Lesson 4: The Shape of a Town

This lesson explores the physical form of a community.

Support material: Information Sheet 17 "Maynooth", Information Sheet 18 "Scale, Vista and Axis", Clean copies of Maynooth Maps 2 - 5, Worksheet B5.

Spotlight

The form and fabric of Maynooth

Key Concepts

Scale. Axis. Vista.

Review of work

Go over Worksheet B4 with the students. On the board, list their observations and discoveries.

- What geographical features influenced the selection of this site for a settlement?
- What historical factors influenced the development of Maynooth?

Discussion — Scale, Axis and Vista

Distribute copies of Information Sheet 18 "Scale, Vista and Axis". Students also need their copies of Information Sheet 17 "Maynooth".

The word "scale" can have many meanings. In this lesson, it refers to the size of something in relation to its function, or in relation to the things around it. Without realising it, we use the **human scale** every day. We expect the buildings we live in and the objects we use to be the right size for human beings.

When we say that something is **out of scale**, we mean that it is the wrong size for what it is, or in relation to the things around it. Things which are out of scale often look funny or awkward. This is particularly true if some parts of a building are at one scale and some parts at another.

Buildings are sometimes deliberately designed on a large scale. For example, a cathedral is usually very big. This is not just because it has to accommodate many people — after all, people who are no more than two metres tall do not need a roof that is 30 metres high. A cathedral is so large because its designers wanted the building to express the importance of God and religion in their community.

"Scale" is not the same as "size". The houses in Main Street, Maynooth are built on a modest scale. The house at Carton was built on the "grand scale". Refer to Information Sheet 17 when discussing the following.

- How does the design of Carton House impress us as being on a grand scale?
- How does it compare with the design of St Patrick's College?
- Why are the designs different?

Everything about Carton House — doors, windows, columns — is very large for one house. On the other hand, while St Patrick's College has a number of large buildings, the size of its windows suggests that many of the rooms may be quite small. For a college that has to accommodate many people, it is not particularly large in scale.

The scale we choose when we design a building, or part of a town, is often concerned with practical things like the size of the site or what we can afford. But it may also reveal a lot about what we value.

Formal town layouts are often planned around a **central axis.** (Axis = a line which divides a regular figure symmetrically.) The layout is not always exactly symmetrical, but the axis represents the most important line of direction. Sometimes there is a **cross axis** at right angles to the main axis. This is the second most important line of direction. Axes help to create some order in the layout of towns and buildings.

Towns and buildings can also be planned to create interesting **vistas.** (Vista = long narrow view.) Maynooth and Carton House provide excellent examples of axes, vistas and buildings at different scales. These will be explored in Worksheet B5.

Activity — Maynooth: Case Study 2

Distribute copies of Worksheet B5 and clean copies of Maps 2 - 5. Discuss the tasks with the class. Decide on working pairs. Students may complete the worksheet outside class time, if necessary. Remind them that they will need their coloured pencils.

Homework

1. Complete any part of the worksheet which was not completed in class.
2. See further instructions for drawings, **Scrapbook** and **Vocabulary Files** on Worksheet B5.

Cross-Curricular Connections

1. History — Plan a class field trip to Maynooth. Visit some of the historic buildings you learned about in studying the map.
2. History — Research the history of the FitzGerald family in Ireland.
3. History — Do a project on the Normans in Ireland. In which areas was their influence the greatest? Who were the great Norman families in these areas? Find out more about them — their family crests, famous people etc. What effects did the arrival of the Normans have on the areas in which they settled?
4. Political awareness — Contact your local TD to arrange a visit to Leinster House in Kildare Street, Dublin 2. It was built by the Duke of Leinster, earl of Kildare.
5. Geography/Design — In towns or cities, different districts often have a distinctive

character. This can depend on many things: the scale of the streets and buildings; the activities that take place there; the density of development; the presence or absence of front gardens; the building materials used; vegetation; colour. Find an example of a distinctive district in your own community. Use maps, photographs and drawings to present a picture of its particular character.

6. Geography/Design — Make a study of cities in which the presence of water within the city plays an important part, Venice and Amsterdam are famous examples, but there are many others.
7. Design/Social and Environmental Studies — Make a study of the work of one of the following individuals whose planning ideas were intended to improve the lives of ordinary people. Robert Owen (New Lanark, Scotland); Ebenezer Howard(Letchworth,); W.H.Lever (Port Sunlight, Liverpool); Clarence Stein (Radburn, New Jersey); Frederick Law Olmstead (New York City).