

# Genius Loci: Preserving the Spirit of Place during Adaptive Reuse within Local Irish Communities

## Background to and Justification for Research

### Background:

- Genius Loci a modern philosophy which centres around the idea that the identity and character of a place, as well as its overall atmosphere i.e. its "spirit", is created by the impressions that the place has on the human mind.
- "A place is a space which has a distinct character" - Christian Norberg Schulz<sup>1</sup>
- "The casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place" - Edward Relph.<sup>2</sup>

### Justification:

- By delving into the topic of genius loci and truly understanding its meaning, places of meaningful significance can be respected and their spirit of place safeguarded during adaptive reuse.
- A notable gap in research of the identification and protection of genius loci is evident within the setting of Irish communities.
- "It is also important to look at the development of the protection of the twentieth century assembled fabric in order to determine the best way to approach conservation and adaptive reuse effectively. However, most of the projects where it is being applied the 'character, spirit and sense' of place is often missed." - Ramola Helena Lewis<sup>3</sup>
- In actively protecting the genius loci of dilapidated buildings in townlands in Ireland, the culture and local histories of these town communities are simultaneously preserved.

## Methodology

### Research Statement

In recent years, more emphasis has been placed on protecting our dilapidated buildings, through adaptive reuse. While doing so, increased attention has been evidently focused on preserving the building's sense of place, as well as the Irish culture and heritage. This research will examine the practices and strategies of Genius Loci being employed in the adaptive reuse intervention of the Old Mill in Killorglin and examine its effectiveness of safeguarding the spirit of place and local histories of the building and town.

### Research Question

How has the spirit of place been accurately identified and effectively preserved during the adaptive reuse of the Old Mill on Annadale Road, Killorglin, Co. Kerry?

### Research Hypothesis

The spirit of place of the historical building, the Old Mill in Killorglin, is being accurately identified and respected using genius loci strategies, while undergoing adaptive reuse.

### 1. Aims and Objectives:

	Aims	Objectives
1.	Examine the historical emergence and the philosophical connotations of genius loci.	Research various works including: books, official documents, research study's, architecture journals and databases, to uncover the historical significance of genius loci, and its associated philosophical and psychological viewpoints.
2.	Understand and identify the sense of 'spirit' of a building.	Search for theoretical works that further explore and define the natures of a sense of 'spirit' and a sense of 'place', for instance, E. Relph's 'Place and Placelessness' (1976); and examine the differences between these ideas.
3.	Investigate how genius loci strategies and practices can be employed during adaptive reuse of historic buildings.	Identify genius loci strategies and practices and examine how to evaluate their effectiveness in maintaining the sense of spirit in the adaptive reuse of historical buildings.
4.	Develop a case study of 'The Old Mill', Killorglin in relation to the role of genius loci in the adaptive reuse process.	Gather primary sources of information including interviews, questionnaires, and surveys.
5.	Assemble conclusions derived from the research project and recommendations to industry.	Provide a series of conclusions and recommendations for further research.

### 2. Source Materials

- Secondary Sources**
- Books
  - Official documents
  - Research studies
  - Architecture journals
  - Online databases
- Primary Sources**
- Structured Interviews
- Interview with Conservation Architect, Gareth O'Callaghan, Director of JCA

### 4.

### Data Evaluation

Janet Wall's 9 Step Process Program Evaluation Model



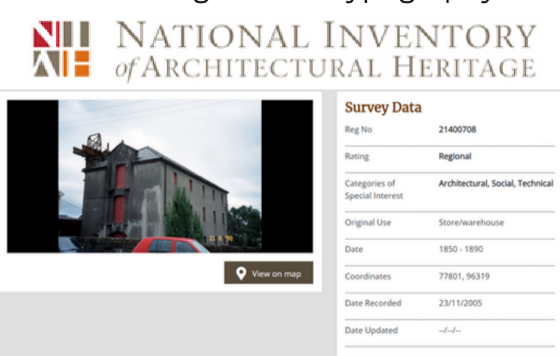
### Evaluation Tools

- Interviews
- Literature
- NVIVO
- Clusters
- Audio and Video Transcription
- Emails
- Pictures
- Web

### 3. Sample Selection

#### Criterion Sampling Selection Model

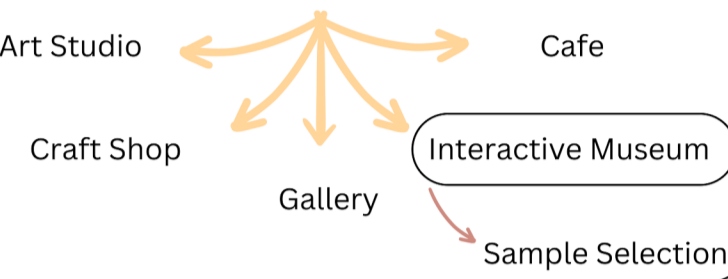
- Assemble list of criteria for building demographic:
  - Mill Building constructed between 1800 - 1900.
  - Building must be capable of holding 3 floors.
  - Building must require renovation or change of use.
  - Gross floor area must be less than 2000m<sup>2</sup>
- Enter criteria into an online database to yield results of buildings of that typography.



## Case Study

### Studio Project: Killorglin Heritage Centre

#### What?



#### Where?

Old Mill, Annadale Rd, Killorglin, Co. Kerry

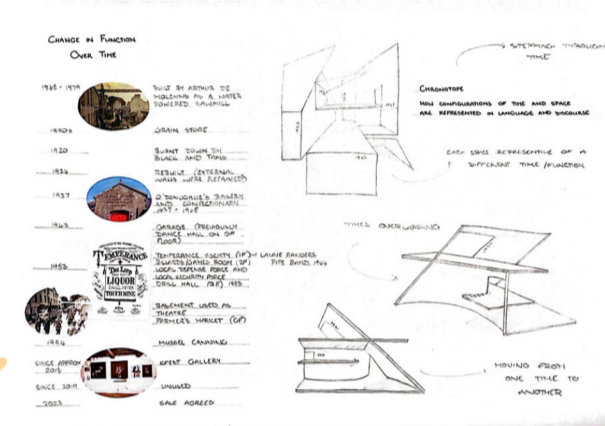
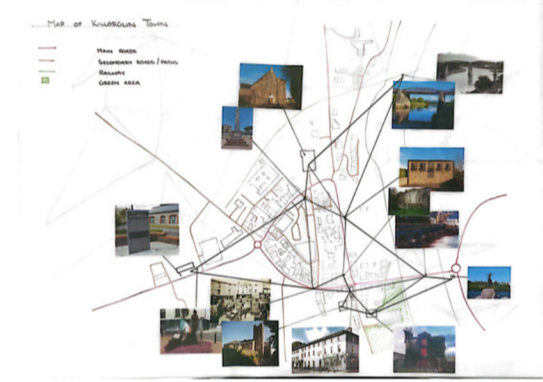


#### Who?

- Primary Users:**
- The general public visitors.
  - Heritage Centre administrative staff and educators
  - Café/restaurant and craft shop staff.
  - Maintenance workers.
- Secondary Users:**
- Students and teachers.
  - Holidaymakers
  - Students registered for art classes and artists renting art studio space.
  - Café/restaurant customers.

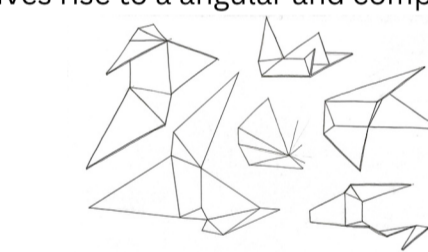
### Design Development

- The Design Development of the project is directly inspired by the several changes in function that the mill and the surrounding buildings within Killorglin, that have undergone in the past.



- Mapping key buildings and monuments that signify change and have served the community throughout Killorglin's history, preserving the town's culture, gives rise to an angular and complex geometry.

- By developing these geometries, a distinctive and reminiscent architectural concept and language has formed which references the town's rich culture and heritage



### Test Investigation



#### Projection Area

- Killorglin imagery projected on walls with soothing background music for an immersive and relaxing experience.

**Example Interview Question:** What can be seen of safeguarding genius loci and the spirit of place in the render provided?



#### Genealogy Section

- Stairs following conceptual approach
- Use of existing and complementary materials

**Example Interview Question:** Is this intervention done well/not well? Why?

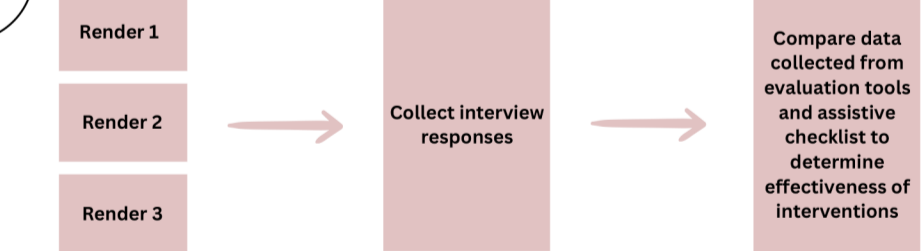


#### VR Station

- Virtual reality space allowing visitors to 'go back in time' to when the mill was functional.

**Example Interview Question:** How can this intervention be improved?

- The interactive museum space, has been taken as a sample selection of the heritage centre. This space educates visitors about Killorglin's history and culture through architectural and technology-based interventions.
- The renders shown are used in the interview schedules, these spaces highlight efforts made to safeguard the spirit of the mill. Their inclusion in the interview is vital as the participants critiques will become a core element of the test investigation.
- By combining the data from the evaluation tools, and comparing the interventions to the assistive checklist for identifying and safeguarding genius loci during the adaptive reuse process, the author hopes to answer the research question.



#### Assistive checklist for identifying and safeguarding genius loci during the adaptive reuse process.

	Yes	No
<b>Intangible Values</b>		
Has historic research been conducted?		
Has the surrounding location been observed? (i.e. city, town, village)?		
Have previous reports on the building been sourced?		
Has there been information gathered from the local community?		
Have culture and heritage values been identified?		
Is the new function suitable? e.g. related to the previous use, respond to community?		
Have professionals from different disciplines been involved in identifying and respecting the intangible qualities of place?		
Have the intangible qualities been utilised to come up with a design concept?		
Have reports or documents been produced with evidence of how the intangible qualities of place are being preserved?		
<b>Tangible Values</b>		
Has the original building and design been explored?		
Have the current building and site conditions been acknowledged?		
Has a site visit been undertaken?		
Have drawings of the existing building been sourced?		
Have photographs of the building over the years been sourced?		
Is the structure and form representative of the original?		
Is the spatial configuration representative of the original?		
Is the materiality representative of the original?		
Does the lighting draw attention to significant points or features within the design?		
Have any original design details been preserved?		
Have professionals from different disciplines been involved in identifying and respecting the tangible qualities of place?		

## Conclusions

### Emerging conclusions:

- There is a wealth of knowledge available on the topic of genius loci, particularly literature and studies that focus on the historical emergence and philosophy of genius loci as well as the theory of "spirit of place".
- Genius loci has developed over time from a spiritual belief into a modern branch of philosophy. Awareness of this area is gradually developing in architectural conservation and the interest in the topic seems to be growing.
- There is limited legislation in place, specifically in Ireland that advise designers on the implementation of genius loci strategies.
- Little to no education on the topic of genius loci or history theory as a whole are provided to architectural design students. Little support is also set in place by universities in Ireland for students to expand their knowledge of the topic.
- Genius loci is a vital aspect of conservation that should be thoroughly considered before and during adaptive reuse. Efforts should be made to identify the existing spirit and preserve the existing building elements where possible and introduce new functions that respect the original use of the building where necessary.
- In projects that have undergone adaptive reuse, meaningful spaces that respectfully address the spirit of the building are created where the designers have researched the historical context of the building, accurately identified the existing genius loci and followed the available guidelines in safeguarding the genius loci and spirit of place.

## Recommendations

### For Government:

- Encourage the identification and protection of the genius loci of buildings before and during adaptive reuse.
- Encourage the consultation of genius loci principles and strategies within adaptive reuse projects.

### For Educators:

- Take the topic of Genius Loci into consideration within the next programmatic review, with a view to including the topic within the curriculum.
- Consider the implementation of a history theory electives for students seeking to specialize or those who have an interest in architectural conservation.

### For Practitioners:

- Research buildings before undergoing the design process to accurately identify and therefore respect the historical significance, genius loci and spirit of place of the building.
- Follow government guidelines and genius loci strategies to effectively safeguard the genius loci of a building in adaptive reuse projects.

### For Further Research:

- Following this research project, subsequent studies could investigate completed adaptive reuse projects in Irish communities to determine if genius loci and spirit of place is a theory that is being considered during adaptive reuse and to judge the effectiveness of these completed projects in identifying and safeguarding the genius loci and spirit of the building.

## References

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