13.00	FRIDAY 09.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30	
MONDAY 12.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30 🗨️ Sight and Hear Loss: the City and You 12.00-14.00	TUESDAY 13.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30 ☆ Chinese Culture @Lunch 12.00-14.00 ★ Women in Architecture discussion (RSUA event) 18.00-20.00	WEDNESDAY 14.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30	THURSDAY 15.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30	FRIDAY 16.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30 👤 Upsurge Workshop 9.00-13.00	SATURDAY 17.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 10.00-14.00 ★ The Walking Studio: the Art of Discovery 11.00-13.00
MONDAY 19.09 closed	TUESDAY 20.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30 ☆ Deconstructing the Belfast Alley Map 16.00-17.00	WEDNESDAY 21.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30 ⚙️ Quality of Life - Ulster University Workshop 14.30-16.30	THURSDAY 22.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30 ⚙️ Shaping Community Places Workshop 14.00-16.00	FRIDAY 23.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30 ☆ Kultural Arts Friday with Kabosh Theatre Co and White Ink Architects 17.30-19.30	SATURDAY 24.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 10.00-14.00 ⚙️ Reimagining Ageing in the City 10.30-12.30
MONDAY 26.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30 ⚙️ Shaping Community Places Workshop 11.00-13.00	TUESDAY 27.09 ☆ Urban Room Exhibition 9.30-16.30 ★ Quality PB! Launch of the Participatory Budgeting Charter 10.00-12.00				

🗨️ Meet an organisation ⚙️ workshop ☆ drop in event
 👤 Private booking ★ event (free, booking required)







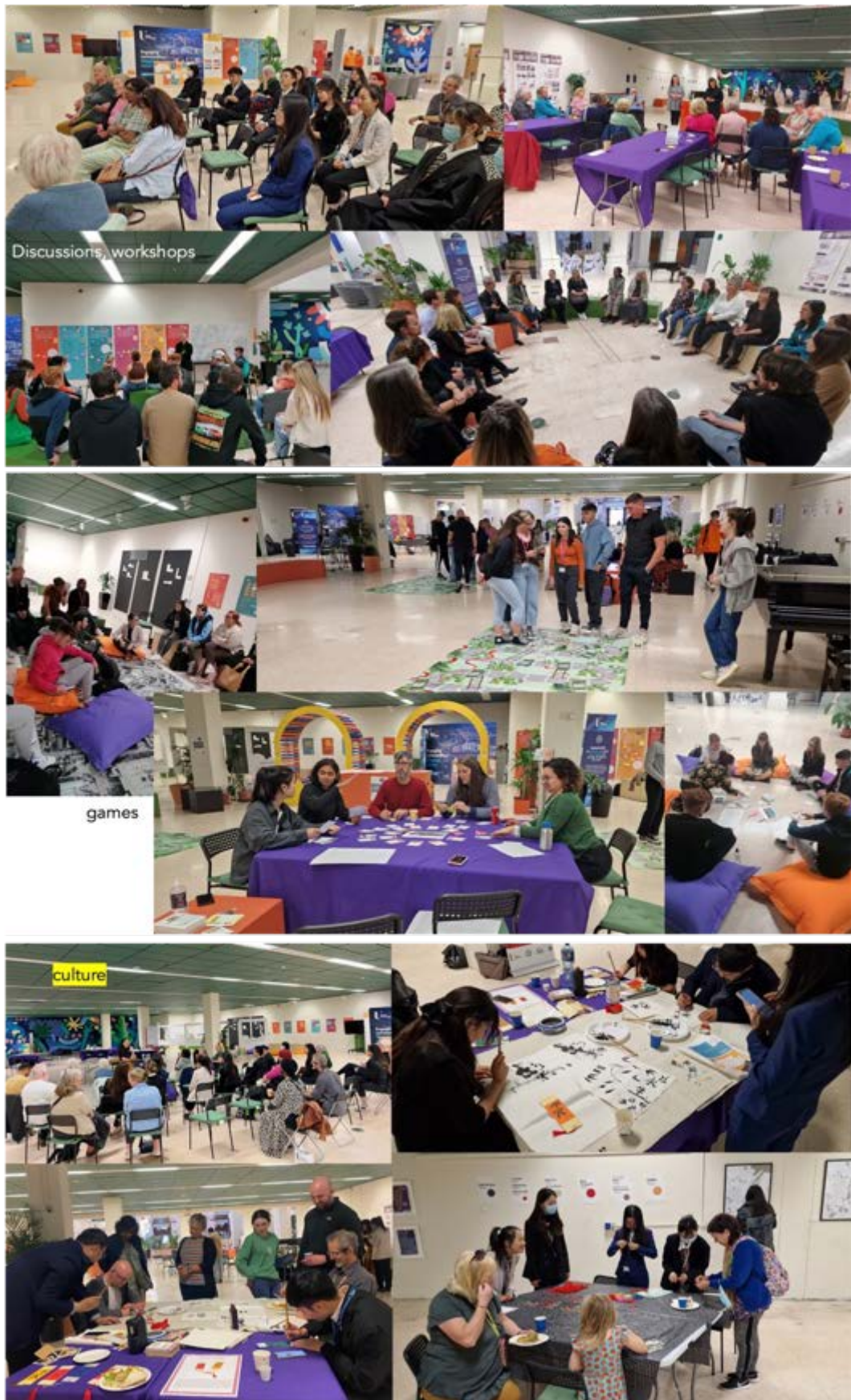







22. Your City Your Voice Belfast, CCQOL Events Calendar 5-27 September 2022, Authors

We collaborated with MayWe Events on programme and the space we would occupy on different days. Images below show the range of activities affecting the internal 2RA layout. An overview of each event hosted by CCQOL gathered under shared themes is set out in the next section.



23. Overview of YCYVB event types and different uses of 2RA spaces: Workshops, Learning Games, Culture & Arts-based activities. Authors.

Events: Themed overview with reflections on project activities

The next section focuses on YCYVB events, grouped by themes vs by calendar order, including event publicity and a breakdown of the main hosts, and numbers of participants, with reflections on the activities connected to later report lessons/sections. (All image by Authors, with permissions)

Each event, where possible, began with a starter activity to allow YCYVB researchers to present about the CCQOL project and introducing guests to our “Quality-of-Life Wall”, to discuss the six QOLF themes and invite written contributions that we have gathered and continue to analyse for this report and contributing to the CCQOL Inclusion Toolkit (see Appendix A- Publications). Sessions and co-hosting agreements included dedicated time to ask participants to complete the digital YCYVB-CCQOL website mapping and consultation surveys via the Commonplace platform.



24. Co-hosted activities incorporating discussions and contributions to the YCYVB-QOLF wall, Authors.

Quality of Life Foundation Workshop

Urban Universities as Catalysts for Quality of Life: A Belfast Perspective (21.09)



Each Urban Room held an event focused on our Project Partner’s *The Quality of Life Foundation* Framework. In Belfast, accompanying our QOLF *Meaning Maps*, we organised a joint ½-day workshop focused on the role/responsibility of Ulster University – with a new £250million pound Belfast campus extension opened in September 2022 – to help improve quality of life in the city centre, surrounding neighbourhoods, and beyond.

QOLF Director Matthew Morgan and Ulster Professor of Politics and Director of Community Engagement, Duncan Morrow, joined the Belfast CCQOL Lead Saul Golden to facilitate the event with guests from government, business, charitable, and local community organisations including representatives from the Police Service Northern Ireland. From presentations and a discussion focused on the terms and definitions associated with quality of life framework and the University’s campus-city ambitions, the workshop moved to a round-robin-type format focused on each QOLF theme in sequence – asking participants to contribute thoughts/ideas on three areas: 1. Their Hopes for the future city with Ulster’s enhanced presence; 2. Their Fears for the same scenario; and 3. Their proposed actions and/or solutions for the University to consider (policy, investment, management, outreach, physical interventions, and so-forth).



25. Top-left, QOLF Director M.Morgan; Top-right, Prof. Duncan Morrow, Ulster University; Bottom left-right: QOLF discussion and Ulster University focused round-table workshop, Authors.

Education, Professions, and Improving Planning Processes:

Shaping Community Places – Planning Workshops and Games (08.09; 22.09; 26.09)



Three days of workshops with the public, YCYVB Ambassadors, first-year architecture students from Ulster University, and MArch students from Queen’s University Belfast and first-year planning students from Ulster. Facilitated by not-for-profit social enterprise *Community Places* - set up in 1984 as *Community Technical Aid* - specialising in providing public-facing support with planning advice, engagement, participatory budgeting. For YCYVB, Community Places brought two specially designed games for a series of interactive workshops:

- *Snakes and Ladders for Planning*: Showing participants the complex scenarios of NI planning decisions and statutory processes including the ‘ups’ and ‘downs’ of navigating the system.
- *My Places* card game: Helps participants open up conversations about what “place” means to them and in describing the qualities of local places and neighbourhoods.



Royal Town Planning Institute President’s Visit: RTPI Northern Ireland (20.09)



RTPI President Timothy Crawshaw visited YCYVB ahead of the RTPI NI Planning Conference in Belfast (Planning for Climate Outcomes) on 21.09.2022. Our team presented the CCQOL project and hosted a talk with Ulster and Queen's University Planning students about consultation and the future of planning in uncertain times. An opportunity for informal discussions including how planning professionals can work better with local people to deliver places that are environmentally, socio-economically, and culturally sustainable.



Quality PB! Launch of the Participatory Budgeting Charter (27.09)



Participatory Budgeting

Community Places



Community Places hosted this event to launch a Charter to support quality Participatory Budgeting, a democratic process that involves local people having a direct say on the spending and priorities of part of a public budget. The event featured the Charter Network, people and communities with experience across Northern Ireland, promoting PB as a means to go “beyond informing or consulting with communities”, to empower them to chart their own course. One of the larger events during the Room, audience/speaker format with supporting 2RA/MayWe coordination.



Women in Architecture discussion (14.09)



Women in Architecture

Royal Society of Ulster Architects

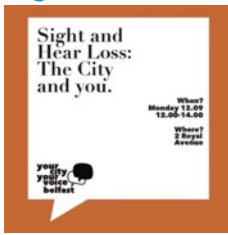


A YCYVB and 2RA evening event, co-sponsored by the Royal Society of Ulster Architects. The topic of the evening was “Urban rooms and the need for inclusive civic spaces for engagement”, facilitated by the RSUA’s Women in Architecture Group with discussion led by CCQOL’s own Principal Investigator, Professor Flora Samuel. This event was a joined-up opportunity to engage with other researchers from our partner institutions, and to demonstrate the value of the urban room and consultation research with the local architecture professional institution, linking local discussions with national debates.



Accessibility and Diversity

Sight and Hear Loss: The City and you (12.09)



Co-organised with RNIB, Guide Dogs NI, DeafBlind, AngelEyes, Sense Charity and Forsight, we were joined in both a round-table discussion and had opportunities with a ‘market-place’ type set up for each organisation to share their own work with us and visitors to 2RA. Round format discussions focused on ways in which Belfast’s built environment can become more inclusive and improve the quality of life for people with sensory disabilities in the city and in public spaces. The quality-of-life themes were used to structure the discussion, sharing experiences as a way to raise awareness of their needs and to showcase their services with lessons in assistive technology for public transport and communication aids for improving engagement generally.



Reimagining Ageing in the City (24.09)



This event was an opportunity to extend the CCQOL themes to the questions of What is an Age-Friendly City and How does the city’s built environment impact the quality of life of older people? The interactive workshop, supported by BCC’s Age Friendly Belfast, facilitated by architecture practice *Studio idir* (www.studioidir.com/) as part of *Self-Organised Architecture’s Reimagining Elderhood* project (funded by the Irish Arts Council), worked with invited older persons to put ideas together about rethinking the city and the home, “to make the city better for ageing (and therefore better for everyone)”.



Local activism - cultural and environmental sustainability

Deconstructing the Belfast Alley Map (20.09)

Deconstructing the Belfast Alley Map

9ft in common | studio idir | startling start | Belfast City Council | Social Farms and Gardens | Social Farms and Gardens

A conversational event about mapping Belfast’s alleyways and the practice of recording and communicating through mapping. A range of speakers reflected on a presented Alley Map of Belfast as community action, information dissemination, form of resistance, and as art. The event accompanied the 9ft in Common exhibition that formed part of the YCYVB urban room design, including the Belfast Alley Map and a special commission of a limited-edition cyanotype and screen-prints, inspired by the Belfast Alley Map, by artist Jonathan Brennan with associated prints, posters and postcards as a fundraising aspect of the event.



Upsurge: Belfast City Council & Queen’s University Belfast (16.09)

UPSURGE workshop

Belfast City Council | Queen's University | Open Ormeau

The *Upsurge* event was the third in a series of co-design workshops on nature-based solutions for a site in south Belfast, part of a joint EU Horizon 2020 project by Belfast City Council and Queen’s University Belfast. The YCYVB hosted activities focused on bringing together a range of interested parties and people to get their feedback on proposals and to think about how the selected site might operate. The set up allowed for both a formal presentation and then more informal discussion time with food and drink brought in to encourage longer conversations and for those who may have travelled some distance from outside the city centre to take part.



Culture and Arts-focused Activities

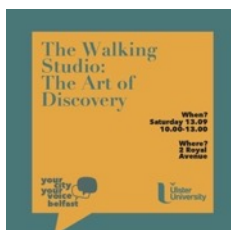
Confucius Institute at Ulster University, Cross-community Chinese Culture Event



The Confucius Institute at Ulster University facilitated this lively lunch event introducing Mandarin Language and Chinese Culture with traditional music performances followed by Chinese painting, knot making and tea tasting. We jointly developed the event with the Confucius Institute, established in 2011 to help develop a greater understanding of Chinese culture through a programme of visiting scholars from China who run workshops in primary and secondary schools across Northern Ireland. For most visitors, this was a first introduction to Chinese culture. Confucius guests also contributed their perspective on Belfast and Quality of Life to our mapping and surveys.



The Walking Studio: The Art of Discovery (13.09)



Ulster University Art Psychotherapy teaching staff and students led this event; one of a few activities linked to the YCYVB Urban Room but taking place outside the 2RA venue. Featuring a guided walk for participants of all ages to “discover what we all take for granted – the everyday thoroughfares and artistry of Belfast’s public realm,” the event took on board the Quality of Life Themes, starting participants off at the Urban Room for an introduction before exiting 2RA to find places in Belfast to develop their own in-situ responses and conversations. This was the first collaboration between the research team and Art Psychotherapy tutors.



Poetry, Place and Quality of Life: Nandi Jola reading, Quality of Life Workshop, 22.09



South African born poet, storyteller, and playwright Nandi Jola has been living in Northern Ireland and working in many creative guises for over 20 years. She holds an MA in Poetry from Queen's University, 2022. She was a Smock Alley Theatre Rachel Baptiste 2022 Programme Recipient and her one-woman play 'The Journey' opened the International Literature Festival Dublin, 2020. In 2021 she represented Northern Ireland at the Transposie Poetry Festival and was a creative writing facilitator for Ulster University Books Beyond Boundaries. As an invited contributor to both our Urban Room exhibits and our Quality of Life-UU workshop on 22.09, Nandi read her poem "Arrivals" published in 2022, from her book *Home is Neither Here Nor There*, Doire Press.

Arrivals, below, captures Nandi's connections in and between Northern Ireland and South Africa

We came in our rags
with smiles and full of hope
unpacked into our matchbox homes
in places called Springfarm
with pictures of our exotic places and things fixed on the
walls
then, we ventured out to reality
through interfaces we crossed
called foreigners
sometimes welcomed
not mentioning our religion
our gods
we danced
we sang
in our gay clothes
selling our culture
waking the bones of this troubled city.

arrivals

Nandi's reading played a key role in our QOLF discussion on perceptions of language, the specificity of language and its varied nuances of meaning in different contexts.

The accompanying debate, and contributions to our QOLF Meaning Map are part of the Urban Room and CCQOL-YCYVB aims to widen understandings about aspects of our environments that might be taken for granted and can be given new perspectives from those outside traditional voices.

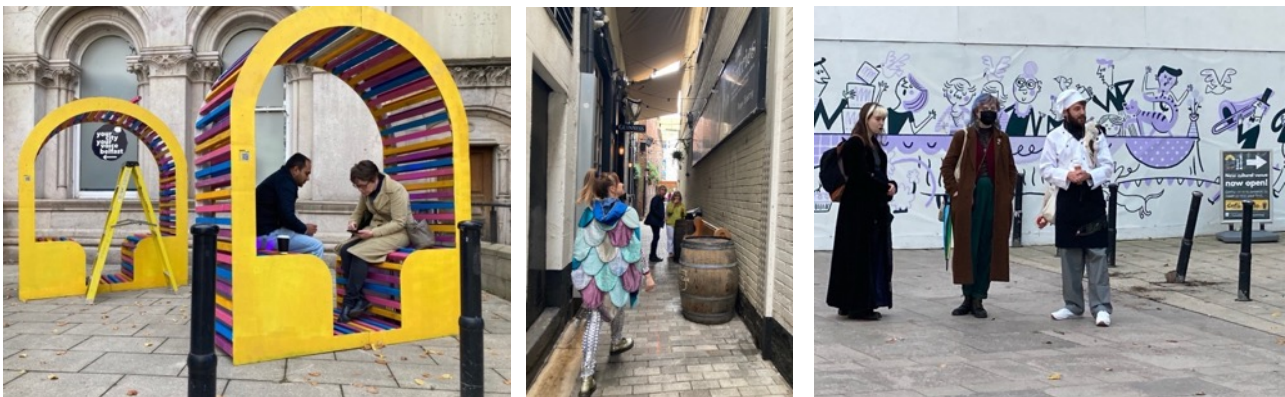
<https://www.doirepress.com/writers/nandi-jola>
(Images, top: Nandi Jola, Bot: Authors, with permission)



Kultural Arts Friday: Arts & Architecture “InKstallation” and Kabosh Theatre, 23-24.09



For our final weekend we curated an arts-based installation and performative event in and around 2RA to test how such approaches might impact on engagement, building on the spirit of the QOL Themes, and celebrating the 2RA building heritage and the city’s resilience after COVID-19. We partnered with a local architecture practice *White Ink Architects*, and with arts organisation Kabosh Theatre Company, known for public performances “giving voice to site, space, and people.”



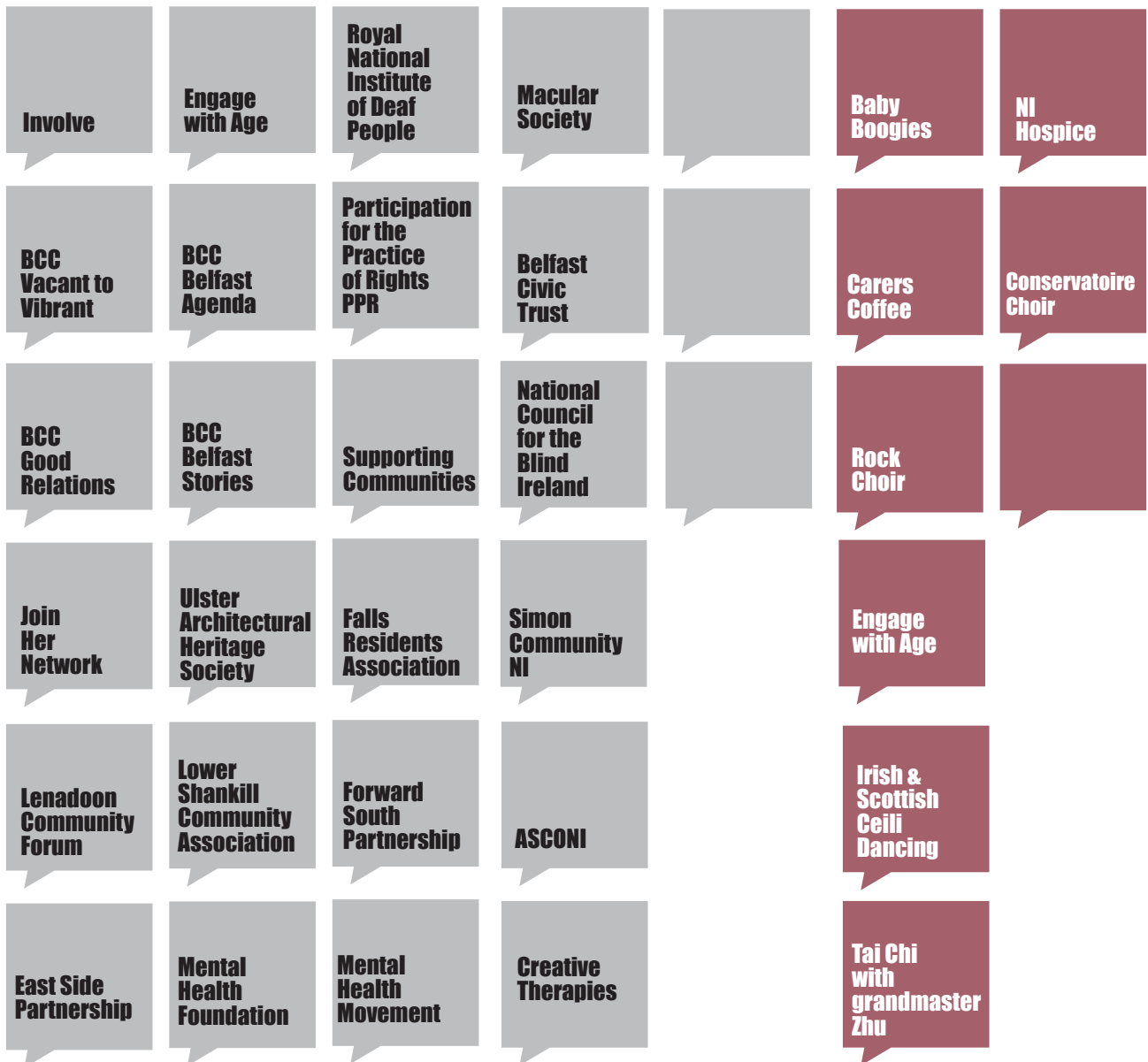
We gave White Ink a brief, which they used with Placement and recent graduate employees as a live project, to design a seating installation for outside 2RA; they conceived of and then built what an “InKstallation” – what we called a *Conversation Station* (above, left) – colourful, mobile enclosures designed as two rainbow arches with closely spaced seats facing each other; BCC and MayWe, provided logistical and equipment support for setting up and integrating lighting fixtures.

With Kabosh, we agreed on two existing performances, reformatted for our venue, each with a single actor: *Belfast Entries*, an interactive tour of Belfast with Lagan River deity “Nuala” leading participants through narrow historic ‘alleys’ - storytelling with social, and contemporary commentary (above, mid: written by Charis McRoberts; performed by Debra Hill); and *Belfast Bred*, which features a fictional chef from the Titanic, defrosted from “that Iceberg” after 110 years to engage people in the street with historical stories (above, right, written by Seth Linder, performed by Christopher Grant). For YCYVB, tour participants met Nuala at 2RA to complete our digital surveys, while “Chef Barney” helped direct people on the street into 2RA (staying in historical character).

Unexpected outcomes of this weekend of activities, being afforded the opportunity through our partnerships to work outside of traditional consultation frameworks included increased engagement with younger visitors to 2RA. Seating, as an external and later internal physical installation had an immediate impact - drawing people to sit and linger in what were usually empty spaces. The performative aspect was most surprising, helping us connect with younger visitors by introducing what the noted urbanist William H. Whyte described as ‘triangulation’ or the third element within

Additional Engagement through BCC and MayWe Ltd.

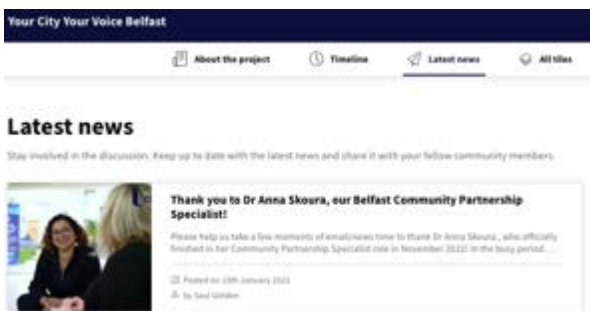
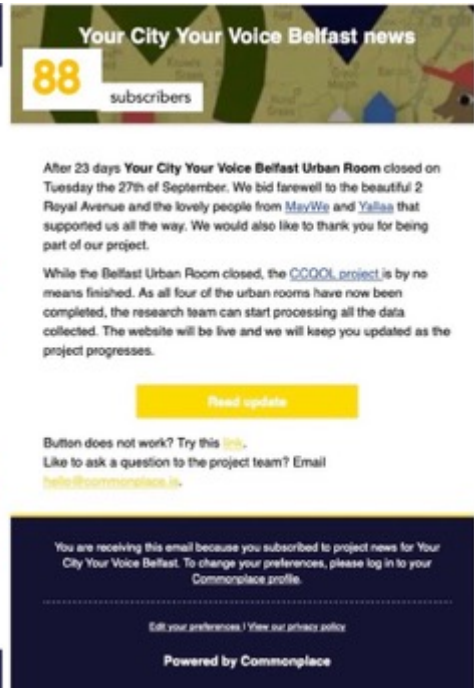
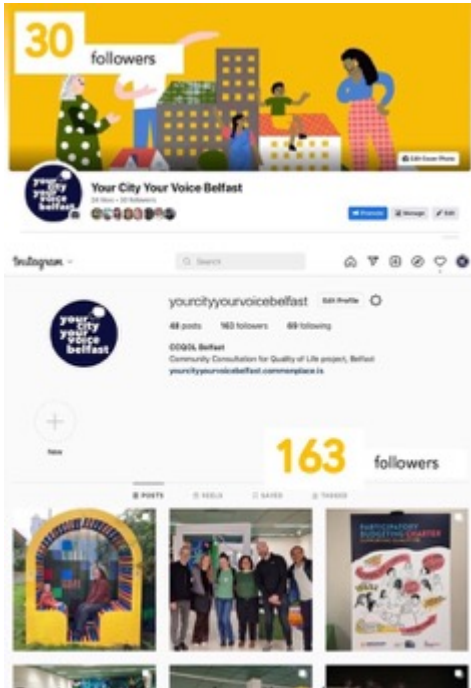
We additionally thank the following organisations for help in developing our programme through their role and participation in events hosted by Belfast City Council & MayWe Ltd.



Our Communication: Continuously Closing the Loop



Closing the loop is a vital part of improving how consultation evolves toward more effective, and longer-term engagement, helping avoid issues raised with consultation fatigue and repeatedly contributing to policy and project developments without further information. As part of our approach, led by Dr Anna Skoura as Community Engagement Specialist, supported by National Research Associate Ruchit Purohit and our Ulster University Project Ambassadors, we used a variety of online means to keep both the public and those who signed up with email permission informed of progress and project outcomes.



In addition to social media and email communication, we documented parts of the 2RA Urban Room experience through film and interview excerpts; our first, issued in January 2023, is available to view through our YCYVB-CCQOL website and VIMEO: link: <https://vimeo.com/786597725>

Post-room Interviews: Feedback from Co-Hosts

Yan Liu, Director of the Confucius Institute at Ulster University

Experience with the Urban Room:

I think this is such a wonderful and successful program. And it's also lovely to get some support from Belfast City Council to use a beautiful venue. And I think your program is really rich, it covered diversity and involved with all the community. The program demonstrated not only the Chinese culture, Indian culture, but also other cultures

I really appreciate [you took] time to meet us the day before our event. It's always nice to see how we are going to set up and what the venue looks like and also to go through the program. [...] It's not just a display the culture, but it's engaging with the local community and to get their voice on it, and to do the improvements with different individual groups.

That's another thing which I think is really, really nice and helpful because when you have lots of people coming in, you know, they may just come and go. But people like to spend their time with you and talk to share their ideas, share their experience, and also give them opportunity to speak out, and to take their voice and to value their voice. I think that's something - the engagements, the communication from both sides. You know I think it is also something's really passionate for us as well.

Opportunities arising for your organisation from taking part in the urban room:

Normally we work closely with the primary and post primary schools in Northern Ireland, but through your project, we actually worked with wider community. In such a venue, in such a public location, you never know who will be coming in, who will show up; it's also a very unique opportunity for our Confucius Institute. We are so proud to be part of the program and we are so, so, happy there's a way, there's a platform for us to engage with the general public.

Experience and views on consultation from the Urban Room:

I see the consultation part as adding to what we normally do, you know the presentations about the culture. And although I've been here for quite a bit long, there's still so many, for example, places I never been to visit and parts of the culture I am not familiar with. So I think all those consultations and the work you do is just kind of like that. It's really added value to the whole program. I think it's a wonderful program for the governments and also for the people who work in that industry of how they can improve those kinds of services.

Views on a permanent Urban Room:

I think if we have somewhere permanent that will be wonderful. It's not just the Chinese community, but that another community will have a space, you know, to share our wonderful different culture and promote diversity in in Belfast. That would be wonderful. If we could have some permanent place to do those things and then we would love to be involved and also we actually celebrate all different cultures. So, it's not just the way to share our culture, but we also learning another culture. I think there's a wonderful thing to bring people together if we do have a place we can use and we can share events for those who live in this city.

Value and lessons from the Urban Room:

I think your program is a very successful program. We felt the involvement in the project from the beginning. And I think I can see you all spend a huge amount of time and work and effort to put things together during the program. There were lots of challenges. You know, the death of the Queen [Elizabeth II]. That's another thing I have to say. Your team is a flexible enough, to adjust. The program of the day had to adjusted and that was a challenge. I think that's something you know, I'm really impressed, you know, for the flexibility of your team and how you manage the change. And after the program you used the questionnaire, the surveys to gather everybody's feedback.

Experience with the Urban Room:

We had the, the really great opportunity to work with you to deliver some of our kind of more innovative engagement tools and techniques. And it was really great to you know to be able to use those with the students and others, you know, members of the public and to be able to share and highlight those as well, but also in really fantastic space. I really liked the way that you use and present the information in terms of the visuals and the maps and then the thematic areas,, capturing that kind of spatial analysis of what people thought. The urban room was a really, really engaging, great space, great team of people welcoming the public attending and seeing the information and engaging with the different content.

Opportunities arising for your organisation from taking part in the urban room:

It was really beneficial for Community places in terms of our staff team having developed further skills on facilitation and engagement and chatting to people and getting that feedback. And I think it was really useful that we had some of the students who had that planning and architecture background, and then with the mix with some of the other participants like the community groups and representatives which may be given more real life view of how communities can actually experience some of the quite difficult complexities of navigating the planning system. It wasn't just the tools but kind of the conversations that those tools facilitated. So I think that's a great relationship in terms of having opportunities potentially in the future and also raising the visibility of our organisation as well.

Experience and views on consultation from the Urban Room:

The fact that it was a city centre location, would have reaffirmed some of the kind of quality approaches that we would put in place toward public conversations.. So going to places that are accessible and having a safe and warm environment, but also then displaying the information in a creative, colourful and way and I always think like having a map, people really like maps, you know, they're drawn towards them. They're like where are we on this? Where do I live, where's my normal area? And so I think those kind of techniques and having that type of those kind of visuals are really, really important. But equally and having a really great team.

Views on a permanent Urban Room:

That would be a really great idea, different things. It's, I guess it would be who, who would be the kind of owner or the home of that and is that the Council or a partnership of people. And like having a one point where people know that they could drop in there and find out what's happening, what's going on in the city, how they can have a say. And maybe even it's more about the bigger more strategic issues like a whole vision for the city and you know building into that bigger picture of of how they won't places to be rather than specific small themes. It's maybe more the role in the kind of that visionary and more strategic thoughts on.

Value and lessons from the Urban Room:

Having people there to engage and chat to people, especially in that setting where it wasn't necessarily people who were interested in planning. To build that kind of Community ownership, you need to have that kind of interactiveness. you need to have the workshops...that programme of events and activity, and associate it with the urban room to build trust with communities and then to be able to build those relationships. If they are only viewed as information points, with visuals, it's just not enough.

Experience with the Urban Room:

The setting was great, because people love going to the venue, 2 Royal Avenue. You and the facilitators really put everybody at ease, and I think everybody spoke. Everybody had the opportunity to speak, and everybody did speak up, and I think I suppose it was quite a variety of people there from different backgrounds, different types of living. Quite a few people with you know relatively big houses, people in sheltered accommodation, people in rented accommodation. So I think that was a good to get a good variety of people from across the city. There were a mix of people who wanted to stay in their own homes and then there was a few of the people who had downsized and the benefits of those. And I suppose it's just how the house needs to be adaptable. I think access to services is a big, big deal, like you know to shops and bus stops.

Opportunities arising for your organisation from taking part in the urban room:

And well, yeah, well we would sort of do consultations like that before. Obviously the last couple of years have done a number on ones more like this, more like on Zoom and things like that. But yeah, I think that sort of face to face and small group consultation is really where you do get the best out of it and people you know one person says something and then it sparks off something else and other things and it was very interesting as well.

Experience and views on consultation from the Urban Room:

Towards the end [someone] came in on her accessibility scooter. That sparked a whole conversation that we haven't had before...something that could have been totally missed if she hadn't, if she hadn't come in. She came on the back of [the previous day's accessibility and the city workshop], that's why she came and she's come to other events too, so that's always great.

Views on a permanent Urban Room:

Well, yes, absolutely. Something that we've been looking at, to you in a similar way, for looking for older people's connection hubs. We've been calling them, and we're looking at having something like a couple of mornings a week in. The space of 2RA is lovely, does lend itself to be in something you know, cause it wouldn't necessarily be something that you would be using all day everyday all year and the beauty of two Royal Avenue. So I think there will always be those wee spaces...And I suppose ideally in the long term you can see things like a couple of monitors there that would connect you to the like of all our Belfast City Council consultation hubs and then maybe to the universities and some sort of portal that could connect to things like that would be sort of on the longer term. And then it's a space that people would, you know, sort of think "I haven't been in there in a month we'll go in and see what's happening now".

Value and lessons from the Urban Room:

I love anything physical so always good that things like that model that you had...and those type of things. I suppose, just a different ways of tackling things ; like the thing we start off saying, "Tell me what you love about your home and what you know?" You know, I think that the good thing is that analogy of the sandwich that you're good, bad, and then good. You know that it was sort of, even though people did discuss things it was a sort of quite upbeat sort of feeling, like, you know, they might have said something that might actually be used.

Appendix 1: Post-Urban Room Impact events

Beyond our residency, we strived to extend YCYVB Urban Room themes, including the Quality of Life Framework as a key interactive tool, through teaching and research activities within Ulster University, and through community workshops and public events. Having developed our network, these activities help us keep connected and apply our learning and mapping to wider debates about the future of Belfast and on improving quality of life and inclusion in cities more generally.

UU-QOL-Campus Forum Workshop, October 2022

Following our joint Urban Room workshop with Ulster University and Quality of Life Foundation, which featured invited members of local government, PSNI, and city centre statutory agencies, this follow-on activity was hosted with Professor Duncan Morrow and invited members of Ulster's Campus Community Regeneration Forum, a collective of voluntary groups and individuals from neighbouring areas around, and most impacted by, the new Ulster University Belfast campus. Participants discussed and added to our QOLF meaning maps, contributed to discussions on what opportunities the relocation of the University might bring to improve quality of life and support wider inclusive growth in the city, and completed the CCQOL online survey/mapping.



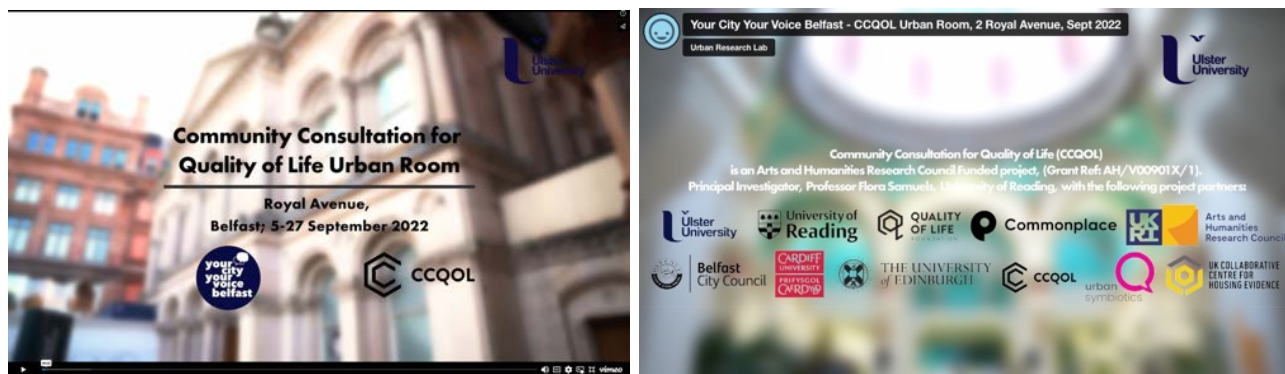
ESRC Festival and Walking Studio – November 2022

Inspired by our Urban Room Walking Studio collaboration this activity was organized by Belfast School of Art Lecturer in Art Psychotherapy, Dr Pamela Whittaker and CCQOL Belfast Lead Dr Golden as part of the 2022 Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Festival of Social Sciences in Northern Ireland. Participants were introduced to CCQOL and the Quality of Life Foundation Framework, and then asked to “imagine Belfast as a canvas for creative living” and develop their own social value mapping and poetry about the real streets of Belfast.



Documentary/Reflective Films – January 2023

To document the Urban Room and share activities and reflections on the CCQOL project, we commissioned filming during two days at 2 Royal Avenue, in collaboration with Ulster University's Creative Services Team. The film captures architecture undergraduate and graduate students from the Belfast School of Architecture and the Built Environment, learning through interactive games about planning processes with charity Community Places, and our first workshop on the Quality of Life Framework and future of Belfast City Centre with Matthew Morgan, Director of The Quality of Life Foundation, and Duncan Morrow, Ulster University Professor of Politics and Director of Community Engagement at Ulster University. The film is available to view through the Your City Your Voice website: <https://yourcityyourvoicebelfast.commonplace.is/news>



Linking CCQOL & QOLF to allied health research – March-June 2023

Building on the health themes of quality of life and marginalisation, YCYVB joined with another Arts & Humanities Research Council funded project at Ulster, CHOICE (Challenging Health Outcomes-Integrating Care Environments) to co-host an international workshop and public lecture by Dr Rosie Frasso, Professor of Population Health of Jefferson University, Philadelphia, USA titled: *Arts Informed Tools for Amplifying Vulnerable Voices and Tackling Health Disparity*. The co-sponsored workshop with students and researchers from Architecture, Art Psychotherapy, Photography, Planning, Psychology, and Sports Sciences was followed by a public lecture at Ulster University. Both activities focused on, and shared lesson about arts-based creative techniques for engaging people from more marginalized and vulnerable groups, to support more meaningful collaborations that can help centre *community* in processes that can make a difference for practice and policy. CHOICE itself focuses on engaging with people living with severe mental illness, to help overcome isolation and stigma that both prevents greater engagement in civic life and has life limiting impacts.





**Community Consultation for Quality of Life
Your City Your Voice Belfast
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Your City Your Voice Belfast is a part of the Four Nations Community Consultation and Quality of Life Project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. For more information about CCQOL please go to <https://ccqol.org/>

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