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Testimonies of the River is a long-term site-specific public art project

devised and directed by North-55 which aims to animate the public space

of the River Foyle.

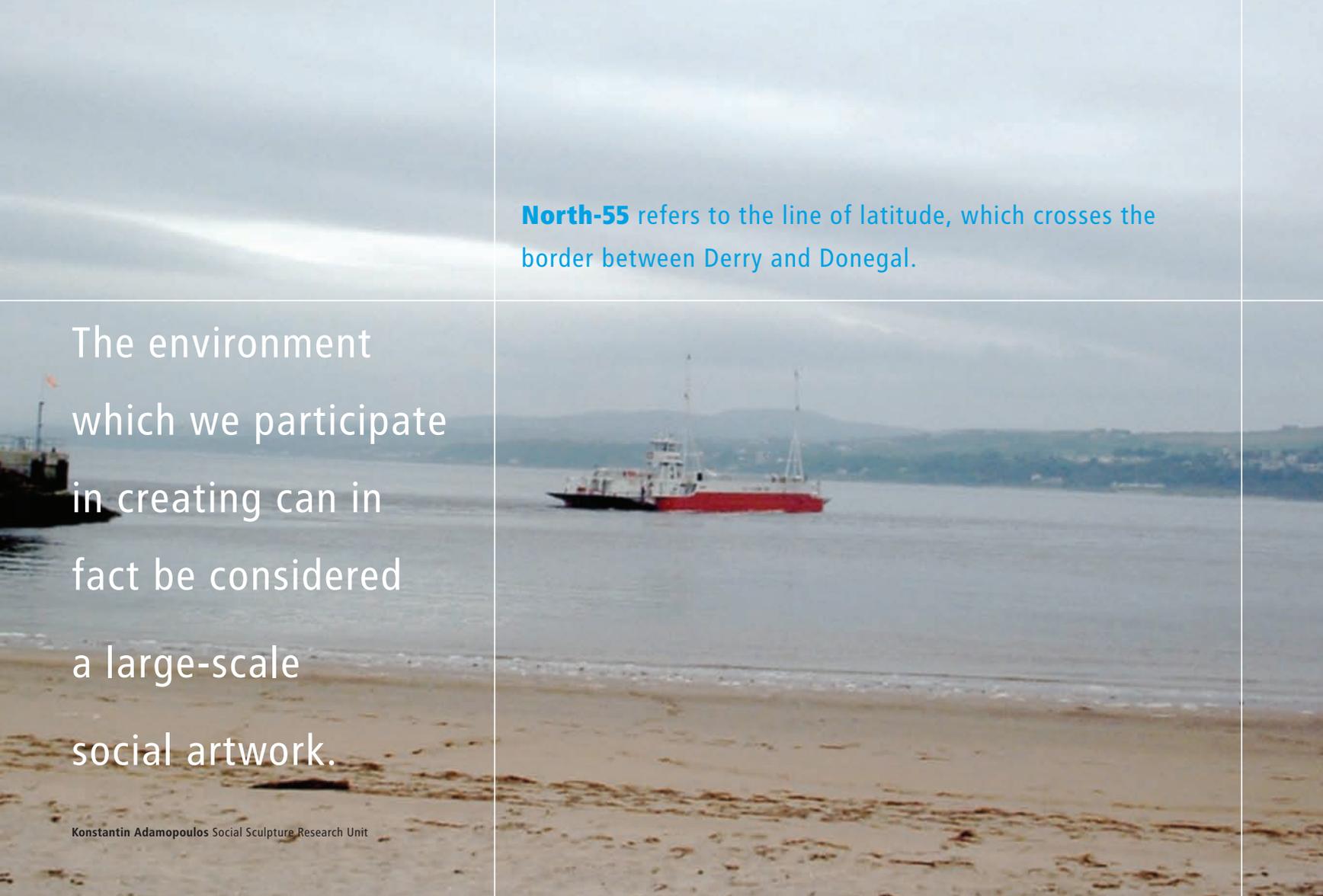
The River Foyle flows through the Donegal/Derry hinterland and is viewed as both a neutral space and connecting force.

The river is accessed by both religious traditions, and urban/rural communities alike.

Testimonies of the River evokes associations that already have common currency in the consciousness of the people of the area, with the river acting as a metaphor, a point of departure and an actual site.

Testimonies of the River is an innovative public art project which engages with local communities in order to critically reposition the voices and experiences of local people in the realm of cultural and civic discourse. Conceived as a process of socio-cultural mapping, Testimonies of the River will work with communities which hold factors other than geography or politico-religious identity in common, such as long-term unemployment, early school leaving and lone parenthood. Testimonies of the River is using a variety of conceptual approaches and innovative artistic forms to respond to more than the specific thematic of the border itself.

Testimonies of the River is a collaborative project and has to date developed strategic alliances with other artists/organisations who are bringing new synergies to the development of the project. Central to its success is the building of close working relationships with local agencies connected to the river.

A coastal scene with a red and white boat on the water and a sandy beach in the foreground. The sky is overcast and grey. The boat is in the middle ground, and the beach is in the foreground. The water is calm with some small waves. The background shows a hazy coastline with some buildings and hills.

The environment
which we participate
in creating can in
fact be considered
a large-scale
social artwork.

North-55 refers to the line of latitude, which crosses the border between Derry and Donegal.



PROJECT PHASES

Testimonies of the River is building on an extended action research phase conducted from 2005–2006. In 2007–2008, the project will move into its production and implementation phase, culminating in a large-scale event on the river itself.

ACTION RESEARCH (2005-2006)

In 2005 Testimonies of the River engaged directly with a range of individuals and groups in a number of multi media works, which investigated the community's responses and connections to the river environment. Working with two visual artists and a radio producer, those involved included young people, divers and fishermen from the Greencastle, (Donegal) and Magilligan, (Derry) areas. Using photography and audio-visual recording, a range of testimonies, which speak of life on the river, the decommissioning of boats and the invisible "border" line in the water were gathered.

In 2006 the project developed as collaboration between North-55 and New York based artist collective ConjunctionArts. Artists from both organisations co-facilitated a series

of workshops with the Cathedral Youth Club, (Protestant) and the Glen Youth Club (Catholic). These young people explored how they navigate the river environment, how they negotiate the interface areas of the city and how they deal with points of tension such as the marching season. These explorations, enriched with intergenerational perspectives, are reflected in a series of oral testimonies, photographic portraits and video recordings.

In early 2007 the project will concentrate on communities closer to the river's source. The process of gathering audio/visual testimonies from individuals and communities along both sides of the waters route will extend to include those of both emigrants and new immigrants to the area.

PUBLIC ART EVENT AND SEMINAR (2007-2008)

In 2007-2008 Testimonies of the River will culminate in a large-scale public art event on the River Foyle.

Over four consecutive weekends the various testimonies of the diverse communities which inhabit the environs of the River Foyle will emanate from the tannoy system of the ferry as it transverses the border. In addition, recorded voices composing soliloquies and choruses, reflecting the collective narrative gathered by Testimonies of the River will be audible at various locations along the rivers route, on local radio, and through pod-casts downloaded through a website.

By way of context, the river itself will become a visual element within the work, framing the voices contained in the audio recordings, thus creating a "live" performative public artwork experience. The audience for the work will include students, deliverymen, commuters, local people and tourists among others, as they make their journey on the Foyle Ferry.

This month long event will culminate in CIVIC TESTIMONIES, an international public seminar. This will strategically bring together artists, community activists, participants, critics, politicians and others to develop a critique around the Testimonies of the River project, within the context of wider cultural and geopolitical debate.

MISSION

North-55 is a socially-engaged visual arts organisation which develops site-specific public art that engages divergent communities on civic issues on a cross-border basis.

North-55 has shaped a hybrid form of cultural practice that utilises a multi-disciplinary approach, fusing cultural and aesthetic pursuits with community development processes. North-55 establishes new coalitions with other arts, community and statutory organisations through long-term partnerships, thus creating a cultural corridor where innovative ideas are visualised and articulated across the region.

North-55 promotes critical art practices and cultural strategies through projects, ongoing research, and public forums.

AIMS

To act as a catalyst for the development of innovative cross-border projects, that utilise a multi-disciplinary approach.

To initiate collaborative site-specific projects that target marginalised groups, encourage access to the arts and engage diverse audiences.

To develop strategies that breach cultural isolation and create a dialogue beyond conflict. North-55 takes full cognisance of cultural diversity in the development and delivery of its programmes

To promote international collaborations, critical debate, and the dissemination of information, within this area of practice.

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