



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



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



Acknowledgements

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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 Pilot Projects: Key Activities



Create themes for local engagement pilot projects that reflect the context and culture of each of the four nations cities.

Scoping




Design the fitout for an urban room with exhibition materials and scope for a range of activities

Designing



Reach out to community organisations. Schedule a series of events based on the Urban Room themes for each city

Organising



Test both digital and physical maps to share opinion on a topics impacting their quality of life.

Mapping



Host conversations about what local communities value and need in their area

Listening

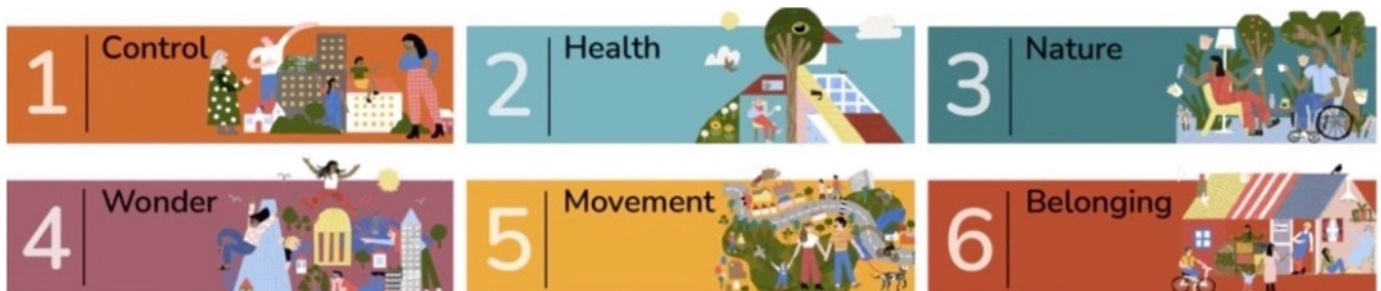


Gather data to identify areas important to community health and wellbeing to define social value.

Gathering

What is Quality of Life?

The Quality of Life Framework consists of six themes, shown below, developed by the Quality of Life Foundation, a UK Charity. We use these themes in our project to help compare responses about the places in Belfast that are important to you and others.



Quality of life describes a person’s physical, social, and psychological wellbeing. It draws attention to the accumulated impact of the day-to-day, which is the level to which individuals may feel their lives to be happy, active, sociable, interesting, and meaningful. It encompasses a multiplicity of desirable conditions that are overlapping and have different scales, but which are partly influenced by the built environment – the buildings and neighbourhoods where people live. We believe that if we can improve this built environment then we can improve people’s quality of life.

- Professor Sadie Morgan OBE, Chair, Quality of Life Foundation

CCQOL Publications 2022-2023

National CCQOL Project Publications: with project partners.



April 2022:

Public Participation in planning in the UK.

CACHE, CCQOL

A review of published, peer-reviewed and other policy literature on public participation. The aim of this initial report, CCQOL Stage 1, during Autumn 2021, was to capture what has been written about the practice of public participation within UK land-use planning and placemaking since 2010. The publication suggests areas for further research and was used to underpin the development of each urban room and associated online surveys in 2022.

Available at:

https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/220406-Public-participation-in-planning-in-the-UK_v3.pdf



November 2022

Inclusive Engagement Toolkit.

Urban Symbiotics, Quality of Life Foundation, CCQOL

A resource outlining steps and principles for equal access to opportunities and resources during consultation and engagement processes, drawn from lessons in the Pilot Urban Rooms and CCQOL National Advisors and Partners. or anyone interested in undertaking or participating in an inclusive engagement process.

Available at:

http://ccqol.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/221006_CCQOL_003b_InclusionToolbox_Final_interactive.pdf

Forthcoming in 2023-2024 (CCQOL research & analysis continues through December 2023):

- *Community consultation and engagement in planning: a code of conduct.* QOLF, CCQOL
- *Four National Reports on Regional Project Findings on Public Consultation/Engagement: England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland*
- *CCQOL Overall Project Findings Report*
- *Additional peer reviewed articles/conference papers TBC (see CCQOL website for updates).*

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)

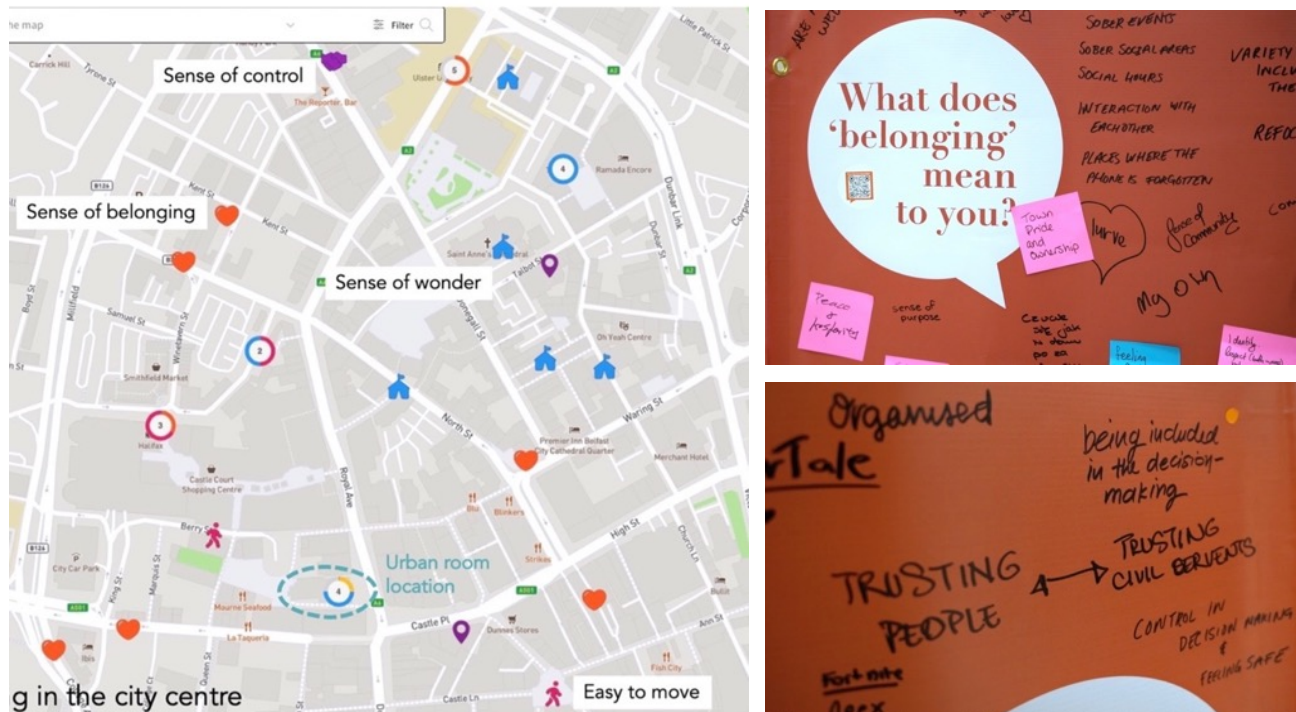
“Your City Your Voice Belfast” developed as the theme for our Belfast Pilot through several months of pre-discussion with our Local Advisory Group from local and regional government, and from charitable/community organisations. For Belfast **we focused on finding ways to open conversations about the 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:

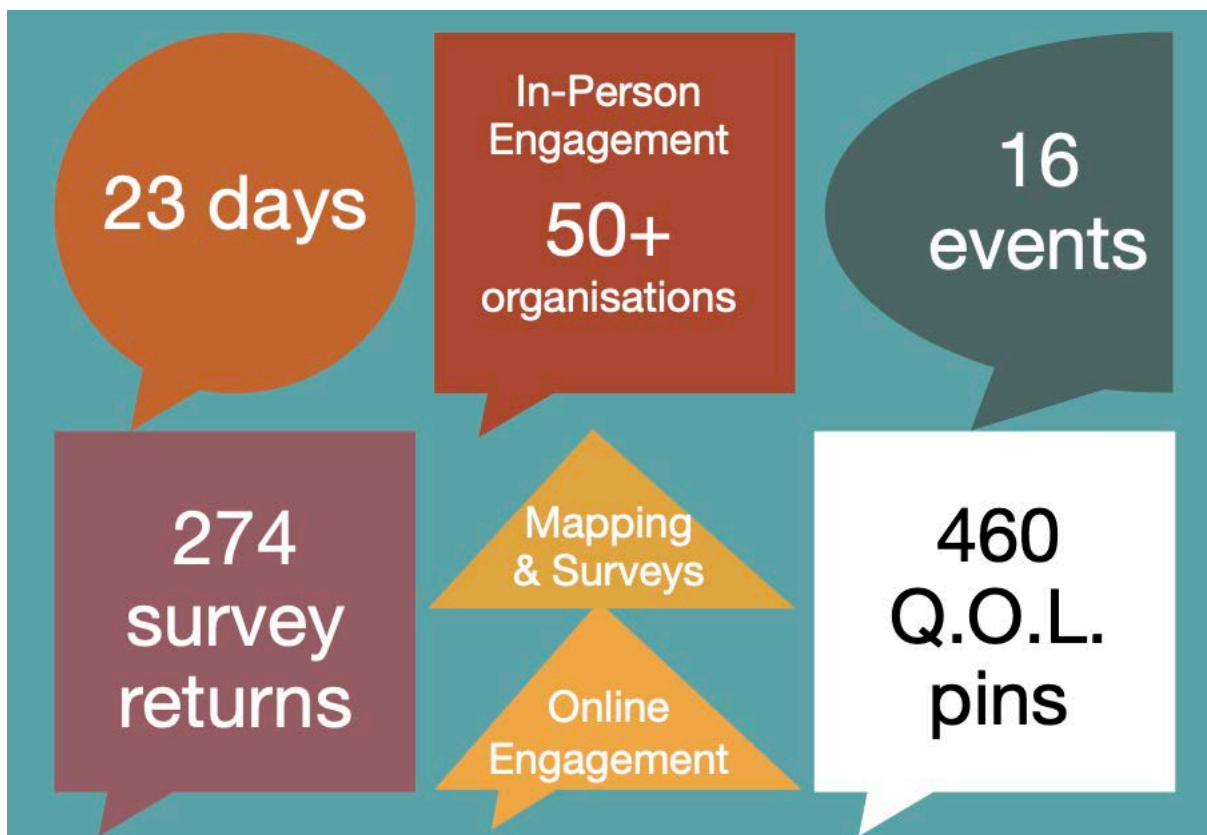
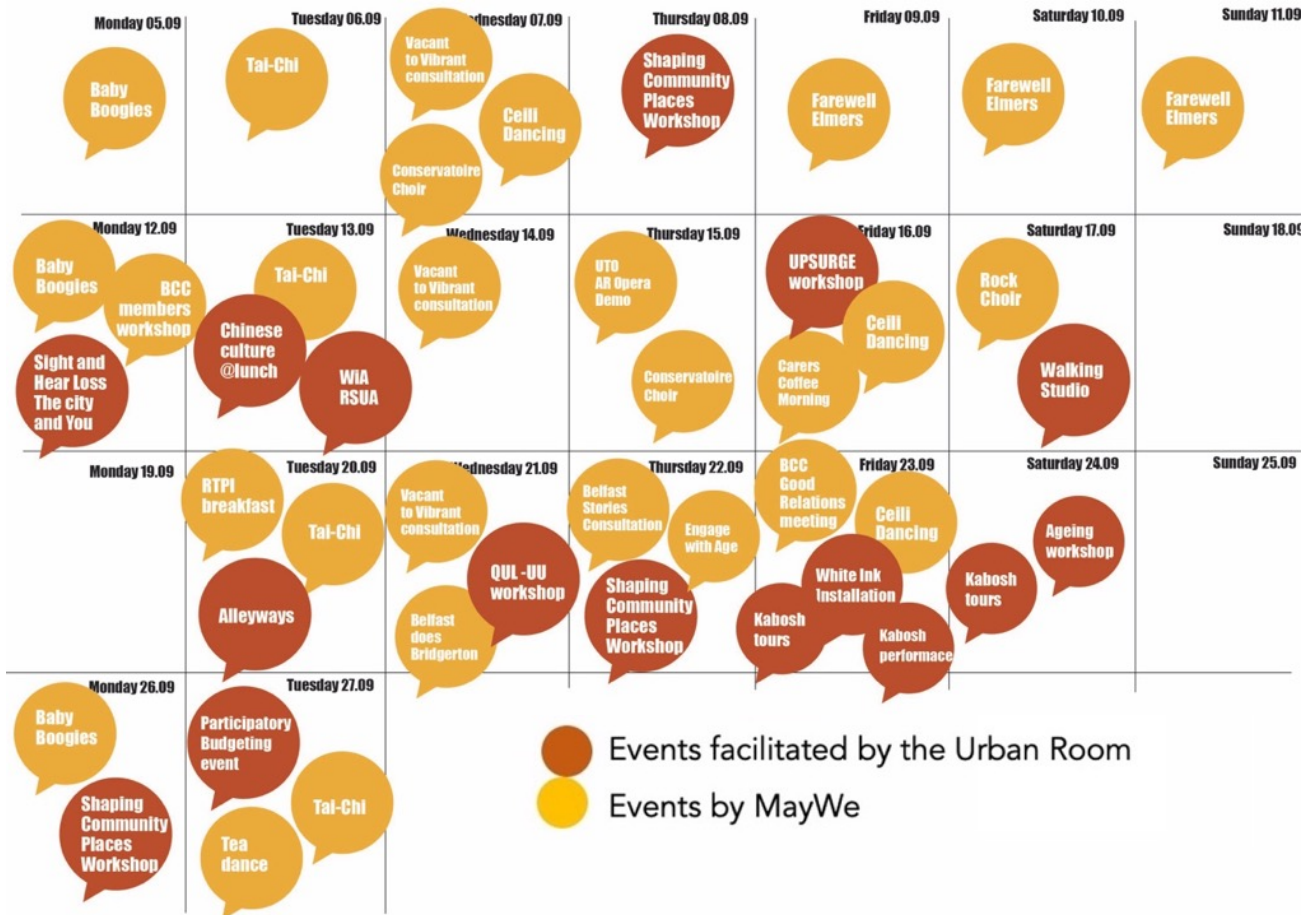
Control, Health, Nature, Wonder, Movement, and Belonging

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

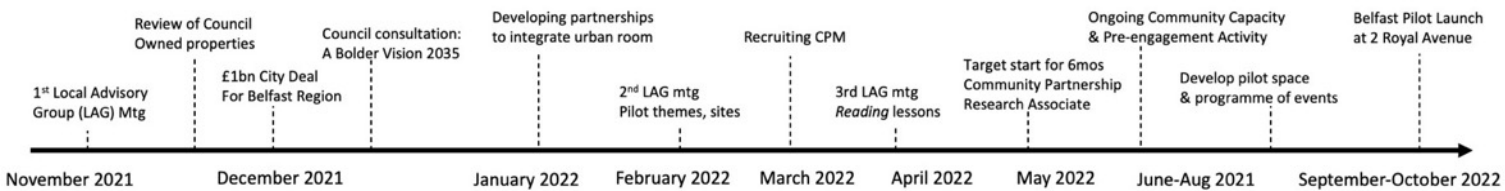


2. Top: Your City Your Voice Belfast diagram of co-hosted activities (5-27 September 2022); Bot: Results of Urban Room data collection and in-person/online mapping activity through related events Authors.

3. Belfast Room Planning & Delivery

Belfast being the fourth and last pilot in the CCQOL project, benefited from all the learnings from the other Urban Rooms.

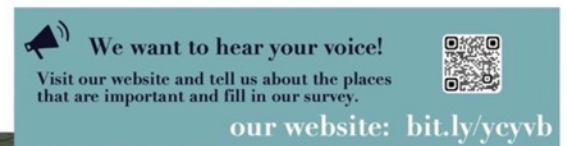
The project planning by the Belfast Lead, Dr Saul Golden, began almost a year in advance of the room delivery. Key steps included working with a Strategic Advisory Group from Autumn 2021, recruiting a Community Partnership Specialist Research Associate, Dr Anna Skoura, in Spring 2022, and then building a wider team of Ambassadors from Ulster University and a strong network of community groups and individuals from across, and beyond Belfast's geographic planning areas (see map overleaf).



Belfast Strategic Advisory Group:

Our local advisory group supported the Belfast team through volunteered time, specialist knowledge and experience. The LAG helped facilitate contact with local communities and organisations and were instrumental in shaping room themes, finding a location and design of the eventual physical/digital project spaces themselves.

- Catherine Blease, NI Housing Executive
- Colm Bradley, Louise O'Kane, Community Places
- Ciaran Fox, Royal Society of Ulster Architects
- Colm McDaid, Supporting Communities
- Catherine McKinney, Department for Infrastructure, Planning Engagement Partnership
- Keith Sutherland, Belfast City Council, Development Plan & Policy Manager



3. Your City Your Voice Belfast: Organisational map, left, and team in our 2RA location, right, Authors.

Locating the Urban Room: Belfast Specific Considerations

The Belfast team worked with and learned from our CCQOL project partners as they rolled out sequential urban rooms in 2022. We also studied prior uses of ‘consultation’ type spaces in Belfast, including council, charity, and private-developer led pop-ups/semi-permanent ‘shopfronts,’ e.g.,:

P.L.A.C.E. Ltd-NI (Planning, Landscape, Architecture, Community, and Environment) 2004-2019

<https://web.archive.org/web/20191202204212/http://www.placeni.org/projects.html>;

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110904070914/http://www.architecturecentre.net/docs/network/centres/>

PLACE was a Belfast-based charity focusing on built environment engagement and planning, part of the UK Architecture Centres Network with members from Glasgow to Cornwall. Funded primarily by The Arts Council NI, and in previous partnerships with BCC and the RSUA from 2004-2019, PLACE facilitated public events and research from a city centre base and across Northern Ireland. Former PLACE employees and volunteers continue in key engagement roles; many contributed directly to YCYVB. (Authors, PLACE, BBC)



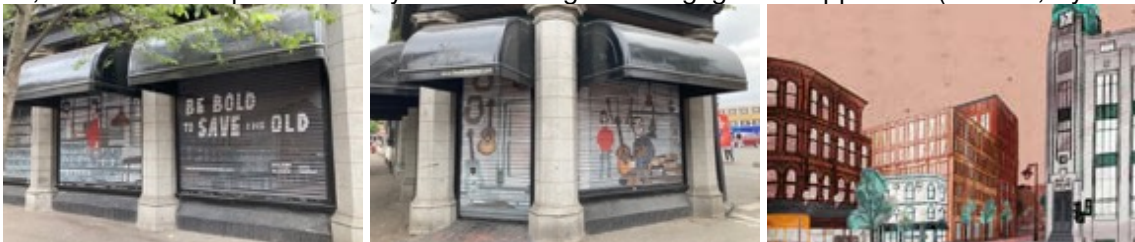
TRIBECA-Belfast, 2019 (https://www.tribeca-belfast.co.uk/whats_going_up.html)

“TRIBECA,” is a name given by property developers Castlebrook Investments to a £500m 12-acre Belfast site, formerly known as “Royal Exchange” and “North East Quarter”; a controversial project that has existing in several formats since 1999. Castlebrook, the most recent *developer vehicle*, set up a consultation/exhibit space as part of its statutory planning application, which was approved in 2020. (Authors, Tribeca-Belfast)



Smithfield Yard-The Butcher’s Building, Belfast, 2018 (<https://www.smithfieldyardbelfast.com/>)

Smithfield Yard, a +-15,000m² mixed-use development by Byewater Properties and Ashmour developers, was approved in 2020 by Belfast City Council. The developers set up a pop-up exhibition/consultation space using the ground floor of a listed building and former butcher-shop, part in their scheme. The exhibition fit-out, films, and events adopted a notably informal design and engagement approach. (Authors, Byewater)



Belfast-A City Imagining, 2018 (<https://urbanscaleinterventions.com/projects/cityimagining/>; belfastcity.gov.uk)

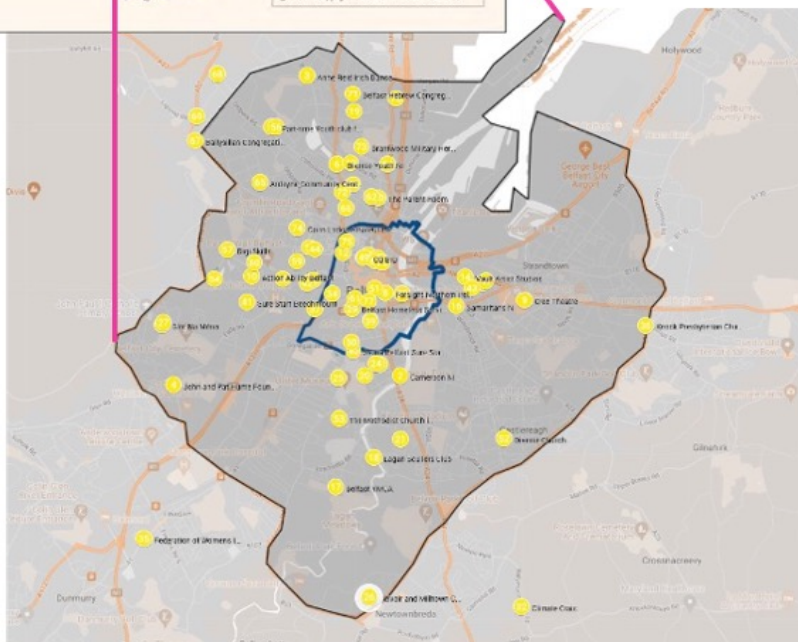
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, BCC developed a new cultural strategy linked to a new Community Plan, *The Belfast Agenda*, with a 2035 vision for “a culturally vibrant city” and publicised “people-centred approach” aiming to recognise past challenges by engaging people in the developing policies. BCC, hired *Urban Scale Interventions* to set up a public pop-up on the central high street of Royal Avenue, featuring many aspects familiar to the urban room typology – informal drop-in design, diverse workshops, and events. (BCC, USI)



The previous examples provided some context to early-stage CCQOL location, design and programme discussions focused on how the Belfast Room would address specific projects in the city - making distinctions between research objective to test welcoming, interactive public engagement and urban room models that could do more than replicate previous pop-up versions.



For Belfast, therefore, given the importance to both learn from the pilots and be specific to the local context, we started with feedback from our Advisory Group to help build a strong community-based network. This network developed months prior to selection of a venue, our key themes, and the plans for our launch and programme, beginning with a contact list of groups, charities, and businesses that grew through recommendations and word-of-mouth - across, and beyond Belfast’s central business/tourism core (ringed in blue on the map below).



We considering Belfast City in its wider metropolitan area and neighbouring councils (top left map), and differing City Centre planning boundaries, from the commercial core to outlying neighbourhoods (bottom right map). The bottom map also shows the distribution of community groups across and beyond the city who contributed to our urban room planning.

4. Mapping Belfast's Metropolitan Boundaries and Engaging Local Knowledge
(Maps: OSNI, 2024, Permit 40248, adapted by Authors)

Our approach also included reviewing local issues on history and diversity, and development to take account of both existing as well as changing demographics, and challenges remaining from Belfast’ ethno-national conflict (The Troubles), and post-conflict urban developments. Part of this process was working with our network, and available information to establish more current knowledge about ‘who’ lives, works, and visits Belfast, and the key present-day issues for the Urban Room to address.

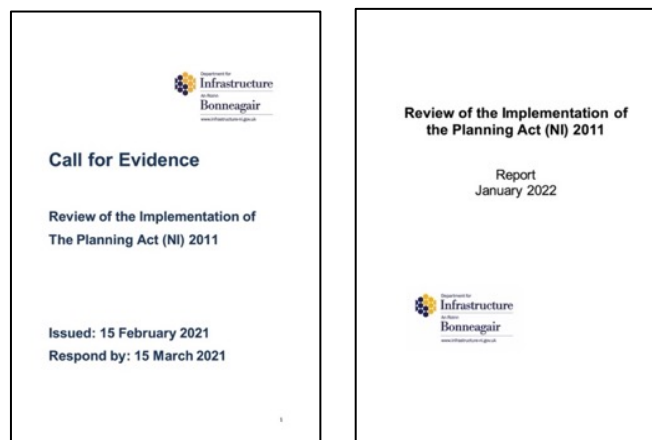
Recognising a Still-divided City

An important starting point is the recognition that Belfast’s Troubles legacy includes the outworking of the decades long conflict between mainly Catholic-Nationalist and Protestant-Unionist communities, with complex dynamics within these existing populations and a resulting large number of highly segregated neighbourhoods and contested spaces around the City; the conflict also left a city-centre with a much smaller residential population (particularly within the core area highlighted in blue on the map overleaf) compared to other regional/capital cities.

Addressing Governance Divisions and Planning Challenges

Another key aspect of setting up the urban room in the city centre, has been how -since the official end of the Troubles and the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement - investment and regeneration proposals around the city centre have often been highly contested projects, or through contested regeneration processes based on top-down ‘red-lining’ of ‘underperforming’ neighbourhoods by government bodies with vesting and investment powers over regeneration (the Department for Communities and its predecessor The Department for Social Development).

Despite planning reforms in 2015 (following 2011 legislation for Northern Ireland), divisions, and inherent tensions remain between local council planning powers and those retained centrally by the Northern Ireland Assembly Departments. These divisions have been the subject of recent evidence-based government and other planning research (e.g. NI Department for Infrastructure reports), which will be reviewed further for consultation impacts in forthcoming National CCQOL publications.

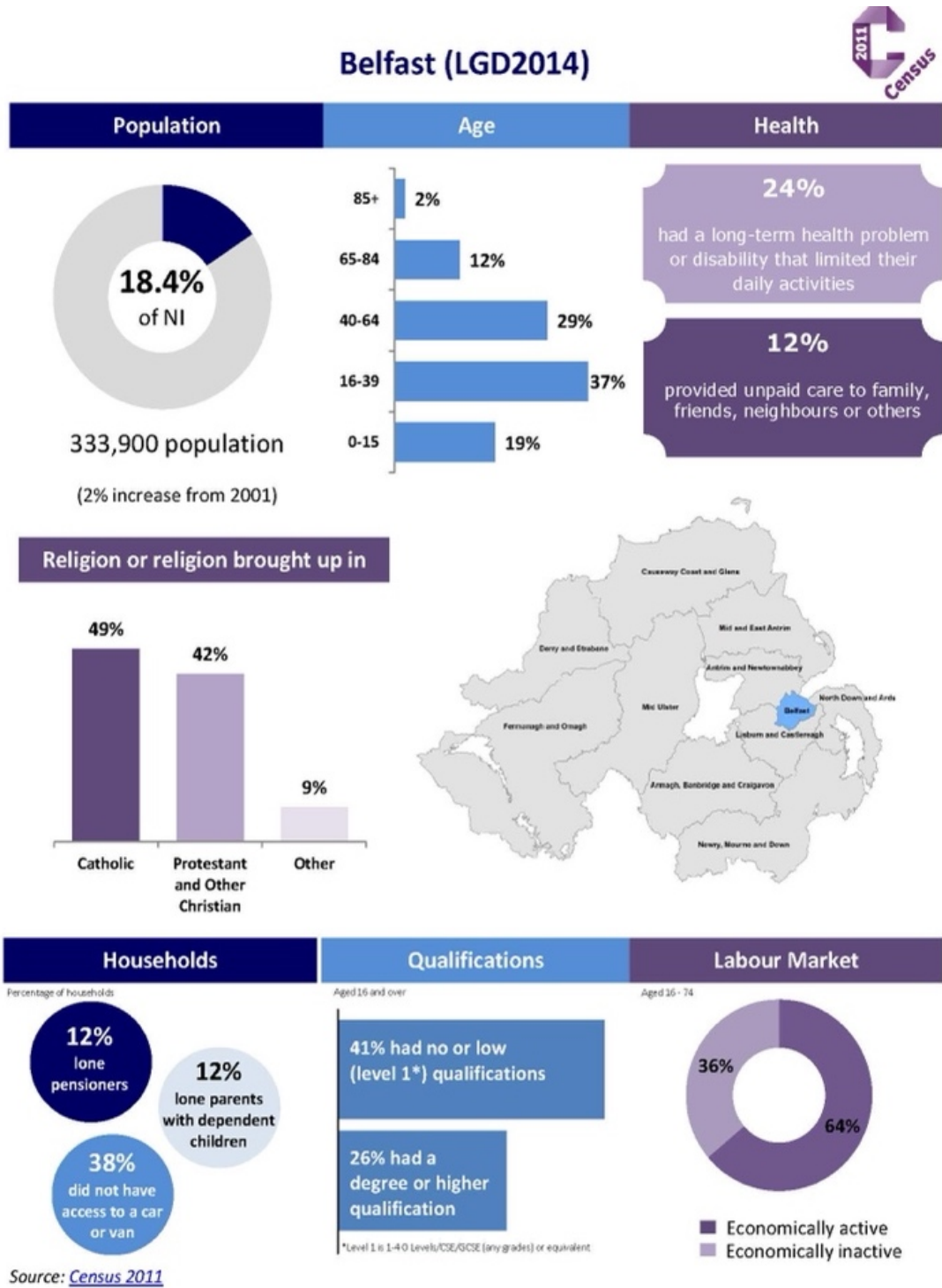


5. <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/review-planning-act-ni-2011-report>

The divisions have also a) hindered coherent, holistic, and more transparent development of increasingly larger areas of Belfast, impacting on aims for substantially increasing and diversifying city-centre living, and b) led to multiple – often overlapping and contrasting – local vs regional masterplan proposals and consultations that have led to considerable “consultation fatigue” amongst more established community groups from neighbourhoods around the city centre, many of Northern Ireland’s poorest Council Wards within and bordering on the commercial centre. This wariness for both central and local government consultation processes, and about project focused on property-led development in/around the city’s commercial core were important early knowledge outcomes for planning the Belfast Urban Room.

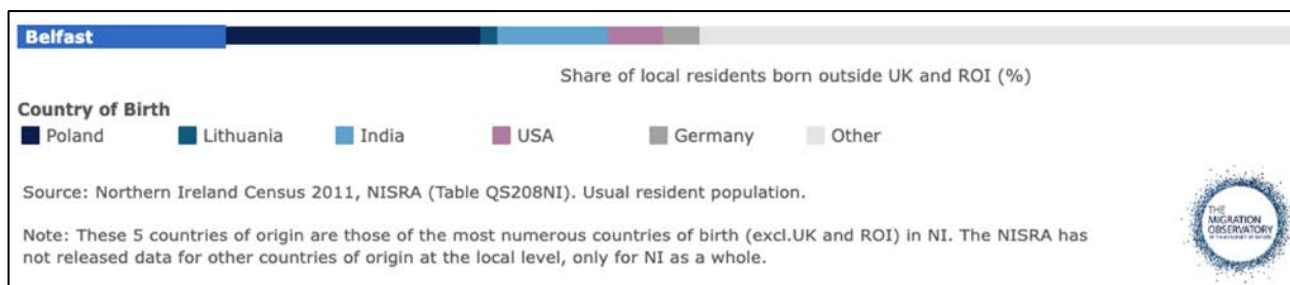
Demographic Studies: Census and Community Data

A next step in our preparation focused on understanding the current residential and working populations within the city centre, and the implications for considering the centre’s future in a post-COVID-19 environment. Looking first at the demographics we reviewed public census data. With a new census underway in late 2021, the official data on Northern Ireland and Belfast’s population demographics was limited to 2014 (Census 2011) statistics, supplemented with additional desktop reviews and data from community organisation. Updated 2021 data is discussed together with our Post-Room Findings and reflection on visitor/event engagement levels.



6. Belfast - Census 2011 Overview, NISRA, 2014

From the 2011 census data on Belfast, the top 5 countries of origin for those living in the city and born outside of the UK and ROI were Poland, Lithuania, India, USA, and Germany. There is also a long-established substantial Chinese community in Belfast.



7. Top 4 countries of birth (excl. UK and ROI) as share of local residents born outside UK and ROI: Census 2011, NISRA, The Migration Observatory, 2014

Looking further at demographic data, an important aspect of the city’s changes in 25 years since the signing of the Belfast Peace Deal (The Good Friday Agreement) in 1998, other studies highlighted how - between 2001 and 2010 alone - there was a 199% increase in the population born outside of the UK and Republic of Ireland (The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, 2014). The YCYVB team were also aware that migration since 2014, including changes in movement to/from Europe post-Brexit as well as increased residential population in the city from Africa and Asia, meant that the census data did not fully represent the current diversity of Belfast. With as much desk-top information as was available we reached out within our network to find out how we might make our room in the centre more widely accessible and welcoming to as many people as possible - to all residents, new and more established – across and beyond the centre, aiming to maximise cultural engagement to address challenges and open conversations for the future city.

Focusing spatially and thematically on the changing city centre therefore, many options were considered before a partnership with Belfast City Council was agreed where the CCQOL team could act independently as its own honest broker of research topics and data collection. This partnership also recognised the Council’s pro-active work, with examples of their “Tactical Regeneration” (place-based, social meanwhile uses and wider public engagement policies), and open-ness to supporting a pilot scheme that could contribute to their own improved processes. There was a consensus that any ‘room’ location should:

- Be free of specific property development associations (whom the urban room might be seen to represent. even in empty units, where these were part of larger contested regeneration),
- Ensure a neutral place for research, where all opinions and topics could be broached,
- Be an accessible, visible location available to all communities (existing and new).

This agreement led to our team and room taking up residency in 2 Royal Avenue (2RA), an important listed building in the centre, both discussed in the next section, and YCYVB’s use of Quality of Life (QOL) themes in the Room itself, also discussed further in the report from the next section.

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).

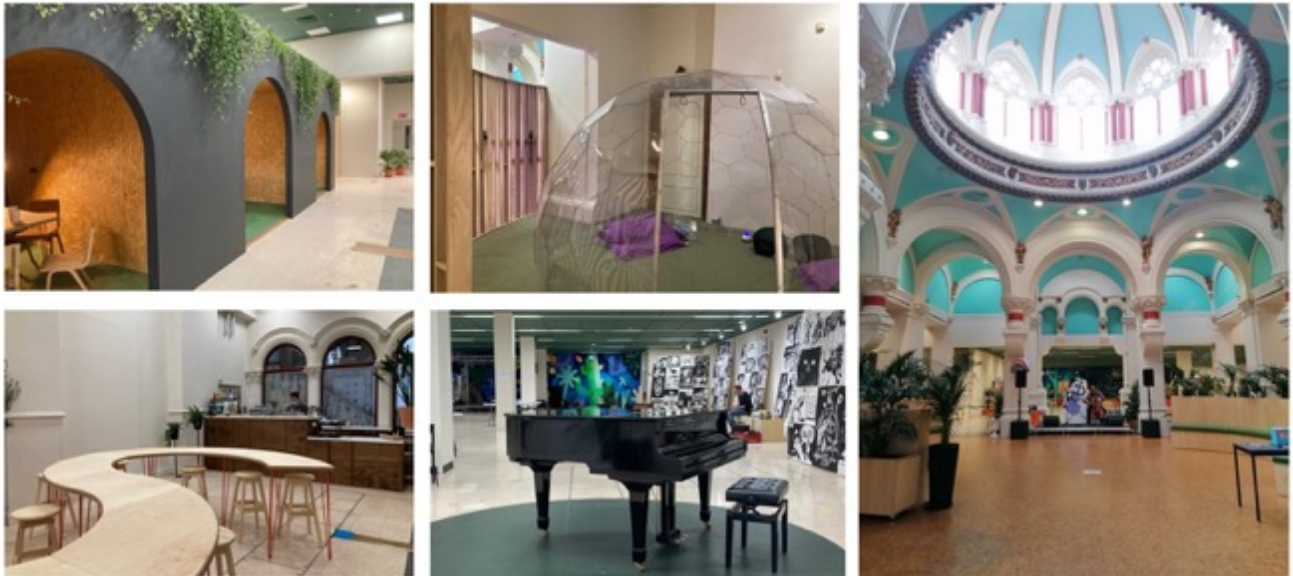
In the 1990s the building was converted into a *Tesco* store that closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Belfast City Council purchased the building and chose to repurpose its existing spaces as a public meanwhile-use cultural venue - part test-bed for a new approach to heritage and culture-led enterprises 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.

Overall the team and partner collaborations evolved from informal cooperation during Summer 2022 into a symbiotic type of mutual support (and great *craic*) during the one-month residency, adding value to both, providing potential operational examples for future urban rooms of this kind.

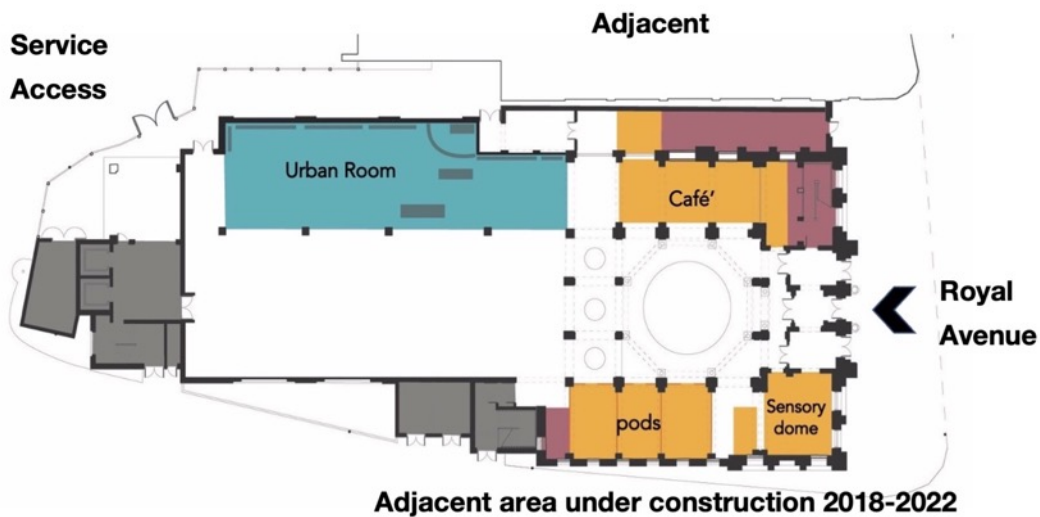


13. Your City Your Voice Researchers-Ambassadors with MayWe Ltd & Yallaa Café partners, Authors

Designing for flexibility and accommodating diversity

With a team in place, the next challenge was dealing with a unique design and management aspect of the Belfast Urban Room, the fact that - ironically – our agreed installation was not within a room or fully enclosed space at any point in time. As a shared venue with Council sponsored, free to the public activities, and existing flexible café, meeting, and social spaces around 2 Royal Avenue, we had to be flexible in our design consideration, choice of furnishing, and how we planned both our core and secondary spaces to contract and expand depending on anything else happening in the 2RA building on any given date.

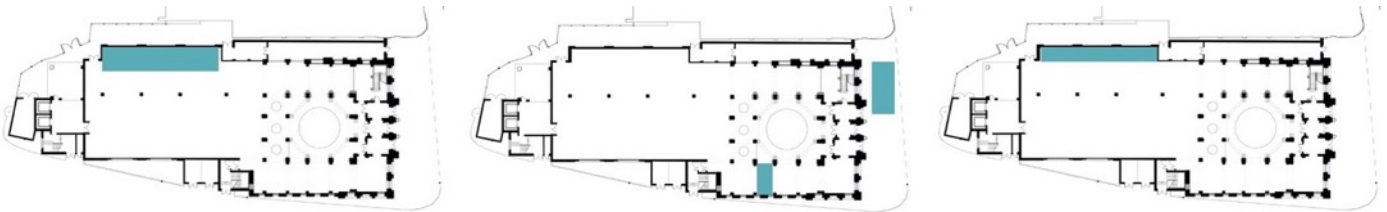
While a fixed exhibition remained in place for the duration of our residency, there were days we could take over more than half of the building and others when we had to confine our activities to a single desk. These conditions steered us towards a curated program of events that were all closely related to the scope and themes of Your City Your Voice Belfast and to ‘design’ our installations to be as lightweight and mobile as possible. When MayWe hosted larger events, including Tai Chi, céilí folk dances/ cèilidhean, family sessions, and BCC consultations (about other Council projects and planning proposals), we adapted our layout accordingly to focus on meeting the visiting public.



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.

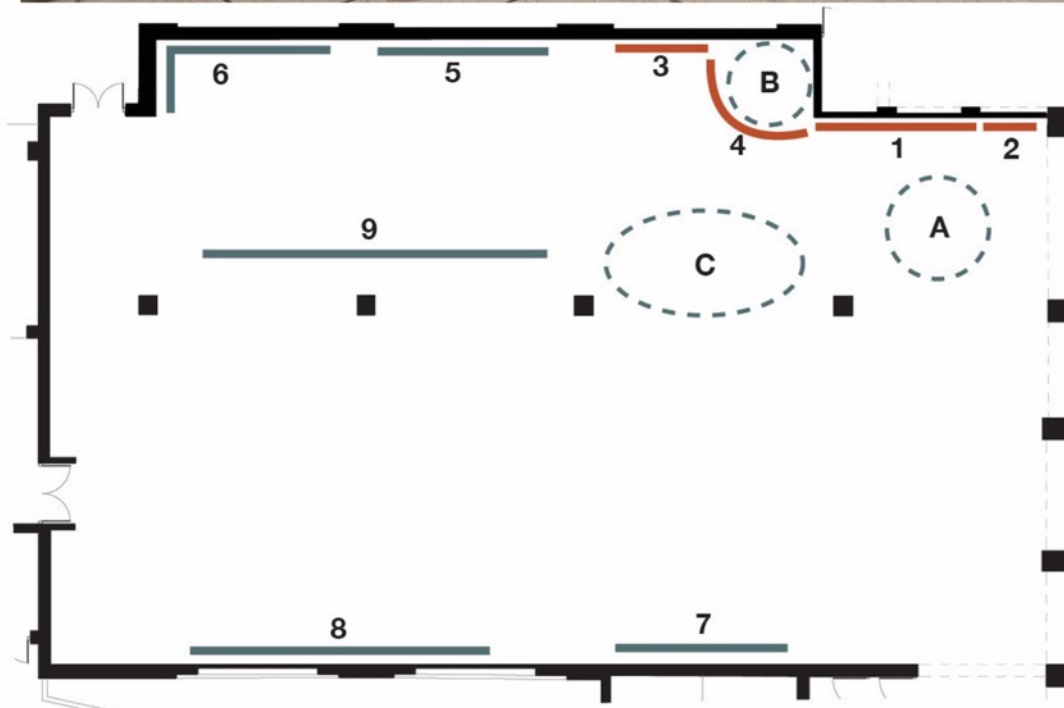
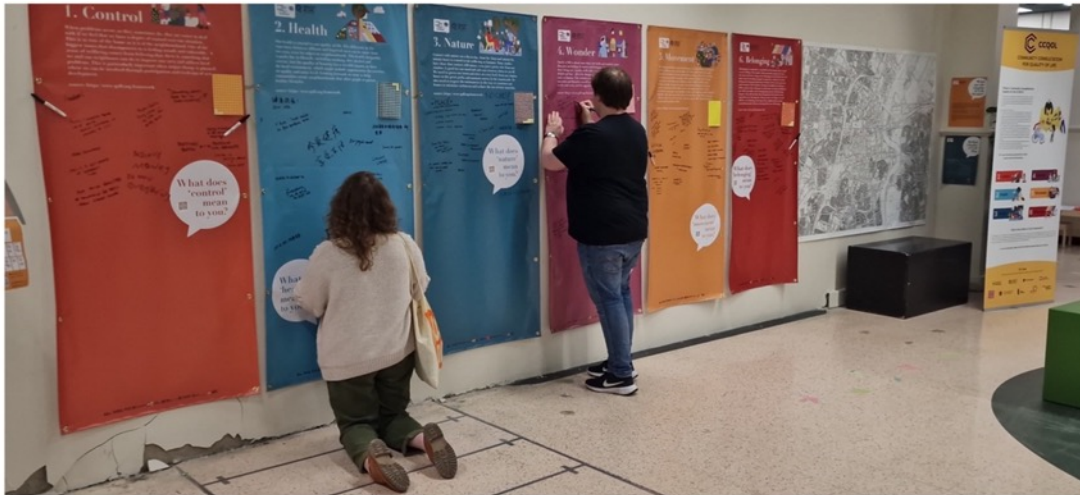


17. YCYV flexible spaces for conversations and in-person engagement & data gathering. Existing furniture and 2RA fixtures repurposed as informal to more structured uses, Authors.

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.

BELFAST theme

1. Control

When problems occur, as they sometimes do, they are easier to deal with if we feel that we have a degree of control over our situation. This is as true of the home as it is of the neighbourhood. One of the biggest issues that disempowers us is feeling unsafe and vulnerable. A sense of well-being comes from believing that there is something that we and our neighbours can do to improve our area and address local problems. This is particularly important when major change is planned where we can be involved through participation and co-design of new developments.

source: <https://www.qoif.org/framework/>

What does 'control' mean to you?

2. Health

Our health is crucial to our quality of life. The difference in life expectancy between affluent and deprived areas can be more than ten years, even for adjacent neighbourhoods. This health inequality is partly due to lifestyle, including smoking, diet, alcohol and exercise, but the quality of housing has a notable impact, as does the local environment, which might include opportunities for exercise, air quality and noise level. Looking forward, we want to help communities create neighbourhoods that allow people to pursue healthy lifestyles.

source: <https://www.qoif.org/framework/>

What does 'health' mean to you?

3. Nature

Contact with nature on a day-to-day, hour-by-hour and minute-by-minute basis is central to our wellbeing as humans. Many studies have shown that contact with nature, even just a green view from our window, is good for our mood and aids our recovery when we are ill. We need to green our towns and cities at every level, from our windows to the great parks, and maintain access to the countryside. We also need to respect the environment in the way we construct our homes to minimise carbon use and reduce the use of toxic materials.

source: <https://www.qoif.org/framework/>

What does 'nature' mean to you?

4. Wonder

Quality of life is about more than our health and comfort, more than just our feeling of control and belonging, important as all these things are. Quality of life also includes a sense of wonder, delight and fun – all of the things that bring us happiness and make us human. This includes creativity and cultural expression, museums and libraries, as well as the design of the places where we live and work, and the opportunity to enjoy ourselves.

source: <https://www.qoif.org/framework/>

What does 'wonder' mean to you?

5. Movement

We should probably accept that having a car contributes to your quality of life. It allows you to get to places for work and leisure that would otherwise be hard to reach, particularly for those of us who don't have access to great public transport. The problem is that where everyone owns these machines our collective quality of life suffers. Roads become unsafe, congested, noisy and polluted. Parked cars clog our streets, and our health suffers as we walk and cycle too. We need to therefore encourage more people to walk, cycle and use public transport. Inevitably, this may mean that the car is used less, but before being proud will ask why we need two cars, or even a car at all. This will contribute to everyone's quality of life.

source: <https://www.qoif.org/framework/>

What does 'movement' mean to you?

6. Belonging

Belonging to a community is a powerful need in humans and is central to our wellbeing. This is partly about community groups and events, but many of us find a strong sense of belonging even if we don't have the time to go to a meeting or engage in community activities. It is about being part of a group and sharing an identity, about trust, cooperation and reciprocity. This is built by knowing our neighbours, chatting to fellow parents at the school gate or in the park, or even just nodding at our fellow dog walkers and exchanging pleasantries with local shopkeepers. This is all too often taken for granted and is hard to create, especially in new developments. However, there are things we can do with the aim of housing, the design of the neighbourhoods and the social infrastructure that can encourage this sense of belonging.

source: <https://www.qoif.org/framework/>

What does 'belonging' mean to you?

19. YCYVB bespoke banners incorporating the 6 Quality of Life Foundation Framework Themes for visiting participants to add their own views in-person on the Foundations definitions and terminology, Authors, adapted from The Quality of Life Foundation.

A physical wall map accompanied the Quality of Life themed posters, paired via matching coloured stickers for visitors to add, intended to supplement the main digital QOL mapping.

Tell us which places in Belfast City Centre contribute to your Quality of Life!

Place a sticker on the map where

you connect with nature

you go to feel healthy

you feel a sense of belonging

you feel a sense of wonder

you feel a sense of control over your environment

you find it easy to get around

Belfast Quality of Life Map



20. Bottom: Printed map of Belfast, wall hung, with an invitation (Top) for in-person visitors to mark the place they associate with each Quality of Life Theme, Authors adapted from Quality of Life Foundation.

Project related displays:

In other areas, posters contained inspirational quotes including from Jane Jacobs, Margaret Mead, and William H Whyte - prominent 20th Century urban activists who promoted place-based and community/evidence-driven approaches to urban design and development, and about urban rooms as promoted by Tom Dixon and Lorraine Farrelly in the UK.



21. Poster designs: Themes associated with Placemaking & Community Engagement, Authors design, adapted quotes CW from Top-right, T.Dixon and L.Farrelly; J.Jacobs; M.Mead, W.H.Whyte.

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

Lessons on event hosting and management from other urban rooms:

The spacing/timing of events in our room also gained from previous room experiences:

Reading - the first room - operating from a defined empty retail unit, tested a condensed calendar and open booking system for community groups to use the space for their own (theme-linked) activities. This achieved over 60 activities (up to five per day) as a recognition of the value of these types of public meeting spaces to bring diverse groups together in a short time-span. However, setting-up, disinfecting -due to COVID-19- and re-setting up for each event, had impacts on research associate and ambassador time to engage with each group, and on space within the room for more casual visits and longer conversations.

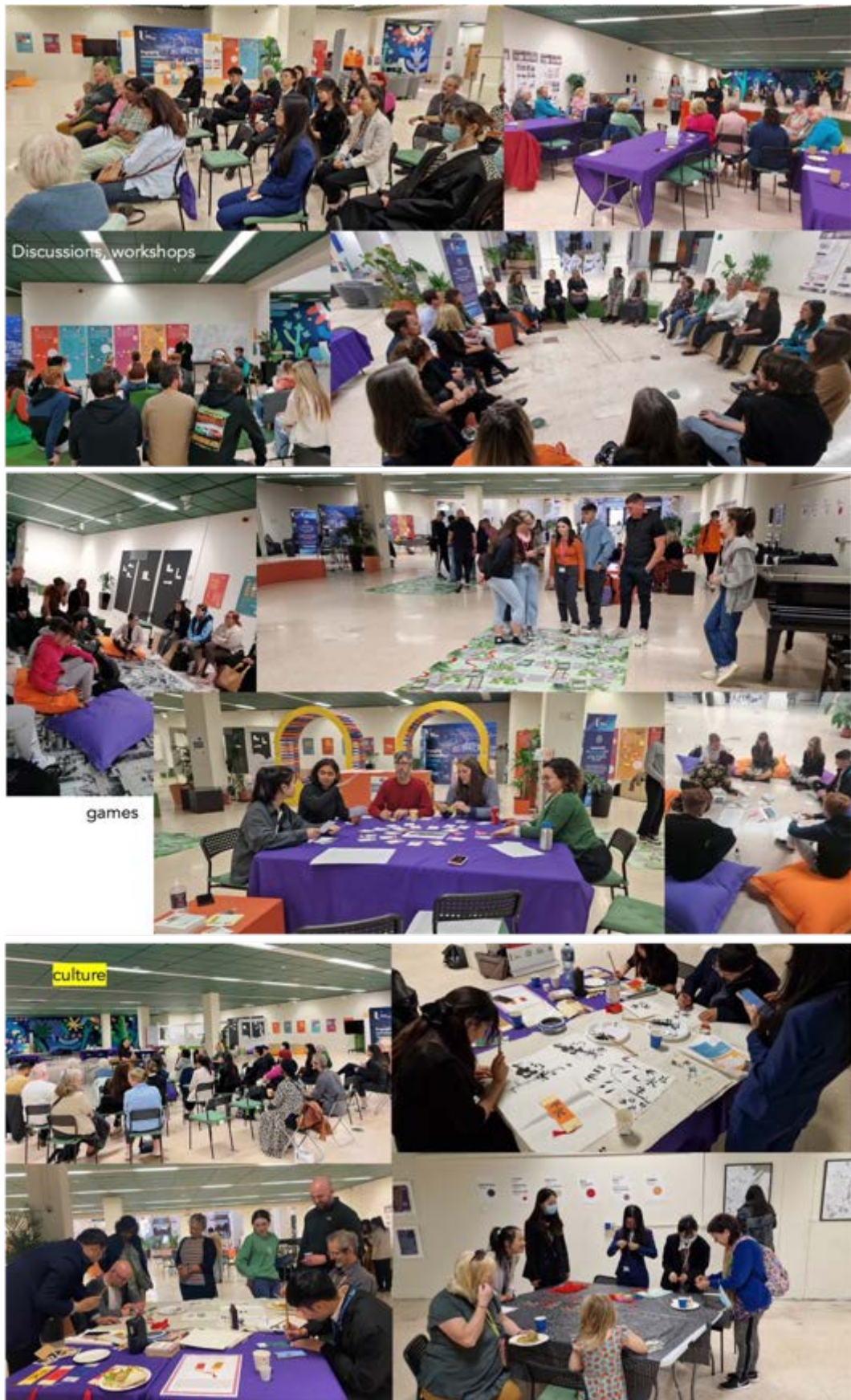
Cardiff, which operated within an existing and decade-long established community centre with links to the University, built their engagement activities around this neighbourhood venue to feed more directly into Cardiff Council's Local Development Plan. This depth of activity indicated the long-term value of investing in community voices, trust-building and locally-relevant activity with wider place-based planning implications.

Edinburgh, bridged the two prior models, working from a fixed 'room' in a mall within the city's world heritage city centre and by hosting events in two satellite neighbourhoods for focused discussion. Lessons from the tourist centre were the challenges of engaging more local voices in the room when not hosting groups, which led researchers and ambassadors to change tack and more actively seek out people in the public realm for mapping and survey work. Satellite events themselves demonstrated the value of linking a centrally themed space, with project information and a base for project team members, to conversations with those who might not otherwise be engaged about central development issues relevant to the wider city.

For Belfast, these experiences influenced our choice of venue and calendar from the type of internal spaces for seating and meeting to working within our network of community groups to link themes and workshops specifically to our general project enquiries around Quality of Life and how urban rooms - in our case a single (flexible) dedicated public place might function in less established locations and less-densely populated city centres like Belfast. We also aimed to keep a balance of themed activities open to all visitors, limiting private functions to one, and threading discussions of Quality of Life and mapping/survey contribution into each community-focused activity. In return, along with our Council and cafe partnership, we were able to focus on providing resources (publicity, materials, catering) to enhance participation for people who lived outside of the city centre and to avail of our "coffee-card" offer to encourage all visitors to stop a little longer and talk with our team and complete the online surveys.

A key one-off calendar change required was a one-day closure during the public period of mourning following the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Reflections on this period during the room activities are captured in our lessons sections on contingency and inclusion for our diverse visitors from all cultures in Northern Ireland.

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)

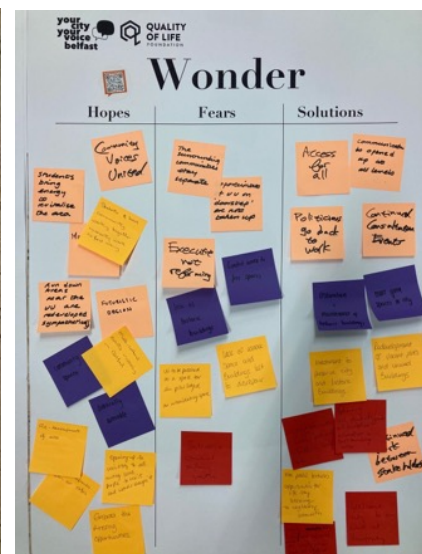
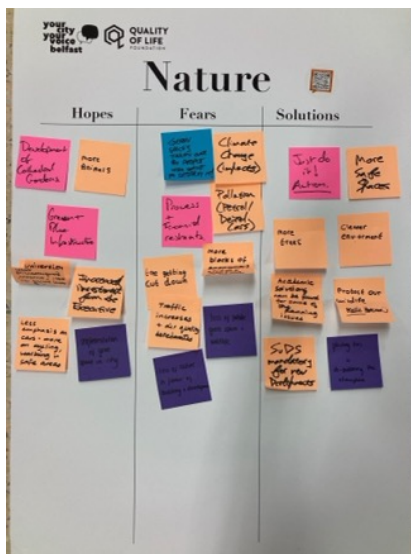
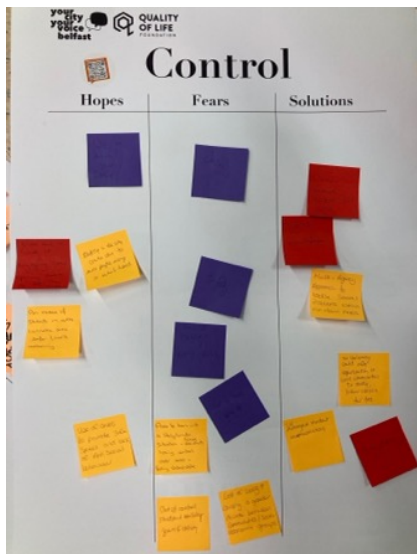
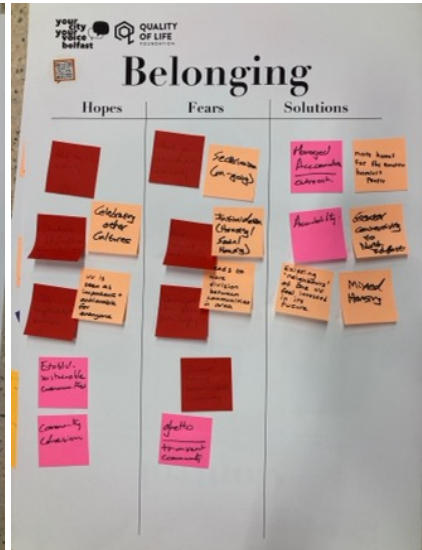
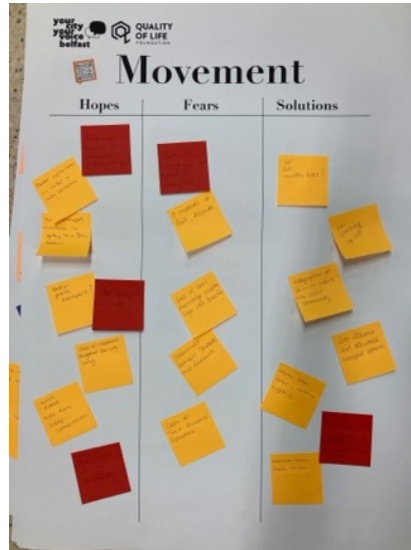


Each Urban Room held an event focused on our Project Partner’s *The Quality of Life Foundation* Framework. In Belfast, accompanying our QOLF *Meaning Maps*, we organised a joint ½-day workshop focused on the role/responsibility of Ulster University – with a new £250million pound Belfast campus extension 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.



26. QOLF-Ulster University Urban Room Outcomes – Targeted proposals for University action. Authors.

The workshop was filmed to share as part of urban room findings; it also led to a further post-room workshop of the same format, working directly with community groups who make up the University Campus Community Regeneration Forum – an external group set up mid-way through the campus development when it became clear that the institution needed to better engage local neighbourhood residents and socio-economic issues. Post-Room activities and an overview of Quality-of-Life mapping are presented in later sections of this report.

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

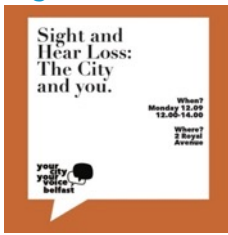


A YCYVB and 2RA evening event, co-sponsored by the Royal Society of Ulster Architects. The topic of the evening was “Urban rooms and the need for inclusive civic spaces for engagement”, facilitated by the RSUA’s Women in Architecture Group with discussion led by CCQOL’s own Principal Investigator, Professor 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

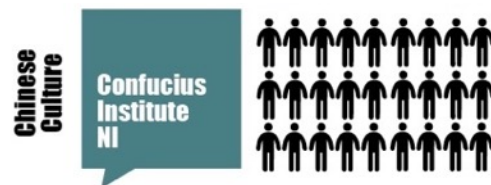
Belfast City Council | Queen's University | Open Ormeau

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

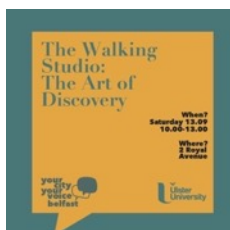
Confucius Institute at Ulster University, Cross-community Chinese Culture Event



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.

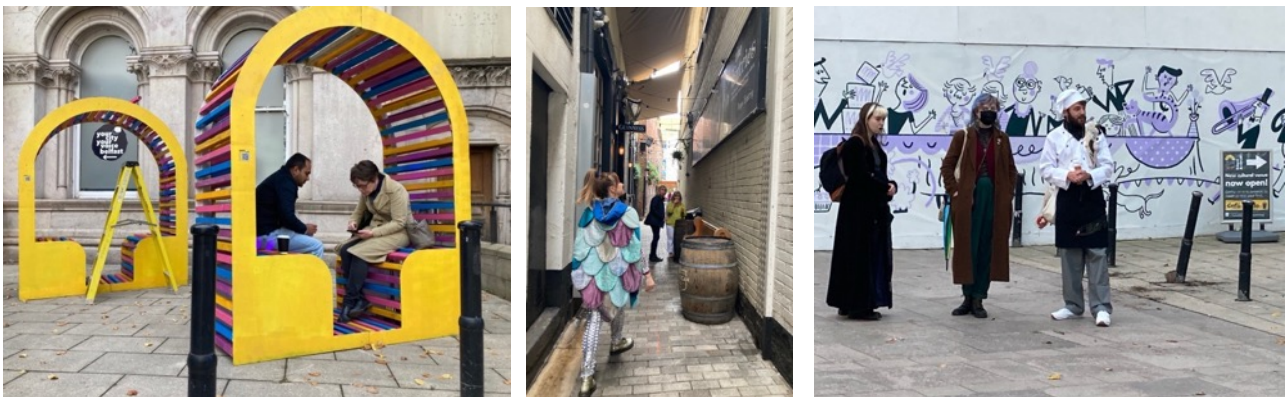
<https://www.doirepress.com/writers/nandi-jola>
(Images, top: Nandi Jola, Bot: Authors, with permission)



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

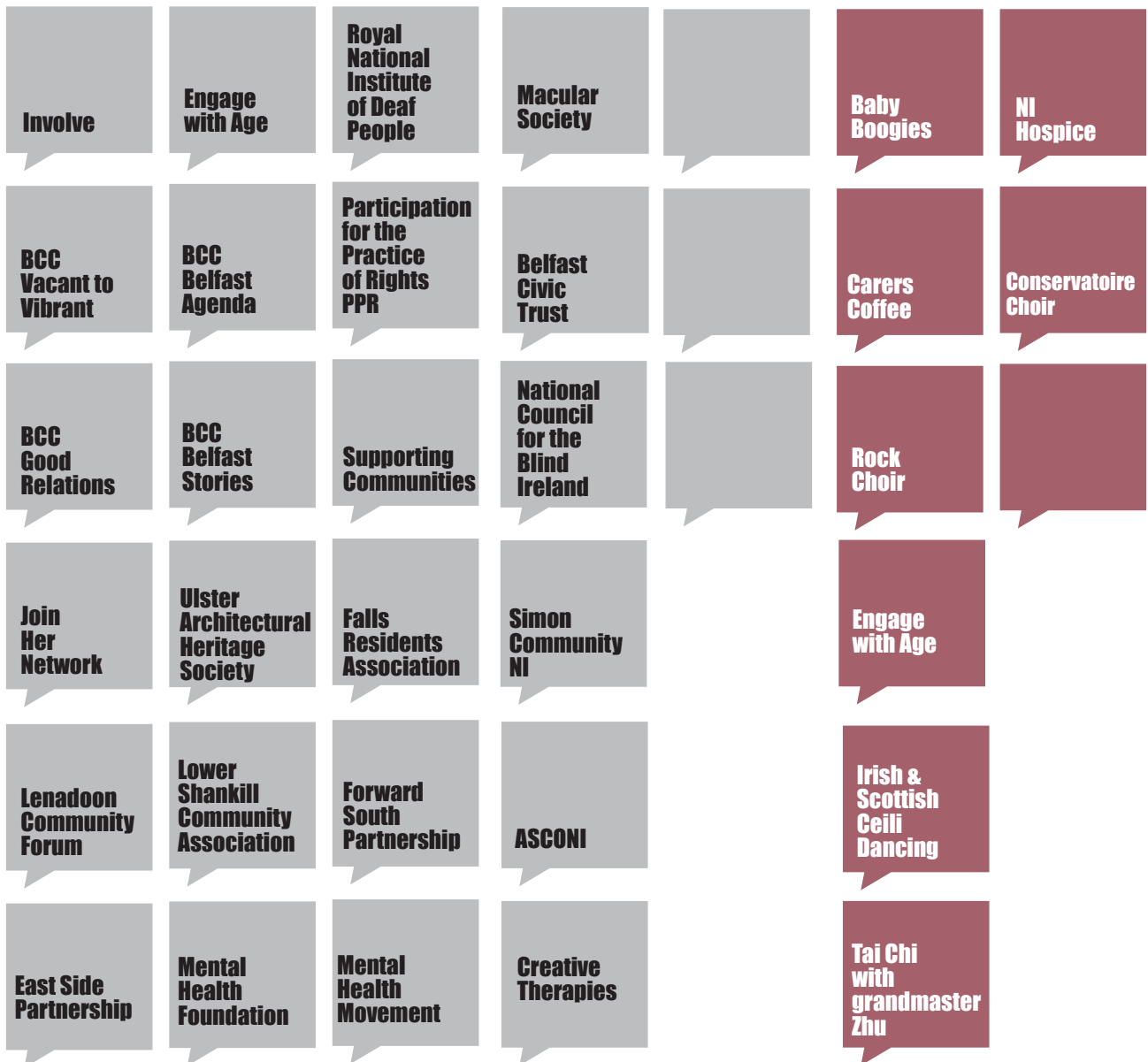
public spaces that encourage “strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other.” For YCYVB the performers became that bridge to our team; helping create spontaneous shared conversations or directly introducing visitors to the project areas and to Ambassadors. From this mix of culture, which was not directly about any project or consultation or survey itself, we then had time to talk to people who had previously walked through or by our exhibit and greeting areas – the result was more maps and surveys complete, and more conversations about the project with secondary school students studying and socialising on our seating installations, which suggests an area for further bespoke project research in the future. The seats themselves eventually found homes after our urban room in a local community allotment and at Ulster University.



27. Top: White Ink Inkstallation-Conversation Station, proposal and completed/in-use day/night. Mid: Kabosh Theatre *Belfast Bred* and *Belfast Entries* interactive performance (Author photos). Bot: Indoor installation with younger and older groups – seating, mapping; Final allotment home.

Additional Engagement through BCC and MayWe Ltd.

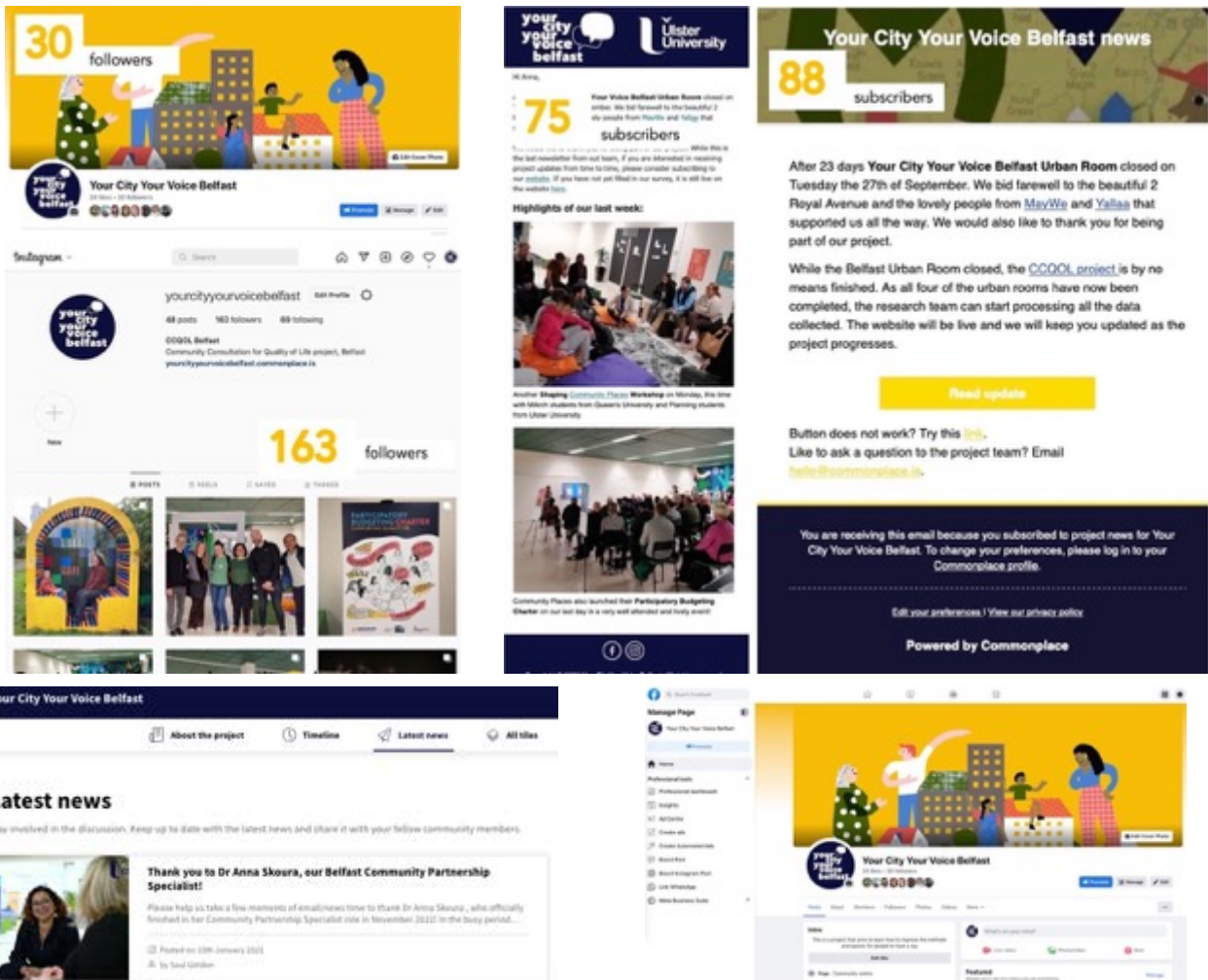
We additionally thank the following organisations for help in developing our programme through their role and participation in events hosted by Belfast City Council & MayWe Ltd.



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>

4. Urban Room Reflections

As a collective effort to gather lessons, we asked members of our team and those who helped us run events to provide their thoughts on the urban room, the challenges of consultation and engagement, and important take-aways for our findings:

*Team and
Co-Host
Feedback*

Research Associates

Community Partnerships Specialist, Dr Anna Skoura

The CPS role helped bring everything together; day-to-day activities, layouts, rotas, engaging exhibits and activities central to the success of our project.

When I joined the project, I was lucky to follow two of the urban rooms in progress and one already completed. I also had the great pleasure of meeting and working with talented people, passionate about improving the urban environment as well as empowering others to do so.

YCYVB offered the exciting opportunity to curate a diverse programme of events, in a beautiful historic building right in the heart of Belfast! We have been fortunate to have had many discussions about consultations throughout the project and especially while running the urban room. Students, built environment professionals and other members of the public, younger and older alike, shared their opinion around the quality of life themes and what they meant to them. Despite consultations on city centre issues and local community planning taking place quite frequently, we learned that certain communities were over-consulted, and others were not consulted at all. In addition to that, people who had taken part in consultations often felt that their voices were not really heard.

Offering the time and space for people to register their views was very gratifying and I hope that bringing the urban room lessons together will help inform more inclusive and meaningful ways for the public to shape their cities and towns.

National Research Associate, Dr Ruchit Purohit

The CCQOL RA stayed in Belfast, living here and working with the team for the entire duration of the Urban Room. Ruchit was a vital link to the lessons, challenges, and management of the previous three pilot rooms for YCYVB.

People are moving in a post pandemic and more digital world, but we do not want only digital consultation. We want people to come together, to attend different events like webinars, seminars or workshops – like many that happened in our Urban Room, where many ideas can be expressed, and people can come by and learn a lot about the city.

What we believe in CCQOL is that an informed community is a resilient community.



Project Ambassadors:

YCYVB Ambassadors were vital to the success of both the urban room and digital data collection. Working in shifts with the CPM, RA, and CO-I, Ambassadors spent their time interacting with the public – whether during organised events or impromptu conversations with people viewing our exhibits, maps, or other activities. As both the face of the project and the operators of our digital tablets, their knowledge, patience, and support for visitors to engage with our Quality of Life maps and consultation surveys ensured our returns provide a robust snapshot of views for our findings.

Alannah Ferry, undergraduate final-year Architecture student:

As helpers to the project research, we had the unique opportunity to give people a voice, we interacted with members of the public who couldn't read English at all, who didn't know how to use technology or who didn't feel as though they were allowed to have something to say about the city they live in.

It has shaped a new way of experiencing the city of Belfast for me and will continue to influence the method in which I approach and develop my own design ethos, long after the project is complete.



Katie Thorogood, undergraduate final-year Architecture student:

The urban room was an important opportunity to get first year architecture involved in our project and showing them how important the planning process is and forming their opinions are for their education and their career.

A really important part of architecture, something that is unfortunately overlooked is how important community engagement is; events like the Urban Room give students a better understanding of things they can comment on; gives them a framework for learning about the planning process.



Emmett Donaghey, Doctoral Researcher, School of Business

Students may be invested in the university, by they might feel detached from the city. [Taking part in the urban room gives] them an understanding of how the city is going to evolve...so it's making sure they have a long term part in the city's future.

Events that took place in 2RA through CCQOL and Your City Your Voice Belfast are all about mobilising and engaging different stakeholders to have their say to understand what's happening in the city, how it's changing, and how they can have a voice and what part they play, because they're not just a final tick box, they should be part of the co-design process from start to end.



Claire Thompson, Doctoral Researcher, Belfast School of Art

These spaces and range of activities in them are really important in terms of engaging the community. Quite a lot of people we have spoken to have never been asked to participate in any form of survey.

There was such a diverse group of people who came through the door; every single one had something different to contribute, which was lovely to hear.

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".

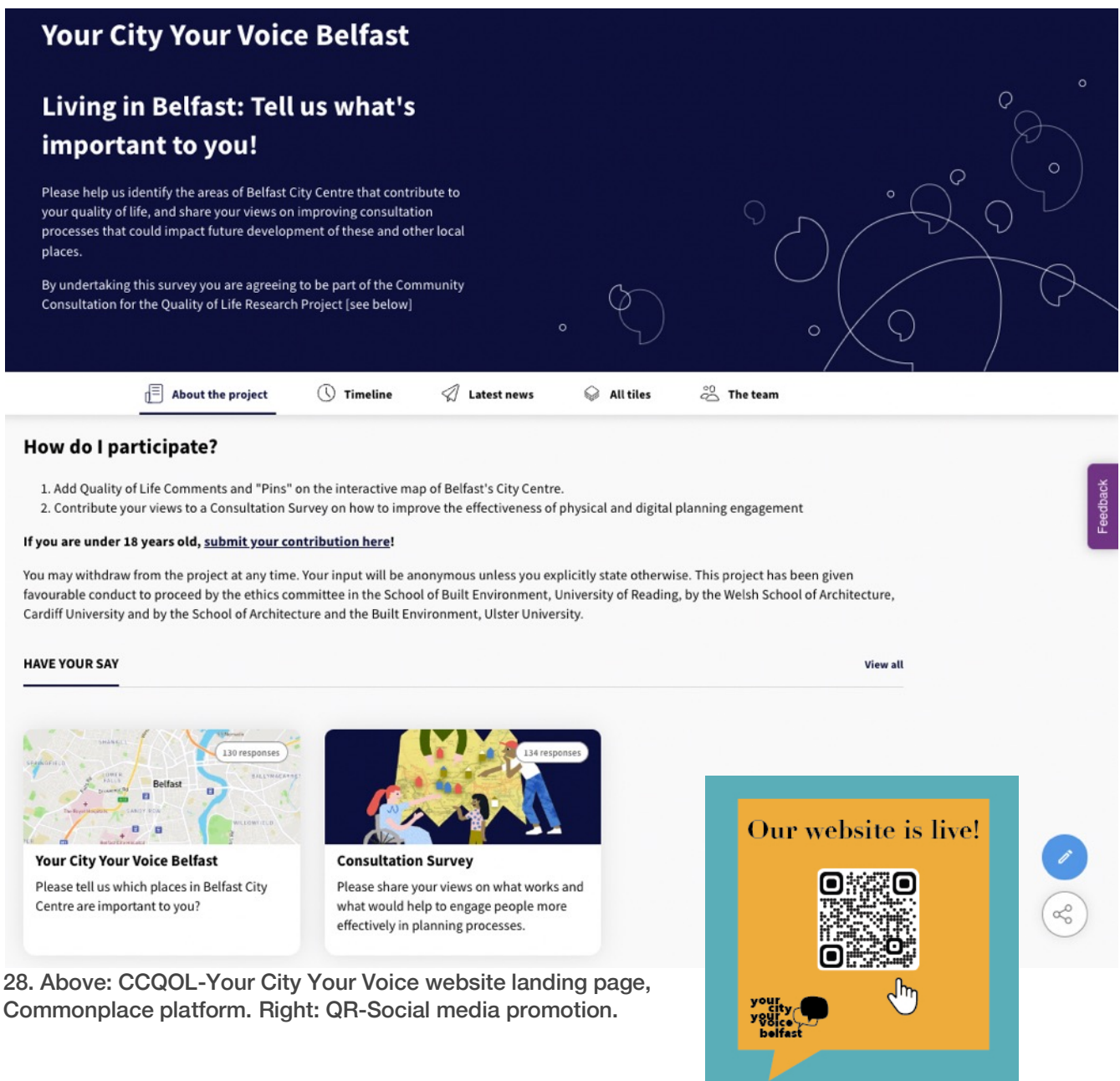
Value and lessons from the Urban Room:

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.

5. YCYVB Mapping and QOLF Results

To inform future research on community consultation and the role of physical/digital 'spaces' in public engagement about decisions affecting local areas, the pilot residences and continuing engagement have gathered views of visitors to the urban rooms, and those who may have only participated in the CCQOL research through our Commonplace YCYVB website. A separate under 18s site was set-up to allow wider, completely anonymous participation in the maps and survey input, which will be separately analysed. This section examines the 18+ findings, looking first at digital survey results about the urban room itself, then local Quality-of-Life mapping and results from in-room physical QOLF Meaning Maps. The next section provides an overview of digital results from our wider consultation survey.

Evidence-based outcomes



28. Above: CCQOL-Your City Your Voice website landing page, Commonplace platform. Right: QR-Social media promotion.

Visitor feedback – survey results about the urban room

We received 430 survey results from people who visited the urban room and engaged with our members and the online platform. Table 1 shows the clear majority stating their reason for attending was the people running the room, followed by the events and activities; atmosphere and exhibitions were tied after that with signage outside at similar numbers. This public feedback corresponds with reflections from our co-hosts about the importance of interactions over purely visual content.

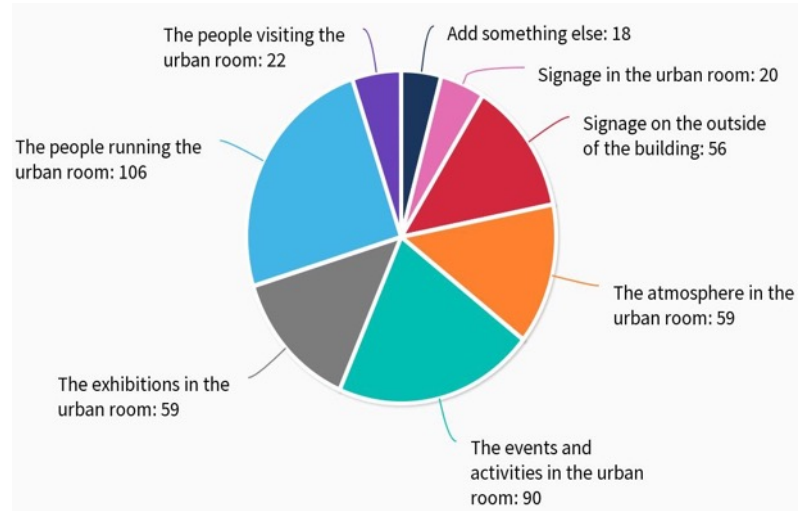


Table 1: What made you want to visit the Urban Room?

The ages of those responding was spread from 18-24 year olds (the highest number) to one person 75-84 years old; the majority were under 35; there was an equal response from 45-54 and 65-74 year olds.

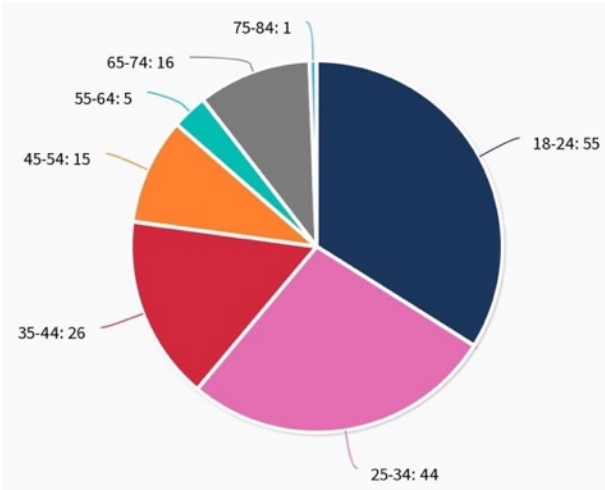


Table 2: Age of Respondents

The highest numbers of respondents stated they lived, studied, or worked in Belfast; closely followed by those who shop and use services here; fewer commute through the city, and very few respondents were people on holiday or who own a business.

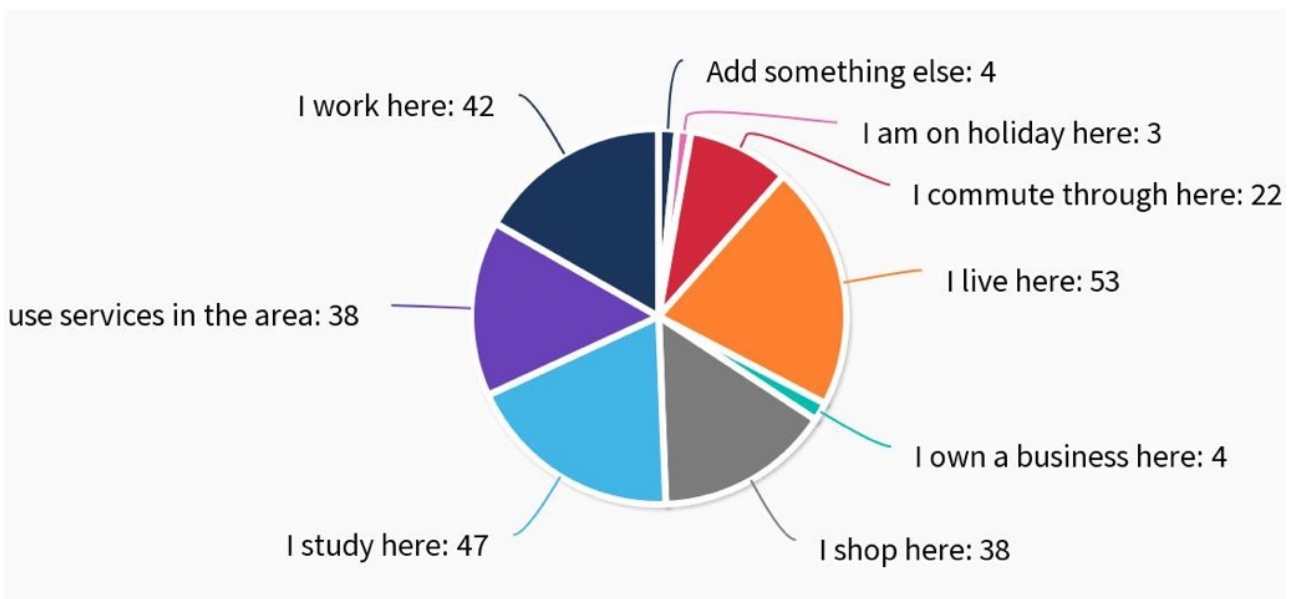


Table 3: Connection to Belfast City Centre

Census Comparisons:

Visitor responses and 2021 census information. Younger groups, highly represented; older groups are roughly equivalent to the Belfast average; 40-64 year olds, under-represented; under 18 figures unavailable. Our diversity figures are above average, with more data required to assess actual figures.

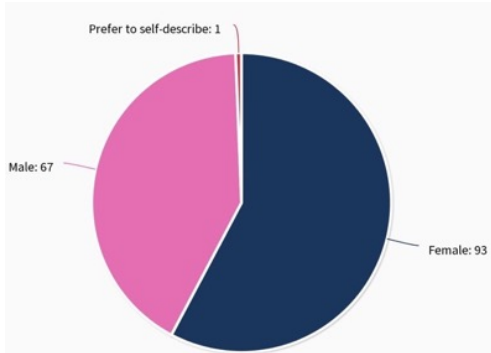


Table 4: Male, 41%; Female, 58%; Undescribed <1%

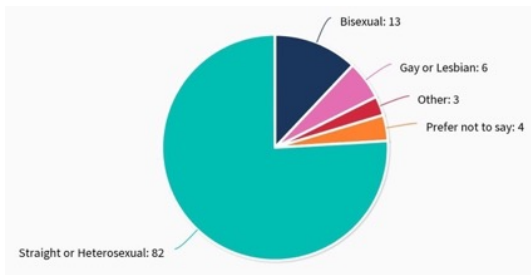


Table 5: Description of Sexual Orientation

● White ● Other ● Mixed ● Indian ● Filipino ● Chinese

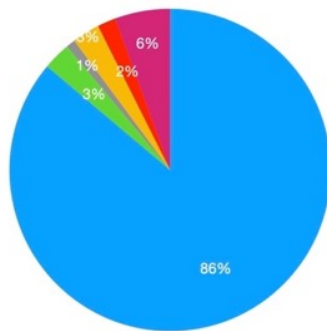


Table 6: Described Ethnic Group

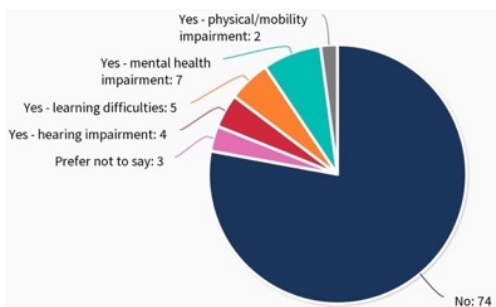
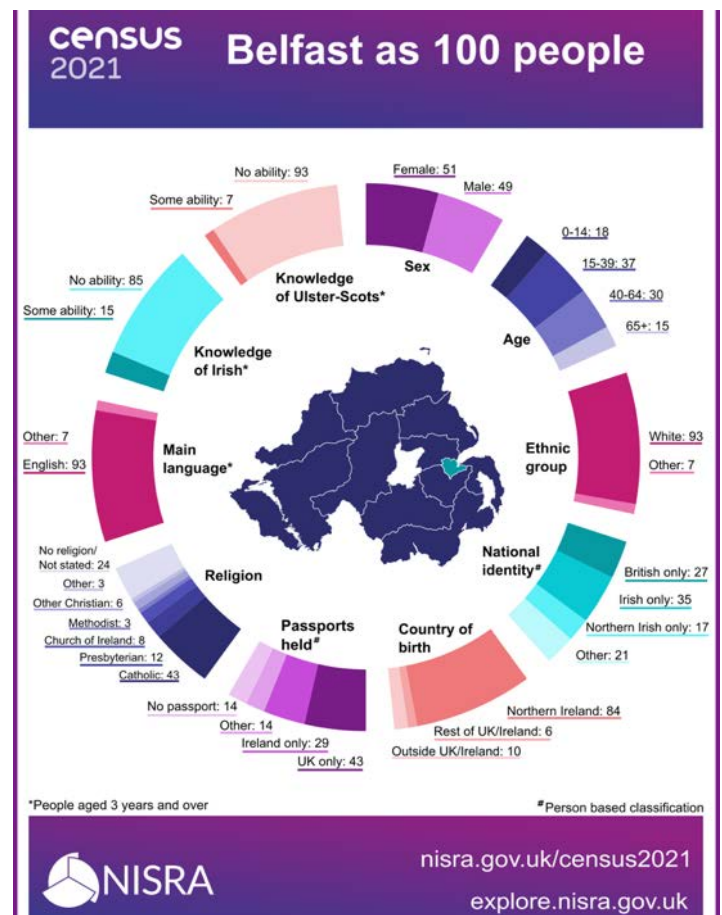
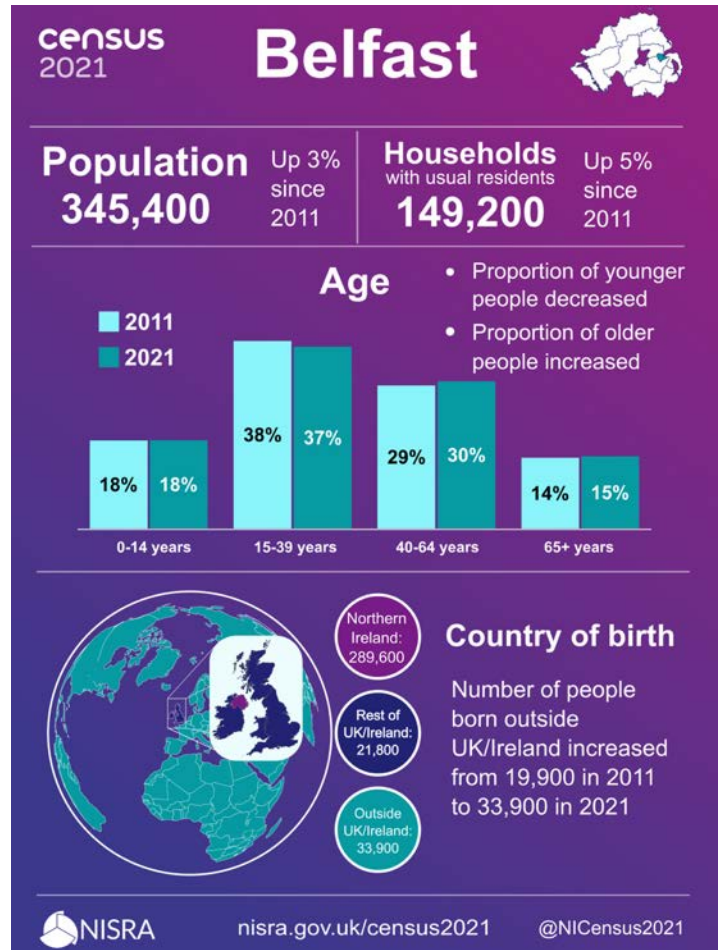


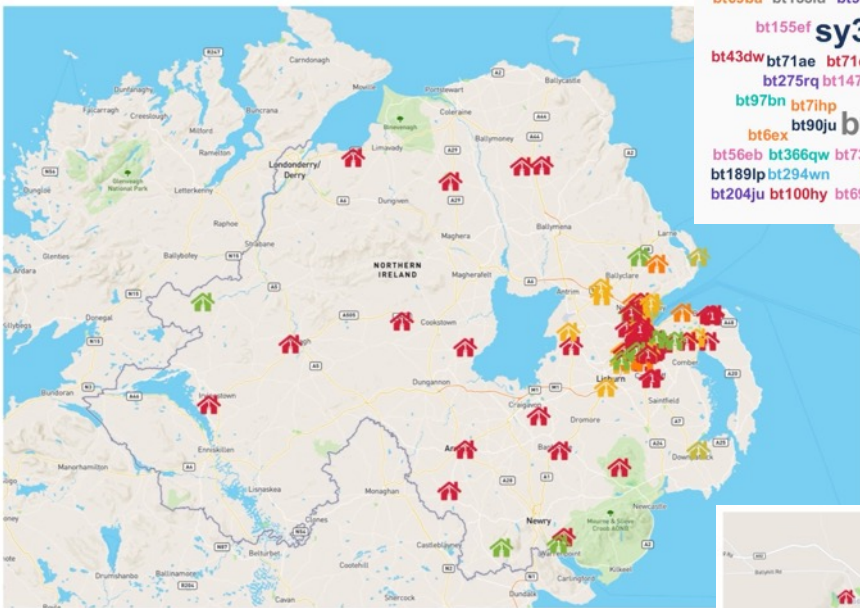
Table 7: Described ability/disability



Geographic spread of respondent visitors (those providing post-codes) :

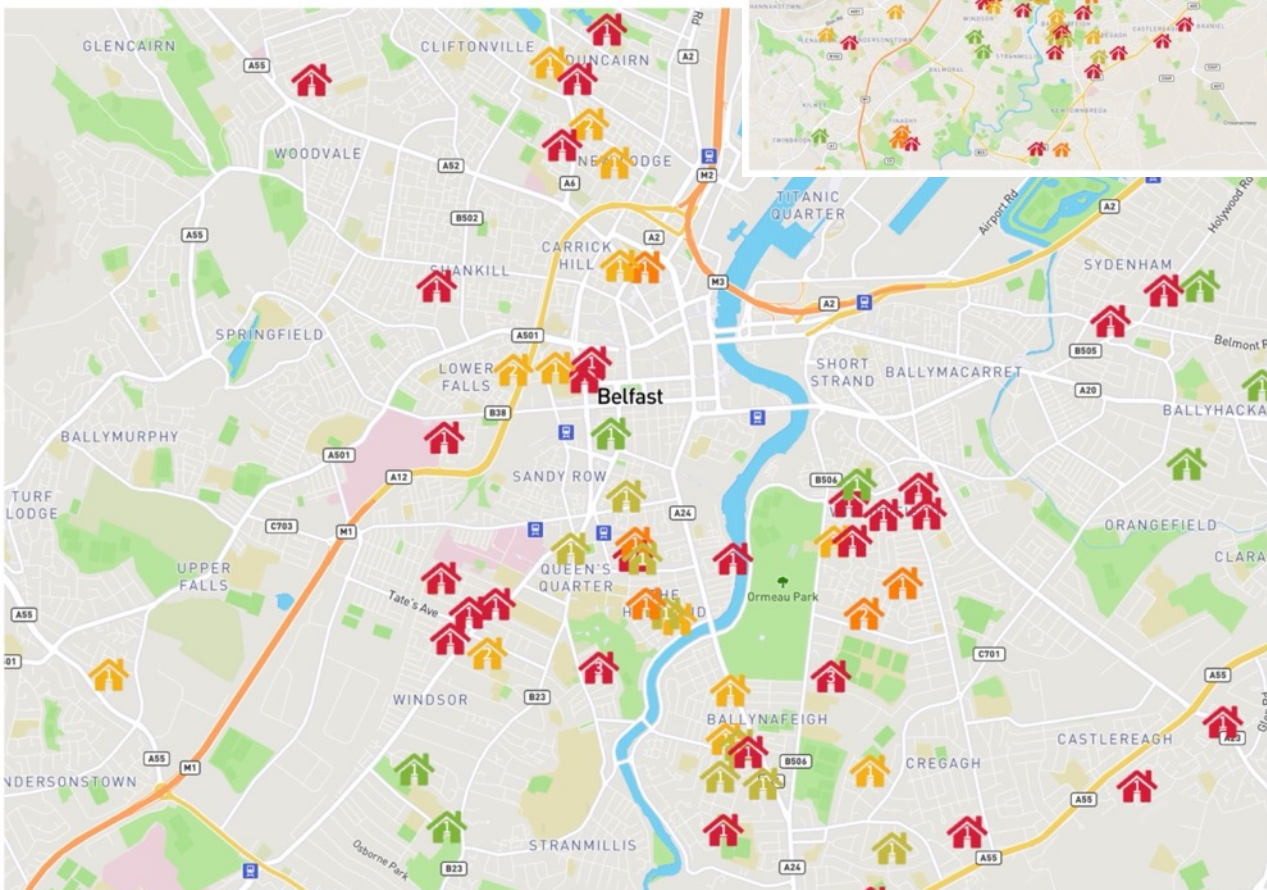
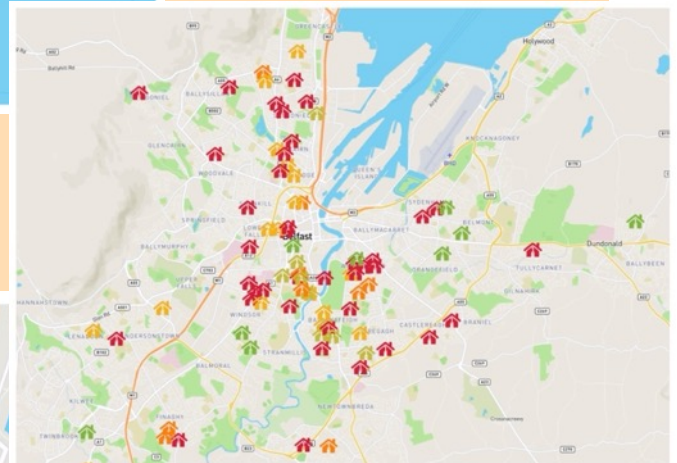
Breakdown provided by Commonplace.
 Post-code word cloud compared with the overall spread across Northern Ireland (right; below)

bt100hu bt403nd bt817xf bt125dl bt155dx bt365xw bt238th bt680gb
 bt370qz b100ep bt603sp bt601ar bt68en bt367ud bt155gw
 bt515ax bt71lr bt60gl bt205qh bt119jd bt124af bt161g bt153aw bt68ju
 bt399un bt364zt bt118fn bt152by bt72ew bt12 bt5 bt154eu bt41sp
 bt87et bt73es bt132dy bt390dz bt71lg bt73fe bt180dx bt343qs
 bt69ba bt133lu bt96jg bt71na bt370nr bt323ls bt97ds
 bt155ef sy38ry bt95aq bt96eq bt12jf bt16ds
 bt43dw bt71ae bt71qb bt275rq bt147nd bt124jt bt60da bt146bu bt73ex
 bt97bn bt71hp bt294wd bt68gq bt234uq bt152et bt27gl
 bt6ex bt90ju bt294wd bt68gq bt234uq bt153nb
 bt56eb bt366qw bt73ga bt390ah bbt170tf glebegardensbt670tu
 bt189lp bt294wn bt170qh bt402qy bt68lg bt366ex bt68je
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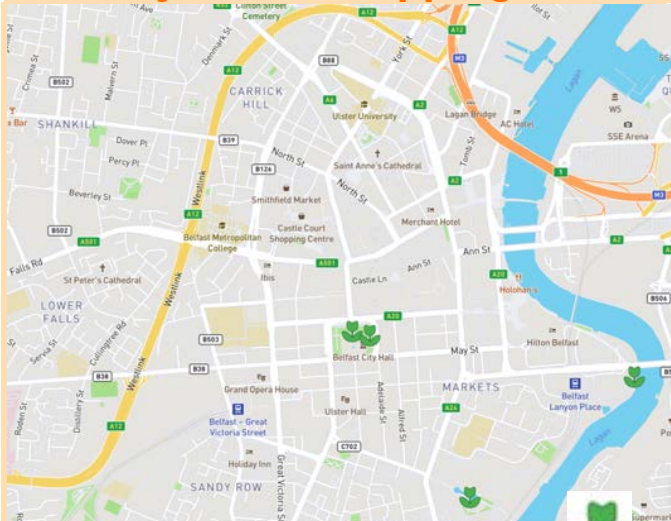


Northern Ireland and Belfast Greater Metropolitan Area (left; below)

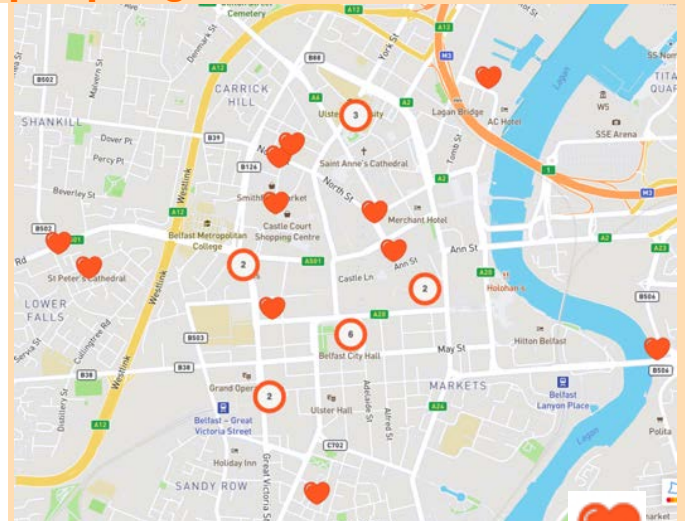
Belfast Metropolitan Area to Belfast City-Centre and immediate surrounding neighbourhoods (right; below).



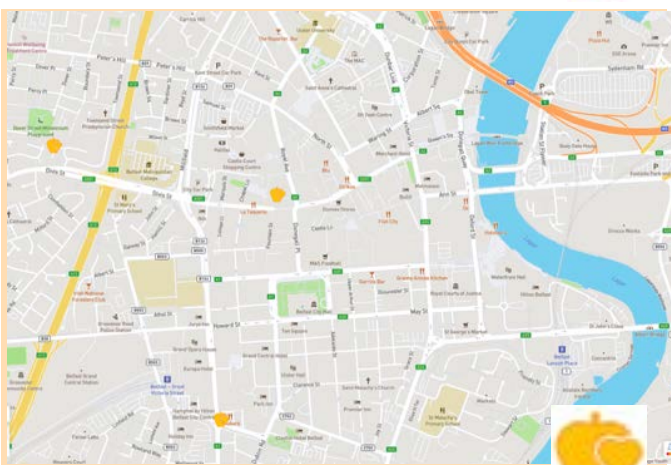
Quality of Life Mapping: Places people go in Belfast to...



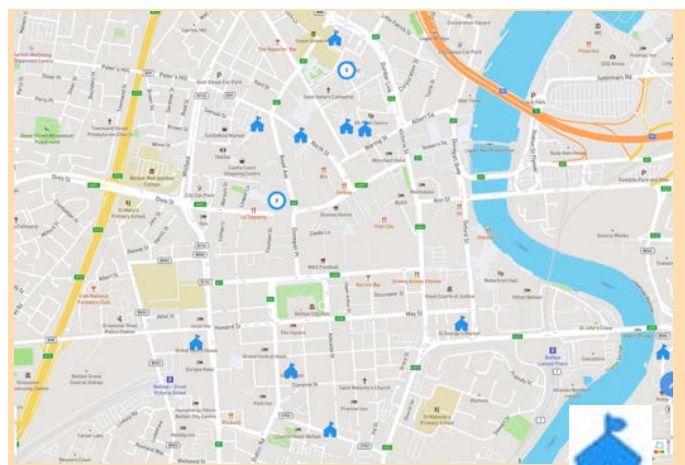
Connect with Nature



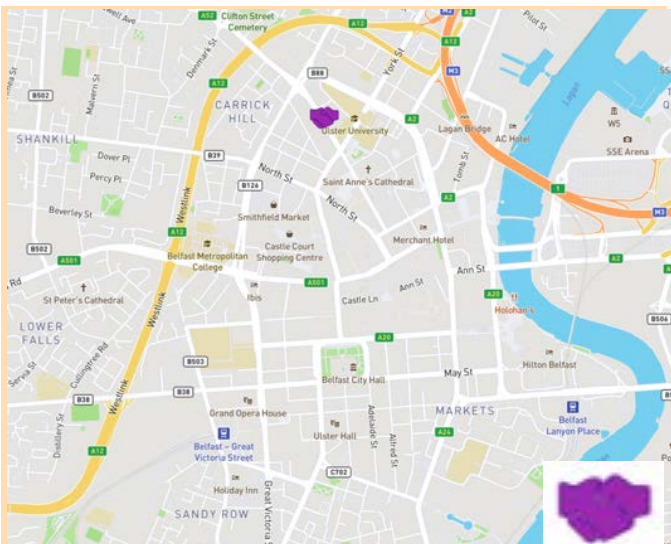
Feel a sense of Belonging



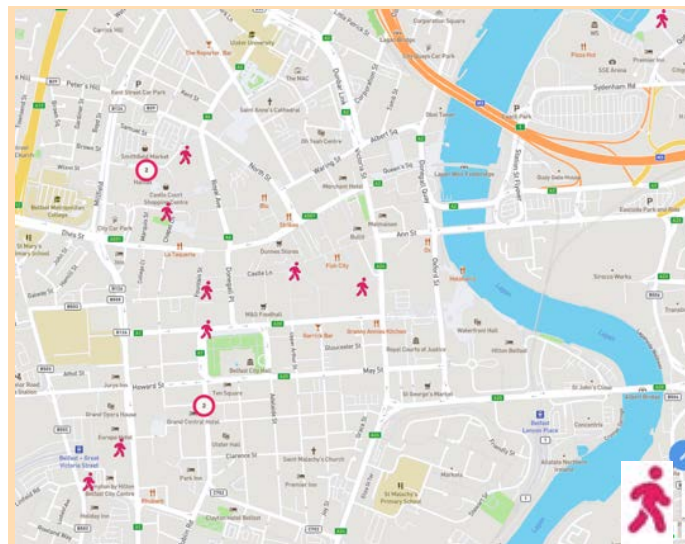
Feel Healthy



Feel a sense of Wonder



Feel a sense of control over their environment



Find it easy to get around (Movement)



People felt a strong connection with Belonging and Wonder in the city, which runs counter to many of the negative aspects often perceived about division and a lack of interest in the centre, and scope to build upon Belfast's inherent character. It is also seen as an easy place to Move around although this is balanced with a poor sense of Health, Nature, and Control people felt over their environment.

6. Consultation Survey Results

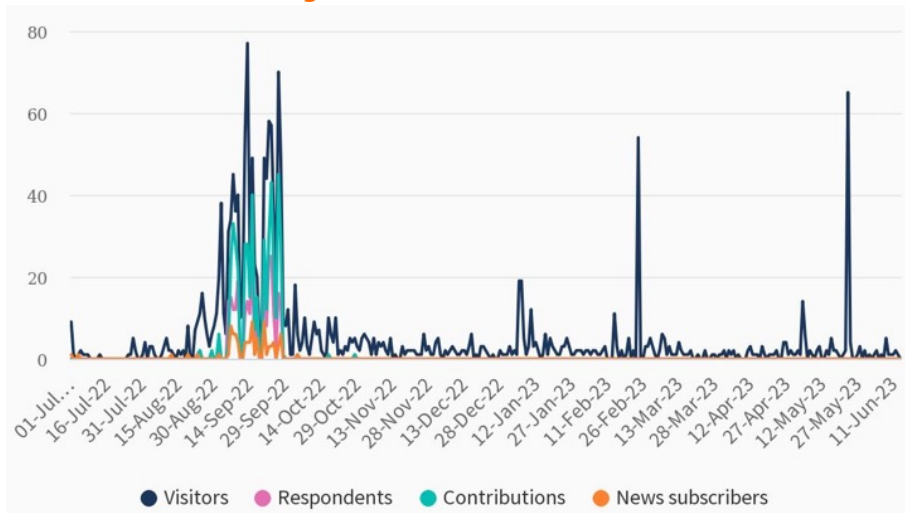


Table 8: Spread of digital visitors, respondents, and contributors since the start of the Urban Room

Findings in the tables below correlate with other room findings about the lack of inclusion most respondents feel in planning consultation, with some contrasting results with more traditional groups in Belfast who feel over-consulted. Findings also highlight the importance of face-face places to find out about consultations, and to seek help if needed to access digital platforms.

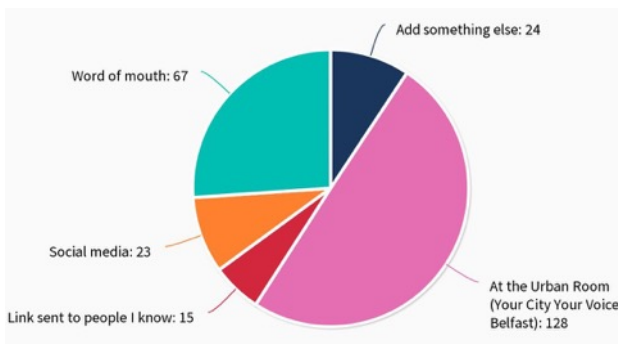


Table 9: How did you hear about this Quality of Life consultation?

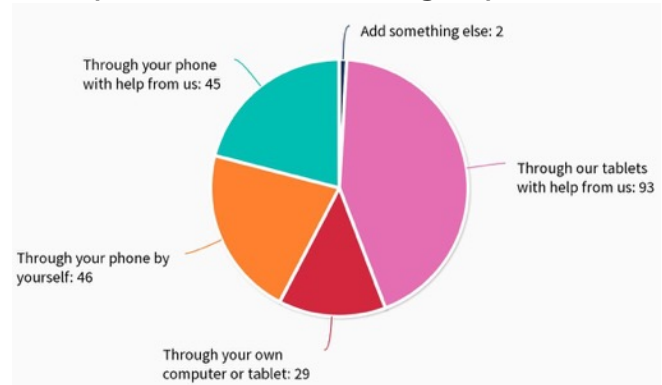


Table 10: How did you access the digital Commonplace platform in the Urban Room.

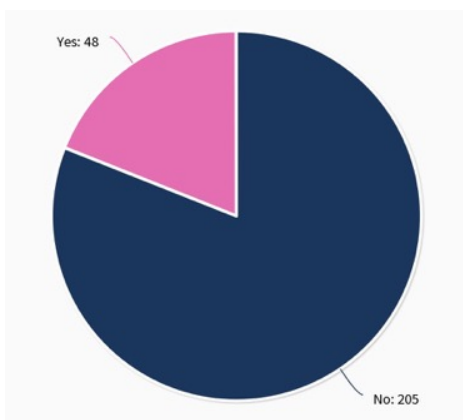


Table 11: Have you participated in a planning consultation?

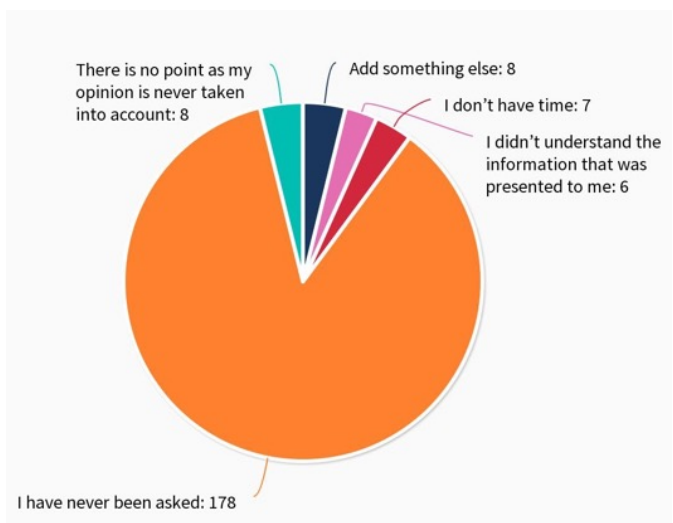


Table 12: If you answered 'No', why?

Findings in the tables below show that while face-to-face consultation appears to be preferable, there are slightly more respondents open to online options if they are “more convenient,” which is by far the most chosen answer about the benefits of online consultation. However it is also important to note the importance of both assistive technology and speed as important combined factors that suggest there is scope for improved platforms to bridge a gap – especially in a post-COVID19 environment and desire to allow greater accessibility to balance the noted benefits of face to face engagement. Other areas to analyse further are highlighted by responses about what people consider to be their neighbourhood and where they feel they should have an opportunity to comment on planning proposals, especially in the fractured context of Belfast City Centre.

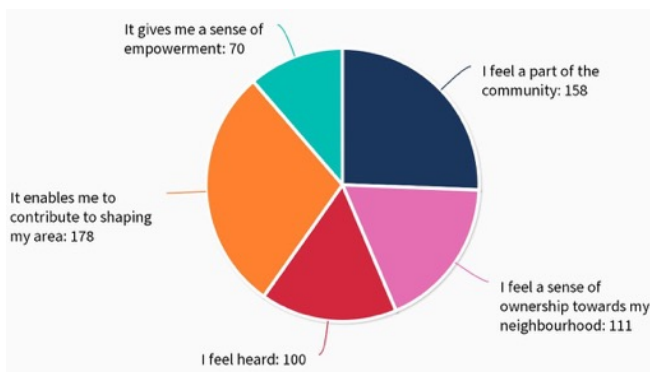


Table 13: What are the benefits of participating in community consultation?

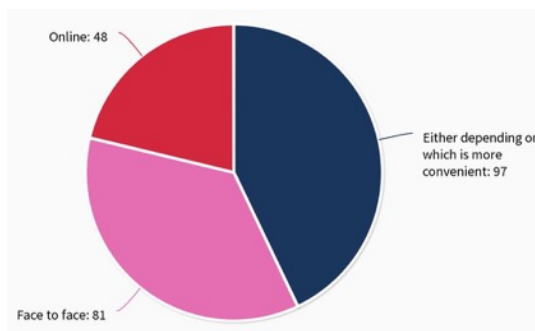


Table 14: How would you prefer us to consult you on planning decisions?

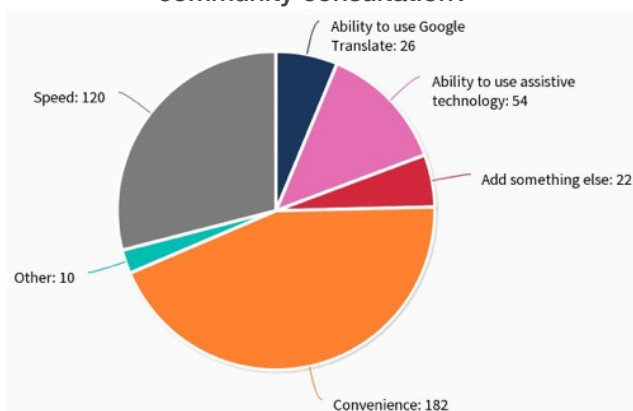


Table 15: What do you think are the benefits of doing community consultation online?

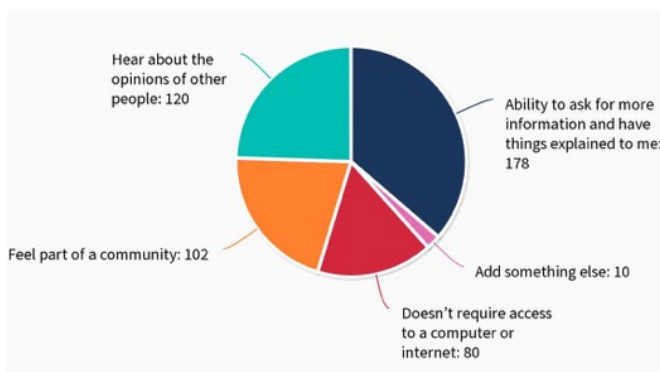


Table 16: What do you think are the benefits of doing community consultation face to face?

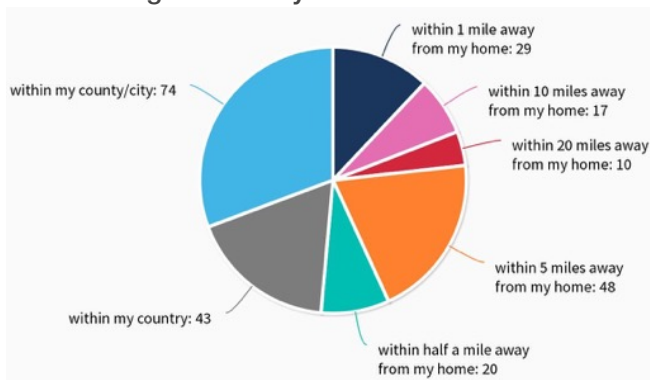


Table 17: Do you think it is important that you are given the opportunity to comment on planning proposals that are?

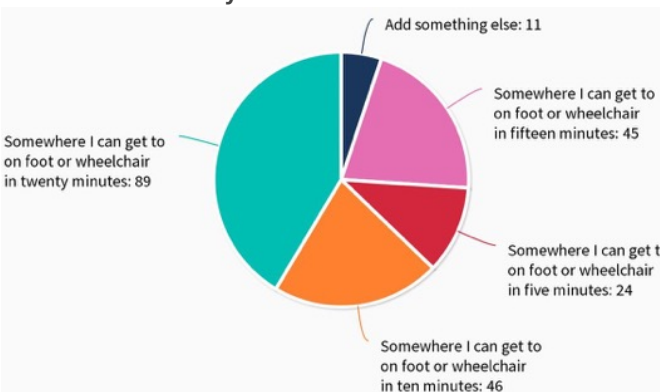


Table 18: What do you consider to be your neighbourhood?

7. Concluding Discussions: Belfast Urban Room Lessons

Our **preliminary findings** suggest that the central location, dynamic and shared space of our Urban Room at 2 Royal Avenue succeeding in extending the reach of our project to people who would not otherwise engage in a consultation. As shown in the previous section, **almost 80% of those participating in our survey responded that they had never been asked to participate in a consultation before.** This figure contrasts the pre-room feedback that city centre and surrounding neighbourhood groups suffer from consultation fatigue or didn't see much value in visiting a new space in the city.



*Urban
Room
Lessons*

Whether it was the draw of the space or the mix of activities, **the urban room provided a platform to engage in conversations people who participated in our events, wandered over to our exhibits, or just stopped by for a free sandwich and coffee.** Furthermore, like the space itself, the **QOLF themes provided a flexibility (the extent to which was a pleasant surprise) to link discussions across many topics and development challenges for Belfast.** These observations, to be analysed further, are part of our lessons (so far) collected below, with thoughts on how a future iteration of the urban room as a neutral place of co-learning, could help address wider challenges of building trust for more projects and process like this in Belfast, beyond the city centre.

Reaching out or Focusing on a Particular Location?

A key decision, which varied between pilots, was where to locate and how to address different physical neighbourhoods and communities through our project activities. We chose to keep our focus of 'engagement' research to the 2RA venue and its immediate surroundings with no satellite locations or ambassadors working further into the city centre. This choice was more about gauging, for Belfast, how our research could contribute to Urban Room understandings in this context, having been central to and participants in other examples of consultation/outreach projects across and outside Belfast. Our findings, in the Room Reflections, result from this focus on a flexible shared space, itself also different to stand alone models, which were the basis for other prior examples.

Important to determining the balance of focus and centralised vs satellite activities in Belfast was our early-stage outreach and networking, both through our Local Advisory Group and through the work undertaken by our CPS. This stage of outreach included travelling to meet individuals and community groups in their preferred locations and local neighbourhoods outside the centre— part of building trust in our intentions. While those discussions sometimes resulted in groups letting us know they would not take part in city centre activities, we were grateful to the many who took part and thus provide lessons for Rooms themselves to enhance lessons from our UK-wide partners.

Flexibility; A non-enclosed approach to urban ‘rooms’

Sharing 2RA brought significant benefits to the urban room model. MayWe, our partners and the venue managers on behalf of Belfast City Council facilitated a safe space with a diverse programme of events that ensured a regular footfall separate to our YCYVB-CCQOL hosted activities. The 2RA building staff, security and volunteers, effectively became ambassadors for the urban room signposting people to our exhibition and surveys.

Key to this aspect working was having at a minimum one fixed area of the building for our project information, especially our Quality-of-Life Meaning Map and project information, as well as our more ‘permanent’ exhibitions – something important to consider when agreeing with external individuals and organisations to lend content and to ensure it is displayed securely and of value to everyone.

Also important, in such circumstances where there is no ‘front door’ to the room or lockable overall space, is to have access to a secure storage area for the room duration – as was provided by MayWe in 2RA, along with a small area for admin that could be easily concealed behind lightweight banners/screens to facilitate having an Ambassador/Co-Investigator base during each day.

Furniture and Furniture: To buy, borrow, barter, or make your own.

Furniture in any urban room is an important factor for welcoming atmosphere, flexibility, comfort, budget, and long-term sustainable practices. YCYVB were fortunate to have a mainly furnished space with plinths, a variety of chairs and tables, cushions, and alternative shared meeting areas in the venue to avoid having to purchase items, or to rent and transport items that might not have a function beyond the room. It was important therefore to choose items that could be stored, re-purposed, and transported after the room closed. Some items, key features such as our display portals were donated as ‘one-way’ gifts; for these furnishings, including our Kulture Night Seating installations, we were able to find alternative uses with the Council and with local community groups.

A Shared Space, a Neutral Space, a Valued Space: Themes & Partners

From previous urban rooms and our networking in Belfast, we found that past examples contributed – from our initial community conversations – to wariness of anything perceived as ‘yet another pop-up’ or survey project. This highlighted that people might not engage in our Room, if the consensus was that we were representing/gathering data for developers, Council or NI Assembly Departments.

Our search for an Urban Room partner was careful to avoid locations (empty or not) that might already be connected (directly or indirectly) with contentious ownership or design proposals. We recognised also that a neutral and shared space are not the same thing. Our Local Advisory Group challenged us with a question: If we were not consulting on “something tangible” then what was the draw to visit our Room and take part in our ‘academic research’; how would we clarify what the possibilities and the limitations of our project could offer for those co-hosting or participating?

Contingency Planning and Community Communication

Contingency planning is vital to the success of any new idea, venture, and especially for physical installations and projects that have a lead-in time for preparations, calendar coordination, and negotiating important aspects of a property lease, public liability insurances, and availability of materials, furnishings, equipment, and so forth.

For our project, the previous challenges of finding a suitable venue also meant that, despite the CCQOL calendar requiring us to open our room by September 2022, we did not have a venue secured until late July (a previous agreement for 2RA put in limbo when the Council announced renovation plans for Summer 2022; thankfully, timing ended up in our favour with renovations pushed back until just after we closed our residency). Until that time, all options had to remain on the table; mobile considerations with a van and tents, using a less accessible or more contentious space, or working within the Ulster University campus – all related to challenges in neutrality and widening participation.

Once up and running, flexibility to unavoidable circumstances remains an important lesson, whether for venue or staffing changes or external challenges. For YCYVB, our most serious and unexpected occurrence during our residency was the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Given the sensitivities and particularities of the local political and cultural context of Northern Ireland, Belfast City Council did not close the room during the official mourning period; given our role as a place for everyone, we felt it important to respect the official Monday closure and postponed our activities. Some of our co-hosts also took this day or the full period of mourning and were unable to reschedule, which meant revising our calendar and format of some of the later events. Importantly, we worked with our Advisors and Network to communicate these choices and changes early, which were roundly appreciated.

Co-habitation and Research-Event Management

The YCYVB calendar highlights another aspect of our shared venue, that of shared exhibitions and one-off workshops – public and private events – and the early importance of working with our Council and MayWe Ltd partners to agree a manageable way for avoiding over-booking or clashing activities during our residency. This required sharing calendar and networking discussions openly – agreeing variations between drop-in type activities, when anyone visiting 2RA could wander through the different ‘room’ set ups and speak with YCYVB Ambassadors - most of the activities - and more dedicated workshops that asked for prior registration (e.g., tours, and catered events), and dedicated 2RA events that might have to take priority over YCYVB uses. From the list of organisations at the end of Section 3, nearly as many groups took part in 2RA/Council hosted events as with dedicated YCYVB activity, including some who used part of the venue – dances, large meetings – and others like a fundraising exhibition of bespoke artist decorated ceramic “Elmer” Elephants that took over the entire venue inside and out for a full weekend, requiring flexibility.

Culture and Arts-driven engagement with Younger & Older Participants

With our partnership agreement to use 2RA free of rent, we sought to focus our CCQOL resources on researching the value of added cultural arts and performative approaches to consultation, and to the outreach of the Urban Room. The arts-based idea we developed for our Kulture Night ‘raised a few eyebrows’ for delivery within the scope of the project - and value for money as well as outcomes – however we were pleasantly surprised when it helped bring more people than expected inside to complete our digital surveys and mapping.

Despite challenges about the extent to which such informal consultation measures in the public realm can be implemented, monitored, "secured" and shown to be value for money – especially in the context of public spaces like our urban room – they proved worthwhile in addition to other exhibits, talks, and workshops. Here, the literal and academic space of the urban room proved pivotal – affording us a more ‘free-spirited’ approach – a leap of faith from our partners – to allow something less polished for a few hours as a learning exercise. These aspects are welcomed project outcomes that we continue to distil for immediate lessons to share, and to inform future projects.

Language and Local Meaning: Terms, Tools, and Technical Speak

We learned that people really engaged well with the physical Quality of Life Meaning maps as opportunities to share what they thought each of the 6 themes meant to them; more contributions were applied to our 6 posters than to the physical map, which was unexpected as that is usually the focus of in-person comments. For us, and for our analysis and use of the QOL Framework, it shows that language, the terms that can often get taken for granted (including consultation and community themselves) need an explicit space (in both process and display) to highlight nuances that might be regional, cultural, and personal, and which can be returned as knowledge for future iterations to our project partners. Control for example had meanings ranging from very specific physical development to being able to trust others and being trusted by others in decision-making, and to the consequences of control and ownership on other QOL aspects. Nature, as another example of written feedback, ranged from the physical aspects of the city to people focusing on “the nature of other people” as most important. Our Meaning Maps (images on page 52).

Future Iterations:

Through CCQOL and Your City Your Voice Belfast, we took small steps to change in how we approach public engagement, as individuals and as a collaborative of partners. From the many contributions, future urban rooms (from the Belfast experience) are wanted as opportunities to:

- *Create more planning education and capacity focused spaces and activities; building on successful events to co-learn about language, processes, and tools important to understand and - importantly for the public- to comment effectively on development proposals or policy.*
- *Continue focusing conversations around positive contributions/insights into our cities.*
- *Create bespoke areas of a room and work in bottom-up ways more with younger people.*
- *Re-establish an objective, independent resource as a permanent Pop-in vs Pop-up Place*

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.



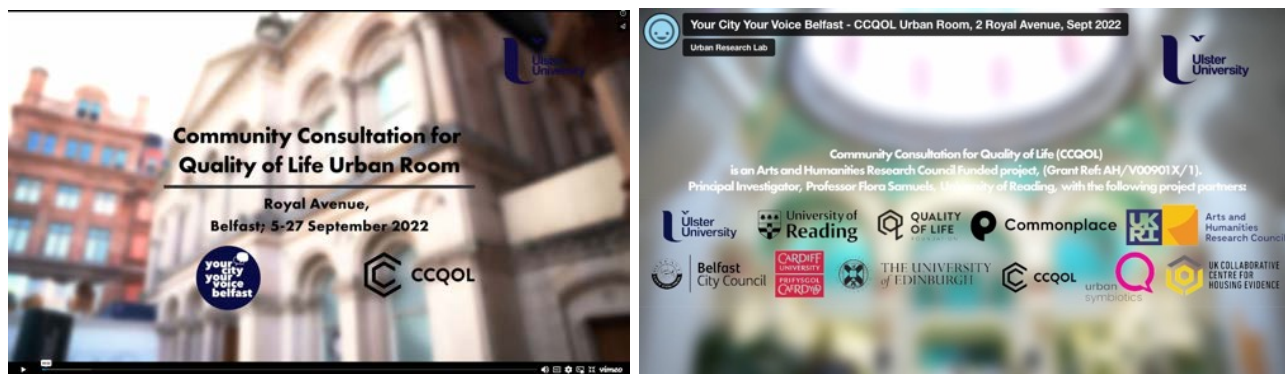
ESRC Festival and Walking Studio – November 2022

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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