

Remembering the Future - A Decade of Anniversaries – Discussion Paper May 2011

1. Background

- a) The Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund organised “Remembering the Future” conference on 21st March 2011 as the commencement of a conversation which raises the issue of remembering in public space and perhaps seeks to promote a process that leads to the development of practice models and principles. This process has potential to reinforce the development of political and civic culture – engaging with culture and identity, rights, what we mean by democracy and the nature of political change. A process that also acknowledges the legacy and supports engagement. 250 participants who attended the conference were drawn from departments, agencies, councils, community and cultural organisations in Northern Ireland, the Republic, academics, media and representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs, British Irish Intergovernmental Conference and US Consulate. We look forward to publishing a set of articles from the conference contributors. CRC has also procured a piece of work to engage with a wide range of cultural groups throughout Northern Ireland which will be completed in May /June 2011.

2. Introduction

- a) The forthcoming period 2011 -2021¹ marks a number of particularly important anniversaries which have shaped the sense of British and Irish identity in Northern Ireland in the 20th century.
- b) These extend to events from 400, 100 years ago to those in recent memory. Partition and the foundation of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland occurred in the 1911-1921 decade and therefore commemoration may include some symbolic gestures or state acts with a north south and east west dimension.
- c) The development of partnership will be critical in inviting individuals and groups to consider the complexities of our legacy. These include partnerships between arts, archaeology, and education, broadcasting and national museums. Add to this local museums reaching out at local level and Councils, cultural groups and /or communities engaging to support and develop events and activities. These could help to dispel myths and fill gaps in knowledge and make connections to hidden history - suffrage, labour, minority ethnic perspectives and international dimensions. This could support more objective discussion of how we remember in the past.

3. Remembering in Public Space

¹ The list of anniversaries is illustrative and includes the Ulster Covenant 2012, Titanic 2012, Plantation of Ulster 2013, First World War 2014, Somme and Easter Rising 2016, the Labour Movement, Universal Male and limited Women’s Suffrage 1918, , Treaty of Versailles 2019, War of Independence 2019, Partition and Government of Ireland Act 2021 and the more recently 20th and 40th anniversaries of salient events within the troubles (Civil Rights 2018, outbreak of ‘the Troubles’ 2019, internment and hunger strikes) and indeed anniversaries of international significance.

- a) CRC believes this period provides important opportunities to develop our understanding of how marking anniversaries should be fostered in the public space and arenas. The principles that could underpin this should we believe aim for deepening understanding and respect as well as a welcome for difference, complexity and debate.
- b) The Community Relations Council takes the view that we should acknowledge these are centenaries that are significant for all of us in different ways, but also that how we remember and mark them is not only remembering 'then', but defining us 'now'.
- c) CRC acknowledges the importance of work within communities and continues to fund some projects and initiatives which provide opportunities for communities and groups to reflect on and address issues of identity within a safe space and to promote many particular contributions to the public realm.
- d) Remembering the Future does not seek to stop groups and communities remembering in their own way – however, we argue that there needs to be a contextualisation and discussion about how we remember periods and events and what the historic record tells us.
- e) Cultural displays, we suggest should occur in the context of civil and political liberties and in accordance with international human rights norms. The possibility of remembering ethically in a different global context should not be overlooked. The Council of Europe “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” (2008) argues civic participation and dialogue are vital elements in any healthy inter-cultural dialogue by enabling us to move forward together, to deal with our different identities constructively and democratically on the basis of shared universal values. We also need to be mindful and provide opportunities to include different perspectives and those that reflect the increased diversity in the population.

4. Intercultural Dialogue and Cultural Diversity

- a) The Council of Europe “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” (2008) argues civic participation and dialogue are vital elements in any healthy inter-cultural dialogue on the basis of shared universal values. In this context, remembering in public space must have at its heart a commitment to reflect the variety and complexity of cultural life, to raise questions, to create safe and open places for interaction and debate, to create gateways for engagement and to resolve political issues in a way that is consistent with the overarching values of equality, human rights and reconciliation. Cultural displays should also take cognisance of changing global contexts and provide opportunities to include different perspectives including minority ethnic and faith backgrounds.

5. Departmental Initiatives

- a) Brian Cowan’s speech in May 2009 at the Institute for British Irish Studies at UCD asserts the interests of the Republic in addressing anniversaries “been opened for a new and inclusive discussion of our foundation stories”. He goes on “This coming decade of commemorations, if well prepared and carefully considered, should enable all of us on this island to complete the journey we have started towards lasting peace and reconciliation.”
- b) The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure NI (DCAL) aims are “to commemorate 400th and 100th anniversaries that occur in the period 2010 – 2021 in a way that delivers value for

money, builds knowledge and understanding and contributes positively to a ‘Shared and Better Future’” using the themes of Plantation, Titanic and 1912-1922.

- c) The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure NI (DCAL) has established a Project Steering Group on Commemorations within the context of a Shared and Better Future. As the driver DCAL’s role is to inform the discussion at national level and assisting a process of exploration at local level. CRC’s role is critical in terms of bringing the decade into a wider audience.
- d) The Project Steering Group suggested the approach should be creative, exploratory, multi-dimensional, educational and non-exclusive. The Commemoration Project Steering Group is composed of DCAL and its arms length bodies CRC was invited to join in late 2010 and has attended two meetings.

6. Principles

- a) The principles that could underpin exploration and anniversary activities in the public arena should aim for a plural and modern approach, and promote models for how commemoration set in broad historical contexts should be fostered in the public as opposed to private space. Such an approach will not result in a single narrative.
- b) Heritage Lottery Fund has developed methodologies which insist that research produced is built on the historical record and must be capable of interrogation.
- c) Initial discussions suggest organisations and institutions will want to frame the decade and development of principles would be useful. It is possible to develop principles within the broader context of the principles identified by the DCAL Commemoration Project Steering Group (creative, exploratory, multi-dimensional, educational and non-exclusive). This approach set out below would suggest how the set of principles could evolve in partnership with DCAL and a broad range of agencies and interested parties. Principles could emerge along the following lines:
 - 1) **Exploratory and Educational**; set in the broad historical context and built on the historical record, evidence based and capable of interrogation;
 - 2) **Plural**: including local and international complexities, differences within and between identities, minority and less dominant understandings and ideologies (such as ethnic, gender and labour points of view), and the active inclusion of different perspectives;
 - 3) **Multi-dimensional and Creative**: aiming for a modern interdisciplinary approach of dialogue and interactivity
 - 4) **Ethical**: human rights based anti-sectarian and forward looking.
- d) The basis of considering whether an activity may become sectarian is explored based on the following research by the Irish School of Ecumenics, Moving Beyond Sectarianism Research. If the outcome entails developing or augmenting more destructive patterns of relating, then the action or event can be judged to be sectarian² i.e.:

² Adapted from the Irish School of Ecumenics, Moving Beyond Sectarianism Research

- a. Hardening of boundaries between groups
- b. Overlooking others
- c. Belittling or demonising others
- d. Justifying or collaborating in the domination of others
- e. Physically attacking or intimidating others.