Cultural Value of Architects in Homes and Neighbourhoods

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Abstract

This paper provides an account of the Cultural Value of Architecture in Homes and Neighbourhoods, (CVoA), a project developed with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). The first stage of the project was a critical review of 'grey literature' since 2000, industry based research on the value of architecture subdivided into themes: overall value; health and wellbeing; neighbourhood cohesion and heritage and belonging. Findings from the review revealed a marked absence of evidence of the value of architecture and an over preoccupation with the final building, the product of an interdisciplinary team not just Architects, as well as a general confusion about what it is that Architects do. Further consultation has led to the development of a framework for defining and communicating the skillsets of Architects and for developing an evidence base for their value. Our target audience is non-Architects as we are concerned with making the profession more inclusive hence our desire to create simple definitions and terminology.

Keywords: Architect, value, professional, wellbeing, neighbourhoods, community

Introduction

The value of Architects is poorly understood by non-professionals the central concern of the Cultural Value of Architecture in Homes and Neighbourhoods project, part of a longer Value of Architecture project currently being undertaken by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and also part of a wider Cultural Value of the Arts project, led by the Arts and Humanities Research Council on evidencing the value of the arts in the UK. The project consists of a literature review followed by consultation on the findings of the review which is onoing. Having outlined the context and methodology we will describe the findings of the review before proposing a framework for developing an evidence base for the value of the skillsets of Architects, concluding with a reflection on the nature of professional expertise 'at once contested, problematical, central and indispensable' (Nowotny et al. 2001, p.215.).

Context

That the project team consisted of five women is perhaps significant. We came together because each of us has an ongoing critical engagement with exclusionary aspects of architectural culture. Being qualified Architects experienced in practice but now immersed in teaching and research we have tried to see architecture from both within and without the profession (Hughes 1996, p.xv). Quantitative methods and simple definitions are often treated with suspicion but, as Lisanne Gibson argues, there is a case for instrumental value discussions when organizations are internally divided and persist in paying lip service to the political imperative of being more inclusive (Gibson 2008) At the same time we argue that architecture - notorious for its exclusivity in terms of gender, race and class - is a case in point and it is time for the field to see its own impact, or lack of impact, expressed in stark, rigorous, instrumental terms. Such sentiments have their origin in feminist concerns with articulating unrepresented voices. In this project we sought to make definitions, to name, to categorise, to make diagrams and to measure. We must name things in order to see them and make them understood. Once they are acknowledged, once they are absorbed they can be dismantled. It is the 'tacit' nature of Architectural culture (Owen & Dovey 2008) that makes it so prone to doxicity, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, ways of working that rely in inside knowledge and patronage. We argue that it is our inability to state what it is actually is that we do, the value that we add to the world that is contributing to the architectural profession's drift towards obscurity. 'The myth that architecture is just architecture, founded on the twin notions of genius and autonomy, leads eventually to the marginalization of architecture. A knowledge base is developed only fitfully and so architecture becomes increasingly irrelevant and, ultimately irresponsible' (Till 2004, p.1).

Value is always culturally specific. This project is embedded in a UK context in which the Architects are attributed very little value, a situation that is also prevalent in the USA. In the UK fee levels have dropped 40% in 6 years. It is estimated that only 10% of UK construction has the input of an Architect (capital A indicates ARB/RIBA qualification). The average median lifetime pay of an architect is £36000 (Tether 2014). Owing to new forms of building contract most Architects are now employed by building contractors and have little say over the quality of outputs achieved. Architects have become extremely marginal meaning that they rarely have the chance to exercise their hard won skills honed over five years of university education on the built environment leading, we argue, to a deterioration in its quality, the poor quality of much UK housing being well known.

Value is also a complex philosophical question. It is therefore unsurprising that most the discussions of value in architecture have foundered at the first hurdle within the depths of theory (Benedikt 1997; Saunders 2007). The relationships between everyday life, material, economic, political, geographical and historical contexts and the ways in which they are perceived and understood is a cultural phenomenon. Whilst acknowledging the importance of these issues we have had to set them to one side. The difference between 'social value' and 'cultural value' is subtle. We believe cultural value is often implicit within social value. Social values are wider values about accepted ways of being while cultural values are a shared codes belonging to a particular cultural group within society. *The Value Handbook* (CABE 2006, p.10) includes a summary of value types: exchange value, use value, image value, environmental value and cultural value. When put together these provide a useful framework for assessing architectures value beyond economics.

Methodology

The CVoA review focused on 'grey literature', a critical selection of 120 reports and documents produced by industry, charities and others since 2000, the year that the Royal Institute of British Architecture first really turned its attention to the issue of value, strongly supported by the policies of the New Labour government at that time. 'Grey literature' is not searchable via the usual academic search engines and a systematic survey of grey literature in the built environment has yet to be made (Auger 1998) meaning that it is very difficult for people in industry to make sense of its outcomes. There is a spectrum of grey literature which depends upon its audience which extends from government and policy to potential clients. Our aim in focusing on the grey literature of housing and wellbeing was not only to extract evidence of value and frameworks for expressing value but also to make the field more intelligible to others.

Each member of the team had a different focus: wellbeing and ageing; community cohesion; heritage and identity and participatory practice. The project was developed through a 'studio methodology', which has origins in architecture but which has been pioneered by the social scientist Kate Pahl for her AHRC funded Co-Producing Legacy: 'What is the Role of the Artist in Connected Community Projects?' By 'studio methodology' we mean a constant cyclical process of negotiation between ourselves and others on the framing and development of our findings.

Our work brought up to date three important literature reviews in this field:

1. David Halpern's book *Mental Health and the Built Environment (1995)*
2. The *Bibliography of Design Value* (Carmona 2001)
3. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre's *Literature Review of the Economic, Environmental and Social Impact of Design* commissioned by the Scottish Executive (Scottish Executive 2006)

A great many of the documents that we analysed have their origins in the Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) that was set up by New Labour and now lives on within the UK Design Council but vastly reduced in funding. CABE played a very important role in mustering debate on value in the built environment and trialing techniques of evaluation (CABE 2007; Warwick et al. 2014). Its output was large - it produced over 80 research reports in about ten years. Other particularly significant resources are the research outputs of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and in the field of conservation, Heritage Counts. Inevitably we find ourselves writing a history of value and the built environment to accompany our critical review.

Findings

The critical review of 'grey literature' revealed a serious paucity of evidence of the value of architecture which we argue has been caused in part by undeveloped research culture within the profession (Samuel et al. 2013). One of our main findings is that too much weight is given to the final built artifact when a building or place is the result of a huge interdisciplinary team making it very difficult to trace back the value of the Architect's input once construction is completed. Some of the most successful research that we have reviewed focuses on the 'actions of architects, planners and developers in creating places where people are genuinely happy to live' (CABE 2005, p.1), rather than buildings. It is for this reason we focus on the skills of architecture, rather

then the things that they produce, architecture as verb not noun. We propose a new focus on the processes that go into developing a project, processes that bring added value to homes and communities and are fundamental to the skillset of architecture.

A further discovery in the course of the project was that we should focus on the value of Architects, not architecture, as it is only trained architects that have the skillset that we are referring to. It has become fashionable recently to suggest that anyone can do architecture but what then is the value of the profession? That most people can do architecture is indeed true, as *Architecture Without Architects* testifies (Rudofsky 1987) however Rudofsky's famous book focuses on stunning works of ancient vernacular not on the complexities of the twenty first century built environment for which the rigorous, knowledgeable, specialist, strategic and critical training of a good architect is badly needed.

One of the problems with architecture is that is contains several different value systems which can often appear to be at odds with one another sending a mixed message out to its potential audience. In the language of marketing we need to 'segment' the market to make our values and audience more clear. Many people were consulted in the course of the projects evolution. but it was our three advisory group meetings – one with a group of social scientists, one with a group of architects and housing experts in London and one, led by Paul Iddon a marketing expert, with a group of architects and housing developers in Manchester - that have had the greatest impact on the project's direction. It was the input of the Advisory Groups that has given us the courage to suggest a radically simple way for architecture to express its value, a framework that is directed at an audience of non-architects.

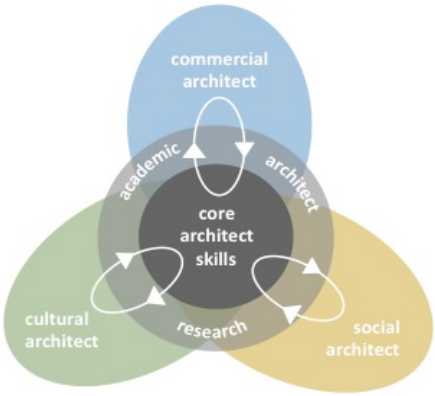


Fig. 1 Architect Value Types

We propose three different categories of architect: social, cultural and commercial (Fig. 1). These categories are not mutually exclusive but suggest priority values. Alain de Botton observes that:

> The advantage of shifting the focus of discussion away from the strictly visual towards the values promoted by buildings is that we become able to handle talk about the appearance of works of architecture rather as we do wider debates about people, ideas and political agendas (De Botton 2006)

David Halpern (1995) has identified four 'channels' by which designers act upon the world. We have renamed these 'skills' and adapted and extended these to five, allocating a skillset to each of the Architect types mentioned above. We tried to define these in the simplest possible layman's terms as can be seen on the project website www.culturalvalueofarchitecture.org These categories attempt to reframe the Architect more as a co-creator who facilitates an awareness and shares understanding of built environment issues in others than as a powerful leader with an monopoly on knowledge (Nowotny et al. 2001, p.215).

As the primary focus of CVoA was social value we shall now focus on the 'Social Architect' category. The skillset of the Social Architect Type are defined as follows:

- Transforming Mental and Physical States – Creating environments to transform the way we feel and think.

- Changing Networks and Communities – Creating built, and other, frameworks for community interaction.

- Identity, Belonging, Heritage and Social Labelling – Co-designing curation/branding of place to positively impact on resident's feelings about the value of their place in the world.

- Making Transformations through the Design Process Itself – Facilitating fulfilling learning through co-design, also architecture as part of experience economy.

- Rigorous Recording and Representation of Events – Mapping and representation of space in use, networks and events, in doing so providing important evidence of impact.

They are not discrete. They reinforce one another. Networks, for example, can impact upon sense of identity (Hampshire & Matthijsse 2010). In the UK the menu of services offered by Architects is largely defined and limited by the RIBA Plan of Work. Although it has been recently revised it does not reflect the full extent of ways in which Architects are making themselves useful in communities. As Marcus Menzel the sociologist employed by HafenCity Hamburg GmbH has stated 'You cannot build a neighbourly feeling. . .But I think architecture can help certain processes and hinder others'(Schaer 2010). A major finding of CVoA was the need to promote an expanded view of the potential of practice.

Evidence of the value of the social Architect

The next task is to develop an evidence base for the value of the skills defined above, a process which continues with a further Arts and Humanities Research Council project entitled Evidencing and Communicating the Value of Architects (2015-2017). What follows is a brief review of our research so far revealing the positive impact of Architects referring largely to UK based literature, both gray literature and refereed academic research. Evidence that poorly conceived architecture can have the obverse effect is a by product of our studies (NEF 2010 p.24).

Transforming mental and physical states

Architects have an important role to play in taking the strategic overview of neighbourhoods and communities. 87% of the public believe better quality buildings and public spaces improve their lives (Ipsos Mori & CABE 2010). 'How people feel about their physical surroundings, can impact on not just mental health and wellbeing, but also physical disease' (Scottish Government 2006).

Architects, urban designers and planners are also needed to take a strategic overview of the health benefits brought about through the provision of green space (Hillsdon et al. 2011) and safe green routes for walking and bicycling (UKGov 2013). It has been found that large open spaces do not promote positive community feelings as much as smaller natural areas close to housing. This sense of community cohesion can be further promoted by providing a range of uses including private and public activities keeping the area animated throughout the day for the enjoyment of a wide range of users (Kaplan 1985). Adaptable public space is used by more people in more diverse ways over a longer time period than spaces designed for specific limited functions. Key attributes include open space along streets that are well defined by enclosed edges of buildings and landscapes, open (Shehayeb 2007). The quality and diversity of the outdoor environment within two streets of the front door is important if children's needs for imaginative and social play are to be met (Wheway & Millward 1997).

At the level of the home, particularly old people's homes 'Gradation of space is associated with resident quality of life, highlighting the necessity for design guidance to emphasize a variety of spaces. However, well-designed buildings with a variety of spaces can offer little choice to residents if access to different daytime locations is restricted.(Barnes et al. 2012). The benefits of views of nature and pleasant distractions are well known in healthcare literature but little research has shown the value of these attributes in the home.

Changing networks and communities

Halpern highlights two studies (Festinger et al. 1950; Caplow & Forman 1950) which 'at least for relatively homogenous populations' show that 'the form of the built environment can strongly influence friendship and group formation (Halpern 1995a, p.119). Willmott's study of Dagenham made the finding that cul de sacs and other short narrow roads appear to result in friendlier and more supportive neighbourhood relations (Halpern 1995, 122; Willmott 1963). Choreographing the degree of privacy between neighbours is a complex issue particularly in high density settings (CABE 2005b, p.17). It too can contribute strongly to well being.

Great care needs to be taken in considering networks particularly for the mentally ill who are constrained by very limited social networks (Halpern 1995b, p.110; Greenblatt et al. 1982). Halpern notes the growing importance of taste based networks rather than networks based on proximity (Rosenblatt et al. 2009, p.139) but as Unger and Wandersman write 'neighbouring is more important and more complex' than is generally realised (Unger & Wandersman 1985) Research has shown a marked absence of community on new housing estates in the UK and, what is still more troubling, given the health implications of loneliness, a positive desire not to engage with neighbours (CABE 2005c, p.5). Indeed there is a body of evidence that shows that neighbourhood relationships can impact greatly on place attachment (Halpern 1995b, p.113; Fleury-Bahi et al. 2008). Rosenblatt et al write that 'people will only engage in civic and community activity if it connects with their 'projects' or biographies of selective belonging that relate to their specific needs or predispositions (Rosenblatt et al. 2009, p.139)'. Participatory

architectural practitioners are well used to teasing out of communities the best way in which this might be done (Jenkins & Forsyth 2010).

Crime and perceptions of safety are extremely important for communities. Armitage has set out with great clarity the importance of design for the minimisation of crime (Armitage 2013). Design against crime works at different scales, from the layout of streets to the design of front doors, all impact on this issue. It has been found, for example, that discussions of crime remain on the internet for all to see in perpetuity, impacting on conceptions of place. (Cheshire & Wickes 2012, p.1179).

Identity, belonging, heritage and social labelling

There has over recent years been a drive towards mixed development (Joseph & Chaskin 2010). While this may create diverse communities it doesn't necessarily foster social inclusiveness (URBED 2000). Designers of low cost housing must take real care with the image of the housing that they are creating (Cooper-Marcuse & Sarkissian 1986) as the impact of the form and look of housing is not to underestimated. Clare Cooper Marcus' and Wendy Sarkissian's *Housing as if People Mattered* research based on nearly 100 post occupancy evaluations in the UK and elsewhere came to the conclusion that the overall impression of homes had a considerable impact on the way that people felt about them.

Halpern writes that 'the labeling of an area, whether good or bad, can have very dramatic and self-fulfilling effects in that area (Halpern 1995a, p.143). Residents try to maintain and create a positive label for their area by extending their cognitive maps to include high status places (Rapoport 1982). Halpern writes that 'symbolic aspects of the environment act to catalyze and compound other kinds of environmental design problems '(Halpern 1995a, p.145; Levine et al. 1989). Further, 'labelling and stigmatization may also have a direct effect on the self-image and mental health of residents, though this has yet to be conclusively proven.

'How residents feel about their neighbourhood, and how they perceive others to view their neighbourhood are related to both their perceptions of home quality, and their feelings of status and control' (Clark & Kearns 2012, 934). Research has shown the importance of building distinctive features into housing for neighbourhood satisfaction (CABE 2005c, p.4). The University of Bristol carried out a survey of 600 households on a large suburban housing estate with little or no distinctive design quality. The researchers found that these residents exhibited more difficulties in selling and experienced more negative equity than those living on more distinctively designed developments (Forrest et al. 1997). The problem is that house builders in the UK are rarely concerned about the fate of their estates once all the 'units' have been sold.

CABE found that 'Beauty is regarded as a positive experience strongly related to bringing about happiness and wellbeing in individuals lives' (Ipsos Mori & CABE 2010, p.4). Beauty in the built environment was seen as being important for civic pride and for attracting people to an area. Generally there is a strong consensus for striving for more beauty in neighbourhoods, towns and cities. Beauty in place is recognised as not evenly distributed. Where there is less, it is seen as part of depravation; people can and do pay more to live in areas which are more beautiful. Beauty in place is also seen as part of a cycle of respect, it can make people respect an area more, and by being respected, an area can retain its beauty (Ipsos Mori & CABE 2010, p.5). 'History and memory can play an important role in making a place feel beautiful. There tends to be a preference for older buildings over newer ones – for a variety of reasons that go beyond purely visual taste'. People's overall ability to appreciate beauty is affected by

whether they feel comfortable, safe and included in a place. It was felt that by investing in improving a place – be it through buildings, public events or general upkeep – it can encourage people to find those places more beautiful, and to treat them with more respect and care'. (Ipsos Mori & CABE 2010, p.5).

It is important to use creative means to counter negative perceptions of ageing within neighbourhoods. It is surely here that architects can make a real difference. Wiesel writes 'Much active agency by older people and their advocates is required in order to achieve positive neighbourhood ageing. Just as importantly, there is a need for a supportive policy and planning environment that embraces rather than fears population ageing. Urban and housing researchers can contribute to the development of such an environment by expanding the optimistic scenario of ageing neighbourhoods, through creative theoretical ideas and empirical explorations of the ways ageing can improve neighbourhoods.'(Wiesel 2012 155). This, we argue, is the territory of architects, the curation of lifestyle and branding of place being an underrated aspect of their work (Klingmann 2010).

Peter Hall has written of the impact of 'branding' on some of the newer neighbourhoods in the Netherlands. 'The idea of 'branding' different neighbourhoods, as with manufactured goods, seems a powerful one. It has helped create a much broader market for new homes than in the UK, as new homes offer a distinctly better product than many of the old apartments'.(Hall 2013, 170). Hall also observes the importance of using 'architects or other building professionals able to act as catalysts or enablers' to facilitate the adoption of sustainability. In Freiburg it has been found that although better architecture and construction can add 8-14 percent to the cost of new homes, it is more than repaid through energy savings'(Hall 2013, 265).

'Visioning', working together to imagine community futures, is another underexplored skills of Architects. John Punter writes that 'visioning has become an integral part of corporate governance in the UK, a key feature of civic entrepreneurialism and place-marketing'. Further 'it has a particularly important role to play in conveying desirable urban futures and building public consensus to deliver them. (Punter 2011, p.29). Unfortunately there is remarkably little evidence that this is really the case.

Making transformations through the design process itself

One of the most resoundingly powerful message emerging from this review is the importance of participatory practice for wellbeing. (Halpern 1995a; Scottish Executive 2006). This, argues CABE, should be compulsory training for all Built Environment professionals (CABE 2010) and is a key part of the Architects role.

Savings due to community engagement were estimated to be in the region of £500,000 on a £2.2 million housing redevelopment project for the Shoreditch Trust in north London. Compared to other projects, there were fewer delays and associated costs caused by responding to residents' complaints, reworking designs at a late stage to meet user needs, and on-site events such as vandalism and crime (Kaszynska & Parkinson 2012, p.8). A New Economics Foundation Study of two developments in Peckham, London revealed that ' the way in which a development or regeneration project is delivered on the ground matters, influencing the extent to which all stakeholders feel part of the place shaping and place making process and the connections which are fostered between people within the neighbourhood' (NEF 2012, p.3). 'This sense of 'neighbourliness' was sustained long after the renewal work ceased and was

identified as one of the core neighbourhood assets in Bellenden that supported people's individual well-being (NEF 2010 23).

There is a very large body of evidence that proves the efficacy of community art practice on health (MacPherson et al. 2012, p.3). We speculate that fruitful comparisons can be drawn between the potential wellbeing benefits derived from working together on arts projects and wellbeing derived from working together on the built environment. 'There is no study or toolkit capturing directly how community-led design impacts on the creation of quality public space' write the authors of the AHRC funded 'Valuing Community Led Design' project (Alexiou et al. 2012). They observe that while artists and others have often recorded the impact of community work on individuals they rarely record the impact on the community overall.

Rigorous recording and representation of cultural changes

The 'Valuing Community Led Design' project also offers important lessons about the need for mapping skills (Alexiou et al. 2012, p.8), to demonstrate social value in particular, including:

- Visual and Experience Mapping
- Film, video, photography, blogs and social media
- Asset mapping (Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design 2013)

These can be used in conjunction with other other common techniques in the social architect's tool cupboard such as interviews, walks and workshops.

The mapping of human activity has been pioneered through the public space studies of the architect Jan Gehl (Gehl & Svarre 2013). It was used to create an evidence base to show transformations in space use and human behaviour in cities. Architects have taken mapping to new heights with the use of digital technologies (Yaneva 2012). Tools of mapping are invaluable to make manifests aspects of spatial experience no other discipline can collect (Awan & Langley 2013). 00:/ suggest that 'Unlocking dormant assets requires a wide awareness of what is there already. Collaboratively "mapping" the assets of places (both physical spaces and hidden talents and learning dreams) is a process that could bring policy-makers and service providers together with the wider public, creating platforms for genuine discussion about the shared aspirations for places' (00:/ 2011, 179). This little known aspect of the Architects skillset is ripe with potential.

Conclusion

Almost inevitably our exploration of the value of architecture has led us to question the role of the professional in twenty first century society at a time when 'old demarcations between producer, supplier and user have broken down' (Nowotny et al. 2001, p.26), something that our reframing of the Architects skillset begins to address. Our brief review of the literature reveals a matrix of knowledge about the contribution of Architects to neighbourhoods and communities which is riddled with holes. Most worrying is an absence of professional reflection on the nature of expertise and the role of the Architect as knowledge broker. As knowledge is democratised and levels of public knowhow rise it puts pressure on professionals to offer something more, something different. This, we believe will emerge from a concern with process, the experience of shared learning rather than object buildings developed in splendid isolation. Herein lies the social value of the culture of Architecture.

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